



Putting Pakistan's Ban of the Haqqani Network into Perspective

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Structure: (1) Abstract; (2) Background information about the problem in question; (3) Accessible and comprehensible presented arguments supporting the authors’ position.

Size/length: Less than 4,000 words, potentially including keywords, acknowledgements, and references. Contributors should be able to provide appropriate citations for any facts or quotations their pieces contain. Guest authors may also present a short biographical note. Adding an abstract is optional, but not mandatory.

ABOUT SADF

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The Haqqani network is an Afghan and Pakistani terrorist group, which is recognised as one of the most experienced and sophisticated militant organisations in the region. Launching its first activities in the 1970s in Afghanistan, it is now believed to be centrally located in Pakistan, in North Waziristan, a mountainous tribal area at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, also known as the Durand Line (cf. Ressler/Brown, 2011). The main reason for its presence there is that it enjoys the backing and protection from Pakistan's security agents, especially the country's intelligence establishment. As a result, the Haqqani's evidently benefitted not only from official impunity but were granted sanctuaries in which they could regroup and regain strength in order to persistently challenge foreign and Afghan troops during the last years. Given that they can count on around 15,000 fighters (cf. Rose, 2011), the Haqqani network is a powerful actor in the Afghanistan-Pakistan nexus. Not only does it maintain close ties with the Taliban, but it also cooperated extensively with al-Qa'ida (cf. Ressler/Brown, 2011). As such, it played a significant role in the evolution of militant Islamic fundamentalism in South Asia, and contributed tremendously to the genesis of 'Global Jihadism'. This is a quite disturbing phenomenon for the international community engaged in Afghanistan in general and the US in particular (cf. Gopal, 2009). It is very worrying and confusing for Washington that Islamabad was supporting organisations, which were well known for their anti-US activities, while the US was channelling large sums of aid to Pakistan in order to carry out counter-terrorism. This not only eroded trust between Pakistan and the US, but also undermined peace and stability in its neighbouring countries, Afghanistan and India (cf. USDoD, 2014).

In order to address the international criticism, as well as deal with militant groups like the Haqqani network - which not only seems to be uncontrollable by Pakistan but also turned against its (former) 'patron' - Pakistan's Armed Forces started operation Zarb-e-Azb during the summer 2014 (cf. Bruki, 2014). Due to the lack of independent information and transparency, it is difficult to measure the success of this military campaign as well as Pakistan's claimed 'new willingness' to finally fight terrorism in a comprehensive manner (cf. Haqqani, 2014). These efforts refer to the international demand to target all terrorist groups, including the ones that are used by Pakistan as a strategic tool to exercise influence in Afghanistan and in the Indian administered provinces of Jammu & Kashmir.

However, the Peshawar school massacre (cf. Fishwick, 19.12.2014) as well as numerous other terrorist attacks during the last months clearly displays the fruitlessness of Pakistan's anti-counterterrorism campaigns. As a consequence, the security circles in Islamabad and Rawalpindi – where the army's headquarter and the real political power is located—decided to ban the Haqqani network, as well as several other Islamic fundamentalist organisations. There is no doubt that this happened in order to please the US, given the latest visit of Secretary of State John Kerry and to keep the aid from Washington flowing (cf. Buncombe, 12.1.2015). Nevertheless, weeks after Kerry's visit, there is still doubt about Pakistan's real intentions regarding the use of militants to gain power at the regional level (cf. Ahmad/Ahsan, 2015).

This raises a number of important questions:

First, what made Pakistan ban an organisation like the Haqqani network while many experts said that Islamabad considered it to be a strategic asset? It seems that one of the major reasons for the ban was to show the international community that Pakistan is finally following a comprehensive approach in its counter-terrorism strategy. In more concrete terms, Islamabad wanted to convince Washington that this time it is seriously pursuing the militants instead of nurturing them. Pakistan's decision-makers most likely wanted to demonstrate that they are no longer pursuing a differentiation between good and bad militants (cf. Sarwar, 17.12.2014). In other words, the country is detaching itself from the conception of using terrorism and insurgents as tools within its operational strategic portfolio ('state terrorism'). Before, Pakistan's security sector agents were accused of supporting the Haqqani network and other militants, and of using them as a proxy to gain political and military leverage in Afghanistan as well as to contain the growing influence of its arch-rival India in Pakistan's western neighbourhood (cf. Riedel, 2013). However, doubts among international analysts remain regarding the extent of the ban and if it is an earnest effort to curb terrorism or if it is just part of a larger strategy to justify bolstering an increase of the soldiers' role in Pakistan's internal affairs. Therefore, the ban doesn't have to be seen only in the context of Kerry's visit but also in relation to the military's willingness to underline its dominant position in the country's political arena. As a matter of fact, the military establishment has been entrusted with a new martial law against terrorist groups through the proclamation of the 21st Amendment. Out-lawing the Haqqani network implies that the military

brass would absorb a tremendous decision-making power, which would enable them to act without judicial accountability through higher civilian courts or any remarkable parliamentary oversight (cf. Sahgal, 14.1.2015).

