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## Reports

# Pakistan and the Armed Factions: Proxy Wars



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After ten years of alliance against what is described as terrorism, U.S-Pakistani relations have become unprecedentedly tense, following US allegations of Pakistani collaboration with Sirajuddin Haqqani's network, as US military Chief Admiral, Michael Mullen, had branded Haqqani's network as a "veritable arm" of ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence, i.e. Pakistan's premier intelligence agency).

The White House and some U.S. Congress members demanded that Pakistan "break any link they have" with the Haqqani network, designate it as a terrorist organization, and move forces against its bases in the region of North Waziristan in order to prevent militants from attacking international forces in Afghanistan.

Pakistan, however, rejected all these demands and responded directly by reinforcing the internal front and holding a conference for all Pakistani parties under the auspices of the Prime Minister. Perhaps, this is the positive side of the crisis for Pakistanis as they agree – for the first time – on something amongst themselves, namely responding to U.S. policy towards Pakistan.

## **Historical context**

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947, Islamabad has adopted the proxy war strategy. It has liberated Pakistani-controlled Kashmir through Pashtun militias to avoid a full-scale war with India, which is an enemy that Pakistan cannot confront directly, especially since it had only recently achieved independence.

Pakistan maintained the same approach in the war that resulted in the secession of Bangladesh in 1971 when it supported armed groups, such as Al-Badr, Al-Shams, and so on. This was repeated decades later in the war that took place in Afghanistan against the Soviets and communism by supporting Afghani and even Pakistani fighting groups, paving the way to the establishment of Kashmiri armed groups fighting India, which was further demonstrated in more than one conflict with India, starting from the Kargil War in 1999 and ending with the Mumbai attacks in 2008.

Today, Pakistan approaches U.S. policy or choices in the region with the same strategy mentioned above, i.e. proxy war, owing to its cheap price, modest financial and political costs, and few repercussions on the state. Such strategy was also imposed by the geo-strategic reality of Pakistan, which believes that it lives in an atmosphere of allies whose loyalty is questionable, especially the United States as it may turn on Pakistan at any moment just as it had during Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 despite its support for the "Afghan mujahideen" against the Soviets. Moreover, Washington imposed military and economic sanctions on Islamabad rather than reward it for the war that was – in many aspects – fought for America.

## **The Haqqani Network and Pakistan**

The name of the Haqqani network is derived from Jalaluddin Haqqani who is now in his late seventies, suffering from an incurable disease, and unable to spearhead the movement.

Jalaluddin Haqqani is one of the seven Mujahideen leaders that opposed U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. He was a follower of Commander Yunus Khalis, the leader of the Islamic party, who died years ago. He joined the Afghani Taliban after it emerged and pledged allegiance to its leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, to whom Haqqani was the most prominent ally in east Afghanistan. This did not prevent Haqqani from maintaining his excellent relations with Pakistan which began with the start of Afghan jihad in the mid-seventies. After he became seriously ill, Haqqani left the leadership to his sons. His eldest son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, became one of the most influential leaders that challenged Western forces in east Afghanistan. Sirajuddin Haqqani used the tribal areas of North Waziristan as a starting point for his activities and has a relationship with Pakistan, specifically Pakistani intelligence services.

To understand the relationship between Pakistan and the Haqqani network, it is essential to understand the geographical proximity between the two parties. Since its establishment, Pakistan has depended on its relationship with Afghan tribes to secure its borders, as it did during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan wherein Afghan tribes, especially Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani's men, played an important role in this regard. They served as soldiers defending the borders of Pakistan at a financial cost and no political cost worth mentioning compared to the costs it would incur if it deployed its own forces and army, as it did on the border with India.

It is worth noting that within this context that the Haqqani network is an integral part of the Afghan Taliban and therefore cannot be discussed as if it were a movement separate from the Taliban. This causes Pakistanis and others to question the secret behind American interest in the Haqqani network separate from the larger movement, Taliban.

It seems that what concerns the Americans is Haqqani's existence in a region beset with Taliban Pakistan, such as Pakistani commander, Gul Bahadur, who leads Taliban factions based in North Waziristan, in addition to the Al Qaeda network, which is allegedly active in that region and raises the American concerns even more.

The recent attacks, which are believed to have been executed by the Haqqani group, on the U.S. Embassy and the CIA's Kabul headquarters as well as other qualitative operations believed to be carried out by the network against U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan have raised tension between the United States and Pakistan.

American analyses concluded that there were some sort of similarity between the techniques used in the abovementioned attacks and the Mumbai attack in 2008, suggesting that Pakistan's security forces trained both the Lashkar-e-Taiba, which carried out the Mumbai attack, and the Haqqani network, which carried out the Kabul attack. It must be taken into account that the tension between the two countries began when Washington solely killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden near Islamabad, and the American accusations of Pakistan were involved in providing protection to bin Laden near the capital.

