

Thomas Ruttig

# The Ex-Taleban on the High Peace Council

## *A renewed role for the Khuddam ul-Furqan?*

The establishment of the High Peace Council (HPC) by President Hamed Karzai on 18 September and in particular its composition has attracted much attention and also criticism. One Kabul newspaper wrote that the HPC members had ‘more experience with war’ than with peace. Ten civil society organizations demanded to replace those members ‘who are accused of human rights violation[s] and [who are] suspects of war crimes [...] with experts and those with greater experience in conflict resolution, mediation and reconciliation’ in a joint declaration.<sup>1</sup> The international community, meanwhile, hopes that it can open channels for possible contacts and negotiations with the Taleban leadership or some Taleban networks.

An analysis of the 70 members<sup>2</sup> reveals that indeed 53 of them formerly belonged or currently are

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<sup>1</sup> Zaffar Shah Ruyi, ‘A’za-ye shura-ye ‘ali-ye solh dar jang beshtar tajruba darand’, *Hasht-e Sobh* (Kabul), 11 October 2010; [Resolution of Afghan Civil Society Organisations about the High Peace Council], Kabul 4 October 2010, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/VVOS-89WJSX?OpenDocument>.

<sup>2</sup> The full list was published in: *Hewad* (Kabul), 17 Mizan 1389 (9 October 2010). For a more general analysis see: Martine van Bijlert and Thomas Ruttig, *Warlords’ Peace Council*, AAN blog, 28 September 2010, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1175>. Find here also the initial 68-member list, in English.

linked to political groups that were armed factions involved in the civil wars of the 1980-90s. Amongst them are 13 persons with links to Hezb-e Islami, eight to Jamiat-e Islami/Shura-ye Nazar, six to Ittehad-e Islami (now Da’wat-e Islami) and four to Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami.<sup>3</sup>

Twelve members of the HPC held positions in the Taleban Emirate’s government between 1996 and 2001. Within them, a group of four to six individuals belonged to one of the oldest Islamist groups in the country, the Khuddam ul-Furqan (KhF - Servants of Providence). It was revived in late 2001 in Pakistan, unsuccessfully attempted to register as a political party in Afghanistan and is, as of today, described by its members as ‘dormant’.

Meanwhile, all ten women on the council – with a possible exception of one – have never been linked to one of these factions. They can be counted under ‘civil society’ as (only) two of the male members. This leaves civil society and women heavily underrepresented in the council.

Conspicuously unrepresented on the council on the political side is the ‘opposition’ wing of

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<sup>3</sup> The remaining belong to smaller ‘parties’ like NEFA, ANLF, Jombesh and the various (Shia) Harakat, Wahdat and Ismaili factions. Some of the HPC members have changed their ‘party’ membership during their political career. Under HII, only those are counted who did not become Taleban members.

Jamiat/Shura-ye Nazar – led by Dr Abdullah Abdullah, who in 2009 was President Karzai's main challenger during the presidential elections and now heads the opposition group Taghir wa Omid (Change and Hope)<sup>4</sup>, and the Massud brothers. Further absent are the two most prominent ex-Taleban – former foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil and former ambassador Abdul Salam Za'if<sup>5</sup>, the former Royal family, prominent figures from the Afghan diaspora, the business community, democratic parties as well as journalists and NGOs with experience of working in insurgency-influenced areas.

The following paper provides background on the little-known Khuddam ul-Furqan group, an Islamist faction that preceded the larger Taleban movement, joined it in the 1990s and re-established itself after the Taleban regime's collapse in 2001. The aim of the paper is to better understand their current position and capabilities for dialogue, and what their possible role may be both in the recently established High Peace Council and in the broader political process in Afghanistan. The paper has three sections. The first section introduces the main members of the group that were appointed to the High Peace Council. The second section discusses their (unsuccessful) initiatives to play a role in the early peace process and their 2007 seven-step peace proposal. The third section provides additional background on the historical roots of the Khuddam ul-Furqan.

## 1. THE KHUDDAM UL-FURQAN AS THE 'TALEBAN FACTION' IN THE HIGH PEACE COUNCIL?

Within the ex-Taleban group on the council, a group of four to six individuals is the most interesting one. It is rooted in the Khuddam ul-

<sup>4</sup> Taghir wa Omid was supposed to become the new opposition party with Dr Abdullah as its 'political manager' and former President and Jamiat leader Burhanuddin Rabbani as its overall leader. But Rabbani's appointment as head of the HPC had undermined the new party before it took off. See my remarks on the issue in: Thomas Ruttig, Talk about Talks Again, AAN blog, 7 October 2010, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1204>.

