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# THE HAQQANI NETWORK IN KURRAM

THE REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF A GROWING INSURGENCY

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A REPORT BY THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF  
WAR AND AEI'S CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*This paper details the expansion of the Haqqani Network in Pakistan's tribal areas through peace accords signed between rival Sunni and Shia factions in Kurram Agency, Pakistan. The peace accords brought nearly four years of continuous fighting to an end. Despite the appearance of legitimacy, the peace accords were manipulated by the Afghanistan-focused Haqqani Network to serve its own ends. In exchange for brokering the peace between Sunnis and Shias, the Haqqanis allegedly received the authority to operate through Shia-controlled terrain in central and upper Kurram which will aid their ongoing insurgency against Afghan and coalition forces throughout eastern Afghanistan. The Haqqanis have also demonstrated their growing power and influence in the Pakistani tribal region in areas beyond their historical stronghold of neighboring North Waziristan Agency.*

- The Haqqani Network is Afghanistan's most capable and sophisticated insurgent network. The Haqqanis enjoy sanctuary in the tribal areas in Pakistan along the border with Afghanistan. With the backing of elements within the Pakistan security establishment, the Haqqanis have used their sanctuary in the North Waziristan Agency of Pakistan to operate across the border in southeastern Afghanistan.
- In response to increased coalition activity against the Haqqani Network in both Pakistan (via drones) and Afghanistan (via Special Operations Forces), the Haqqanis have increasingly sought new Pakistani sanctuary and additional infiltration routes in order to continue to battle coalition forces for control of southeastern Afghanistan. The Haqqani Network has increasingly turned their attention to Kurram Agency over the past several years as a potential sanctuary for the Haqqanis and affiliated terrorist organizations.
- Kurram is a region of special strategic importance to Afghanistan-focused insurgents. It served as a base to the Afghan Mujahideen during the war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Kurram remains coveted terrain today as it facilitates convenient access to several Afghan provinces and is also the shortest route to Kabul from anywhere in Pakistan.
- In September 2010, reports surfaced that suggested the Haqqani Network was involved in peace negotiations between Kurram's Shia and Sunni tribes. The Haqqani Network's earliest reported involvement in Kurram peace talks dates back to early 2009, though they have been involved in fighting the Shia in Upper Kurram to facilitate access to Afghanistan since at least 2008.
- In exchange for brokering the peace between Sunnis and Shias, the Haqqanis allegedly received the authority to operate through Shia-controlled terrain in central and upper Kurram. It is likely that other national and transnational terrorists who operate with the Haqqanis, such as al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e Taiba, will join them in Kurram.
- The Haqqanis will likely relocate critical elements of the network to Kurram Agency. This will have the dual effect of relieving pressure on the Network from U.S. drone strikes in North Waziristan and allow for greater freedom of movement for its fighters, facilitators, and leaders.
- The expansion of the Haqqani Network and affiliated terrorist groups will have negative consequences for security and stability, not just in Kurram, but in eastern Afghanistan and elsewhere in Pakistan, as it will become more difficult to identify, track, and strike national and international terrorist groups.

# FATA and NWFP

## Legend

- Country capital
- Province capital
- Major city
- Other city
- Primary road
- Province borders
- District borders



MAP 1: AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN BORDER

# INTRODUCTION

In February 2011, Sunni and Shia tribesmen in Kurram Agency, a tribal region in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province), signed a historic peace deal that brought nearly four years of internecine warfare to an end. As part of the agreement, Sunni militants agreed to reopen the agency's main road that had been blockaded since April 2007. This newfound peace in Kurram, however, also allowed the Haqqani Network, an Afghanistan-focused insurgent network and one of the most powerful and violent organizations in the region, to dramatically strengthen its position. The Haqqanis were influential in brokering the peace between Sunni and Shia tribes in return for access through Kurram to Afghanistan's eastern provinces.

Kurram is a region of special strategic importance to Afghanistan-focused insurgents. It served as a base to the Afghan Mujahideen during the war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s and is coveted by insurgents today because of its "parrot's beak" shape that protrudes deep into eastern Afghanistan. This allows convenient access to several Afghan provinces and is the shortest route to Kabul from anywhere in Pakistan. This access has become critical for Haqqani Network fighters, who have lost much of their ability to project force into Kabul due to coalition targeting of their network in southeastern Afghanistan throughout 2009 and 2010. The Haqqanis have been pressured in their main area of operations—namely the provinces of Khost, Paktia, and Paktika along the border with Pakistan—and have since sought new routes into Kabul. The Haqqanis have also come under pressure from drone strikes in their sanctuary of North Waziristan, near the border with Afghanistan in Pakistan's tribal areas. The Haqqani Network has successfully exploited an ongoing Sunni-Shia rift in Kurram, with at least some assistance from the Pakistani security establishment, in order to expand its area of operations, open up new lines of communication to reach Kabul, and relieve the pressure on its besieged strongholds in North Waziristan.

Though Sunni and Shia tribes may enjoy a brief respite on account of the peace agreement, the Haqqani Network's expansion into Kurram will likely lead to increased militant intimidation, and expanded drone strikes. A Haqqani sanctuary in Kurram will also allow radical groups like the Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaeda to reconstitute and redouble their efforts against the Pakistani state and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Furthermore, these developments may facilitate an expansion of the Haqqani Network and affiliated groups throughout Afghanistan's eastern provinces.

