

## **STATE OF THE TALIBAN JANUARY 6, 2012**

### **DETAINEE PERSPECTIVES**

**A summary of reflections on the current state of the insurgency, ISAF operational effectiveness, external influences shaping the Taliban, and their views on ending the war and moving forward.**

### **TF-3-10 BAGRAM, AFGHANISTAN**

#### **Overview**

This document is intended to provide a unique view of the Afghan insurgency, one which is derived from the insurgents themselves. It is a reflection of the most common themes emerging from interrogations and debriefings in Afghanistan in 2011. Throughout the year, TF 3-10 conducted over 27,000 interrogations of over 4,000 Taliban, Al Qaeda, foreign fighters and civilians. As this document is derived directly from insurgents, it should be considered informational and not necessarily analytical.

The removal of key insurgents from the battlefield is an essential element of the TF 3-10 mission. As a direct result of rapport-based approaches used during subsequent interrogations, detainees provide a wide range of targetable information. However, in addition to names and locations, detainees offer thousands of personal anecdotes, insight into insurgent strategies and tactics, reflections on local attitudes, sources of recruitment and motivation, views on reconciliation, and observations on the effectiveness of both the International Security Assistance Force and GIRoA.

The year 2011 was pivotal for the Afghan insurgency, as Al Qaeda's regional influence continues to dissipate. The death of Al Qaeda leader Usama bin Laden was a resounding success for the international community, yet his elimination remains only another milestone in the ongoing, relentless degradation of the world's foremost terrorist network. Al Qaeda's ability to operate effectively has been further restricted by the deaths of Sheikh Said al Masri, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, Mohammad Khan and scores of other experienced personnel.

The year also brought unprecedented international media attention to the Government of Pakistan's persistent and fundamental role in the Afghan insurgency. Pakistan's response to the Abbottabad raid publicly exposed its inability to control international militants within its borders, and provided the world a glimpse into the widespread support among their population for extremist groups. Reflections from detainees indicate that Pakistan's manipulation of Taliban senior leadership continues

unabatedly. The Taliban themselves do not trust Pakistan, yet there is a widespread acceptance of the status quo in lieu of realistic alternatives.

In the last year there has been unprecedented interest, even from GIROA members, in joining the insurgent cause. Afghan civilians frequently prefer Taliban governance over GIROA, usually as a result of government corruption, ethnic bias and lack of connection with local religious and tribal leaders. The effectiveness of Taliban governance allows for increased recruitment rates which, subsequently, bolsters their ability to replace losses.

Taliban commanders, along with rank and file members, increasingly believe their control of Afghanistan is inevitable. Though the Taliban suffered severely in 2011, its strength, motivation, funding, and tactical proficiency remains intact. While they are weary of war, they see little hope for a negotiated peace. Despite numerous tactical setbacks, surrender is far from their collective mindset. For the moment, they believe that continuing the fight and expanding Taliban governance are their only viable courses of action.

### **Strategic Developments**

Since 2010, Taliban strategic messaging has focused increasingly on redefining the Taliban "Emirate" as a legitimate government. Taliban moderates, including Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour and its Media Committee Chairman, Emir Khan Mutaki, have made a concerted attempt to accomplish this. Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, a relative moderate and reputed pragmatist, serves as the Taliban's deputy commander, directly subordinate only to Mullah Mohammad Omar. Mullah Abdul Qayum Zakir, an ardent, if occasionally irrational commander, who was once a contender for this position, heads Taliban military operations.

The Taliban has widened its existing base of popular support within Afghanistan, and begun offering some reassurance to the international community that they are capable of rational and progressive leadership. Taliban leaders, including Mullah Mohammad Omar, have publicly related a somewhat clearer and more consistent vision for a future Taliban government in Afghanistan, one which ostensibly advocates acceptance of all Afghan ethnic groups and distances the group from international extremism. However, even senior detainees acknowledge that this will remain a difficult message to sell.

In order to overcome widespread skepticism, Taliban leaders are beginning to more freely acknowledge that, if given the opportunity, they would attempt to avoid past mistakes, both domestic and diplomatic. While the validity of this assertion is certainly questionable, the fundamental message is beginning to resonate among the Afghan population. Regulating the behavior of Taliban personnel is a critical element of this message. In 2011, the Taliban have limited acts of brutality. In order to minimize civilian deaths, commanders now coordinate with village elders to determine the placement of mines.

Commanders also work with civilians to explain future offensive operations, and even request permission to transit through certain areas.

The Taliban La'iha, or code of conduct, is designed specifically to maintain control of Taliban ranks and limit the possibility of rogue elements. The La'iha serves as a guide for promoting close relationships between Taliban commanders and local civilian leaders. The code is strictly enforced, with an elaborate system of checks and balances to insure compliance. Through the use of neutral observers and judges who report only to higher-level commanders, the Taliban leadership quickly identifies issues and replaces leaders. In rare cases, Taliban leaders have already gone as far as to expel or imprison their own members for violations.

Efforts toward moderation appear to be part of an attempt to hasten the withdrawal of ISAF personnel. It remains to be seen whether a revitalized, more progressive Taliban will endure if they continue to gain power and popularity. Regardless, at least within the Taliban, the refurbished image is already having a positive effect on morale. As opposed to years past, detainees have become more confident in not only their potential to win, but the virtue of their cause. Detainees from throughout Afghanistan report that popular support for the insurgency, in terms of recruitment and donations, increased within the last year.

The Taliban leadership controls nearly all insurgent activity in Afghanistan. Outside groups such as Al Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and others must receive permission from Taliban leaders prior to conducting operations on Afghan territory. Despite public statements suggesting distance between Taliban and international extremists, no formal split has yet occurred. However, many within the Taliban appear prepared to enforce a separation from these groups, should they receive orders from the Taliban Central Shura in Quetta, Pakistan.

Many Afghans are already bracing themselves for an eventual return of the Taliban. GIROA continues to declare its willingness to fight, yet many of its personnel have secretly reached out to insurgents, seeking long-term options in the event of a possible Taliban victory. The Taliban recognize this trend and formalized a reconciliation system of their own. In 2011, the Taliban substantially altered their internal guidance and strategic information operations messaging to encourage GIROA personnel to switch sides.

A point of continued frustration for Taliban leaders is their inability to independently negotiate an early end to the conflict. Pakistan continues to monitor, manipulate and direct Taliban interaction with outside entities. Safe havens provided by Pakistan are juxtaposed with their willingness to immediately arrest any Taliban personnel deemed uncooperative. Many Taliban members believe that neither Pakistan nor GIROA are willing to allow a peaceful end of the war, and therefore forsake the considerable material gains to be garnered from the conflict. Even senior Taliban leaders are fearful that they will be pressed from each side to continue the fight indefinitely.

## **How the Taliban Government Works**

In the last two years, the Taliban leadership continued to refocus from military operations to the establishment of alternative civilian governance. The Taliban have recognized that the public has been dissatisfied with GIRoA for many years, but with no ability to act as a substitute and little control over subordinate personnel, they could not generate widespread support among the population. While Taliban military operations continue to gain media attention, their growing ability to provide essential governmental services has become a strong source of appeal for Afghans.

The Taliban believe that Islam is the most unifying factor in the country and therefore base their concept of governance on Islamic principles. Even in modern Afghanistan, decisions appearing to be based in Islamic law may not be questioned. In mediating tribal, personal and criminal disputes, the Taliban will not accept money. Local villagers report a surprising degree of satisfaction with Taliban decrees. Conversely, favorable GIRoA judicial rulings tend to require bribes, which many simply cannot afford. Taliban personnel often work closely with local leaders in order to minimize the appearance of outside intrusion. There is a widespread belief in Afghanistan that a highly centralized government established by foreigners will always be fundamentally unwelcome and incapable of long-term success.

The Taliban first gained popularity in Kandahar in approximately 1994 when, in the midst of the post-communist civil war and widespread lawlessness, they offered stability and justice. Mullah Mohammad Omar was well-liked in Kandahar because he was perceived to be strict but fair under Islamic law. Many from that area, including some who were not supporters of the pre-2001 Taliban government, acknowledge that the early Taliban began as proponents of local people who had been disenfranchised or otherwise mistreated by the ruling warlords.

