

## BOOK REVIEW

***Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012.* Vahid Brown and Don Rassler. London: Hurst and Company, 2013. Pp 320.**

Vahid Brown is a specialist in the history of Islamist militancy and the author of *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in Al-Qaida, 1989-2006*. He is also a PhD student at Princeton University. The co-author, Don Rassler is an instructor in the Department of Social Sciences, and Director of the Harmony Research Programme at the Combating Terrorism Centre of the United States Military Academy at Westpoint.

Primarily, Part one of the book gives a detailed historical account of the origins of Haqqani Network and the various phases of its development, whereas part two of the book is an analytical exploration of the group's value proposition to its local, regional and global partners.

The book gives a detailed account of how the Haqqanis assembled themselves as a liberation group under the ideology of Hadda Mullah in Afghanistan. The first generation of Haqqani leaders were mostly students from Haqqaniya Madrasa. In the 1970's, the Haqqanis were successful in gaining direct support from Pakistani military establishment, political circles and a significant control in North Waziristan and in Paktia Province of Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion of the latter. Later on, they started to globalise this mechanism of jihad in order to represent themselves as "fountainhead of Jihad" against the 'evil empire'.

Historically, one can assume that the Haqqani Network developed as a local actor with local concerns like liberation of Loya Paktia (Greater Paktia), and withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. These seemed as short-term goals and objectives. The Haqqani ties with Afghan Arabs gave birth to the phenomenon of global jihad. In addition to this, the authors contend that Osama Bin Laden was the first Afghan Arab who began his military relations in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets with the Haqqanis.

Discussing the role of Pakistan during the Soviet invasion, the authors point out that the Pakistan's military used the jihadist proxies in order to achieve its geostrategic and geopolitical objective, which is a very strong barrier to dysfunction the current militancy infrastructure in Pakistan.

In Part two of the book the authors highlight the rise of the Haqqanis as a "Nexus Player" since 1973, and becoming a very powerful and influential voice of one of the many mujahideen groups in Afghanistan. The authors point out that the Haqqani network's association with Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) shows that there is a link between militancy in Loya Paktia, and the violence that is adversely affecting Pakistan. This simply shows that for the Haqqanis, establishing good and strong relations with local tribes and militants is far more important than bonding with Pakistani government. Commenting on Pakistani perspective, the writers indicate that Pakistan's support for the Haqqanis was dependent on seasonal interests, and on many occasions they showed their back to Haqqanis for their interests. However, support by Pakistan to the Haqqanis is no longer used against the former Soviet Union, but is now directed against the US. The book explores the events after the 9/11 incident, when Pakistan was quite valuable for US in dismantling Al-Qaeda and many senior operatives of the various Afghan groups were captured. Yet, both Pakistan and the US negotiations with the Haqqanis to end the present conflict in Afghanistan clearly shows that both the states still recognise the importance, strength and central role of the group in the future of Afghanistan.

In conclusion, the writers narrate that the Haqqani group is facing a number of challenges, and the most important challenges are its linkages with TTP and Al-Qaeda, and militant operations in Pakistan. The authors also mention that the future of the Haqqanis relations with TTP and Al-Qaeda is an open question and cannot be answered in a single dimension. Taking the post-2014 environment into consideration, the authors admit that it is difficult to assess whether the Haqqanis will become a part of global Jihad or not.

This book is an interesting read which uses primary Afghan sources including magazines like *Manba' al Jihad* and *Nusrat al Jihad* published by the Haqqani network, and are reviewed for the first time. In the

research on the Haqqanis, the writers have also relied on the materials stored in US Defence Department's Harmony programme's database. The book is laced with interviews done with many journalists, historians and policy maker who were directly involved in dealing with, and studying the Haqqani network over the decades since the 1970s, and which make this book a value addition to the existing literature. This is a highly recommended book for those who are studying strategic and security issues of Afghanistan and the surrounding regions.

Asad Ullah Khan, Research Fellow,  
*Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.*

\*\*\*