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## Afghan Warlord With Many Enemies, and Possibly One Notorious Ally, Killed by Suicide Bomber

By Rod Nordland

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Hajji Zaman Ghamsharik, the Afghan warlord accused of helping Osama bin Laden escape from the Americans at Tora Bora, had so many enemies that his assassination on Monday came as no particular surprise.

What was a surprise was the manner of Hajji Zaman's death: by a suicide bomber wearing an explosive vest, who killed him and 14 others as they gathered at a ceremony to distribute land to returning refugees at a village in his tribal stomping grounds near the eastern city of Jalalabad.

His enemies were not just the ideological kind. There was also a blood feud between him and the family of another warlord, which blamed Hajji Zaman for his assassination in 2002. There were rivals to his large and powerful Khugiani tribe in Nangahar Province, and rivals within the tribe. And there were furious American Special Forces and C.I.A. operatives who believed he was a mercenary who took money to join the fight against Al Qaeda but then helping arrange Mr. bin Laden's escape.

Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan are usually quick to take responsibility for suicide bombings. Not in this case; when asked about Hajji Zaman's killing, the usually garrulous Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, said he did not know who did it.

The police in Nangarhar Province said the killing took place in the village of Dasht-e-Chamtala, about 10 miles west of Jalalabad, during a ceremony for local residents lured by land grants to return from camps for the displaced, according to a police official, Gen. Mohammad Ayob Salangi. At 3:45 p.m., the bomber entered the midst of a crowd of officials, including the returnees and repatriation department chief, Shams ul-Rahman Shams. In addition to the 15 killed, 20 people were wounded, many of them critically, the general said.

“We don’t know exactly who the target was, but we think it was either Hajji Zaman Ghamsharik or the head of the refugee department,” said General Salangi. Mr. Shams, however, was only wounded so presumably not as close to the bomber.

“He was a warlord, and he was fighting since 1980,” said Mirwais Yasini, a member of the Afghan Parliament from Nangarhar. “He was bitterly disliked by very many people. And then there were business interests too.”

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, he was a mujahideen leader, and later fought both for and against the Taliban. When the Taliban regime collapsed, President Hamid Karzai appointed him military commander of Jalalabad and a large part of eastern Afghanistan, including Tora Bora.

That put him at odds with another warlord in the area, Hajji Qadir, who later ousted him in Jalalabad. When Mr. bin Laden and his Qaeda followers took refuge in the Tora Bora mountains south of Jalalabad in late 2001, Hajji Zaman and another warlord, Hazrat Ali, offered the services of their armed followers to help the Americans flush them out.

Instead, Mr. bin Laden and his group escaped. Many American officials were convinced they could not have done so without collusion from the Afghan warlords.

Hajji Zaman “had a very adventurous life,” said Babrak Shinwari, another member of Parliament from Nangarhar. “But there was always a lot of intertribal fighting, even fighting within his tribe, and he had a lot of enemies.”

The uproar over Mr. bin Laden’s escape led to Hajji Zaman’s flight and exile to France and Pakistan for most of the next eight years. During that time, he was accused of engineering the assassination in Kabul of Hajji Qadir, who by then had become a vice president in Mr. Karzai’s government. Hajji Zaman’s brother was detained in connection with the case for several years but never convicted.

Finally Hajji Zaman announced that he would return last year to take part in the election campaign as a Karzai supporter. When he crossed the Torkhum border from Pakistan, a huge motorcade and throngs of cheering supporters greeted for him. Many were from his Khugiani tribe, whose support Mr. Karzai was courting. Hajji Zaman was whisked to Kabul in a government helicopter.

“He came back just a few months ago, it’s really tragic,” said Anwar al-Haq Ahadi, a former finance minister in Mr. Karzai’s government. “He was going to play quite a larger role in the

future.”

There are a number of former warlords in the Karzai government and in Parliament. Hazrat Ali, the other Tora Bora commander, is a member of Parliament.

Recently, President Karzai has been hosting a tribal jirga, or council, to try to resolve the issue of whether Hajji Zaman had been responsible for the assassination of Hajji Qadir, but their families and tribal followers had been unable to reach the required consensus.

Despite the cloud over his head, Hajji Zaman was apparently invited to the land distribution ceremony as a tribal elder. Several other tribal leaders were among the dead.

Mr. Yasini said he did not necessarily believe that the assassination was motivated by ideology. “Now some suiciders can be bought and sold,” he said. “You go to the Taliban and pay them a lot of money, and the suicider never knows what the reason for his mission is.”

An Afghan employee of The New York Times contributed reporting from Jalalabad, Afghanistan.