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CIA bomber shared US and Jordanian secrets

By Zeeshan Haider

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A Pakistan television station today showed what it said was the suicide bomber double agent who killed CIA agents in Afghanistan sitting with the Pakistani Taliban leader, and reported he shared US and Jordanian state secrets with militants.

AAJ television showed a video of the bomber, speaking in hardly audible English, sitting beside Pakistan Taliban chief Hakimullah Mehsud, leader of a growing insurgency against Pakistan's pro-American government.

"Jordanian and American intelligence had offered him millions of dollars in exchange for spying on the mujahideen (holy warriors). But he rejected wealth and joined the mujahideen," said AAJ of Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi, a Jordanian.

The channel, identifying the bomber by his online name, Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, quoted him as saying he "shared all secrets of Jordanian and American intelligence with his companions".

If the video is verified, it will point to massive intelligence failures by the United States and Jordan, one of its most important Middle East allies. It was not clear when or where the video was taken but the presence of Mehsud would suggest it was taken in Pakistan.

That will lead to even more US pressure on Pakistan to eliminate militant sanctuaries in its lawless northwest.

But at the same time, Pakistan is likely to feel vindicated by the video which would appear to show that the Pakistani Taliban were behind the attack on the CIA, following claims of responsibility by it and several other groups.

Pakistan has long argued that it should focus on fighting the Pakistani Taliban and can not afford to open up new fronts against Afghan Taliban factions, whose members cross the border to attack Western forces in Afghanistan.

Mehsud lost all his main bases in his South Waziristan bastion in a Pakistani offensive launched in mid-October.

His whereabouts are not known but he is believed to have fled from South Waziristan to seek shelter with allies, possibly in North Waziristan.

Balawi, a former doctor, appeared in the video wearing a traditional Pakistani and Afghan hat. A black banner behind him read: "There is no God but Allah. Mohammad is the Prophet of Allah.

"He said he had quit his profession and family for the sake of mujahideen," said AAJ.

Al Qaeda's Afghan wing had claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing, the second-most deadly attack in CIA history, saying it was revenge for the deaths of militant leaders, including Mehsud's predecessor, Baitullah Mehsud, who was killed in a US drone aircraft strike in Pakistan in August.

Strong links between a double agent who managed to outfox the CIA and one of the Arab world's best intelligence agencies and Mehsud would suggest Pakistan's battle against the Taliban could be far more complex.

The video, if authentic, will be further confirmation of how close the Pakistani Taliban and al Qaeda are now.

"I think this man basically belongs to al Qaeda. His appearance with Hakimullah Mehsud in a video shows how al Qaeda and the Taliban are closely linked," said Mehmood Shah, former security chief of Pakistani tribal areas.

Followers of Mehsud, who is seen as a particularly brutal leader, already pose a stiff challenge to the Pakistani state, despite the offensive which has been hailed as a major blow against the Taliban.

The Taliban have extended their reach from strongholds in the northwest along the forbidding border with Afghanistan to major cities, including the commercial capital Karachi.

Speculation has been growing that Afghan Taliban commander Jalaluddin Haqqani's network may have played a role in the December 30 attack on the CIA.

Islamabad has resisted US pressure to attack the Haqqani network, which is entrenched in a border enclave opposite the Afghan province of Khost, where the CIA agents were killed.

The Haqqani network is allied with the Taliban and believed to be closely linked to al Qaeda and the architect of several high-profile attacks in Afghanistan.

Pakistan see Haqqani - who had long-standing links with Pakistan's military ISI spy agency - as a valuable asset in Afghanistan if US troops leave, as Pakistan anticipates, before the country is stabilised.