However, as the Taliban expanded in the mid-1990s, newer and younger recruits began to abuse their power, enforcing regulations more on personal whim than Islamic jurisprudence. Flagrant excess and abuses, as well as corruption of other forms, became commonplace. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (known colloquially as ISI) and foreign extremist elements increasingly appeared to manipulate the Taliban leadership. Popular support inevitably dwindled to the point that, even in centers of early support for the Taliban, Afghan civilians welcomed the arrival of coalition forces in 2001.

Since then, however, the Taliban government has developed widespread appeal by returning to simple, values-based administration with overlapping systems of checks and balances to ensure at least the appearance of incorruptibility. The Taliban have achieved this through their civilian commission system, which is designed to provide local, Sharia-based government, unbiased mediation, judicial systems free of

corruption, as well as an independent voice for civilians who have issues with the Taliban military command.

*"Because I am a religious leader, the Taliban use me as a conduit to local villagers."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], Taliban-associated village imam, Helmand Province [photo redacted]*

For most rural Afghan civilians, these are the only government services necessary to maintain order.

Civilian commissioners are chosen for their impartiality and local respectability, by leaders who are echelons above local Taliban military commanders. Most are religiously trained, though some are chosen simply because they are esteemed local leaders. Taliban leaders are directed under the La'iha to incorporate local religious and tribal leaders into any decision-making process. With inclusion and backing of local leaders, even severe punishments are often supported.

One of the strengths of the civilian commission system is its flexibility. Taliban provincial governors are free to establish a civilian commission system which suits the needs of their assigned province. Guidance from the Taliban leadership insures only that the civilian commissioners operate independently of the military leadership. How the system is implemented can be easily adapted to the needs of the region or tribe in question.

*"The commission comes into Paktika Province every summer, to ask villagers their opinions on Taliban in the area."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], Taliban commander, Paktika Province*

A shura-level commission system, based in Quetta, Pakistan, maintains teams of specifically-designated personnel who travel throughout Afghanistan speaking with locals, eliciting complaints against the Taliban leadership, and mediating any disagreements between the Taliban themselves. This is designed to insure that the provincial

governor does not intentionally manipulate the system for the benefit of himself or his subordinate commanders.

In the event that the district, provincial or Taliban central civilian commission system fails, the Taliban leadership has now distributed phone numbers throughout Afghanistan, which can be used to anonymously inform Taliban leaders of internal issues involving corruption, brutality, misdirected military operations or an inability to solve local criminal, tribal or regional issues.

An independent team investigates each complaint and reports directly to the Taliban Central Shura. Civilians have reported their satisfaction with the system. Scores of accounts from across Afghanistan, from Taliban and civilians alike, describe situations in which Taliban military commanders were rapidly replaced, expelled or even jailed for trespasses against locals. Tribal elders have reportedly informed Taliban commanders that, as long as the Taliban continues to work with locals in this manner, they can be assured of long-term local support.

### **Why the Taliban Fight**

The Taliban believe that President Karzai and his allies will deliberately perpetuate the war, in order to further disenfranchise the Pashtun population and capitalize on the influx of international resources. Much of GIRoA is made up of Northern Alliance leaders and former communists of the Najibullah era, some of whom were once considered war criminals even among the international community. The Taliban regularly exploit this, as a means of characterizing GIRoA as anti-Islamic and ethnically biased.

Taliban personnel believe that GIRoA is incapable of garnering sufficient popular support to effectively administer Afghanistan. They believe that a government based in Islamic values and free of foreign, liberal or secular influence is seen as the only viable option for maintaining a stable society.

*"When the Karzai government was established, we all thought there was a chance for something good. The harassment, the corruption and the abuse are unbearable. We chose to fight. We chose the Taliban."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], senior Taliban commander, Helmand Province*

Taliban leaders, and a large number of Afghan civilians, view the current Afghan constitution as a perplexing and contradictory document,

designed to centralize power in Kabul rather than promote Islamic values.

In Afghanistan, the term "liberal values" often equates to civil-war-era lawlessness and chaos, sexual permissiveness and a promotion of secularism. Even relative moderates equate the term "democracy" to liberal, Western values. Democracy, education, religious tolerance, and women's rights were all common Soviet propaganda themes during the 1979-1989 occupation.

Whether it is accurate or not, there is a persistent view that any goal promoted by the Soviet Union was simply part of an overall effort to undermine Islam itself. Such themes are largely dismissed in Afghanistan as being concerns of the "red faces," as the British, Russians and Americans are commonly labeled. Ignorance and misunderstandings among the Afghan population are commonplace. However, combined GIRoA/ ISAF efforts to educate the public on the true definition or societal value of democracy, secularism, tolerance, liberal values and women's rights have tended, thus far, to be disregarded outright.

Western concepts of women's rights remain widely rejected, at least publicly, by the majority of the Afghan population, though the Taliban themselves are divided on the issue. For example, the Taliban leadership does not yet officially support education for girls, yet there has always been a regional public girls' school located immediately within the Haqqani Madrassa, the headquarters for the Haqqani Network.

Traditional roles of women, including the wearing of the burqa, predate Islam and are thoroughly entrenched in rural Afghan society. "Protecting our traditional values" continues to be a powerful insurgent theme. This message resonates at nearly every level of society, even crossing boundaries between historically acrimonious ethnic lines. The Afghan capital is a singular exception to this rule. Although, in private conversations, Afghans commonly confide that "Kabul women are not Afghan." Most Afghan tribal leaders appear to agree with the Taliban that Western-style women's rights will lead to a degradation of society. Many others believe that the acceptance of women's rights is no less than a blatant contradiction of Islam, which in itself is an admirable reason to wage jihad.

The Taliban will not accept any government which is perceived to exclude the Pashtuns, who constitute the largest tribe among the Afghan population. GIRoA corruption, abuse of power and suspected lack of commitment to Islam continue to provoke significant anti-government sentiment. The Taliban will be hostile to any government which appears to act as an agent of foreign powers to instill Western values. The Taliban do not fight for financial gain. The eventual overthrow of GIRoA remains their primary motivator.

### **Pakistan's Role in the Conflict**

The Government of Pakistan remains intimately involved with the Taliban. In the opinion of Taliban personnel, a primary mission of ISI is

to insure that Pakistan-based militant groups' activities remain externally directed. Pakistan remains fundamentally opposed to GIRoA. Hamid Karzai is perceived as deeply influenced by India, Iran and the West, and therefore a potential strategic threat to Pakistani security. Most detainees believe that Pakistan will continue to overlook any concerns with Afghan-focused insurgent groups, in order to undermine GIRoA. Reflections from detained senior leaders consistently indicate that until the Taliban returns to Afghanistan they will have little choice but to endure Pakistan's control.

Senior Taliban leaders meet regularly with ISI personnel who advise on strategy and relay any pertinent concerns of the Government of Pakistan. These meetings are secretive, and although they are widely rumored among insurgents to take place, only the highest-level detainees have reported firsthand access to ISI personnel. Even in these instances, detainees are fearful of providing specific details, primarily due to the prospect of intelligence leaks, which could prompt an ISI-instigated backlash against them and their families in Pakistan.

In meetings with Taliban leaders, ISI personnel are openly hostile to ISAF and the government of Afghanistan. ISI officers tout the need for continued jihad and expulsion of "foreign invaders" from Afghanistan. When Taliban personnel are imprisoned in Pakistan, the arrest is blamed on U.S. pressure or intervention. These incidents are subsequently used to motivate Taliban personnel into amplifying the conflict in Afghanistan.

Taliban personnel, from low-level fighters to commanders, describe the Government of Pakistan with remarkable consistency as "untrustworthy," "manipulative," "controlling," "demeaning," and fundamentally "indifferent to the interests of Afghanistan." There is a widespread belief that, despite their professed support, ISI has no intention of allowing the Taliban to end the war and return to Afghanistan. The Taliban leadership is aware of Pakistan's historic duplicity. Most believe that the Government of Pakistan is also conscious of Taliban suspicion and resentment.