## BRIEF HISTORY OF KURRAM AGENCY

The history of the Shia Turi tribe in Kurram dates back to the end of the fifteenth century. A nomadic tribe, the Turis established a summer headquarters in Ariob (currently located in the modern day Afghan province of Paktia). By 1700 A.D., the Turis consolidated their control over upper Kurram and eventually drove out their rivals, the Bangash. Some Bangash embraced Shia tenets and were granted equal rights, while others fled. Today, Bangash living in lower Kurram are almost entirely Sunni while those in central and upper Kurram are a mix of Sunni and Shia.<sup>1</sup>

More recent sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shias in Kurram dates to the the 1930s, where incidents of communal violence

occurred sporadically, particularly during the Islamic holy month of Muharram and Nowruz, the Persian New Year, both of which are important in the Shia traditions.<sup>2</sup> The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran exacerbated the sectarian conflict in Kurram. It encouraged some Shias to demand the creation of a Shia-majority province known as Karakoram, which would include Kurram Agency and other adjoining Shia-majority parts of the country. The Turi tribe, allegedly with Iranian support and funding, backed this movement, though it was later challenged and put down by Pakistan's Islamist President, General Zia-ul-Haq.<sup>3</sup>

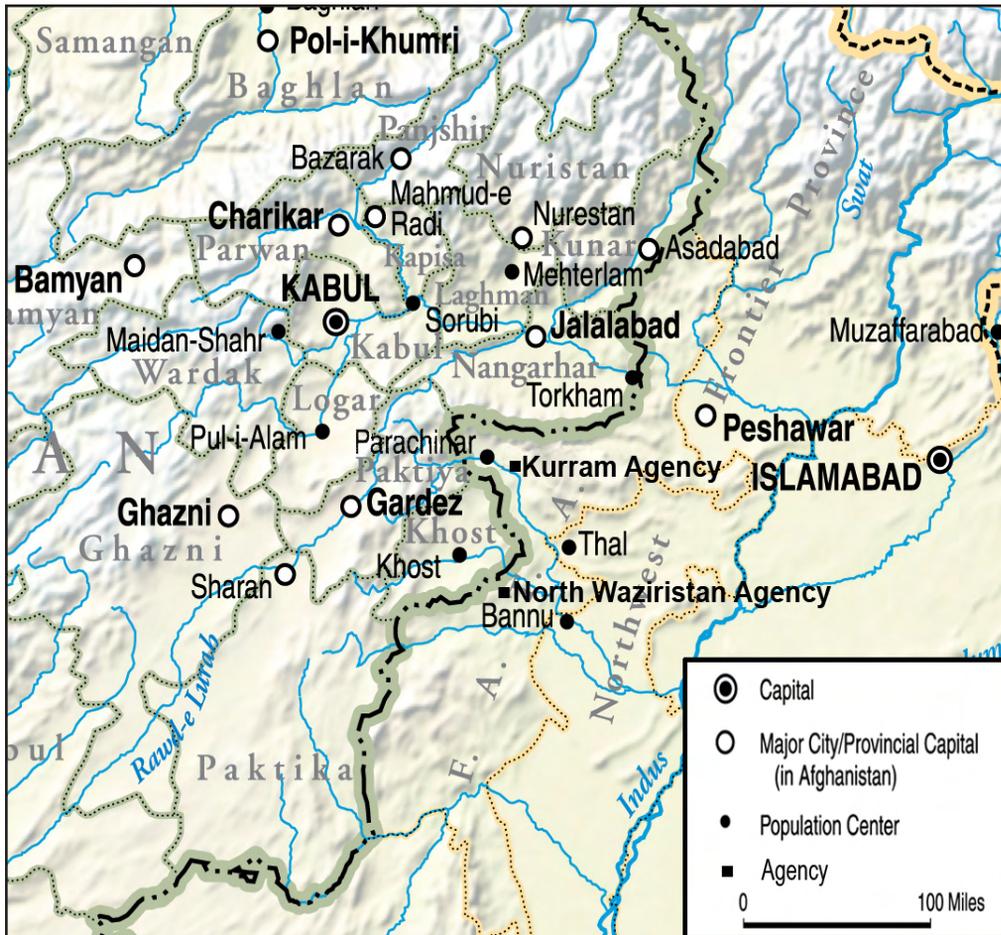
#### THE MUJAHIDEEN YEARS AND OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

During the 1980s, Kurram Agency served as a staging ground for Mujahideen participating in *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Consequently, Kurram experienced a massive influx of Sunni Afghans. These Sunnis brought with them a militant ideology that clashed with Kurram's Shia population, at a time when the latter was being radicalized by the Iranian Revolution.<sup>4</sup> Although there were sporadic clashes between Sunnis and Shias throughout the early 1980s, the first large-scale clash occurred in 1986 when Shia Turis prevented Sunni Mujahideen fighters from passing into Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> In response, Zia-ul-Haq allowed Mujahideen and local Sunni tribesmen to 'purge' Shia Turis in the upper Kurram city of Parachinar. At that time, Turi leader Allama Arif-ul-Hussaini was the spiritual leader of the Shia in Kurram. Allama Hussaini was murdered in Peshawar in August 1988. Many Turis hold General Zia responsible for Hussaini's death.<sup>6</sup> Despite Shia resistance, Kurram was of great strategic significance to the Mujahideen.

Among the Sunni Mujahideen fighters operating in the region, one in particular stands out. Osama bin Laden first arrived in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region in 1984, visiting the frontline camps of rebel commander Abdul Sayyaf in Jaji, Paktia.<sup>7</sup> Sayyaf was one of the most notorious Mujahideen commanders fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan and had constructed at least one known facility at Khaldan, located in the border region between northern Kurram and Afghanistan's eastern provinces of Paktia and Nangarhar.<sup>8</sup> Over the course of the next several years, bin Laden constructed another camp for Arab fighters in nearby Jaji, assisting the Afghan Mujahideen in their fight against the Soviets. Bin Laden fought mostly with Jalalludin Haqqani's forces during the late 1980s.<sup>9</sup>

