Al Qaeda & The Haqqanis: A Tale of Two Networks

David Isby
Jamestown Foundation Conference
Washington DC, 8 December 2011
www.DavidIsby.com

From Guys to Networks

- This is a story about two networks and how they interact.
- Before they were networks, they were two guys: Jalulladin Haqqani (now largely retired) & Usama bin Laden (now deceased).
- The story is not how the guys became networks, but rather how their networks relate to each other and to other actors (Talibans, ISI, Pakistan) who have networks of their own.
- Reflect divisions in Afghanistan and importance of outside resources and actors in destroying/shaping Afghanistan.
- Patron-client relationships in Afghanistan and Pakistan are an important part of the story. Benefits flow both ways.
- Have an impact on the future of conflicts at multiple levels (local – regional – transnational) and foci (Loya Paktia & FATA - Afghanistan and Pakistan - international).
- Came to share ideology and objectives.
- Both used their networked relationships to transform themselves, have an impact far beyond that which they otherwise would have had, and so provides insights on next generation threats.

Jalluladin Haqqani (c1990) with Amin Wardak (l) and Hadji Abdul Haq (r)

Importance of Patron-Client Relations

- Rise, transformation to a networked organization, and decline of Al Qaeda well documented.
- Creation of Haqqani networks reflect patron-client relationships.
- Patron-client relationships key in Afghanistan.
- Reflect nature of authority/power/legitimacy in Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan is a poor country with limited ability to access resources regardless of who/what you are.
- Afghanistan is a country where it is costly in money, resources, time to do/accomplish anything, reflecting terrain, lack of infrastructure, diverse population.
- Afghanistan has few resources and it takes a lot to do things, Afghanistan have traditionally looked to outside patrons that provide these resources.
- King Abdur Rahman uses British patronage to create Afghanistan as a country late xix c.; currently Kabul depends on patronage from US and international community; insurgents rely on patronage from networks running outside Afghanistan (ISI, Pakistan, Arabs, opium). Limited number of educated/capable Afghans makes outside source of expertise & competence as well as resources.
- Patrons hope clients will create the Afghanistan they want.
- Outside patronage has limited effect without legitimacy in Afghan and Islamic terms (as Khalqis found out 78-79 and Najibullah 86-92, HiH (86-96).

Patron-Client Relations Enabling HN, AQ

- Patronage allowed Jalulladin Haqqani to transform himself from a Jadrani 'tribal entrepreneur' in the 1970s (whose tribal role was to interface with outsiders as he had worked in the Gulf and spoke Arabic) to a figure whose network provides regional (Loya Paktia), national (Afghanistan and Pakistan) and potentially global impact.

- Patronage, not politics or economics, enabled Haqqani to go from a guy to a network. It's not because he's brilliant, a political warrior, or a man of destiny.

- Haqqani has rival for Jadrani influence (Pacha Khan). Haqqani is *alim* – traditional way of going beyond tribal divisions for Pathans.

- In return, his actions as a client have given his patrons needed capabilities, training insurgents for Kashmir in the 90s (creates links to LeT, LeJ, JeM, SeS), allowing Al Qaeda to shelter in Pakistan in 02 (creates links to IMU/IJU, TTP/ Behtullah Mehsud), striking the Indian embassy in Kabul in 08 (pluse Serena hotel, parade), against Kabul's perceived legitimacy.

- Having HN as client kept AQ alive, gives ISI, others way of striking in Afghanistan. Haqqani's Afghan nationalist & tribal loyalties do not prevent.

- HN also had access to AQ and other outside generated concepts (e.g., shift to multiple simultaneous attacks, generates lots of videos, killings and terror). Creates own PR arm (*Menba al-Jihad*). Were not there pre-2001.

- Importance of personal links (include familial succession inside HN, typical of Afghanistan, outsiders may not be aware of or get wrong (e.g., negotiations).

Loya Paktia – Pushtun threats to Kabul come from here (trade via Nangarhar or Kandahar) (1924 Khost revolt, 29 CW, 91 fall of Khost)