<sup>5</sup> Both also had rejected to participate in the June 2010 Consultative Peace Jirga with its handpicked delegates which had decided that a High Peace Council be formed. For more details, see AAN's series of Peace Jirga Blogs between 28 March and 4 June 2010 (starting here: <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=711>), with following Freeing the Prisoners Blogs.

Furqan (KhF), an Islamist group already founded in the 1960s, long before the emergence of the Taleban movement to which it contributed. Their long history with the KhF gives its members a strong political cohesion and contributed to the formulation of a distinct position vis-à-vis a possible peace process not many other similar groups have done. Members of this group already have attempted to obtain a role as pioneer thinkers on peace and reconciliation-related issues, from the angle of their former Taleban membership.

The group of former Khuddam ul-Furqan members consists of four 'core' members, three of which have been appointed to the HPC. Furthermore, there are three 'associate' KhF members on the council who have closely consulted with the group over the past few years. The remaining fourth KhF 'core' member currently runs for parliament – while one of the 'core' members already is a Senator.

This is Maulawi Arsala Rahmani who has been appointed a senator by Karzai in 2005. For his seniority, he is the 'spokesman' of this group and seems to assume the same role also in the HPC. Rahmani was Minister of Education in the pre-Taleban mujahedin government of Burhanuddin Rabbani and served as deputy in the same portfolio under the Taleban.

The three other 'core' members are Maulawi Abdul Hakim Mujahed, Qari Habibullah Fauzi (both appointed to the HPC) and Maulawi Rahmatullah Wahedyar who is a candidate for the Wolesi Jirga in Paktia province. Mujahed was the Taleban 'ambassador' to the UN, Fauzi was a senior Taleban diplomat in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Wahedyar also served as a Taleban deputy minister, for martyr and refugee affairs.

The three 'associate' members of this group on the HPC are Maulawi Pir Muhammad Rohani who was President of Kabul University under the Taleban, Haji Na'im Kuchi and Maulawi Kalamuddin. Kuchi was minister for border affairs in Rabbani's mujahedin government and a military commander under the Taleban regime (without a higher official position), Kalamuddin was deputy head of the *amr bi-l-ma'ruf*, the Taleban's 'religious police', and later chairman of their National Olympic Committee. All three have a different regional background than the 'core' group as a result of which they only joined the group in the post-Taleban period. As of late, Rohani seems to be the closest among them.

When the UN Security Council, in January and July 2010, removed five names from its sanctions list, Mujahed was the only one included from the KhF

group.<sup>6</sup> Other former Taleban delisted were Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil, Salam Za'if and Musa Hotak as well as Abdul Hakim Munib – a former deputy Taleban minister who served as provincial governor of Uruzgan from 2006 to 2007. Munib is currently Deputy Minister for Hajj and Auqaf and seems to refrain from participating in this group's activities, although he frequently was in contact with it in the last years.

The Khuddam ul-Furqan, the history of which will be discussed in more detail in section 3, is one of the oldest – if not the oldest – Islamist groups in the country. According to members of the group it was founded in 1967. After the Soviet occupation in 1979, KhF joined Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami (HI/ Movement for an Islamic Revolution), one of the seven major Sunni mujahedin groups based in Peshawar. When Harakat split in 1982, the former KhF members mainly stuck to their original leader Nasrullah Mansur who headed his own faction.<sup>7</sup> The later reunited Harakat merged with the Taleban in late 1994. However, it maintained some of its organisational cohesion even within this movement. It re-emerged under its original name in December 2001 after the Taleban temporarily disintegrated as a result of the US-led intervention when its core group (with all four on the HPC involved) announced the establishment of a 'moderate Taleban' party under the old name of Jamiat-e Khuddam ul-Furqan in Pakistan.