Haqqani was an influential Zadran tribal leader and Mujahideen fighter, who led a major front for the Hizb-i-Islami Khalis faction in and around Khost.<sup>10</sup> Hizb-i-Islami Khalis was one of the "unity of seven" Mujahideen resistance factions that banded together to fight the Soviets and Mohammad Najibullah's government forces in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Other Mujahideen groups included Abdul Rasul Sayyaf's United Islamic Front for the Liberation of Afghanistan, Pir Sayed Ahmed Gailani's National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami (distinct from the Younus Khalis faction) and Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-e Islami.<sup>11</sup>

Within Kurram, the agency's capital of Parachinar was used as a Mujahideen distribution center and recovery area throughout the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> Mujahideen fighters visited locations in Parachinar where they received weapons and supplies from Peshawar, delivered by truckload every three to four days.<sup>13</sup> From Parachinar, fighters moved men



MAP 2: ISLAMABAD &amp; KABUL

and materiel forward to numerous border bases close to Afghanistan's southeastern provinces.<sup>14</sup> From the border, Mujahideen lines of communication, known as the "Logar route," ran from the Afghan district of Jaji in Paktia province all the way to Logar province, just south of Kabul.<sup>15</sup> Roughly forty percent of all supplies used by the Mujahideen in Afghanistan were brought in via the "Logar route."<sup>16</sup> Although Soviet and Afghan government military forces were deployed to seal the border between Kurram and Afghanistan, it was impossible. On rare occasions, signaling the increasing desperation of the Soviet campaign, Pakistani military forces reported Afghan military fighter jet incursions into Pakistani territory

and bombings in and around Parachinar.<sup>17</sup>

In May 1988, Soviet forces began withdrawing troops from Jalalabad, Gardez, Kandahar, and other cities.<sup>18</sup> In response to the Soviet withdrawal, Afghan Mujahideen formed the "Afghan Interim Government" in Peshawar, Pakistan to take control of the country after what they hoped would be the precipitous fall of the Soviet-backed Najibullah government in Kabul. Mujahideen forces in and around the Tora Bora mountains began their campaign against the Najibullah government in March 1989, focusing on the strategically important eastern city of Jalalabad.<sup>19</sup> Tora Bora is a narrow mountainous area adjacent to upper Kurram and about thirty miles southeast of Jalalabad. Fighters used Mujahideen facilities

that were constructed by Khalis commanders in and around Tora Bora to lay siege to Soviet and Afghan government forces in the province of Nangarhar.<sup>20</sup> Fighters also used roads that were constructed by bin Laden in 1987 and stretched from Jaji, across Kurram and into Tora Bora.<sup>21</sup> The campaign was a disaster for the Afghan Mujahideen and allied Arab fighters which became known as the single greatest failure of the Arab-Afghan experience. For much of the next decade, a cataclysmic civil war between former Afghan Mujahideen factions destroyed much of what was left of the country.

Following the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, al-Qaeda and affiliated fighters sheltering in and around Jalalabad, Nangarhar began a mass exodus to bin Laden's cave complex in the Tora Bora Mountains. Tora Bora was terrain under the control of Younus Khalis, who sheltered bin Laden and introduced him to Mullah Omar. Khalis also is considered by some to have been a father figure to bin Laden.<sup>22</sup> Bin Laden and roughly 500 to 2000 fighters were believed to have remained in the mountains until their escape sometime in mid-late December 2001.<sup>23</sup> It is rumored that the majority of these fighters fled into upper Kurram Agency and took shelter with sympathetic Sunni tribesmen before relocating to safer terrain, including the Zharwar Kili cave complex in Afghanistan's Khost province.<sup>24</sup> This was a familiar path for bin Laden and his followers, who had used the very same routes in the late 1980s while battling Soviet forces in Afghanistan's east. Bin Laden and his followers did not expect to face resistance from the powerful Shia communities in Kurram, however, in December 2001, approximately 200 al-Qaeda affiliated Arabs were turned over to Pakistani government authorities by Shias in lower Kurram.

## SURGE OF SECTARIANISM IN KURRAM

Despite the capture of al-Qaeda militants in Kurram in 2001, there were no significant reports of violence in Kurram between 2002 and 2007. As the Taliban insurgency against the Pakistani state started to gain momentum in 2004, however, it eventually spilled north from its cradle in Waziristan to other parts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and brought an influx of Sunni militant Islamist organizations including al-Qaeda and its affiliates into the region. Some of those groups, including the Punjab-based Sipah-e-Sahab Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), began shifting to the FATA after the Musharraf government banned them in 2002. Another organization, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), reportedly moved to the FATA from Kashmir following the devastating 2005 Kashmir earthquake.<sup>25</sup> The presence of groups such as SSP, LeJ, and JeM, with a history of anti-Shia violence elsewhere in the country, all but guaranteed that communal sectarian violence would intensify in Kurram.<sup>26</sup>

Until 2007, previous clashes between Sunnis and Shias in the agency were usually the result of small-scale sectarian disputes and historical animosities. These minor clashes were quickly resolved when they did occur, as tribal elders and government officials intervened to end the fighting.<sup>27</sup> Sectarian violence largely remained localized.<sup>28</sup> Yet, the addition of Taliban fighters and Sunni militants from outside the region exacerbated these small-scale tensions, raising violence to unprecedented levels.<sup>29</sup>

On April 6, 2007, a procession of Shias was attacked in the agency headquarters of Parachinar, a city of 70,000 people, igniting sectarian clashes across Kurram. Sunni and Shia fighters used heavy weapons such as rockets and mortars in the attacks.<sup>30</sup>

Fighters on both sides were effectively organized and received significant external patronage. Shia fighters were divided into two armed factions, Hizbullah and the Mehdi Militia, both backed by unspecified Iranian elements.<sup>31</sup> One Sunni group, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), gave a press conference in Peshawar on April 9, 2007 claiming that the Iranians were furnishing the Shias with arms and cash and threatened to rally Sunnis from all over the country to come to Kurram to fight the Shias.<sup>32</sup> The Shias accused Sunni factions in Kurram of being supported, encouraged, and reinforced by Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) factions in Kurram, Orakzai, and Waziristan. Punjabi extremists from JeM and LeJ, as well as Haqqani-affiliated fighters from neighboring North Waziristan who sought to expand their access to Afghanistan, also backed the Sunnis.<sup>33</sup> The extent of Haqqani Network involvement is discussed at length below.

