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Haqqani Network is part of the Taliban -- Siraj Haqqani

By Bill Roggio

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Haqqani Network leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is closely linked to al Qaeda, denied that his forces operate separately from the Taliban and said his followers are loyal to Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar.

Siraj made the statement during an interview that was published in the September 2012 edition of Al Samoud, the official magazine of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, or the Taliban. The article was translated by the SITE Intelligence Group.

In answer to a question addressing Western claims that his organization, which is referred to as the Haqqani Network, is "an independent front from the Islamic Emirate," Siraj dismissed the characterization as a rumor and said that he and his fighters are part of the Taliban.

"There is no truth to such claims and rumors at all; they are part of the war of rumors by the enemies of Islam," Siraj responded. "We are one of the fronts of the Islamic Emirate, and we do jihad in the Cause of Allah under its banner, and we are proud of our pledge to its Emir [Mullah Omar] and we carry out its orders and all its regulations. All formations and the employment figures with us are by the Islamic Emirate, and we obey completely in good deeds the Emir of the Believers Mullah Muhammad Omar...."

Siraj's denial is identical to that of other senior Haqqani Network leaders as well as the Taliban. Jalaluddin Haqqani, his father, told Al Samoud in an interview in 2008 that the "all the Mujahideen wage Jihad under the leadership of the Ameer ul-Momineen Mullah Mohammed Omar Mujahid against the American invaders and their lackeys."

"There is no crisis (of division) under the names moderate or extremist among the Mujahideen," Jalaluddin continued. "They all fight under a unified leadership."

During the interview, Jalaluddin also stated that he is "a member of the High Council of the Islamic Emirate," which is known as the Quetta Shura.

Mullah Sangeen Zadran, one of Siraj's top lieutenants who also is the shadow governor of Paktika, also denied that the Haqqanis are a separate entity, in an interview published in Al Samoud in January 2012.

"It [a division between the Haqqani Network and the Taliban] is a rumor war that the broadcast stations of the enemy and its media centers are waging," Sangeen said. "I assure you with all confidence that all the mujahideen of the Emirate are united under the leadership of the Emir of the Believers Mullah Mohammed Omar, may Allah the Almighty preserve him, and he is the one who guides this battle in all the land, and his honest leadership is taking the jihadi movement towards the anticipated victory, Allah the Almighty willing."

In September 2012, the Taliban released a statement on their website, Voice of Jihad, declaring that there is "no separate entity or network in Afghanistan by the name of Haqqani," and that its overall leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, is a member of the Quetta Shura, the Taliban's top leadership council.

"The honorable Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani is a member of the Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate and is a close, loyal and trusted associate of the esteemed Amir-ul-Mumineen [leader of the faithful, Mullah Omar] and those Mujahideen entrusted under the command of his sons are in fact the heroic Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate who like other Mujahideen strictly obey the esteemed Amir-ul-Mumineen and wage Jihad against the invaders throughout the country," the Taliban statement said.

The Taliban also claimed that the Haqqani Network was created by the US as part of "its satanic plot" to divide the group.

In the past, US military officials and the State Department have characterized the Haqqani Network as a terror group that has operated independently of the Taliban, and have sought negotiations with so-called "moderate" elements of the Taliban. The US has even engaged members of the Haqqani Network in an effort to negotiate a settlement to the Afghan war, despite the fact that its members are in league with al Qaeda. US officials have now largely abandoned efforts at negotiations, and the State Department added the Haqqani Network to the list of foreign terrorist groups in September.

The Haqqani Network is a powerful Taliban faction that operates in eastern, central, and northern Afghanistan, and is based in North Waziristan in Pakistan. The terror group has close links with al Qaeda, and is supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). Siraj is the operational commander of the Haqqani Network and leads the Miramshah Shura, one of four major Taliban regional councils. Siraj is also a member of al Qaeda's Shura Majlis, or executive council, US intelligence officials have told The Long War Journal.

Since 2008, nine top Haqqani Network leaders, including Sirajuddin, have been placed on the US list of terrorists; six of them were designated in 2011. All of them have ties to al Qaeda. Jalaluddin has not been added to the list. For more information on the Haqqani Network, see LWJ report, US adds Haqqani Network to list of terror groups.