

**RELEASE
IN FULL**

From: Reines, Philippe I <reinesp@state.gov>
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WASHINGTON (AP) - The Obama administration targeted key leaders of Afghanistan's Taliban with new financial sanctions Thursday in a move that could complicate relations with Pakistan and Afghan efforts to reconcile with insurgents.

The action by the Treasury Department will freeze the militants' assets, ban travel and trigger an arms embargo. It follows similar action by the United Nations earlier this week, and comes after calls from Gen. David Petraeus, the top military commander in Afghanistan, and Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, for sanctions against Afghan insurgent commanders operating in Pakistan.

Taken together, the U.S. and U.N. sanctions prohibit any financial transactions of the terror leaders in U.N. member countries, putting additional pressure on Pakistan to take broader actions against the Taliban militants.

Three financial kingpins were targeted with sanctions, including a key member of the Haqqani network, which directs operations against U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan from safe havens in Pakistan. Among those sanctioned Thursday was Nasiruddin Haqqani, an emissary for the Haqqani Network and brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani who leads the group with his father, Jalaluddin.

Others sanctioned included Gul Agha Ishakzai, the head of the Taliban's financial commission and Amir Abdullah, the former treasurer to captured Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Barader. The sanctions placed on the three leaders as terrorists would deprive them of the assets they need to fund their terror operations, said Adam J. Szubin, director of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. "We will continue to aggressively work to expose and dismantle the financial networks of terrorist groups in support of the president's goal of a stable Afghanistan," he said.

According to officials, Ishakzai is the head of the Taliban's financial commission, has collected money for suicide attacks in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and has been involved in the disbursement of funds for Taliban fighters. He has served as a main financial officer and close adviser to Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. Abdullah has reportedly traveled to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya and the United Arab Emirates to raise money for the Taliban and facilitate meetings and communications with key leaders. Nasiruddin Haqqani has collected funds for the Haqqani group, including from al-Qaida. Last week, Gen. David Petraeus, the top military commander in Afghanistan, urged officials to add commanders from the Haqqani network to the terrorist list. At the time, administration officials said a review was under way, largely accelerated after the May 1 failed Times Square bombing. The man who has pleaded guilty in the New York incident, Pakistani-born American Faisal Shahzad, said he trained with the Pakistani Taliban to build bombs, then returned to the U.S. to launch an attack that would avenge attacks on Muslims by U.S. forces overseas.