The intense fighting resulted in the closure of the Thall-Parachinar road. The road is the main artery running through Kurram that connects all parts of the agency to Peshawar and the rest of Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> The road is also the main supply route to Kurram Agency, especially upper Kurram. The closure of the road during the skirmishes resulted in a severe shortage of commodities and prevented the transportation of the wounded to hospitals in Peshawar when adequate care was not available locally.<sup>35</sup> Fighting eventually petered out by April 15, following a ceasefire negotiated by the warring tribes and a military-imposed curfew throughout the main towns.<sup>36</sup> The road between Sadda and Parachinar remained closed to traffic, however, effectively hemming in the Shia in upper Kurram.<sup>37</sup>

The use of the Thall-Parachinar road is a defining issue for tribes in Kurram Agency, especially for the Shia tribes in upper Kurram.

The closure of the road became a major grievance for the Shia community as the conflict in Kurram progressed. Sunni groups and Taliban militants fighting the Shias realized the strategic importance of the road to the Shias of upper Kurram and used their control over the road as a weapon in their efforts to pressure the Shias into capitulation. Indeed, guaranteeing safe usage of the road became the most important bargaining chip that the Haqqani Network offered the Shias when it intervened to settle the conflict in late 2010 and early 2011.<sup>38</sup>

Although the shooting had stopped by late April 2007, the situation in Kurram did not stabilize. Sunni tribes continued to arm themselves against the Shias. Six Sunni tribes in Kurram—the Teri Mangal, Ali Sherzai, Musazai, Wathazai, Khuyad Khel and Chamkani—along with the Mamuzai tribe from neighboring Orakzai, amassed a total of \$1.17 million (seventy million rupees) for weapons purchases.<sup>39</sup>

The tense truce between Kurram's Sunnis and Shias was indeed short-lived. In November 2007, fighting started anew and was much bloodier than before.<sup>40</sup> In the renewed fighting, over a hundred people were killed in the first two days, including eleven Pakistan Army soldiers in Parachinar.<sup>41</sup> Troops were given shoot-to-kill orders as part of an attempt to quell the violence.

Sunni-dominated lower Kurram traditionally served as a hotbed for many sectarian organizations, including the virulently anti-Shia groups, SSP and JeM. The resumption of sectarian violence, the entrenched presence of highly trained anti-Shia terror groups such as al-Qaeda, SSP and JeM, and the fresh involvement of Pakistani Taliban militants from Waziristan and Orakzai fueled increased violence in Kurram.<sup>42</sup>

Taliban militants in Orakzai closed off the Kurram-Darra Adam Khel road to Shia traffic, closing the only other artery out of upper Kurram besides the Thall-Parachinar road. Fighting continued into January 2008 with dozens of fatalities reported. Many Sunni families even began fleeing across the border to the Afghan provinces of Khost and Paktia to escape the hostilities. It was the first time in years that refugees flowed from Pakistan into Afghanistan. According to the UNHCR, over 900 families (over 6,000 people) fled to Afghanistan to escape the violence.<sup>43</sup>

The Shias in upper Kurram faced dire shortages of food and medical supplies and had begun to travel through Afghanistan in order to reach Peshawar to obtain basic supplies.<sup>44</sup> The circuitous and dangerous route required an eighteen hour journey from upper Kurram into Paktia province, and then through the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province before traveling on to the Pakistani city of Peshawar. The journey from Kurram to Peshawar is normally only four hours-long when using the Thall-Parachinar road.<sup>45</sup> Those who risked traveling through Sunni- and Taliban-controlled Thall or Darra Adam Khel suffered the possibility of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, ambushes, kidnappings, and beheadings.<sup>46</sup> The Afghanistan detour was not necessarily much safer: many of the Shia were abused at the hands of Afghan Sunni Pashtuns, Afghan border police officials, and soldiers of the Pakistani Frontier Corps that manned the checkpoints along the border.<sup>47</sup>

By the end of September 2008, following eight straight weeks of heavy fighting, a tribal *jirga*, or meeting of Sunni and Shia elders, finally agreed to a ceasefire.<sup>48</sup> A peace deal was agreed upon and signed by both sides on October 17, 2008 in Murree, Pakistan, just a few miles northeast of the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. The deal, which would become

known as the Murree Accords, declared an end to the fighting. Dozens of people kidnapped by both sides were released, the Thall-Parachinar road was re-opened, and internally displaced people (IDPs) were permitted to begin returning home.<sup>49</sup> The conflict had claimed 1,500 lives and 5,000 injuries, and had resulted in the closure of the Thall-Parachinar Road for fifteen months.<sup>50</sup>

This agreement, however, would also not last long, as major clashes resumed in June and July 2009 and killed over one hundred people.<sup>51</sup> By now the TTP was playing a central role in stoking sectarian violence in Kurram. Hakimullah Mehsud—the future leader of the TTP and, at the time, the TTP commander for Kurram, Orakzai, and Khyber Agencies—was reportedly behind much of the resurgent violence.<sup>52</sup> Hakimullah has been described as fervently anti-Shia, and is said to have earned his reputation as a fierce fighter by demonstrating his brutality towards the Shias in Kurram Agency.<sup>53</sup> An influx of TTP militants fleeing the large-scale Pakistani military operation in nearby Swat district and other surrounding areas in May 2009 provided reinforcements to the renewed and expanded anti-Shia assault in the agency.<sup>54</sup> The situation was further exacerbated when much of the TTP's leadership and hundreds of its fighters, who were expelled from South Waziristan during Pakistani military operations there in October 2009, made their way to Orakzai and Kurram agencies.<sup>55</sup> The Pakistani military, as a result, began frequently launching air raids and gunship attacks on TTP positions in Kurram and Orakzai. A number of troops also moved into parts of Kurram agency in mid-December 2009, causing rumors to spread that Kurram would be the site of the next big military operation and prompting many locals to flee.<sup>56</sup>