*"Pakistan knows everything. They control everything. I can't piss on a tree in Konar [Province] without them watching. The Taliban are not Islam. The Taliban are Islamabad."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], Al Qaeda commander, Konar Province. [photo redacted]*



There is a widespread assumption that Pakistan will never allow the Taliban the chance to become independent of ISI control, and thereby risk a potentially hostile organization turning against them in the future. Some Taliban commanders have openly threatened to do just that, in the event that they return to power in Afghanistan, but they have been suppressed or privately chastised by Taliban senior leaders, in an effort to keep the peace.

Despite widespread open-source reports to the contrary, detainees have provided little evidence of direct ISI funding of Taliban operations or training of Taliban personnel. Similarly, there have been no credible reports from detainees in 2011 of ISI directly providing weapons to the Taliban. Rather, the majority of ISI support appears to be through intermediaries.

The Taliban utilizes a wide array of ISI-sponsored Punjabi militant groups in North Waziristan Agency and Baluchistan to provide electronics expertise, remote detonators, advanced explosives, mines and suicide vests. These groups were originally created and funded by ISI to operate in Kashmir against India until the post-9/11 era, when they were declared international terrorists and officially disbanded. The Kashmiri training camps for these groups were abruptly shut down at that time, but their personnel quickly relocated to regions along the Afghan border in a renewed role as support elements to the Taliban.

*Pakistani Army Border Checkpoint*

*Where Taliban personnel report  
stopping for "tea and snacks" with  
border guards, as they transit into  
Afghanistan to fight:*

*[Satellite Map Redacted]*

*//[redacted]//*

*North Waziristan Agency, PK*

ISI maintains consistent and direct influence within many of these Punjabi groups since they were disbanded and dispersed. It remains unclear, at least from detainee reporting, to what extent ISI directly provides them with funds. As with most ISI influence, control is wielded by simply allowing such groups to operate, accumulate materiel, recruit personnel and conduct operations unhindered.

Retired ISI director Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul has long served as a liaison to a wide variety of militant groups in Pakistan, many of which focus exclusively on conducting operations in Afghanistan. Detainees have noted that Hamid Gul has always had an integral role in Taliban affairs, since his presence at the Taliban's formal inception in Pakistan in 1994. Taliban personnel consistently dismiss the possibility that certain ISI

elements or individuals could act independently of official Pakistani guidance. Hamid Gul directly represents the Government of Pakistan in meetings with the Taliban.

ISI is thoroughly aware of Taliban activities and the whereabouts of all senior Taliban personnel. The Haqqani family, for example, resides immediately west of the ISI office at the airfield in Miram Shah, Pakistan. The ISI office in Thal, Pakistan, is located on a bluff overlooking the headquarters of another Taliban organization, the Mansur Group. Senior Taliban representatives, such as Nasiruddin Haqqani, maintain residences in the immediate vicinity of ISI headquarters in Islamabad, Pakistan.

ISI is particularly alert to any contact between Taliban personnel and other groups or organizations, including GIRoA or other foreign intelligence and diplomatic services. Most anticipate that ISI will attempt to maintain its historic control over any Afghan insurgents, and remain the sole conduit between the Taliban and the outside world.

### **The Haqqani Network**

The Haqqani Network is the largest of several, similarly-structured Taliban groups operating in Afghanistan. It is based in Miram Shah, Pakistan, and draws heavily on the populations of Khowst, Paktia and Paktika Province, Afghanistan, for support. Though the Haqqani Network maintains its own identity and history, it remains an integral part of the Taliban.

Haqqani Network personnel changes, areas of responsibility, funding, operations, and strategy are directed by the Taliban leadership in Quetta, Pakistan. The Haqqani Network will not independently reconcile, nor are they authorized to act as spokesmen for the Taliban as a whole. Haqqani Network members refer to themselves only as Taliban. The term Haqqani Network is unknown within the group.

Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder of the group, gained a significant and loyal following as a jihadist commander in the 1980s. During the civil wars off the early 1990s, Jalaluddin haqqani acted as a mediator between various belligerent groups, with mixed success. By 1996, on the promise that they Taliban would bring stability and Islamic governance to Afghanistan, he swore allegiance to Mullah Mohammad Omar. Detained members of Jalaluddin Haqqani's family have repeatedly confirmed that his commitment of support was made willingly.

*"First, I have a question for you. You must know where we are every day in Pakistan, I'm sure. Why are Badruddin [Haqqani Network operational commander] and I still alive?"*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], Senior Haqqani Network Commander, Khowst and Paktia Provinces*

Jalaluddin Haqqani refused any senior position within the Taliban government. Instead he accepted a relatively modest appointment as Minister of Border Affairs, primarily so that he could retain an office in his ancestral homeland. He provided commanders and fighters to the Taliban government during the fight against the Northern Alliance and remained loyal to Mullah Mohammad Omar even after the coalition invasion in 2001.

Soon after the 2001 invasion, he encouraged close associates and tribal leaders to reconnect with the interim government and explore options for reintegration. This effort was disrupted when ISAF mistakenly bombed a convoy of family members and tribal leaders in Paktia Province as they traveled to a loya jirga meeting in Kabul to discuss forming a permanent government. Despite this incident, Jalaluddin Haqqani permitted his brothers Hajji Ibrahim and Hajji Khalil ur Rahman to work with government officials in Kabul from 2002-2003, until they were arrested by ISAF and ISI, respectively.

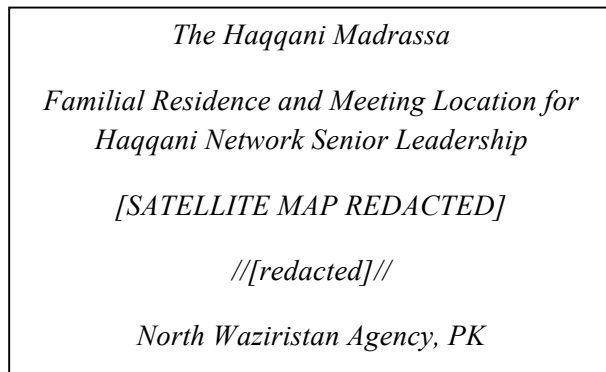
Jalaluddin Haqqani is reportedly alive, though descriptions of his health and lucidity vary. His location is currently unknown and he maintains little connectivity with relatives and associates. By most accounts, Jalaluddin Haqqani provides occasional advice to Haqqani Network leaders, but he no longer maintains operational control over the group. Jalaluddin Haqqani's death will likely be well-publicized, as he retains a wide base of popular support in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Sirajuddin, Jalaluddin Haqqani's second son, was appointed to take control of the group in approximately 2005, and continued his father's commitment to support the Taliban. A wide range of detainees have described Sirajuddin as quiet, serene, pious, compassionate, highly intelligent, reclusive and intensely devoted to jihad. Nasiruddin, the eldest son, is competent and loyal, but not interested in personally accepting the senior leadership position. Nasiruddin instead represents Sirajuddin in meetings with ISI in Islamabad, Pakistan, and the Taliban Central Shura in Quetta, Pakistan. Nasiruddin also handles Haqqani Network finances, including the delivery of funds from the Taliban leadership.

Because Sirajuddin remains in hiding, his younger brother Badruddin coordinates all military operations for the Haqqani Network. The group has become highly centralized around Badruddin, and very little can occur without his knowledge and consent. Badruddin coordinates the distribution of materiel for subordinate commanders, and oversees all suicide operations and large-scale attacks. Badruddin's pattern of life is highly regimented, and he travels each day between several known locations in Miram Shah, Pakistan.

Sirajuddin's location is generally unknown, and even senior commanders sometimes require several days to arrange a face-to-face meeting. The Taliban leadership appointed Sirajuddin governor of Khowst Province. Mullah Sangin, a close associate of the Haqqani family, is the governor of Paktika Province. Outside of these areas, Sirajuddin has numerous subordinate commanders assigned to conduct

operations in Paktia, Logar, Ghazni, Wardak, Kunduz, Baghlan , and Takhar provinces, under the operational command of other Taliban governors.



The Haqqani Network also conducts most of the Taliban's large-scale attacks in the Kabul area. The Taliban leadership designated Kabul City a "free area," in which any commander can conduct operations without prior coordination with the local command. Badruddin and Zakir, a Haqqani Network subordinate commander with extensive ties to foreign fighter networks and militant groups in Northern Afghanistan, have taken a leading role in arranging attacks in the capital. The area surrounding Miram Shah, Pakistan, is home to a wide range of disparate militant groups. Personnel, expertise and materiel are readily available to suit any operation. The Haqqani Network has become adept at combining efforts and utilizing available resources in order to orchestrate spectacular attacks.