Contemporary media reports even included more names in what was called a 'dissident' Taleban group then: the Taleban 'prime minister' Maulawi Abdul Kabir, information and later education minister Mulla Amir Khan Mutaqi – who also acted as chief negotiator with the UN Afghanistan mission (UNAMA) during 2000/01 -, deputy foreign minister Abdul Rahman Zahed, finance minister Taher Anwari, deputy information minister Abdul Rahman Hotak, Maulawi Ahmad Jan and Maulawi Muhammad Azem Azimi. Many of them shared the same regional background with the KhF 'core' group or where close to it, being from Logar or

Paktia and therefore non-Kandahari, as opposed to the Taleban mainstream.<sup>8</sup>

When gathering in Kabul after their – individual – return from exile or detention and covered by an – individual – amnesty by President Karzai from 2004, this group, together with the HPC 'absentees' Mutawakkil and Za'if and other former Taleban, formed an informal coordination council (shura-ye tafahum) to discuss an approach to a peaceful solution with the Taleban and positioned itself as a possible bridge to them. This offer, however, was not taken on Afghan government and its major ally, the US. As a result, the group lingered for years in a government-provided guest house in Western Kabul, with only sporadic contacts with the government. Its elder Arsala Rahmani was appointed a senator in 2005 – seemingly as a recognition by Karzai of the potential of the group while, at the same time, it signaled a beginning incorporation of the group into his informal ruling 'alliance'. The latter led some Afghan observers to conclude that exactly this could have undermined any existing prestige Rahmani, and the group, could have commanded on 'the other side'.

Only when the debate about a possible 'reconciliation' with the Taleban gathered steam in 2007/08, the group's contacts with the Afghan government and international interlocutors intensified.

With its historical links to Harakat/Mansur – which today is one of the major components of the Taleban movement (its leader Abdul Latif Mansur is assumed to be a member in its Quetta leadership council)<sup>9</sup> –, the Khuddam ul-Furqan emerged from an important local faction in Southeastern Afghanistan, outside the Taleban's 'historical heartland' in the South of the country. Its members originate mainly from Eastern Ghazni or Western

<sup>6</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, 'U.N. Removes 5 Taliban From Its Sanctions List', New York Times 30 July 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/31/world/asia/31nations.html?\\_r=1&ref=world](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/31/world/asia/31nations.html?_r=1&ref=world).

<sup>7</sup> Nasrullah Mansur, the 'historical' leader of this faction was an Andar Pashtun from the small Sahak subtribe, which lives in the village of the same name in Zurmat. He had received a religious education at Nur-ul-Madaris. He was killed in 1993 (for details see part 2 of this paper).

<sup>8</sup> Zahid Hussain, 'Taliban officials flee to Pakistan', in: The Australian, 5 December 2001. Mutaqi, Anwari and Zahed seem to be still active in the insurgency, Mutaqi as one of the highest-ranking Taleban, however, seen as a leading proponent of a 'political' wing; Anwari for some years headed the Taleban structures in South-Eastern Afghanistan on behalf of the Quetta shura and in competition with the Haqqani network. Kabir was head of the Peshawar shura and had been (temporarily?) arrested in Pakistan in early 2010 (see: Willi Germund, Finding Kabir, AAN blog 2 February 2010, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=688>). Hotak seems to be inactive.

<sup>9</sup> Abdul Latif Mansur was the head of the Taleban Political Committee – responsible also for negotiations – from early 2009 till mid-2010 and currently is reported to act as Taleban provincial governor of Paktia.

Paktika (Rahmani, Mujahed, Fauzi) and from Khost (Rohani, Wahedyar).

The 'associated' members Naeem Kuchi and Maulawi Kalamuddin are from Paktia and Logar. Logar was the birthplace of the leader of the Harakat mainstream faction, Maulawi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi (died 2002).

Sometimes Commander Haji Muhammad Musa Hotak, from Wardak, is counted among this group of former Taleban. He also was a deputy minister under the Taleban. However, recently he seems to have pursued his own ways. A subcommander in pre-Taleban times – under Arsala Rahmani, in mainstream Harakat – he now leads a Harakat breakaway faction that is registered as a party under this name and has allied itself with President Karzai before the 2009 elections. The rest of the KhF group is likely to perceive this as an unauthorized monopolization of the 'historic' Harakat label.

Mutawakkil and Za'if as well as Abdul Wahed Baghrani (a.k.a. as Rais-e Baghran), meanwhile, are from 'Greater Kandahar'. Mutawakkil, politically, also had links with Harakat or, more precisely, its youth wing and was instrumental in facilitating the merger between Harakat and the Taleban in 1994. Baghrani was a local Harakat commander in his home district of Baghran, Helmand. The other 'former Taleban' on the HPC list – Faqir Muhammad Khan, Ghani Khan Tokhi from Zabul and Haji Atmanzai Otmanzai from Kunduz - are less known and held no prominent official posts in the Taleban regime.

Not incidentally, the HPC members formerly belonging to the Khuddam ul-Furqan group are already the most outspoken on how the HPC should work and what its 'terms of reference' should be – assuming that such do not yet exist, at least not in the public sphere.

