

## Executive Summary

### Insurgent Systems: Systems Behavior Among Insurgent Networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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Today, western Pakistan is host to the most prominent militant and Islamic extremist forces of Central and South Asia. For the last decade, these militant networks have operated along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, specifically in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. These groups, notably including the Haqqani Network, the Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-E-Taiba (LeT) and al Qaeda comprise a multi-layered insurgency based on local, regional and transnational conflicts and multiple distinct militant networks. Over time, these organizations have grown closer together in operations and strategy, increasingly supporting each other's efforts. This growing collaboration increasingly functions as a 'system' or 'syndicate' of militancy, substantially altering the character of the conflict and analysis of it.<sup>1</sup>

The nature of the contemporary conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan prevents a completely transparent view of the insurgency and its components. Of particular intrigue is the nature of inter-organizational cooperation, often shrouded by the fog of the current conflict and isolation of the relevant actors from reliable research avenues. In fact, due to the ever-changing nature of the conflict, Antonio Giustozzi, a scholar of the Taliban argues that "from a scholarly point of view, much of ['systems theory'] still needs more empirical evidence to be confirmed."<sup>2</sup> **This paper seeks to identify the cooperation between insurgent networks in the FATA, finding that these organizations have grown closer to one another over time and share resources to achieve shared strategic and religious goals.**

#### *Defining Systems Behavior*

The intended focus of this study is systems behavior among insurgent networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This collaboration between insurgent networks, "movements that seek to overthrow the status quo through subversion, political activity, insurrection, armed conflict and terrorism," has increased over time to reach the level of systems or syndicated behavior.<sup>3</sup> Critical to insurgent systems behavior is the notion that militant groups in this environment operate as part of a greater whole, in which each component network participates in the efforts of a broader movement.<sup>4</sup> To establish that this is indeed systems behavior, the insurgent networks must be shown to support one another in the accomplishment of shared strategic or ideological goals, as well as through operational collaboration.

#### *The Region*

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan are a remote territory along the Hindu Kush mountains with minimal development, infrastructure or political organization. In this remote region, the United States and Pakistan have limited capabilities and presence, making these state powers unable to enforce consistent control over the population and militant networks operating among them. In lieu of state authority, various tribal and militant groups dominate local security.<sup>5</sup> The intense isolation of the region and its central location as safe haven for militants operating in both Afghanistan and Pakistan creates an environment capable of supporting an active insurgent system. In addition, the strong tribal and religious infrastructure supports a blend of tribal Pashtun and religious Islamic extremist local governance.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Insurgent Networks***

There are a variety of militant groups operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, for the purposes of this paper, the four most prominent and well defined organizations in the FATA are highlighted. Each of these organizations arose out of unique circumstances but has come to share the same physical space and effort since 2001.

- *Haqqani Network*-The Haqqani Network is a confederation of tribal militant groups operating in the Afghan provinces Loya Paktia, Khost and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. This confederation is led by the Haqqani clan, and has historic links to the 1980's anti-Soviet mujahedin. Today, it functions as a semi-autonomous entity within the insurgent system, conducting its own operations while serving as insurgent infrastructure, hosting and supporting components of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, al Qaeda and Lashkar-E-Taiba.<sup>7</sup> The Haqqanis have deep ties to Pakistani military and intelligence, notably the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate and are afforded a high degree of protection from state actions due to this relationship.<sup>8</sup>
- *Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan*-The Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan, known as the Pakistani Taliban, is a large confederation of militant Islamic organizations in Pakistan's North and Western provinces founded in 2007.<sup>9</sup> This group, led by the Mehsud tribe of South and North Waziristan, is primarily headquartered in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. The TTP is linked to the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and maintains close ties to al Qaeda.<sup>10</sup> This organization is far more radicalized than the locally-oriented Haqqani Network and is an open opponent to the Pakistani state.
- *Lashkar-e-Taiba* -Lashkar-e-Taiba is a Pakistani-based militant group with deep ties to the Pakistani state apparatus and Deobandi militant groups such as the Afghan Taliban and Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan. Historically, LeT is oriented against Indian-controlled territories in Kashmir. However, following the 2001 collapse of the Taliban, and notably after 2006, LeT has increasingly linked with Afghan-based militant groups and conducted expeditionary terrorist operations such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks.<sup>11</sup>
- *Al Qaeda*-The Islamic extremist terrorist organization founded by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri in the early 1990s.<sup>12</sup> Al Qaeda's core founders and central leadership largely reside in Pakistan. The group is known to maintain links to local and regional groups throughout the insurgent theater, and continues to play a prominent ideological, financial and leadership role in the global jihad. Al Qaeda supports insurgent efforts and terrorist operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Linkages Between Insurgent Groups***

The insurgent networks of the FATA seek to accomplish broadly similar strategic and ideological goals. In addition these networks collaborate operationally with one another against common foes. The nature of the linkages between these organizations is hard to discern at a day-to-day level, but notable case studies provide context and information regarding the overlap of these groups.