Mullah Mohammad Omar considers Sirajuddin one of his most effective commanders, and the two maintain regular correspondence, typically through a series of couriers, including Nasiruddin Haqqani and an unidentified brother of Mullah Mohammad Omar. Mullah Mohammad Omar has specifically noted Sirajuddin Haqqani's ability to continually carry out high-profile, large-scale attacks and assassinations, which generate significant international media attention for the Taliban.

The Haqqani Network remains the only significant Afghan Taliban group to have conducted military operations against Pakistan. Deceased Tehrik-e Taliban (TT) leader Baitullah Mehsud began his jihadist career as a low-level Haqqani Network commander under now-detained senior leader Hajji Mali Khan. Baitullah Mehsud remained in the Haqqani Network until approximately 2007, when he restructured his subordinate personnel and redirected all efforts against Pakistan. This garnered him unprecedented regional support. Numerous Haqqani-affiliated commanders, including Hajji Mali Khan and Mullah Sangin, were often inspired to covertly fight alongside Baitullah Mehsud against the Pakistani military.

The ISI association with the Haqqani Network is highly secretive, and it can often be difficult to differentiate rumors from fact. ISI has exerted

particularly tight control over the Haqqani family, likely as a result of Haqqani Network leaders' reportedly deep resentment of the Government of Pakistan. Even senior Haqqani Network personnel lament Pakistan's influence over Sirajuddin. However, most acknowledge that there is currently no choice but to accept at least a certain degree of ISI control, in exchange for the sanctuary they provide. ISI has repeatedly arrested senior Haqqani Network personnel without warning or apparent cause, all while privately touting the fact that Haqqani Network leaders are permitted free movement in Pakistan. Most of the Haqqani Network leadership assumes that this policy is simply another of Pakistan's methods for asserting its control.

Sirajuddin and Badruddin have held meetings directly with ISI personnel. However, most communication is handled through Haqqani family members Hajji Ibrahim, Hajji Khalil ur Rahman and Nasiruddin Haqqani. ISI appears to view its liaison with the Haqqani Network as a back channel means of communication to other militant groups in North Waziristan, as well as a tool for tailoring insurgent strategy to more closely match the goals of Pakistan.

Detainees have provided little credible evidence of Pakistan directly funding, training or equipping Haqqani Network personnel. As in other cases of ISI-Taliban cooperation, the relationship appears to focus on maintaining overarching Pakistani direction of the Afghan insurgency. As in many of its other relationships, ISI employs a delicately balanced combination of coercion and support to keep the Haqqani Network under its control.

## **Taliban Finances**

The Taliban continue to openly raise the majority of their revenue through donations. Collectors travel door to door throughout Pakistan requesting donations, without disguising their Taliban affiliation. Most donations are provided under the official title of zakat, or religious tithing, but the eventual use of the donation for jihad is clear. Donors range from wealthy businessmen to impoverished families, and the amount donated is typically determined as a percentage of available income at the time. Taliban collections regularly take place throughout the year, in every city in Pakistan.

Donors from the Gulf Region also provide funds to support Taliban efforts, though this process is far more secretive. Taliban members find it difficult to travel commercially and any decision to do so must be made assuming the visibility of Pakistani ISI and other national intelligence services. Detainees have described fundraising efforts in the Gulf Region as being under the guise of either religious donations or venture capital, ostensibly to fund Afghan entrepreneurs. These funds are typically transferred via courier or through independent money transfer establishments known as hawalas. Taliban leaders have virtually no direct involvement with traditional banking systems.

*"This year, more funds were given to the Taliban to conduct operations than in any previous year."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], commission chief,  
Parwan Province*

Assessing the legitimacy of such funds transfers can be extremely difficult. As with most Taliban financial transactions, funds are transferred in small amounts, typically under \$10,000.00. To further complicate matters, Afghan and Pakistani expatriates working throughout the Gulf Region generate a continuous, yet legitimate flow of currency back to family members at home. This can lead to additional confusion over what is or is not insurgent-related. Many detainees have pointed out that even legitimate financial transactions between family members or businesses may later be donated, at least in part, to insurgent organizations.

Donations are also collected throughout Afghanistan. Under Section 12 of the La'iha, the Taliban are not permitted to use criminal activities, such as forcibly collecting zakat or hijacking and kidnapping for ransom. Taliban personnel accused of stealing from local civilians or kidnapping for ransom are quickly replaced. In 2011, there were numerous cases of Taliban expelling their own personnel for perceived corruption. The capture of materiel destined for Coalition bases is specifically noted as an exception to this policy, though the eventual disposition of captured goods and currency is strictly controlled under Section 5 of the La'iha.

*"We collect from Afghans everywhere. There are even a thousand Afghan homes in Dubai, all of whom donate what they can to the cause."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], senior Taliban financier*

The narcotics trade provides funds to Taliban operations, though the nature of this process is widely misunderstood. The Taliban does not officially encourage or discourage narcotics production, and it does not play any direct role in the farming, smuggling, refining or distribution process. However, the Taliban regularly collects a percentage of zakat from any individual involved in any stage of narcotics production. This

zakat may be collected in Afghanis, Pakistani rupees or, frequently, raw opium or hashish.

Yearly throughout Afghanistan, during the spring harvest, raw opium becomes a form of currency. The opium is openly traded in any of the hundreds of narcotics bazaars which emerge at that time, usually away from population centers under government control. In the event that the Taliban commander receives a portion of the zakat in raw opium, he will send an associated to the local bazaar to exchange it for the monetary equivalent. This money, along with other donations collected from local residents, is then used to purchase motorcycle fuel, phone cards, ammunition or other sundry items used to maintain Taliban operations in that area.

More significant equipment such as vehicles, various small arms, 107 mm rockets, heavy machine guns, recoilless rifles or specialized ammunition typically require additional finances from higher-level commanders who are based in Pakistan. This is often a point of contention, as funds are not always available to meet the lower-level commander's operational needs. Lower-level Taliban commanders often find it easier to replace personnel than equipment.

Tactics involving direct-fire attacks using small arms are often used sparingly in order to minimize equipment losses. Mines, fertilizer, detonation cord, blasting caps, remote detonators and other elements related specifically to IED operations are delivered free of charge from the Taliban leadership in Pakistan. Taliban personnel endure far fewer losses in personnel and materiel by focusing on IED operations.

In 2011, a wide variety of detainees discussed Taliban finances. As a rule, district commanders receive between \$50,000 and \$200,000 per year, depending on the level of insurgent activity in their area. The Taliban regional military commissions in Pakistan apportion funds to each province, and the Taliban provincial governor then distributes his allotment to his subordinate district commanders. Based on only detainee estimates, the Taliban appears to require between \$100 million and \$150 million per year to operate. Detainees often note their ability to operate effectively with minimal resources, without the yearly multi-billion-dollar budgets of GIRoA security forces.

Almost without exception, Taliban members do not receive salaries or other financial incentives for their work. Low-level fighters and facilitators who live and operate in Afghanistan must keep their jobs in order to maintain an adequate income for themselves and their families. Commanders at the district or provincial level tend to suffer financially. However, any commander who is forced to leave Afghanistan and resettle in Pakistan receives a stipend to assist in renting a house for his family. Normally, even these commanders must request donations from other family members in order to subsist.

### **Effectiveness of Coalition Operations**

In direct combat, most Taliban commanders understand that they simply cannot compete with ISAF. Direct confrontation frequently leads

to staggering losses of Taliban personnel. Despite these losses, however, commanders such as Mullah Sangin in Paktika Province, Badruddin Haqqani in Khowst Province and numerous others in Southern Afghanistan will occasionally engage in large-scale direct attacks. These attacks are often combined with indirect fire and suicide operations to maximize psychological impact. Though these attacks are tactically ineffective, they garner widespread media attention, generate interest and commendation from the Taliban senior leadership and actually bolster recruiting and fundraising efforts.

Taliban leaders anticipate personnel losses. Commanders and fighters are easily replaced, at least initially, with minimal impact on operations. After eliminating a commander, ISAF will often switch focus to other areas and targeting lines. While this type of targeting may remove specific insurgents from the battlefield, it will typically have a negligible effect on insurgent operations overall.