AQ-HN Relationship Not Exclusive

- Patronage not unitary. Jalulladin - multiple/non-unitary patrons since the 70s.
- Original patrons 'Arabs' (non-unitary) alongside ISI, Pakistan.
- Al Qaeda enters picture with UBL (86-87) and then when AQ takes over 'Arab' patronage in Afghanistan post-96.
- Pakistan security services also patrons from 70s, see Haqqani as 'their' Pushtun, able to counter Daoud & tribal leadership on Pushtunistan.
- Tensions with Pakistan, reports of direct aid from US.
- Taliban enter picture c95 – links date to 80s (HiK). 'Haqqani' not name but honorific, points to shared madrassa experience (but not same madrassa, also tribal division, Taliban does not approve of tribes). 96-01 Taliban does not seek to supplant HN with top-down authority from Kabul. Current – HN operates closely with Taliban "shadow governor of Kabul", Mullah Dawood from Logar.
- Links neither linear nor exclusive. (ISI pushes 'Arabs' to support HiH 87-94. 'Arabs' & HiH (not HN) wage 'jihad' in FATA against Touray Pushtuns 87 (reflect Zia fear of 5th column). Jalulladin supports 'commanders shura' (not ISI creation) c90. Nationalist appeal against AIG (ISI-controlled). Tensions with Taliban and Mullah Omar.
- Provides interface with Pakistan for benefits (allows TTP to access war in Afghanistan, timber/transport mafias to access Afghanistan, opium?).
- HN links to TTP benefit both tribal (Karlanri links w/Wazirs. Mehsuds), personal link w/ Baitullah Meshud. AQ-Spread of suicide bombing, coordinated attacks.

Dealing with AQ Decline

- AQ decline (UBL death, leadership losses, lack of grass roots support, limited number of individuals in HN AOR) does not undercut HN.
- Leads to increase in importance of other HN patrons, especially ISI, hence ADM Mullen's Sept 11 statement that HN 'veritable arm' of ISI.
- Yet Pakistan may well be unable to "deliver HN" to negotiations.
- HN links to Arab sources of funding/patronage predate AQ and are likely to continue. HN protects AQ assets in region (e.g., Bekkay Harrach, AQ German).
- HN "really committed to something far broader than simply driving American troops out of Afghanistan" – David Rohde.
- Beyond TTP, HN also has links with other n/w groups (LeT, JeM, IMU/IJU) that aim to operate outside Afghanistan. HN "eager to carry out suicide attacks in the US in revenge for drone strikes" – David Rohde.
- Nominal independence from multiple patrons allow HN to look to tribal or Afghan sources of legitimacy not available to outsiders. Networks allow HN to go around sitrust of most tribal leaders in Loyta Paktia.
- Puts premium on tactics that can disrupt n/w (distrust more damaging than UAVs) and the key human relations they depend on.
- But recognize limitations. Despite divisions/tensions with Mullah Omar, for HN to transfer loyalty away from IEA would potentially undercut its claim to Afghan legitimacy. Najibullah able to buy many local truces, no major transfers of loyalty.

How is the Story Going to End?

- Shows importance of patron-client relationship in Afghanistan and difficulty of replacing it through negotiations or a peace settlement.
- What do you offer HN to replace the outside patrons that have worked for it since the 70s and expect it to oppose Kabul?
- If we offer Afghanistan and Pakistan a future of democracy, what role for HN and counterparts? HiH may want to be Hezbollah, hard to see Siraj going for same deal, but may be possible.
- As US and international forces disengage, what will our clients do? (panic? Cut a deal?) How can we use networks, patron-client relations FOR Afghanistan?
- HN may not be able to demand a deal that cuts out Kabul's Jadran clients (Pacha Khan). If so, will it be acceptable? HN not accepted by all in TTP (though Hakimullah Mehsud backs for authority (Hafiz Gul Bahadur 'Amir or Waziristan' supports) Fazl Sayid opposed: HN power in Pakistan needs Pakistani links.
- US and international community created alternative patron-client relationships rather than using those already there.
- Networked threats more difficult to defeat, make it easy to maintain relationships even though an actor (e.g., AQ) may decline.
- HN limitations (that of Siraj and inner circle). ISI have waged political warfare through surrogates in Afghanistan since the 1970s and have not won. Do not hold the high ground of legitimacy, nationalism, Islam, or Pushtun identity.

What Does This Mean in Washington?

- AQ & HN show strengths and limitations of networks in terrorism, insurgency, and political warfare.
- Networks are able to embed themselves with multiple actors and are not dependent on single access points (Usama, Jalulladin). Able to adapt (HN operates since the 1970s).
- Networks are vulnerable; need trust, control, way to ensure that multiple points do not become multiple ways of attack.
- Both networks had to adapt to the geographic/human terrain of Afghanistan.
- Demonstrated ability to use patron-client relationships and Jadrani tribal links.
- HN has kept at least nominal independence despite client status.
- This is importance for legitimacy with followers and supporters.
- Both networks have limitations as terrorists, insurgents, and political warriors.
- But may use Afghan society and patron-client relationships more effectively than Kabul and its US and international community backers.
- Bottom line: Do not think that, if US disengages again from Afghanistan, the death of bin Laden and the decline of Al Qaeda means that there will not be future transnational terrorist threats to the US, the West, & India from there. The networked nature and agenda of the HN and their allies with roots in Pakistan (e.g., LeT) and C. Asia (e.g., IMU), means that any vacuum can be filled; the commitment, motivation, and capability remains after bin Laden is gone.