## 2. 'PEACE STEP BY STEP'

In mid-2008, the group launched a 7-point plan under the self-explanatory title 'Sola gam pe gam' (Peace Step by Step) and distributed it amongst major actors in Kabul. Its plan includes the following points: (1) that the Afghan government convinces the international military forces that the war cannot be won militarily; (2) starting initial contacts between all involved parties on confidence building measures which would include that the 'armed opposition' stop destroying civilian infrastructure, Kabul release 'some' Taleban prisoners and the international forces stop all operations not approved by the Afghan

government (including house searches and arrests) and are concentrated at some 'centres'; (3) a jirga of mutually acceptable Afghans contacts the parties who work out a peace plan; (4) the jirga informs all relevant Afghan forces about the procedure of the peace process, secures U.N. and Islamic Conference support for round table talks including security guarantees for the Taleban participants; (5) the Taleban leaders are de-blacklisted, bounties on their heads lifted and a ceasefire is called; (6) a commission is established to organise a Loya Jirga; (7) this Loya Jirga votes on the decisions taken in the round-table discussions and proceeds to end the war.<sup>10</sup>

The group itself indicated that this proposal had been discussed with or even approved by the Taleban leadership. Some observers doubted whether the group's links to the Taleban leadership were really that close. Indeed, it cannot be excluded that the initiative was an attempt to improve the group's political weight in the first place. However, the content of the proposal concurs with what Taleban leaders have stated in less confrontational years. More importantly, it shows a practical way out of the stalemate caused by the preconditions established by all involved parties. The ambiguity about whether it has been 'seen' or even 'approved' by the Taleban leadership, or members of it, involved in this proposal also presents an opportunity to try out whether the KhF group can prove to be a meaningful channel for eventual contacts or negotiations.<sup>11</sup>

Recent statements mainly of Rahmani – who as the senior member of the group also acts as its unofficial spokesman – and Mujahed but also of Mutawakkil, both before and immediately after the establishment of the HPC, echo this paper.

Habibullah Fauzi was the first one who publicly developed some thoughts about a political process in March 2005. In an radio interview he said: 'For the higher interests of the country, we think there is a need for a political process in order to reach a mutual understanding between different ethnic groups, based on Islamic principles and Afghan values. [...] We want to bring peace, unity, and stability to our country, and we believe that strengthening peace and stability in Afghanistan is not only in the benefit of Afghans, but it is also in

<sup>10</sup> Based on author's interviews with members of the group, Kabul April 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Ruttig, *The Other Side: Dimensions of the Afghan Insurgency: Causes, Actors and Approaches to 'Talks'*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kabul, July 2009, p. 28.

the interest of the region and the world.’ He also confirmed that this group had met government representatives: ‘We talked to the government representing the Khuddam al-Furqan.’<sup>12</sup>

Mutawakkil, still under house arrest then, ‘urged the Afghan government and US-led coalition forces to set free innocent detainees in the interest of the ongoing reconciliation process’ for the first time in a short interview with an Afghan news agency in May 2005.<sup>13</sup>

But only after his participation in Saudi-sponsored ‘iftar’ consultations in 2008<sup>14</sup> he talked more in detail: ‘Dialogue will then begin without preconditions by discussing the easy issues and by showing good will by closing the Guantanamo and Bagram detention camps, releasing prisoners, and cancelling the black lists. This will help us join the plan. [A]n atmosphere of confidence and good will should first prevail. Talks should also begin by discussing easy issues. The Islamic Taliban Movement in Afghanistan should be viewed as a party. Security guarantees should be provided for its representatives in Afghanistan and abroad. This should happen before anything else as this will pave the way for presenting constructive proposals. [...]’

He also hinted at a learning process of the Taliban. ‘People now admit that the Taliban Movement no longer concentrates on minor issues or harass people on issues like listening to music, for example. [...] I think it will be in the interest of the Afghan people if Taliban’s past experience in maintaining security and combating drugs is added to media and political openness and to the international support extended to the current government.’