*"After the next guy, [the District Commander] Mualawi Zahir was killed, we just left to go back to Pakistan. The airstrikes and the raids at night were too much.*

*[Photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], IMU Deputy Commander, Kunduz Province*

Taliban commanders are most fearful of precise, yet persistent targeting. Unrelenting, pinpoint ISAF operations targeting specific command elements have had a demonstrable effect on the insurgents' ability to conduct operations. Because Taliban provincial governors tend to remain in Pakistan, beyond the scope of ISAF operations, the most striking results appear to be derived from successive targeting of Taliban personnel at the district command level.

When a Taliban district commander is captured or killed, he is replaced within hours by his deputy. If ISAF can quickly remove the deputy, a senior commander from the district typically takes his place and a new deputy must be chosen. This leads to an inevitable rippling effect throughout the local insurgent chain of command as leaders are selected for promotion.

When that replacement commander is killed or captured, insurgent operations in the area often cease, at least temporarily, in order to reshuffle the chain of command and resolve any perceived operational security issues. This often leads to infighting, mistrust and accusatory behavior which, by Taliban regulations, must be resolved at the commission level in Pakistan. Though even these networks will eventually reconstitute, the process can disable a Taliban district



command for weeks or months. In the spring or early summer, at the beginning of the fighting season, this sustained targeting can be particularly disruptive.

The targeting of facilitation networks has also had a demonstrable effect on Taliban operations. IEDs are most often constructed inside Afghanistan. Various materials such as fertilizer, blasting caps and detonation cord are not widely available and must be smuggled in from Pakistan, often in large quantities, for use over an extended period of time. Insurgents have frequently indicated that large interdictions severely limited their ability to conduct operations in their area. After losing large quantities of materials, senior commanders are forced to redistribute the limited available resources, often leading to internal disagreements and other organizational inefficiencies.

Coordination of targeting and strategic information operations messaging increases ISAF effectiveness. For example, the continued presence of foreign elements in Afghanistan can be publicized as a clear hindrance to eventual ISAF withdrawals. Continuous ISF operations specifically targeting foreign fighters in a particular area can greatly amplify this messaging. In instances when ISAF operations and messaging have been synchronized, the population has been more liable to appreciate and support allied operations. In the past, such operations have not only removed key personnel from the battlefield, but forced the Taliban to adapt their strategy, by severely restricting their use of foreign personnel.

Targeting tribal elders, religious leaders, shopkeepers, laborers and others with nominal contact with Taliban personnel can foster deep resentment and mistrust of ISAF and GIRoA. It is increasingly difficult for civilians in much of Afghanistan to completely avoid contact with Taliban personnel. It can often be a challenge to differentiate between local civilians who have contact with insurgents and members of the Taliban who act in a facilitation role.

Villagers commonly relay that the Taliban are continually present in their areas solving disputes, purchasing supplies at local bazaars, meeting with tribal leaders or staying overnight in guesthouses or the local mosque. They take exception to being arrested for this type of contact. Throughout Afghanistan, under established cultural norms, a homeowner is obliged to provide overnight accommodation to passersby without question.

Large-scale conventional operations can also have a negative strategic effect. While these operations can initially produce a certain degree of stability, the imposition of GIRoA governance often leads to widespread dissatisfaction, resentment and a long-term upsurge in support for insurgents. Unlike large-scale operations, pinpoint raids and kinetic strikes on confirmed militants can usually be explained and understood locally, particularly when few civilians are beleaguered in the process.

ISAF personnel are not nearly as disliked as Afghan security forces, and ISAF is not burdened with the GIRoA reputation for corruption, ethnic bias or favoritism in local disputes. However, ISAF cordon and

searches, counterdrug operations or mass detentions quickly generate sympathy for the insurgency and lead to a hostile environment for both ISAF and GIRoA personnel. Taliban commanders reported intentionally goading ISAF and Afghan forces into conducting such operations, or deliberately luring ISAF into arresting tribal and religious leaders only to meet with angry locals afterward in order to express sympathy and bolster support for the Taliban.

### **The Pakistani Taliban**

The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, or Pakistani Taliban, is a conglomeration of Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen, Central Asian extremists, Al Qaeda affiliates and former Punjabi militant groups, some with experience in Kashmir. TTP continues to conduct operations throughout the tribal areas of Pakistan, with particular emphasis on South Waziristan, Bajaur, Mohmand and several strategic regions within the Northwest Frontier Province.

However, since the death of TTP founder Baitullah Mehsud in 2009, TTP strength and influence has waned considerably. The Government of Pakistan has developed an innovative strategy for subduing the TTP through a combination of clandestine diplomacy and intense military action. ISI has directed much of its effort toward undermining the TTP from within, and subsequently redirecting insurgent efforts away from Pakistan. TTP commander Hakimullah Mehsud remains a polarizing, unpredictable and emotional leader, a fact which is easily exploited and manipulated by ISI.

In South Waziristan Agency, a historic base of operations for TTP, full-scale warfare between TTP and Pakistan military forces continues daily. Both sides have endured significant losses in the conflict. Pakistani artillery and airpower are employed regularly, often indiscriminately, in an effort to root out insurgents. Alliances among ISI, Afghan Taliban, tribal elements and various other militants in South Waziristan are in constant fluctuation, making it difficult to ascertain the ground truth of the situation. Many senior TTP personnel have fled into North Waziristan Agency, where the Pakistani government does not conduct operations.

Gul Bahader, the TTP-affiliated emir for North Waziristan, abides by a mutual ceasefire agreement he made with ISI, which bans all offensive operations in the agency. Gul Bahader is considered one of the most powerful commanders in Pakistan's tribal areas, with dozens of senior sub-commanders and thousands of fighters under his command. ISI has persuaded Gul Bahader to support operations exclusively in Afghanistan, which he accomplishes by temporarily assigning his personnel to work under Afghan Taliban commanders, typically of the Haqqani Network.

The ceasefire in North Waziristan is a significant point of contention between Gul Bahader and Hakimullah Mehsud. Against the explicit orders of Gul Bahader and local Afghan Taliban, Hakimullah Mehsud continues to attempt to provoke the Pakistani government into breaking

the agreement. Many believe that this discord will eventually lead to open conflict between TTP and remaining North Waziristan-based militant groups. This serves the strategic interests of Pakistan by keeping belligerents focused on each other, degrading TTP in the process.

An example of TTP provocation was the videotaped execution of Colonel Imam, a close associate and confidant of former ISI director Hamid Gul. Colonel Imam was Hamid Gul's liaison to numerous militant groups throughout Pakistan and, like Hamid Gul, he was a historic proponent of Afghan Taliban, Kashmiri militants and Al Qaeda. TTP ostensibly captured and killed Colonel Imam because he was a symbol of ISI collaboration with insurgent groups, a notion which Hakimullah Mehsud finds reprehensible. This execution prompted a significant outcry from other militant group leaders, including Sirajuddin Haqqani, who saw Hakimullah Mehsud's actions as pointlessly provocative.

While the Pakistani military applies intense pressure to the most belligerent TTP elements, ISI has had demonstrable and consistent success in approaching and pacifying mid-level TTP commanders. In Bajaur Agency, Swat and Chitral, ISI has methodically split the TTP and their collaborators into a series of disparate and uncoordinated subgroups and redirected their operations into Afghanistan. An example of this is Harakat ul-Jihad-e-Islami, a TTP-affiliated group formerly led by deceased Al Qaeda-associated militant Ilyas Kashmiri. HUJI now primarily supports Al Qaeda and Taliban personnel in Konar and Nuristan provinces, Afghanistan.

Despite a mutual aversion to ISI and the Government of Pakistan, TTP continues to alienate even formerly sympathetic Afghan Taliban personnel. TTP remains notorious for its brutality, which is widely seen as counterproductive to long-term efforts and arguably contrary to the teachings of Islam. TTP attempts to disrupt the relationship between ISI and Afghan insurgents are viewed as impetuous and impractical. Even deceased Al Qaeda operations chief Atiyah Abd al-Rahman was vocal in his condemnation of TTP brutality, to the point that he threatened a split between Al Qaeda and TTP over the issue.