#### ***Strategy***

Strategically, the four insurgent groups support military and political efforts to remove the United States and its coalition partners from Afghanistan, in addition to preserving broad autonomy for the tribal

areas of western Pakistan and attacking Indian interests throughout the region. Of the component organizations, the Haqqani Network and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan focus on more local and national efforts such as the defeat of the United States and coalition forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan whereas the more transnational organizations, al Qaeda and LeT focus on attacking the worldwide targets and India.<sup>14</sup> These organizations share synchronous strategic goals in relation to most efforts except for the legitimacy of the government of Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> Notably, the insurgent syndicate's main cleavage lies in relations with the Pakistani state. The Haqqani Network and LeT do not espouse anti-Pakistani strategic goals, but rather serve as proxies and clients for the state's military intelligence (ISI) apparatus, whereas the Pakistani Taliban and al Qaeda actively undermine and attack the Pakistani state and its security forces.<sup>16</sup>

### *Ideology*

Ideologically, the primary groups involved in the FATA insurgency are very much aligned. The insurgent groups profess similar ideological goals, most significantly the imposition and spread of strict interpretations of Shari'a law throughout the region and the elimination of United States and western influence from the region. These beliefs are rooted in a Sunni extremist interpretations of Islam, including of Deobandi (Haqqani Network and Pakistani Taliban), Wahhabi (al Qaeda) and Ahl-e-Hadith (LeT). The strong religious component of insurgent ideology directly influences the organizations' strategy and activity. Notably, the shared ideological and religious beliefs allow the groups to coordinate their effort. In addition, the shared religious beliefs of these organizations view some strategic efforts, such as suicide bombings and the targeting of civilians as theologically justified in pursuit of holy war against their enemy.<sup>17</sup>

### *Operations*

Operationally, militant networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan share resources and support each other's activities. In December 2009, three groups were directly involved in the infiltration and suicide attack of a U.S. military base in Khost Province, Afghanistan. This operation involved the management and preparation of a double agent able to deceive U.S. and allied intelligence efforts, especially the CIA's targeted killing campaign conducted by unmanned aerial drones.<sup>18</sup> The Pakistani Taliban, al Qaeda and the Haqqani Network all played critical roles in the attack, to include jointly sharing resources, intelligence and effort to accomplish a common objective. However, despite the groups' close cooperation in the execution of this attack, each remained independent. Following the operation, all three participants in the attack published their own propaganda materials exploiting the bomber's success for their own parochial interests.<sup>19</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The militant networks of Afghanistan and Pakistan have centralized their operations in the FATA since 2001 in order to evade state and military security measures. This centralization has brought together fighters from many organizations and catalyzed a diffuse insurgent syndicate that takes advantage of cleavages within the counterinsurgency efforts and attacks targets of opportunity through joint or parallel operations. The common strategic goals, religious foundations and sanctuary of these organizations make joint operations mutually beneficial.

The most important change for the insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 2001 is the shared operating environment in FATA. Today, insurgents from multiple groups share the same territory, relying upon the same tribal support structure and religious and militant networks to continue daily operations.

Active U.S. and Pakistani efforts in territories surrounding the FATA compels the militants to remain within the sanctuary and share the limited resources.

A critical lesson from the case studies is that the contemporary insurgency is substantially different than the loose confederation of tribal and militant networks that existed in the area in the 2001-02 period. Although the primary insurgent groups have shared similar strategies and ideologies since their inception, the contemporary conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan has created exogenous circumstances incentivizing collaboration between distinct organizations and their members. While the relationships between militant networks and their members date back to the 1980s, individual fighters now participate in operationally-driven insurgent networks composed of fighters from a variety of networks.<sup>20</sup> The varied support network involved in the December 2009 attack at Forward Operating Base Chapman is a clear example of such collaboration.

