

US Post-Taleban Plans Hit Problems

Author: [Michael Griffin](#)

American and Pakistani officials are finding it hard to come up with a blueprint for a post-Taleban administration for Afghanistan.

Pakistan's need to recruit an acceptable face from among the Taleban if it is to have any say in a post-war Afghan government threw up an unlikely candidate last weekend in the form of the mercenary warlord Jalaluddin Haqqani, a veteran of the anti-Soviet war.

Afghanistan's minister of tribes and a commanding figure in Afghanistan's eastern frontier, Haqqani travelled secretly to Pakistan over a week ago with Taleban foreign minister Mullah Wakil Ahmed Mutawakhil, during the course of US secretary of state Colin Powell's visit to Islamabad.

Mutawakhil's presence in Islamabad - and numerous reports of his holding secret meetings with Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence agency, ISI - triggered speculation that an ideological split might have occurred at the highest echelons of the hardline Islamist movement.

Despite three weeks of almost uninterrupted US bombing, the loosely affiliated Taleban administration has shown no sign of splintering into the numerous factions from which it was formed in the early 1990s.

US and Pakistani efforts to design a post-war government require the active participation of leaders of Afghanistan's largest tribe, the Pashtun, who dominate the Taleban. The country's Tajik, Uzbek and Shia minorities make up the Northern Alliance.

Unless a significant wing of the Taleban movement breaks away from its leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, Washington and Islamabad will be unable to forge a broad-based, representative government in Afghanistan, led by ex-king Zahir Shah, who is also Pashtun.

The outcome would be calamitous in two ways. On the one hand, Zahir Shah would be exposed as lacking the support of his own people's tribal leaders, and therefore unfit to lead a moderate, post-Taleban regime. On the other, ethnic war between the Pashtun and the minorities could continue for years to come, with or without the US realising its goal of eliminating Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist network.

An insouciant Mutawakhil travelled home to Kandahar late last week, killing any further rumours of his defection in a brief interview in which he "reposed full confidence in the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar".

But his sidekick, Jalaluddin Haqqani, remained and the speculation about division in the Taleban continued unabated.

A Pashtun warlord, appointed head of the southern military command by Mullah Omar, Haqqani has allegedly expelled al-Qaeda's Arab fighters from his native Khost, near the Pakistani border, and reportedly maintains the loyalty of large numbers of Taleban stationed in Kabul.

"The US and Pakistan are gambling heavily on Haqqani," said a local press report, adding that the US had been persuaded by the ISI intelligence agency to postpone bombing runs planned for Khost airport until

the warlord finally showed his hand.

Haqqani reportedly held regular meetings with the ISI in Miramshar in North West Frontier Province, to arrange his defection and ultimate conversion to the moderate cause, the Pakistan press reported.

But Haqqani is not the shining knight that Washington so badly needs, if it is to patch together a government representing all the political and ethnic powers in Afghanistan. A prominent commander during the Soviet war, he became personally responsible for the maintenance and defence of the former mujahedin training camps built by Pakistan and the US near Khost.

After defecting from the Hizb-i-Islami mujahedin faction to the Taleban in autumn 1996, these same camps were turned over to bin Laden's recruits and militants of the Pakistan-backed insurgent movement in Kashmir, Harakat ul-Mujahedin, HUM. HUM is closely linked to al-Faran, the Kashmiri militant group that kidnapped six Western tourists in 1995, decapitating one, a Norwegian.

The camps were targeted by US Tomahawk missiles on August 20, 1998, 12 days after the suicide bombings of the American embassies in East Africa by terrorists loyal to al-Qaeda.

After his appointment as Taleban tribes minister, Haqqani immediately set about the ethnic cleansing of the Northern Alliance supporters in the Shomali Plains, north of Kabul, in 1999. As many as 200,000 mainly Tajik inhabitants were forced out of their homes in a Taleban campaign of destruction that the UN protested was a "scorched earth" policy.

In the last few days, Haqqani appears to have scotched any suggestion that he might be prepared to join a post-Taleban government. In a Pakistani press interview, he was defiantly supportive of the Islamist movement's current leadership. And he made some revealing remarks about the current state of its morale - and why it appears to be so unphased by the current bombing campaign.

"The Afghans are with the Taleban simply because it is an Islamic government," he said. "The so-called broad-based national government will, by its very nature, be secular, which will never be acceptable to the Afghans. No one from the Taleban will be part of such an unacceptable government, which will be filled with American, Russian and Indian stooges."

He also had some words of warning for US ground forces "I tell you," he said, "the Soviets were a brave enemy and their soldiers could withstand tough conditions. The Americans are creatures of comfort. They will not be able to sustain the harsh conditions that await them."

It is this innate contempt for the courage of the US frontline soldier that chiefly sustains the morale of the Taleban rank-and-file.

Michael Griffin is author of *Reaping The Whirlwind - The Taleban Movement in Afghanistan*, and is project coordinator of IWPR's Afghanistan project.

Location: [Africa](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/us-post-taleban-plans-hit-problems>