Islamabad acknowledges its relationship with the Haqqani network, which the ISI justifies as a relationship for positive goals and does not undermine U.S. presence in Afghanistan. It has stated that the network also has links with European and non-European countries. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Hina Rabbani Khar, went so far as to say that the Haqqani network was once the "blue-eyed boy" of the Americans. However, some believe that when Washington had failed to win over the Haqqani group to its side and tear down the Taliban movement, it began accusing Pakistan of not willing or being able to persuade the network to separate from the Taliban and reconcile with the government in Kabul.

Pakistanis have demonstrated that they do not have much influence on the movement by referring to the kidnapping of General Tariq Majid's son, who was transferred to the east of Afghanistan, where the movement is based, and Islamabad could not release him after the captors demanded a ransom of about 70 million rupees.

Pakistan understands that the most important card in its foreign policy is to maintain good and strong relations with the armed groups, sustaining its interests or possibly interchanging interests with it, especially with the increasing feeling of its great loss in Afghanistan in the face of increasing Indian and Iranian influence. It realizes that there are American efforts aimed at depriving it from political presence after U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. This is because to Washington, it is just a military ally not a political ally, which is enough to concern Pakistani policymakers. Thus, Pakistan will fight all it can to ensure its influence in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of international forces.

Also, Pakistan fears that the United States' demand to cut off its relations with the Sirajuddin Haqqani network will become a precedent giving India the opportunity to also demand it to cut off its ties with Kashmiri organizations, brand them as terrorist, and

even eliminate them by launching armed attacks; and this would be really fatal to Pakistan and its policies towards Kashmir.

## **U.S.-Pakistani Relations**

Pakistan and the United States will not reach the point of cutting off ties as the two parties cannot afford the repercussions of such. To Washington, Pakistan is an important and indispensable ally in the war, which has yet to end, on what is described as terrorism, especially since Washington is ahead of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and will hand it over to the Afghan forces, particularly if its assumptions, i.e. that Pakistan's ally, the Haqqani network, was behind the attacks on Americans, turn out to be true. This will raise more fear from an ally of such strength and will work to avoid losing it; otherwise, it will cause a lot of trouble in Afghanistan. This ally, Pakistan, knows many of Washington's weaknesses and strengths there and is a politically and financially low-cost ally, which will not be the case in any other future coalition that the U.S. may make with India or Central Asian countries.

Islamabad, however, cannot financially afford to sever ties with Washington as it has linked its economy since its establishment to U.S. aid. Washington has realized this strongly and has provided Pakistan with assistance to conduct and control its affairs but not rely on itself, as happens in relations with China.

However, this will not prevent Pakistan -if U.S. pressure continues- from following the policy of brinkmanship towards Washington in order to extract financial or political concessions and the like. This was manifested in its crisis with American detective Raymond Davis, who killed Pakistani individuals and was jailed by the Pakistani Court. Afterwards, Washington claimed that Davis was a diplomat and should be released. Although Pakistan has vowed not to release him, it released him in return for some American financial privileges.

The point here is that Pakistan may succumb to American pressures, but not necessarily by cutting off its relationship with the Haqqani network. Rather, it would be by merely launching military operations in North Waziristan but it will not be serious in targeting or attempting to eliminate the network.

In this case, it is expected that Pakistan will try to strengthen its relations with China, which expressed its readiness to help Pakistan more than once. Pakistan has already received the Chinese Vice-Premier and Minister of Security, who offered Pakistan assistance through a symbol read by observers as an attempt to fill the gap left by the United States if relations between the two parties collapse.

For decades, China had wished for U.S.-Pakistani relations to decline in order for it to benefit from all the advantages and benefits of the alliance with Pakistan alone and deprive Washington of these geopolitical advantages. Also, it has vital interests with Pakistan, whether in order to encounter India and reach the Arabian Sea and Port Gwadar, or enhance its future influence in Afghanistan.

## **Conclusion**

Both parties, the United States and Pakistan, need each other at this stage, especially in the war on terror: Washington needs logistical, intelligence and operational assistance from Pakistan and cannot afford to sacrifice this relationship. On the other hand, Islamabad needs a U.S. cover to facing India, as well as financial assistance because the Pakistani economy is linked largely to fighting what is described as terrorism.

Therefore, it is unlikely that the two parties will reach the point of ending their relationship in their dispute. It is more likely that they would reach a compromise formula, in which Pakistan compromises some of its pride, as in the incident of

Raymond Davis, while maintaining relations with its Afghan partners, particularly the Haqqani network.

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