<sup>1</sup> David Kilcullen refers to the regional insurgent system as an “insurgent ecosystem” that functions as a complex, adaptive system. Kilcullen defines the “insurgent ecosystem” as “many groups and entities interact; outputs from one become inputs for another and contribute to emergent systems behavior.” See Kilcullen, David. *Counterinsurgency* (2010) 196. The author uses the term “system” rather than “ecosystem” for clarity. In addition, Bruce Riedel has referred to the same constellation of insurgent networks in western Pakistan as a “syndicate.” See Riedel, Bruce. Remarks at the International Spy Museum, “Striking from a Distance: Predator Drones.” April 14, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. “The Accidental Guerrilla.” *Perspectives on Politics*. (2010) 988.

<sup>3</sup> For introduction to “systems model of insurgency” see Kilcullen, David. *Counterinsurgency*. “Countering Global Insurgency.” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 65 and 205.

<sup>4</sup> See Hammes, Thomas X. “Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks.” *Military Review*. (October 2006) 151.

<sup>5</sup> Roe, Andrew M. *Waging War in Waziristan: The British Struggle in the Land of Bin Laden, 1849-1947*. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010) 245.

<sup>6</sup> Gul, Imtiaz. *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan’s Lawless Frontier*. (New York: Viking, 2010) 68.

<sup>7</sup> Ruttig, Thomas. “Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network As An Autonomous Entity.” In *Decoding the New Taliban*, ed Antonio Giustozzi. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. 57-88. Also see, Dressler, Jeffrey A. “Afghanistan Report 6: The Haqqani Network: From Pakistan to Afghanistan.” *Institute for the Study of War*. October 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Schmitt, Eric. “Pakistan’s Failure to Hit Militant Sanctuary has Plus Side for U.S.” *New York Times*. January 17, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Abbas, Hassan. “A Profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan.” *CTC Sentinel*. January 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Bajoria, Jayshree. “Pakistan’s New Generation of Terrorists.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. October 7, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Tankel, Stephen. “Lashkar-e-Taiba in Perspective: An Evolving Threat.” *New America Foundation*. February 2010. Also see, Tellis, Ashley. “Bad Company—Lashkar e-Tayyiba and the Growing Ambition of Islamist Militancy in Pakistan.” Testimony before U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. March 11, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Scheuer, Michael. *Osama bin Laden*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Bergen, Peter. *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and Al Qaeda*. (New York: Free Press, 2011) 211.

<sup>14</sup> Gopal, Anand, and Mansur Khan Mahsud, and Brian Fishman. “The Battle for Pakistan: Militancy and Conflict in North Waziristan.” (*New America Foundation*. April 2010) 12.

<sup>15</sup> Gerges, Fawaz A. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Siddiq, Ayesha. “Pakistan’s Counterterrorism Strategy: Separating Friends from Enemies.” *Washington Quarterly*. (Winter 2011) 154. [http://www.twq.com/11winter/docs/11winter\\_Siddiq.pdf](http://www.twq.com/11winter/docs/11winter_Siddiq.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Lanche, Jermie. “Suicide Terrorism In Pakistan: An Assessment.” *Institute for Conflict and Peace Studies*. (September 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Robert Baer, "A Dagger to the CIA," *GQ*, April 2010. <http://www.gq.com/news-politics/politics/201004/dagger-to-the-cia?currentPage=1%3E/4April2010#> and Mark Hosenball, Sami Yousafzai and Adem Demir, "Anatomy of a Double Cross," *Newsweek*, January 9, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> "Interview with Sirajuddin Haqqani." *Flashpoint Intelligence Partners*. April 13, 2010. [http://flashpoint-intel.com/images/documents/pdf/0410/flashpoint\\_haqqani041210.pdf](http://flashpoint-intel.com/images/documents/pdf/0410/flashpoint_haqqani041210.pdf). Also see, *As-Sahab Media*. "Statement Regarding the Battle of Abu Dujanah Al-Khurasani, May Allah Accept Him, Infiltrating the American Fortresses." Translated by NEFA Foundation. December 31, 2009. Also see, *As-Sahab Media*. "An Interview with the Shaheed Abu Dujaanah al-Khorasani." Translated by NEFA Foundation. February 28, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Riedel, Bruce. Remarks at International Spy Museum, Washington, DC. April 14, 2010.