He argued against the deployment of any foreign forces, including from Muslim countries because this would ‘make the Afghan people lose confidence in the ability of their leadership to run the country’s affairs. Moreover, these forces will

be accused of being affiliated with this or that side. I think efforts should be accelerated in order to enable Afghanistan to stand on its legs and let the Afghan people decide their future by themselves. The role of foreigners should be confined to diplomatic efforts as done everywhere else.’<sup>15</sup>

More recently, in November 2009, he described the Taliban’s preconditions and possibilities for confidence-building measures: ‘There are possibilities for peace if Taliban are convinced that their objectives can be met through peaceful talks. [...] Steps [should be taken], which show that foreign forces are leaving Afghanistan [...]. The first requirement is to soften the positions and create mutual confidence.’ He also enlisted Taliban’s other conditions as release of their detainees and abolition of the ‘black list’. ‘Taliban might also wish that they should indulge in political activities, have their offices, a spokesman, and carry out journeys.’<sup>16</sup>

In a meeting with AAN in March 2010, Mujahed confirmed that the Taliban ‘main objective’ would be the withdrawal of the foreign troops. They probably would not press for a change of the constitution as long as Sharia law would be guaranteed. He also defended the use of death penalty, saying that ‘when I was in the US during the Taliban government, Bush was governor of Texas and he executed around 90 people. We also have such a concept in our laws.’ He also pointed to the fact that despite having accepted the Afghan constitution five years ago, ‘my name is still on the UN black list’ (meanwhile removed). He also mentioned the ‘huge contradictions’ between the Afghan government’s statements on peace and their activities which has led to a lack of mutual trust.

After the High Peace Council’s first meetings, Rahmani stated that discussions were already under way within the HPC to request the United States or United Nations to guarantee safe passage for representatives of militant groups to meet somewhere outside of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran to discuss ways to reconcile with the Afghan government. Rahmani, who insisted he was not speaking on behalf of the entire council, said neutral meeting sites under discussion were in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Egypt. He said further that trust must be established

<sup>12</sup> Sultan Sarwar and Golnaz Esfandiari, RFE/RL interviews former Taliban involved in reconciliation talks, Eurasianet, 6 March 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp030705a.shtml>.

<sup>13</sup> Pajhwok News Agency, 8 May 2005.

<sup>14</sup> The Saudi government had invited an Afghan delegation for an exchange about a possible peace process that included both government representatives and former Taliban, amongst them KhF-members. It has never been fully established whether representatives of the Taliban leadership also attended these meetings or were present in the country at the same time.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Jazeera, 2 August 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Abdul Hadi Mayar, ‘Taliban lays down conditions for talks as wire leaks speaks of "strategic reconciliation"', Xinhua, 15 Nov. 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-11/15/content\\_12460984.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-11/15/content_12460984.htm).



between the Taliban and the US and other Western players. He described the release of four or five top Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo and the de-listing of about 150 individuals linked to the Taliban from the UN sanctions as a possible means to remove key stumbling blocks to negotiating peace. Addressing Pakistan, Rahmani said that it should release or give Afghanistan custody of its Afghan prisoners, including the Afghan Taliban's No. 2 leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.<sup>17</sup> 'An impartial country can provide the conditions so that some members of the council can meet the [Taliban]. As a start.'<sup>18</sup>

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: KHUDDAM UL-FURQAN AND THE MANSUR NETWORK<sup>19</sup>

The Khuddam ul-Furqan are one of, if not the oldest Islamist group in the country.<sup>20</sup> It precedes the history of the Taliban movement considerably. It emerged in Afghanistan in the mid-1960s – most likely in 1967 - from within the ulema under the influence of the head of the Mojaddedi family, Ibrahim Mojaddedi.<sup>21</sup> Its spiritual centre was the Nur-ul-Madaris madrasa, in Andar district, Ghazni province, which naturally first influenced the surrounding Andar tribe's territory which stretches over some districts in Ghazni province (Andar, Dehyak, Giro, Qarabagh, Waghaz, Zana Khan),

<sup>17</sup> Deb Riechmann, 'Afghan peace council wants Taliban figures released', AP 13 Oct 2010, [http://www.montereyherald.com/rss/ci\\_16326357?source=rss&nclick\\_check=1](http://www.montereyherald.com/rss/ci_16326357?source=rss&nclick_check=1)

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Markey, 'Tough terms stymie Afghan talks: Ex-Taliban envoy', Reuters, 13 October 2010, <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-52164820101013?rpc=401&feedType=RSS&feedName=SouthAsiaNews&rpc=401>.

<sup>19</sup> This part is an updated and abbreviated version of: Thomas Ruttig, *Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity in the Taliban Universe*. In: Antonio Giustozzi (ed.) *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*. Colombia: 2009.

<sup>20</sup> The following paragraphs are based on various interviews with protagonists of these events, held in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2010.

