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Key Haqqani, TTP leaders killed in drone strikes

by Javed Hamim Kakar & Khan Wali Salarzai
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KABUL/ASADABAD (*PAN*): A major *Haqqani network* leader and a senior Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander believed killed in separate drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal region of Waziristan and in the eastern Afghan province of Kunar respectively, officials said on Saturday.

In Waziristan, a CIA drone fired six missiles at three locations in the Shawal Valley, destroying mud-walled compounds and at least two vehicles. Among the 18 people reported to have been killed was Emeti Yakuf, a senior leader of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a group from western China whose members are Chinese Uighur militants.

Badruddin Haqqani, the operational commander of the Haqqani network, is believed killed in the attack. Reports in foreign media quoted some US officials in Washington as saying that Badruddin, responsible for some of the most spectacular assaults on American bases and Afghan cities in recent years, was killed in a drone strike this week.

"There are indications that Haqqani has met his demise," a senior United States official said in Washington on Friday. He said that officials were waiting to sift through evidence, including information on jihadist Web sites, before they could be certain that Mr. Haqqani had been killed.

Badruddin, thought to be in his mid-30s, runs the Haqqani network's day-to-day militant operations, handles high-profile kidnappings and manages its lucrative smuggling operations, according to a recent report by the Combating Terrorism Center, an independent, privately financed research and educational institution at West Point.

He is considered second in seniority to the Haqqani network's leader, his older brother Sirajuddin Haqqani. Both men are believed to direct operations in Afghanistan from their haven in North Waziristan, where they have allied with local warlords and enjoy longstanding clan ties.

If confirmed, Haqqani's death would be a major benefit to the military coalition in Afghanistan. By Friday evening, reports of Haqqani's death were circulating in Pakistan's tribal belt.

On Thursday, the Pakistani Foreign Office summoned an American Embassy official to officially protest the sudden surge in drone strikes.

In eastern Afghan province of Kunar, a senior Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander, Mullah Dadullah, believed killed among a dozen of others in a *NATO* drone attack Friday evening the Chawgam area of Shigal district, which borders Pakistan's tribal belt of Bajaur.

Kunar governor Syed Fazlullah Wahidi told Pajhwok Afghan News the dead included TTP commander Dadullah, his deputy and 10 others insurgents.

Another seven rebels were wounded in the airstrike, police chief Maj. Gen. Ewaz Mohammad Naziri said. Some of the wounded militants were brought to the Kunar Civil Hospital, he said.

An International Security Assistance Force (*ISAF*) statement confirmed that TTP leader Dadullah was among several insurgents killed on Friday in a precision airstrike in the Shigal district.

ISAF accused Dadullah, alias Jamal, of a series of attacks against Afghan and coalition forces in the province. Dadullah's deputy, Shakir, was also killed in the airstrike, the alliance said.

In Bajaur, over 100 Afghanistan-based Pakistani militants entered Batwar village in Tehsil Salarzai, 50km northwest of Khar, the agency's headquarters, from across the border on Friday and started firing on posts set up by Salarzai Qaumi Lashkar, a tribal volunteer force.

Reports in Pakistani media said that the militants held civilians hostage and took positions atop their houses.

Residents said dozens of Lashkar volunteers rushed to the area soon after the attack and exchanged heavy fire with the assailants. The firing continued till the evening in which six militants and two Lashkar men were killed and five civilians injured.

Earlier on Thursday night, five intruders were killed in an exchange of fire with security forces in Miskini Darra area of Lower Dir. The militants, belonging to the Hafiz Kochwan group of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, sneaked into the villages of Ankal Sar and Miskini Darra from Afghanistan and fired rockets on check-posts, local officials said.

Security forces retaliated with heavy gunfire and killed five militants, the sources said. The gunbattle continued for more than three hours during which attackers took away the bodies of their comrades, they said.

The TTP claimed responsibility for the Bajaur attack. The banned organisation's spokesman Ahsanullah Ahsan told reporters from an unidentified place that the Taliban would continue to launch attacks in the area till people withdrew their support for the government.