By April 2010, the UN declared that the number of people who had fled operations in Kurram and Orakzai since November 2009 had reached 210,000.<sup>57</sup>

The spring of 2010 saw Pakistani military activity in Kurram punctuated with long bouts of infighting between rival Taliban factions in the agency.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the confused fighting, the Thall-Parachinar Road remained closed to normal traffic. Movement along the road was limited to intermittently-dispatched convoys escorted by the Pakistani military, and even these continued to suffer frequent militant ambushes and IED attacks.<sup>59</sup> Despite this, in July 2010, the Pakistani military declared that its operations had cleared militants from over eighty percent of the agency and that the Thall-Parachinar Road was now safe for travel.<sup>60</sup> Still, most locals remained wary and many only traveled on the road occasionally and under escort by Pakistani troops.<sup>61</sup>

The prolonged closure of the road had caused serious shortages of food and medicines and triggered high inflation in the price of wheat flour, a local staple product. To relieve this burden, an agreement was struck with a local aircraft service in order to provide a number of Parachinar to Peshawar flights each week, but the flights were limited, the aircraft capacity low and the tickets prohibitively expensive for most residents.<sup>62</sup>

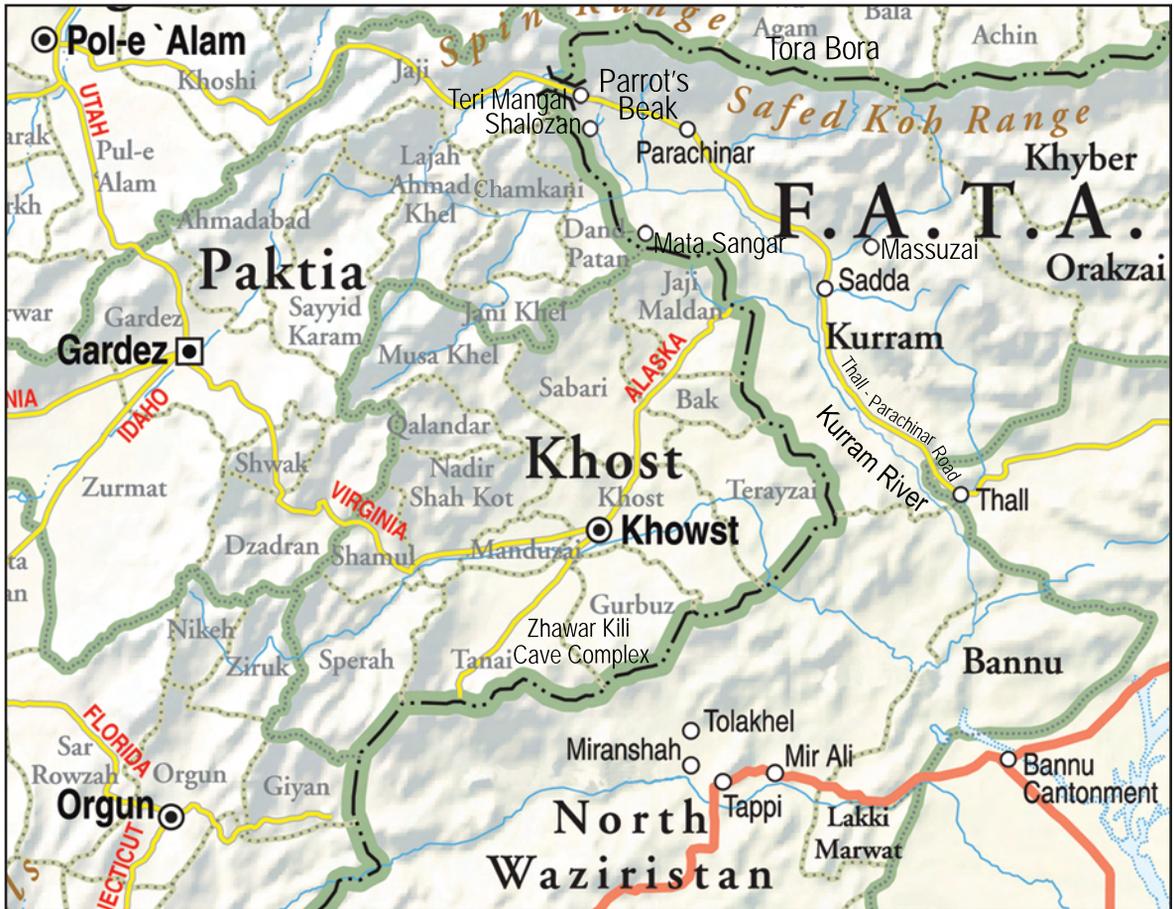
In September 2010, reports surfaced that suggested the Haqqani Network was involved in peace negotiations between Kurram's Shia and Sunni tribes.<sup>63</sup> The Haqqani Network's earliest reported involvement in Kurram peace talks dates back to early 2009, though they have been involved in fighting the Shia there since at least 2008.<sup>64</sup> For years, the Shia resisted Haqqani attempts to infiltrate the region or to use the Thall-Parachinar Road as a route for fighters coming and going from

Afghanistan. Haqqani infiltration was spurred by increasing attention and pressure on the Network's sanctuary in North Waziristan, adjacent to Kurram Agency. The Shias refused any settlement with the Haqqanis because they were strongly opposed to giving the Network unfettered access through Shia strongholds of Kurram into Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup> Despite this, the Haqqanis persisted in their efforts to infiltrate the region, as a new route into Afghanistan as well as new Pakistani sanctuary was becoming increasingly necessary.