Haqqani Network and other Afghan Taliban groups are often resentful of the TTP/Al Qaeda North Waziristan-based counter-intelligence element, or Khorasan Group, for their often overzealous efforts to find, question and execute suspected spies. The Khorasan Group has already executed hundreds in North Waziristan Agency, Pakistan, many with insubstantial evidence. Many militants assume that without significant changes to the TTP leadership and tactics, the organization will likely continue to lose supporters, and increasingly attract outcasts and criminal elements.

### **Relationships with Foreign Fighters**

The deaths of Usama bin Laden, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, Abu Hafs al-Shahri, Ilyas Kashmiri, the Yemen leadership and other commanders, fighters and technical experts have combined to severely cripple Al

Qaeda's ability to operate. Ayman al Zawahiri is now the senior leader of Al Qaeda. Abu Yahya al Libi, his deputy, maintains more direct interaction with residual operational elements. In the past, numerous detainees described Abu Yahya as well-versed in Salafist religious doctrine, but not particularly proficient as a commander or strategist.

It has become increasingly difficult for Al Qaeda to maintain a base of operations in Afghanistan or Pakistan. The constant fear of airstrikes, internal conspirators and spies, and severe restrictions on lifestyle are highly demoralizing. Newly arrived Al Qaeda fighters become discouraged quickly at the scrutiny placed upon them by overly suspicious leaders. Fighters are also frustrated by the fact that they are rendered inactive, untrained, sequestered into safehouses and denied communication with the outside world, sometimes for months at a time. Many former Al Qaeda personnel have left the group to work alongside other militant groups.

*"Al Qaeda cannot trust the Pashtuns. They do not conduct joint operations. The Pashtuns only trust 313 Brigade because we are all Punjabi, with no connections to Afghanistan."*

*"We are only safe in Konar and Nuristan because [ISAF] is too intimidated by the terrain to do operations there."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted], HUKI 313 Brigade Operativ,  
Bajaur Agency, Pakistan and Konar Province,  
Afghanistan*

In most regions of Afghanistan, Taliban leaders have no interest in associating with Al Qaeda. Working with Al Qaeda invites targeting, and Al Qaeda personnel are no longer the adept and versatile fighters and commanders they once were. Even Taliban groups with historically close ties to Al Qaeda, such as the Haqqani Network, have had little or no interaction with them in the last two years. Because the Afghan Taliban largely will not sponsor them, Al Qaeda leaders have been forced to seek other groups, such as TTP, for assistance and sanctuary. TTP and Al Qaeda are now interdependent to the point that many detainees consider them the same organization.

Northeastern Afghanistan has become a small haven for Al Qaeda. Several Al Qaeda commanders, including the Al Qaeda emir for Konar and Nuristan, Farouq al-Qahtani, now live and operate in Afghanistan, with permission from the Taliban, but with the direct support of TTP elements. Al Qaeda, TTP and Afghan Taliban work and train in both provinces, though limited Al Qaeda efforts to expand operations from the region have faltered due to a lack of support and sponsorship.

The Al Qaeda presence in this region is an anomaly from the rest of Afghanistan for several reasons. There are almost no ISAF operations in Nuristan Province, where Farouq al-Qahtani and his subordinates reportedly reside. There is also relatively little ISAF activity in Konar Province, though Taliban, TTP and Al Qaeda elements regularly conduct offensive operations there. Furthermore, the situation in neighboring Pakistan's Bajaur Agency and Northwest Frontier Province remains unpredictable and dangerous for Al Qaeda and TTP elements who have not yet reconciled with the Government of Pakistan. This has led some TTP and Al Qaeda elements to seek refuge in Afghanistan, in order to regroup, train and sustain operations to whatever extent possible.

Konar and Nuristan Provinces are also home to a large percentage of Afghanistan's Salafist population, which has historically been sympathetic to Arabs and Al Qaeda. Anti-government Salafist militias have maintained a delicate yet necessary working relationship with their Taliban counterparts, who are mostly Hanifi. The Salafis are also historically more supportive of TTP, which allows TTP commanders the ability to reach out to them for support when the security situation in Pakistan becomes untenable.

Farsi-speaking members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) operate regularly under Taliban command in the North of Afghanistan, and occasionally alongside Haqqani Network personnel in Paktika and Paktia Provinces. Ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazaks, Azeris and Turks continue to constitute the bulk of foreign fighters flowing into Pakistan, typically through facilitation networks in Iraq. The Iranians have not historically supported Taliban elements or their allies directly. However, they are generally willing to overlook political differences and transiting personnel in order to continue efforts against ISAF. Many of these incoming fighters avoid Al Qaeda, and instead find refuge among other groups, such as Taliban, TTP or IMU.

*"In Berlin, this seemed like a good idea. But, when I got to Iran, (the AQ/Uzbek facilitator) told me to just be a suicide bomber in Chechnya, because fighting in Afghanistan was going to be a waste of time. I should have listened."*

*[photo redacted]*

*--[name redacted],  
Moroccan/German foreign fighter,  
Zabul Province, Afghanistan*

The Iranians have provided moderate support to what coalition forces refer to as the Herat Insurgent Faction, or "Mujahedin of Martyr Akbari", which is a smaller insurgent group operating primarily in Herat and Badghis Provinces. However, Iran has offered far more support to Farsi-speaking groups, many of which currently support GIROA, rather than pro-Taliban elements. Iran continues to indicate that it would be interested in establishing a better relationship with the Taliban. There is significant resistance to this from the Taliban leadership and ISI.

### **Thoughts on Reconciliation**

Many Afghans believe that, despite public statements to the contrary, the present GIROA administration will never be truly interested in allowing the Taliban a meaningful role in the government. The northern, Farsi-speaking tribesmen who control the majority of GIROA have little to gain from increased Pashtun influence that the Taliban appears to represent. The Taliban uses the flow of investments into Kabul from nations around the world, including Iran, India and other states, as evidence that GIROA leaders are simply becoming wealthier by deliberately prolonging the war.

The appointment of Burhanuddin Rabbani as Commissioner of the High Council for Peace was taken as an enormous insult by many Pashtuns. This is largely due to his status as the former head of the interim mujahedin government and president of the Northern Alliance, when he developed a widespread reputation for his partiality toward Farsi-speaking tribesmen. Because of the reputation he developed during that period, Burhannudin Rabbani was considered a war criminal internationally and by much of the Afghan population, to include many non-Pashtuns.

There is a widespread belief that Rabbani's appointment was President Hamid Karzai's deliberate attempt to simultaneously convince the world that he wanted peace while letting the Pashtuns know that he did not. The potential appointment of Rabbani's son, Ahmad Zia Massoud, to take his father's position will have an equally provocative effect on the Taliban and much of the Pashtun population.

Reconciliation is simply not a realistic option for most Taliban commanders. ISAF and GIROA have demanded the surrender of weapons and a pledge of allegiance to the Afghan constitution as a prerequisite for reconciliation. Both requirements remain highly objectionable to most Taliban leaders. In historically Pashtun areas of Afghanistan, where popular support for the Taliban is at its highest, reconciliation is viewed as shameful and, perhaps more importantly, unnecessary, due to the largely unabated expansion of Taliban influence.

The most successful efforts to reconcile Taliban commanders have occurred in the North of Afghanistan, in provinces which historically have had less of a Taliban presence. Sar-e Pul, Baghlan, Samangan and Badghis provinces have had legitimate cases of Taliban commanders reconciling. The Taliban tend to assign less-experienced commanders to

northern provinces. These commanders tend to receive far less funding and replacements than other areas. Morale is lower, and the local Pashtun populations in these areas tend to be smaller, making recruitment and local fundraising more of a challenge.

For the Taliban leadership, independent talks with other nations or entities, to include the U.S. and GIROA, remain extremely difficult. There is significant pressure and influence from ISI not to consider reconciliation. Taliban commanders who lay down arms or swear allegiance to support the Afghan constitution have been targeted for retribution.

### **Taliban Reconciliation Programs**

The Taliban have publicly relayed their intention to include all Afghan tribes, including Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Pashai and Pashtuns in their efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. This message has clearly not yet resonated among northerners. There are widespread fears in the north that, despite such reassurances, if the Taliban eventually gains influence in Kabul they will be unable to control their subordinates and prevent violence.

