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Sent: Monday, May 30, 2011 7:23 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Haqqani insurgent group proves resilient foe in Afghan war (Washington Post)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Monday, May 30, 2011 07:12 AM
To: NEWS-Mahogany; NEWS-SCA; SSRAP
Cc: SES-O_OS; SES-O_Shift-I; SES-O_Shift-II; SES-O_SWO
Subject: Haqqani Insurgent group proves resilient foe in Afghan war (Washington Post)

KHOST (Washington Post) - The United States knows where to find the most feared insurgent family in the Afghanistan war.

Troops can point to the downtown Khost mansion owned by its patriarch, Jalaluddin Haqqani; the million-dollar blue-tile mosque he built for the city's residents; and his base of operations 20 miles away in Pakistan. They are aware of his trucking and warehouse businesses, his sons who command about 3,000 fighters, and their sophisticated training camps that conduct courses in withstanding interrogation and firing rockets across borders.

Defeating the Haqqanis is another matter.

"Haqqani is the most resilient enemy network out there," said Col. Christopher Toner, commander of the U.S. military brigade in this eastern Afghan province.

Outnumbered by the Taliban and less famous than al-Qaeda, the Haqqani network nevertheless poses an intractable problem for U.S. troops, particularly as the focus of the war shifts toward the Pakistani border. After an intensive focus on fighting Mohammad Omar's Taliban in southern Afghanistan in 2010, the Obama administration is in talks, mediated by Germany and Qatar, with an Omar deputy. But a political deal with the Taliban — still a distant prospect — would not necessarily end the war in the east: the Haqqani network is seen as the least reconcilable of the Afghanistan war's motley crew of insurgent factions.

The Haqqani family, protected from all threats save for the occasional U.S. drone strike in its Pakistani sanctuary of North Waziristan, has carved out a lucrative niche by exploiting the porous border with smuggling rings and bribery.

The Haqqanis rely on their Pashtun tribal connections and their patrons in Pakistan's intelligence service, according to U.S. military officials.

The Haqqanis hew to the relatively narrow goal of ruling a three-province swath of eastern Afghanistan that was once their exclusive domain but is now shared with thousands of American troops.

"They want power, wealth, money and a seat at the table when this thing is over," Toner said.

The Haqqani fighters cooperate with the Taliban but are "not fully subordinate" to Omar and sometimes extract tolls from Taliban fighters who transit their territory, said a U.S. military intelligence official, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter for the record.

Resourceful network

Haqqani's fighters slip into Afghanistan along mountain passes and historic trade routes, including several

illegal border crossings used by hundreds of cargo trucks each day. The men generally fight in Afghanistan for many weeks before returning to Pakistan for a break of several months, U.S. officials say.

When in Afghanistan, the fighters move from village to village, never spending more than one night in the same house. They rarely use cellphones or radios, because the communications can be picked up by U.S. surveillance technology, and know to exploit the “red zone” — the one-kilometer-wide buffer zone near the border that U.S. troops do not enter without clearance from their commanders.

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