#### **NORTH WAZIRISTAN AND THE SEARCH FOR NEW SANCTUARY**

The Haqqani Network maintains its command and control, training, and logistical nodes in and around Miram Shah, North Waziristan. The Haqqanis are afforded protection in this area by a local tribal leader, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, who controls the territory between Miram Shah and the Afghanistan border with Khost. The Haqqanis, along with elements of al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, have used Miram Shah as a sanctuary for much of the previous decade. Until the past few years, the Haqqanis' operations in North Waziristan were largely undisturbed.

Since U.S. and coalition forces cannot operate on sovereign Pakistani territory, clandestine operations – such as the CIA's drone program – are the only effective means of striking the sanctuaries of Afghan-focused insurgents operating from Pakistan's tribal regions. Although drone strikes were recorded in Pakistan's tribal areas as early as 2004, they did not accelerate to a significant frequency until 2008. Since then, drone strikes have effectively doubled every year until reaching their peak frequency during the latter half of 2010. These strikes have focused heavily on the Haqqani Network and al-Qaeda figures in North Waziristan. The increase in strikes



MAP 3: FEDERALLY ADMINISTERED TRIBAL AREA

appears to be the result of several factors: the Haqqani Network’s increasingly visible role in Afghanistan’s insurgency and the increasingly potent mix of insurgent and terrorist groups operating under the protection of the Haqqanis and Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan. These groups include al-Qaeda, TTP, JeM, LeT, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and others.<sup>66</sup>

Sanctuary in North Waziristan provided the Haqqanis with the ability to organize, plan, and resource spectacular attacks in southeastern Afghanistan and even the capital of Kabul. In the spring and summer of 2008, Haqqani-linked militants demonstrated their reach and tactical proficiency by executing high-profile assaults in Kabul and mounting

numerous attacks on coalition forces and local government officials in eastern Afghanistan. Fighters affiliated with the Haqqani Network launched complex attacks in Kabul in January and February 2008, targeting the Norwegian foreign minister at the Serena Hotel and government and military officials at a major military parade, respectively.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, Haqqani fighters attacked coalition and Afghan National Security Forces in the eastern provinces of Paktia, Paktika, and Khost; border outposts, government buildings, and police units were repeatedly targeted.<sup>68</sup> Attempts to overrun several district centers in Paktia and Khost demonstrated the network’s boldness and sophistication.

The danger posed by the Haqqanis was reinforced by their role in the December 30, 2009 attack on CIA personnel in Khost. A Jordanian jihadist killed four CIA officers when he detonated an explosive vest during a meeting to discuss the possible location of Ayman al-Zawahiri, al Qaeda's second-in-command.<sup>69</sup> The suicide bomber later appeared on a video sitting alongside TTP chief Hakimullah Mehsud, stating that he had no intention of aiding the CIA and used the meeting as a pretext to conduct the attack.<sup>70</sup> While the Haqqani Network has not publicly claimed credit for the attack, Siraj Haqqani did reference both the attack and the bomber by name in an interview.<sup>71</sup> Drone activity in North Waziristan exclusively targeted Haqqani-influenced territory immediately after the attack; every one of the seven strikes in Pakistan over the next two weeks targeted Mir Ali, Miram Shah, or Datta Khel.<sup>72</sup>

The Haqqanis' increasingly visible role in Afghanistan and their linkages to international terrorist groups has led to an intense U.S. drone campaign on the network's safe havens in Pakistan. After the Haqqanis' 2008 offensive in Afghanistan, drones struck Pakistan thirty times that same year, fourteen of which targeted North Waziristan.<sup>73</sup> By comparison, in 2007 there were four total drone strikes, with three of them striking the town of Miram Shah in North Waziristan.<sup>74</sup> Drone strikes in North Waziristan continued to increase over the next two years, climbing to twenty-two in 2009 before soaring to more than a hundred in 2010.<sup>75</sup> This stepped-up campaign has focused on areas surrounding the Haqqani strongholds of Miram Shah and Mir Ali.<sup>76</sup> Local and foreign fighters associated with the Haqqani Network and relatives of the Haqqanis themselves were among the intended targets.<sup>77</sup>

While drone strikes have increasingly targeted the Haqqanis in North Waziristan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has also stepped up its efforts to target the Haqqanis in Afghanistan's southeastern provinces of Paktika, Paktia, and Khost, an area known as Loy-Paktia (greater Paktia). Between 2009 and 2010, the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) assets in Afghanistan have increased fifty to sixty percent, totaling more than 5,000 personnel today.<sup>78</sup> Concurrent increases in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets in the region have allowed JSOC units to increase its operational tempo and execute hundreds of kill-or-capture missions. Focusing on the Haqqani Network in Loy-Paktia, these assets have pressured the Haqqani Network's operations in Afghanistan.<sup>79</sup> JSOC has targeted mid- and low-level militants operating in Loy-Paktia, which has produced intelligence regarding how the larger network operates. Removing these low and mid-level insurgents requires senior Haqqani insurgents to spend time reconstructing their networks and motivating increasingly reluctant replacement commanders.<sup>80</sup>

The JSOC "hammer" to the drone strikes' "anvil" was designed to restrict Haqqani cross-border operations. In contrast to cross-border militant infiltration in 2008 and 2009, Haqqani Network fighters are no longer able to enter or exit Loy-Paktia in large groups and many are being captured or destroyed.<sup>81</sup> The net effect of these operations is that it is more difficult for the Haqqani Network to synchronize and resource operations in Loy-Paktia.