Many Taliban members suffered through widespread atrocities during the conflict against the Northern Alliance, and again after the coalition invasion of 2001. This has not been forgotten. Those in the north who fear an eventual Taliban takeover are eager to avoid any possibility of violent retribution. Many have begun preparing for this eventuality by arming and training militias. Others are seeking alternative methods of ensuring their safety. The last year brought a dramatic increase in detainee reporting regarding Taliban efforts to "reconcile" government and security forces to the insurgent side.

Taliban personnel anticipate that ISAF will continue to pull out of Afghanistan, region by region, leaving Afghan forces behind to maintain security. The Taliban have adapted their strategy to hasten ISAF withdrawals as much as possible, to include reducing the level of violence in certain areas. Once ISAF is no longer a factor, Taliban consider their victory inevitable. The Taliban are absolutely confident in their ability to subdue Afghan forces.

*Enemy Documents, 2011  
Objective ABP Xfer  
Khowst Province, AF:*

*[Taliban letterhead, "Afghanistan Islamic Emirate" in Pashto and English, and a handwritten note, redacted, with English translation below that:]*

*...Peace be Upon You,*

*As you know, the District Governor and his colleague, NDS Chief Islam, have coordinated with the Taliban to ambush the Americans and Police.*

*This is good news, because we are trying to obtain cooperation from all the government to help you beat the Westerners...*

Taliban commanders have already altered their strategy to allow for a more rapid handover to GIRoA forces. Guidance from Mullah Mohammad Omar in the summer of 2011 directed that no Taliban element will engage ISAF forces as they withdraw. Throughout Helmand Province, even in heavily-contested areas such as Marja District, Taliban governance appears to remain in effect. Detainees already report widespread insurgent cooperation with Afghan forces. Most Taliban commanders there, however, relocated to northern Helmand, where they have attempted to regroup and avoid direct confrontation with ISAF personnel. This move is largely for self-preservation, as they attempt to outlast ISAF in the area.

Throughout Afghanistan, formal and informal agreements between Taliban, Arbakai militias and Afghan intelligence, police and army units have long been a common occurrence. An official Taliban reconciliation program appears to have been implemented in the summer of 2011. It is designed to reach out to GIRoA officials and enablers, in order to garner official commitments to support the Taliban in the long term. For the first time, detainees report the use of officially signed ceasefire and loyalty agreements. These agreements are the first formal recognition of the process from the Taliban side, and they have already seen some success.

Agreements with local Afghan units are most often of a passive nature. Informal ceasefires are common and, in many regions, the norm for Afghan forces. There has been a conspicuous increase in reporting which references outright coordination, equipment transfers, intelligence sharing or occasionally even the incorporation of Afghan security forces into Taliban operations, some of whom have already targeted ISAF personnel.

The weapons bazaar in Miram Shah, Pakistan, is increasingly inundated with rifles, pistols and heavy weapons which have been sold by Afghan security forces. Captured photographs of Taliban personnel riding openly in the green Ford Ranger pickup trucks of the Afghan Army are commonplace throughout Afghanistan. These vehicles and weapons were once only acquired on the battlefield. They are now regularly sold or donated by Afghan security forces.

*"In Konar Province, Afghan intelligence, Afghan police and the Afghan army all work with us now."*

*[Photo Redacted]*

*--[name redacted], Al Qaeda-affiliated TTP operative, Bajaur Agency, Pakistan, and Konar Province, Afghanistan*



Overall contact between Taliban and GIROA leaders also appears to have increased in the last two years. Most Taliban commanders with GIROA connections report that the relationships began with Afghan officials reaching out to the Taliban, not vice versa. Small, yet quantifiable gestures of support are provided as evidence of the GIROA official's interest in cooperation. Most often, these gestures involve leaking intelligence on ISAF operations, guarantees of safe passage, early warning on impending arrests or assistance in releasing captured insurgents in Afghan custody, without the customary bribe.

The nature of any long-term ISAF commitment to Afghanistan remains a fundamental question for the Taliban. ISAF remains a serious threat, and most insurgents believe that the continued presence of ISAF personnel will at least delay the Taliban's anticipated return to power. Yet, there is recognition that ISAF will not stay indefinitely. In the interim, the Taliban will continue to encourage informal peace deals at the local level.

### **Explaining ISAF Goals**

While ISAF strategic messaging has improved noticeably over the last two years, a large degree of confusion among the population remains over ISAF goals. Despite 10 years of conflict, many have surprisingly little concept of what ISAF intends to accomplish or, perhaps most importantly, what insurgents will need to do in order to end the war. Very few in Afghanistan equate the current situation to Iraq where insurgents turned against Al Qaeda elements, fostering an atmosphere conducive to coalition troop withdrawals. Detainees continue to relay varying impressions of the ISAF mission, and most assume that ISAF is in Afghanistan to accomplish one or more of the following:

- Kill or capture Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders
- Impose democracy and Western ideals
- Install and continue to support pro-US GIROA leaders
- Insure that Pashtuns do not return to power in Kabul
- Acquire Afghanistan's resources
- Use Afghanistan as a base to intimidate neighbors, such as China and Iran
- Continue a worldwide crusade against Muslims

In reality, ISAF goals are fundamentally reasonable and, at least in face-to-face discussions, easily explainable. Clarification on exactly what ISAF expects from the conflict is frequently a first step to reaching genuine cooperation and understanding. The primary ISAF goal remains denying Afghanistan as a future safe haven for international extremists. A secondary goal is to responsibly leave Afghanistan under the control of Afghans, without the appearance that bloody civil war is imminent.

In order to encourage talks with Taliban leaders, it is often necessary to appear reluctantly prepared for indefinite war. Many Taliban leaders believe that ISAF will leave Afghanistan even if no compromise can be reached. In order to maintain a certain degree of leverage, it is important to relay a sense of unpredictability and commitment to the fight, despite the inherent cost, simply because the original cause remains valid.

In detainee operations, a variety of messages resonate particularly well among Afghan insurgents. The following themes have assisted in achieving greater understanding of the ISAF mission, and encourage insurgents more toward dialogue than continued violence:

--Our mission is to protect our families at home. The war was begun by belligerents who sought conflict and perpetuated by us only in self-defense. This cause is righteous and understandable in any religion or culture.

--In no way is ISAF in Afghanistan to dishonor Islam, take natural resources, forsake traditional culture or establish a base to spread Western influence in the region.

--The plan for the war was made over a few weeks in September and October of 2001. We made necessarily quick decisions and, of course, many mistakes since our arrival. Now, though, it is important to focus on the future.

--The death of Usama bin Laden and the continued degradation of Al Qaeda have already directly enabled more concerted efforts to withdraw from Afghanistan.

--GIROA clearly needs help from all of the Afghan people. We need to focus on finding long-term solutions and promoting inclusion. Everything is on the table.

--ISAF cannot leave in good conscience if a bloody civil war appears imminent. There must eventually be some dialogue between the major participants.

--The Taliban must be prepared to say and do whatever is necessary to ease Northern fears, if they want to hasten the end of the war.

--GIROA will accept negotiations and approach them earnestly, or risk appearing to be belligerents in the conflict and losing international support.

--Pakistan will eventually have no option but to accept the will of the Afghan people.

--The nations of ISAF are universally prepared to stay or return if international extremism reemerges as an issue in Afghanistan.

--The last time the U.S. lost 3,000 men and women in a surprise attack, we willingly suffered the loss of 450,000 additional personnel to end the threat. While we have no desire whatsoever to repeat this, the safety of our families at home justifies any loss.

--Extremist agendas, which promote the notion that only violence can achieve political goals, should be rendered invalid given the Arab uprisings of 2011.

--The Hadith explains how the Prophet Mohammad overruled the advice of many of his closest lieutenants and made significant compromises to

insure the success of negotiations leading to the peace of Houdaibia, which ended the war between the early Muslims and the Qureshi tribe.  
--It is stated in the Koran, in Sura 8, that while a group must be prepared for a righteous war, it must accept offers of peace, even in the case that the enemy is deemed untrustworthy.  
--An end to 35 years of war should be of interest to every nation in the region.