In this context, it is noteworthy that the aforementioned 21st Amendment in order to grant Pakistani armed forces substantial, constitutional guaranteed and judicial authority not only paves the way for direct military interference, but resembles a well-planned and gradual strategy intended to build up a formal role of the military in the country's political landscape. Some people would call it a 'constitutional coup', diminishing all democratic achievements of the last years (cf. Wolf, 15.1.2015). In sum, all significant decision-making areas will be guided by the same security paradigm defined by an ingrained threat towards India as well as Afghanistan. In this context, it is important to understand that Pakistan historically identifies New Delhi and Kabul, as a threat to its national identity and national integrity.

Second, why did the decision come immediately after John Kerry's visit to Islamabad? Closely linked with the above-mentioned goal is the aim to appease the US by making a concession in banning the Haqqani Network. Without an explicit request by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, it is highly unlikely that the Haqqani network would have been banned – not even on paper. Considering the disastrous economic conditions and the extraordinary defence expenditures compared to its overall budget, Pakistan depends heavily on US military aid (cf. Rana, 19.2.2015). Due to its role during the NATO/US engagement in Afghanistan, Islamabad's position in fighting militancy and its efforts in working towards peace and reconciliation on both sides of the Durand line were perceived as highly ambiguous and raised a lot of criticism. As a consequence, given the NATO/US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent reduction of international attention and of money devoted to the region, Pakistan was forced to do something to ensure the ongoing US-support and to continue the security partnership between Washington and Islamabad.

In addition to this endogenous factor, Islamabad felt additional domestic pressures after the Peshawar school massacre, which outraged many Pakistani people demanding a policy to counter the menace of terrorism and ending the 'double game' of fighting only some militants while supporting those which are perceived as a strategic asset in its rivalry with neighbouring countries (cf. Fishwick, 19.12.2014).

Third, does the decision to ban the Haqqani Network mean that after NATO's withdrawal, Pakistan is willing to cooperate with the US and the Afghan government? In brief, the answer could be: "Not more than before!" This is because at the moment one cannot identify any significant change in Pakistan's foreign and security policy. The latest Pakistani attacks by mortar shells in the Indian- provinces of Jammu and Kashmir or the statement of Defence Minister Khawaja Asif that India is still interfering in Balochistan, indicate that the decision-making process still follows the old patterns, namely the military domination of the political arena. (cf. Ahmad/Ahsan, 2015). Subsequently, there will also be no fundamental change in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, despite the first signs of a rapprochement like the statements made during the latest visits of Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif to Kabul when he expressed the willingness to cooperate with the new Afghani government in fighting terrorism (cf. Haider, Mateen, 17.2.2015). The issue that Pakistan is in favour of including several Taliban in Afghanistan's government shows that the country's security circles are still supporting Islamic fundamentalist groups and terrorists. The fact that the new government in Kabul is also in favour of this offer reinforces the impression that Pakistan is still trying to implement its old strategy of "strategic depth" in Afghanistan by using militant groups as proxies to gain influence (cf. Hakimi, 2010). However, the most important fact in the context of supporting Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan is that this is done not only through security agents but also through civilians, i.e. elected politicians. In this framework of analysis, it is remarkable to note the tremendous financial support that radical Islamic groups and organisations in Punjab receive from the provincial administration, which is governed by the Prime Minister's brother.

Fourth, what is the value of this ban considering the fact that many outlawed militant groups in Pakistan still operate freely inside Pakistan and in Afghanistan? The genesis of militant Islamic fundamentalism and contemporary politics show that Pakistan's security circles have a quite idiosyncratic definition of terrorism, which is not necessarily in line with the international common understanding of this phenomenon (cf. Pillalamarri, 3.1.2015). Consequently, there is at present a concern that the new martial powers granted by the 21st Amendment will be used not only against the Haqqani network and other newly banned terrorist groups, but also against

political opposition, critical media, or separatist groups – especially in the province of Balochistan.

Furthermore, if history is any indication, it is unlikely that the ban will significantly change the approach of the country's security forces towards this terrorist entity. In the past, several militant groups were banished but after regrouping and/or renaming themselves, they still continued to operate on Pakistan's soil without being persecuted, while they were still receiving government-backed support (cf. Haqqani, 2014). In this context, one should mention that there is no proof that the latest military operation in North Waziristan was actually significantly destroying the operational structure of the Haqqani network as announced by the military. In sum, the ban will have no effect without the will to enforce it. Until now there are only limited, traceable and decisive efforts aimed against the leadership, the financial and funding mechanisms, or the military infrastructure of the Haqqani network. In fact, by taking into account the will of the army top brass not to give up its total control of all security matters, it remains highly unlikely that the ban will translate into significant action on the ground.

In sum, one has to see how far the Pakistani military and its spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) are really cutting themselves loose from the Haqqani network. In this direction, especially within the US, there are increasing demands to suspend assistance and impose sanctions on certain Pakistani officials because of their fickle stand on countering terrorism in general and their actions against the Haqqani network in particular. There is still much suspicion revolving around fact that Pakistan's verbal expression to fight terrorists does not result in any real change in the country's policies (cf. Detsch, 24.2.2015). It's time for Pakistan's security sector agents to go beyond the rhetoric of condemning the Haqqani network (and other militant groups) and take actions that are substantial and also transparent. (cf. Detsch, Jack, 24.2.2015). Therefore, Islamabad and Rawalpindi have to understand that the Haqqanis are not an asset but a dangerous reality, which the internationally community is not willing to accept anymore.

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