In response to increased activity against the Network in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Haqqanis have increasingly sought new Pakistani sanctuary and additional infiltration routes in order to continue to effectively

battle ISAF for control of Loy-Paktia. The Haqqani Network, with the active assistance from elements within the Pakistani security establishment, have increasingly turned their attention to Kurram Agency over the past several years as a potential sanctuary for the Haqqani Network and affiliated groups.<sup>82</sup>

At the same time that North Waziristan became unsuitable for the Haqqanis, the resistance to Haqqani expansion in Kurram also appeared to give way. The war-weary Shias, disappointed with the government's lack of support (and suspicious that the government was supporting Haqqani attempts to establish a hold in the area) were more willing to engage in talks than was previously the case.

#### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN KURRAM AND HAQQANI INVOLVEMENT

On February 5, 2011, Shia and Sunni communities in Parachinar, Kurram announced an end to a four-year-long feud. The years of fighting left over 2,000 people dead and over 3,500 wounded.<sup>83</sup> Tribesmen from both communities as well as members of Pakistan's legislative body, the National Assembly, participated in a 220-member tribal *jirga* that produced the newly-reached peace accord.<sup>84</sup> Despite the appearance of legitimacy that the tribal *jirga* bestowed on the accord, the real agreement was reached beforehand through several rounds of negotiations between tribal elders, government officials, and members of the Haqqani Network.<sup>85</sup> The Haqqani Network's involvement in brokering the agreement demonstrates its growing power and influence in the Pakistani tribal region in areas beyond North Waziristan.

The recently-signed accord represents an agreement between Sunnis and Shias, backed by Pakistani governmental representation, to cease attacks on each other's communities

in upper, central, and lower Kurram. The main tenets of the accord will likely mirror the Murree Accord of 2008, requiring the return of captured or deceased tribesmen, the opening of the Thall-Parachinar road and the resettlement of internally displaced peoples who fled the violence.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, in exchange for pressuring Sunni militants to cease attacks on the Shias, the Haqqanis and affiliated groups will be provided with access into Afghanistan through formerly hostile Shia terrain.<sup>87</sup>

Until recently, the Shias have managed to resist the expansion of insurgent-backed Sunnis in Kurram. In September and October of 2010, the influential brothers of Jalaluddin Haqqani, Khalil and Ibrahim, attended meetings between Shia and Sunni tribal elders in Peshawar and Islamabad, respectively.<sup>88</sup> According to individuals with knowledge of the talks that brokered the current truce, Khalil Haqqani was instrumental in reaching a settlement after both sides were allegedly pressured by elements of the Pakistani government to heed his authority.<sup>89</sup>

The Shias had come under increasing pressure to reach a deal with the Haqqanis since September 2010. In September, the Pakistani security services announced the closure of five border crossing points in Upper Kurram and interrupted small aircraft sorties used to ferry supplies from Parachinar to Peshawar.<sup>90</sup> Faced with the loss of their alternate transit route to Peshawar, this development essentially forced the Shias to the negotiating table. Ultimately, the Shias accepted the terms of a peace agreement that was likely dictated in large part by the Haqqanis, according to those with knowledge of the deal.<sup>91</sup>

Though Shia leaders deny the role of the Haqqanis in brokering the peace, the available evidence suggests otherwise.<sup>92</sup> In exchange

for brokering the peace between Sunnis and Shias, the Haqqanis allegedly received the authority to operate through Shia-controlled terrain in central and upper Kurram.<sup>93</sup> It is unclear if the Haqqanis have also secured the ability to operate camps and other facilitation infrastructure in Shia-controlled terrain. It is likely that new infrastructure and facilitation operations will be required to support not only Haqqani fighters but also other national and transnational terrorists who operate with them, such as al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e Taiba.

The peace deal between Sunni and Shia held strong for nearly two months with all sides appearing to cooperate and, for the first time in years, the Thall-Parachinar road was reopened to regular, uninhibited traffic. In mid-March 2011, however, some attacks resumed on Shia convoys. These culminated in an attack on Shia vehicles in Lower Kurram near Baggan on March 25, 2011. Up to thirteen people were killed and as many as forty-five kidnapped (though some were later released).<sup>94</sup>

The incident has raised, in some quarters, questions regarding the solidity of the peace deal.<sup>95</sup> While it may appear to herald more of the same broken promises as in the past, there are several reasons why the deal should not be considered scuttled just yet. Unlike in previous instances, the main warring parties have not taken up arms against each other; the renewed attacks appear to be the work of a single spoiler group operating in mid-lower Kurram that is working to pressure the government to accept its demands for the release of some of its members in custody.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the attack on the Shias, general Sunni-Shia violence has not erupted again. In fact, both the Shia Turis and the Sunni Mangals have made joint calls for the government to take military action against the group violating the peace agreement and have even expressed

that both tribes would be liable to take action against the group in question.<sup>97</sup> Both sides, including the “outsiders who were guarantors of the peace deal” (i.e. the Haqqanis) have been involved in emergency talks to resolve the latest situation.<sup>98</sup>

As it currently stands, the peace deal is very much alive. It is, of course, subject to interference by individual spoilers, a factor that is unlikely to be permanently resolved given the plethora of groups operating in the area. It does not appear on this occasion, however, that the actions of such groups have been able to fracture the accord reached between the Sunnis and the Shias.

## CONCLUSION

On the surface, the Haqqani-mediated peace in Kurram appears beneficial to all parties involved, as four years of bloody sectarian violence has ended in Kurram. Yet, in the short-term, the Haqqani Network, and their affiliates are the only real winners. The United States’ efforts to secure Afghanistan will be more difficult as a result of the Haqqani-mediated peace in Kurram, as well as the more narrowly defined goal of preventing the region from serving as a national and transnational terrorist safe haven. Unlike previous peace agreements, this deal has been endorsed by the Kurram chapter of the Pakistani Taliban (previously the main instigators of violence in the agency), the Haqqanis, and the Pakistani government. In the long-run, the end of vicious sectarian conflict will not be without consequence.