### **Thoughts on Negotiations**

Direct negotiations with ISAF appear to be of interest to Taliban senior leaders, particularly if the negotiations promise to lead to their eventual return to Afghanistan. However, there has been little faith that ISAF will seriously consider Taliban concerns, provide sufficient guarantees of safety and secrecy, or keep to established goals. Many also fear that GIRoA or ISI will surreptitiously derail any talks, simply because each seeks to perpetuate the war for its own benefit.

At least currently, there is little or no interest among the Taliban leadership in direct negotiations with GIRoA. GIRoA is not yet seen as an honest broker, and the Taliban anticipates that GIRoA will initially issue deliberately unreasonable demands in order to prevent progress. Many GIRoA leaders have already announced publicly that there will never again be a Taliban government in Afghanistan and issued pledges to continue the war until the Taliban surrender.

Taliban leaders, who consistently believe that GIRoA is more likely to eventually surrender, tend to take these statements as threats and pledge to continue the fight themselves. Nonetheless, despite this outward posturing, Taliban leaders appear to recognize that talks with GIRoA may eventually become a necessity to facilitate the withdrawal of ISAF. Such talks would demonstrate to the international community there is genuine interest in resolving differences peacefully and avoiding civil war.

There is an increasingly widespread belief that the ISAF mission in Afghanistan will eventually change from counterinsurgency to counterterrorism as troop levels are reduced and targeting becomes gradually more limited to Al Qaeda and international extremists. Taliban commanders also recognize the possibility of an eventual ISAF transition into peacekeeping, security and diplomatic facilitation of GIRoA - Taliban peace talks. Higher-level detainees suggest that the Taliban leadership is likely to support this course of action.

The concepts of family, honor and justified war resonate particularly well in Afghanistan. Even senior Taliban commanders frequently become emotional when the events of 2001 are explained on a personal level. These emotions can also be used to illustrate international unity in mission. We often relay that citizens of nearly every nation in the world displayed banners reading, "Today we are all Americans" after the 2001 attacks. Because the Taliban leadership has no defense on this issue, we

have repeatedly seen this theme lead to capitulation and compromise in negotiations.

Higher level Taliban detainees have suggested that during negotiations Taliban leaders will be primarily interested in discussing the following:

- Accelerating the withdrawal of ISAF personnel from Afghanistan
- Maintaining initial secrecy from GIRoA and the Government of Pakistan
- Recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate organization
- Addressing and overcoming initial concerns of regional neighbors such as Pakistan
- Establishing ceasefires
- Trust building endeavors, such as increased dialogue, cross-border meetings, tailored public messaging and prisoner releases
- Eventual inclusion of GIRoA in negotiations
- Breaking ties with Al Qaeda and international extremists
- The safe return of Taliban leaders to Afghanistan
- The nature and shape of a future Afghan government
- Ensuring rogue elements, on all sides, do not provoke a return to violence
- Future posture of Afghan defense forces
- Future international relations and business ventures
- Monitoring, inspections and surveillance after ISAF withdrawals

Taliban personnel are fundamentally disinterested in the following:

- Immediate meetings with GIRoA
- Any appearance of surrender
- Forced disarmament
- Acceptance of a secondary position within the existing Afghan government
- Swearing allegiance to Hamid Karzai, GIRoA or the Afghan constitution
- Fundamental changes in viewpoint or significant social reforms [including]: Western style women's rights; education for girls; forced secularism; acceptance of "democracy", at least as it is currently understood in Afghanistan.

### **Views on a Post-ISAF Afghanistan**

Most Taliban personnel believe that if ISAF were to withdraw immediately, it would prompt an abbreviated war with remaining GIRoA elements, which would precipitate the Taliban returning to power. Estimates for the length of this war range between two and 20 days, as most expect the vast majority of standing Afghan security forces to reconcile or flee long before any such war begins in earnest. Despite the apparent optimism, many civilians agree with this assessment.

The potential for an indefinite ISAF presence is a concern to Taliban leaders, but most assume that this prospect is not likely. Their principal

fear is the emergence of a reconstituted, post GIRoA Northern Alliance and a bloody and protracted civil war for control of Northern Afghanistan. Though many acknowledge that a northern partition could actually avert a civil war, Taliban leaders do not support the notion of an independent Northern Afghanistan.

This aversion to a separation appears to be nationalistic in nature. Most do not view the north of the country as being overly wealthy, in resources or infrastructure. There appears to be little concept of material gain in the Taliban's insistence on unity. Taliban commanders acknowledge that working with former enemies will be challenging, yet they appear willing to accept inclusion, accompanied by inevitable political disagreements, in lieu of war or partition.

Taliban leaders, many of whom fought in the last war against the Northern Alliance, fear that the widely reported arms buildup in the North is specifically in preparation for this contingency. Whereas a future incarnation of the Northern Alliance may have the support of Iraq, India, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and possibly Russia, the Taliban will likely only have the support of Pakistan. For the Taliban, who are hoping to end the dependence on outsiders, and Pakistan in particular, this presents a decidedly bleak prospect. Dependence on outside entities, similar to what occurred prior to 2001, is something that the Taliban would prefer to avoid.

The Taliban are becoming adept at handling local governance, which has earned them widespread appeal. However, even senior commanders privately doubt their ability to maintain the appearance of incorruptibility when handling the larger issues associated with national governance. Most agree that the Taliban leadership did an inadequate job prior to 2001, and a future Taliban government should be much more progressive, and take a greater interest in education and infrastructure. While Taliban personnel appear confident in their ability to defeat GIRoA, they privately express considerable trepidation when faced with the possibility of accepting a future leading role in Afghanistan.

## **In Conclusion**

If the war ended immediately, it is highly unlikely that the Taliban leadership would rush to reestablish its relationship with Al Qaeda and allow Afghanistan to once again become a training group for international extremists. However, just as it was in the pre-9/11 era, a protracted civil conflict will dramatically increase the chances of the Taliban accepting assistance from any entity who will offer it. The Taliban insist on significant changes to the current Afghan constitution, dramatic changes in leadership and an end to GIRoA corruption. As the Taliban have declared publicly, these details can be decided through either discussions or the violent overthrow of the existing government.

In order to avoid the latter, both sides must be compelled to overcome objections and at least attempt to begin the negotiation process. Taliban personnel suggest that it may become necessary for ISAF to reassure

GIRoA leaders that inclusion is crucial for long-term stability. The Taliban, alternatively, must be made to understand that meaningful dialogue, a reduction of violence and clear distance from extremists will hasten ISAF withdrawals.

Taliban leaders seem to agree that reducing violence and dedeveloping a sense of trust are prerequisites for progress. Numerous methods of indirect communication can be utilized, including public addresses, strategic detainee releases, unilateral ceasefires and the use of couriers, such as tribal leaders, who unavoidably maintain contact with both sides. All of these methods have been used effectively in the past. Numerous detainees have noted during interrogations that this is the "only war in Afghanistan's history with no real backchannel means of communication."

Whether or not it is official, the Taliban throughout Afghanistan are already working with GIRoA on the local level. In areas where ISAF has withdrawn, Taliban influence has increased, often with little or no resistance from government security forces. Low-level GIRoA commanders reach out regularly to the Taliban to establish informal ceasefires. These agreements, however unorthodox, reduce overall violence and, for the moment, allow local populations at least rudimentary governance. As long as the civilian population appears to accept this, the situation is manageable. In the interim, ISAF will obviously maintain the ability to resume offensive operations, should it become necessary.

Though direct negotiations remain a challenge, and full-scale reconciliation is highly unlikely, ISAF goals may still be met through other, more indirect means. The Taliban may be receptive to meeting demands even if formal talks are not held in the near term. Reassurances from the Taliban that they have no intention of working with extremist groups such as Al Qaeda, or fighting a war of retribution against Farsi-speaking tribes of Afghanistan, are a positive first step. More tangible guarantees while clearly necessary, may be negotiated once the security situation improves.

The Taliban's faith in their ability to defeat GIRoA is irrelevant as long as ISAF remains in Afghanistan. Even after major ISAF operations end in Afghanistan, the threat of coalition forces returning will likely remain potent. This may be the greatest source of leverage for ISAF, when demanding compliance from the Taliban. After all, 10 years of war to destroy one organization may in itself be enough to convince the Taliban of the world's remarkable commitment to protecting its citizens from terrorism.

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