Pressuring the Shias to come to terms with a Haqqani-mediated peace agreement appears to have been the result of steady efforts within the Pakistani security establishment—and for good reason. For years, Shias and Sunnis in Kurram have pleaded with the Pakistani

government to intervene in the sectarian conflict fueled by elements of Afghan and Pakistan-focused Taliban. Yet, elements within the Pakistani security establishment appeared unable to, and, once the Haqqani Network got involved, unwilling to broker a peace unless it also paid dividends for the Haqqanis. Relocating elements of the Haqqanis to Kurram also allows the Pakistani Army to take military action in North Waziristan without interfering with Haqqani operations. Pakistan has sidestepped years of pressure from the international community urging them to launch operations against the Haqqanis and their affiliates in North Waziristan. Should the Pakistan Army finally decide to take military action in North Waziristan, it will have the effect of placating or possibly even redeeming their reputation in the international community, while leaving their Haqqani proxies intact elsewhere.

In helping to broker the peace in Kurram, the Haqqanis have secured critical concessions that will aid their operations and tactical proficiency in their ongoing campaign against ISAF and Afghan forces in Afghanistan's eastern provinces. The Haqqanis will likely relocate critical elements of the network to Kurram Agency. This will have the dual effect of relieving pressure on the network from U.S. drone strikes in North Waziristan and allow for greater freedom of movement for its fighters, facilitators, and leaders. Securing new sanctuary in Kurram also provides the Haqqanis with more diverse infiltration routes into Afghanistan's east, especially the nearby important population centers of Jalalabad, Gardez, and ultimately Kabul.

In addition to supporting their Afghan-focused offensive, the Haqqanis' expansion into Kurram will likely increase their capacity to provide shelter and protection for national and transnational terrorists such as al-Qaeda,

LeT, the IMU, and others who operate under their protection in North Waziristan.<sup>99</sup> This relationship has grown stronger over the past several years and is likely to continue.<sup>100</sup> It will certainly be more difficult to identify, track, and strike national and international terrorists if al-Qaeda and others are afforded newfound freedom of movement and territorial sanctuary in parts of Kurram Agency.

For Shias and Sunnis in Kurram, as well as the long-term viability of the Pakistani state, the Haqqani-mediated peace will not be without consequences. In the short term, Shias and Sunnis will regain freedom of movement in and around Kurram without the threat of large-scale violence, though there will undoubtedly be occasional skirmishes and the interference of spoiler groups. However, in the long run, allowing Pakistani and Afghan insurgents as well as transnational terrorists to operate in the region will destabilize Kurram, especially if it brings increased militant activity and, in response, increased drone strikes. If Sunni militants build up a significant presence in Kurram, they may be capable of overrunning large Shia communities in upper Kurram. Ultimately, Pakistani militant groups, such as the TTP, may be able to use their positions in Kurram, in addition to the Waziristans, Orakzai, and other agencies, to increase their recruiting, build new safe havens, and mount a sustained campaign bent on overthrowing the Pakistani state. If such an event were to occur, the short term gains of a peace in Kurram would be outweighed by significant long-term challenges both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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<sup>94</sup> Fabrizio Foschini, "Facts and Fiction on the Frontier: The Haqqanis and the Kurram peace deal," *Afghan Analysts Network*. Available at: <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1627> "Tribal elders meet today to salvage Kurram peace deal," *Dawn*, April 19, 2010. Available at [http://www.dawn.com/2011/04/19/tribal-elders-meet-today-to-](http://www.dawn.com/2011/04/19/tribal-elders-meet-today-to-salvage-kurram-peace-deal.html)

[salvage-kurram-peace-deal.html](http://www.dawn.com/2011/04/19/tribal-elders-meet-today-to-salvage-kurram-peace-deal.html)

<sup>95</sup> Fabrizio Foschini, "Facts and Fiction on the Frontier: The Haqqanis and the Kurram peace deal," *Afghan Analysts Network*. Available at: <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1627>

<sup>96</sup> Fabrizio Foschini, "Facts and Fiction on the Frontier: The Haqqanis and the Kurram peace deal," *Afghan Analysts Network*. Available at: <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1627> "Tribal elders meet today to salvage Kurram peace deal," *Dawn*, April 19, 2010. Available at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/04/19/tribal-elders-meet-today-to-salvage-kurram-peace-deal.html>

<sup>97</sup> "Tribal elders meet today to salvage Kurram peace deal," *Dawn*, April 19, 2010. Available at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/04/19/tribal-elders-meet-today-to-salvage-kurram-peace-deal.html>

Inamullah Khattak, "Kidnapped passengers: Kurram jirga to take up issue with governor," *Dawn*, April 20, 2010. Available at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/04/20/kidnapped-passengers-kurram-jirga-to-take-up-issue-with-governor.html>

<sup>98</sup> "Tribal elders meet today to salvage Kurram peace deal," *Dawn*, April 19, 2010. Available at <http://www.dawn.com/2011/04/19/tribal-elders-meet-today-to-salvage-kurram-peace-deal.html>

<sup>99</sup> Dr. Mohammad Taqi, "Kurram: sacrificed at the global *jihad* alter," *Daily Times*, February 24, 2011; "Pakistani Army allows Taliban to move to new sanctuary in Kurram Agency while finally agreeing to carry out operation against militant commanders in North Waziristan," MEMRI, October 25, 2010; Dr. Mohammad Taqi, "Kurram: the forsaken FATA," *Daily Times*, November 4, 2010; Farhat Taj, "The Kurram conundrum," *Daily Times*, February 5, 2011; Jeffrey Dressler, "The Haqqani Network: From Pakistan to Afghanistan," *Institute for the Study of War*, October 2010

<sup>100</sup> The Haqqanis' intimate association with al-Qaeda and others increases their standing and reputation with the global jihadist movement, which pays dividends in recruiting and financing operations. In turn, al-Qaeda and others plan, shelter, and train under the protection of the Haqqanis who are, in-turn, protected by powerful elements within the Pakistani security establishment.