<sup>21</sup> David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2002, p. 255. Dorronsoro writes that it emerged in the 1950s in Herat under Faizani and only later moved closer to the Mojaddedi family. This seems to be incorrect. Faizani, instead, kept links to Jawanan-e Muslimin. Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan: 1979 to the Present*, London 2005, p. 69.

parts of Zurmat and the Mirzaka area in Paktia as well as parts of Mata Khan in Paktika.

The Mojaddedi family, however, only seemed to have had a symbolic, honorific role; it later established its own mujahedin tanzim, the Jabha-ye Nejat-e Melli. The Khuddam ul-Furqan - and later - Harakat led a life of their own.

Khuddam ul-Furqan's main aim was to counter the rise of the Marxist groups of the time. In 1978, after the takeover of the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), it contributed to the formation of Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami, one of the seven major Sunni tanzim fighting the new leftist regime in Kabul and, after December 1979, the Soviet military invasion. According to participants, its founders were 'mullahs with Khuddam-ul-Furqan links from Helmand, Kandahar, Paktia and Paktika'. They elected Maulawi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi, an Andar Pashtun from Logar, who was the member of parliament for Marja district in Helmand in the King's time,<sup>22</sup> as the new organisation's leader. The *raison d'être* of Harakat, as an organization led by regular religious scholars, was the ulema's rejection of the spiritual authority of the self-proclaimed mujahedin leaders Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani – an engineer and a university professor for religious law - to issue a fatwa for jihad against the Soviets.

In 1982 Harakat split into various factions. Most of its commanders joined the faction led by Nasrullah Mansur, officially called Harakat-e Nawin-e Inqilab-e Islami, or New Harakat, but usually known as Harakat/Mansur. Pakistan, however, refused to recognise it officially; this deprived the new group of a share of the Western and Arab countries' military and financial aid distributed to the mujahedin by the ISI. Its leader therefore advised his commanders to join other—recognised—tanzim; he also made overtures to the Iranian government and to the Northern Alliance. Tehran rejected any cooperation, most probably because Harakat/Mansur was the tanzim seen to be closest to the radical, anti-Shia Deobandi doctrine of Sunni Islam. It also was fervently anti-monarchist and opposed to more moderate groups like Prof. Mojaddedi's Jabha-e Nejat-e Melli and Gailani's Mahaz-e Melli Islami. One of its most popular slogans read: 'In Islam, moderation is kufr [infidel].'

In 1992, Harakat's various factions reunited under Nabi Muhammadi's leadership. When the mujahedin took over the government from the

<sup>22</sup> His family had been resettled to the US-run Helmand and Arghandab Valley Authority irrigation project there.

Najibullah regime in the same year, the Mansur family re-established its grip over Zurmat and suppressed all other competing organisations, particularly Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami which had many local members killed by Mansur's fighters, but also Pir Gailani's Mahaz. On 8 February 1993, Nasrullah Mansur was killed when his car hit a mine in his home Zurmat district after his return from a meeting with Northern Alliance leader and Interim President Rabbani in Kabul. The suspicion for Mansur's killing fell on Hekmatyar's Hezb.<sup>23</sup> According to local sources, the strained relationship between Harakat/Mansur and Hekmatyar's Hezb prevented a possible alliance between the latter and the emerging Taleban.

After the murder, Nasrullah's brother Abdullatif Mansur became the head of the Mansur family; he was perceived as 'more of a politician, an orator not a commander'. A year later, in 1994, Harakat's student wing Tehrik-e Tulaba-ye Harakat—with many Khuddam-ul-Forqan sympathisers—took the initiative to explore whether the organization could merge with the new Taleban movement. A group comprising the later Taleban foreign minister Mulla Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil and his later deputy Abdurrahman Zahed 'went to Quetta to see what the Taleban were really about'. Finding that 'respected people' were with them, they decided to join. In late 1994, Harakat leader Nabi Muhammadi issued a public statement of support for the Taleban that declared his own organisation dissolved into the new movement. Khuddam-ul-Forqan, however, maintained distinctive structures even during the Taleban Emirate's time. Some of them rose to high positions in the Taleban administration.

As a result, the relatively small district of Zurmat was strongly represented in the structures of the Taleban's Islamic Emirate. There were at least three ministers (Abdullatif Mansur for Agriculture, Taher Anwari for Finance and later for Economy and Amir Khan Mutaqi—whose family was originally from Zurmat but had been resettled to Kunduz—for Education), and four deputy ministers (Abdulkhakim Munib for Tribal Affairs; Maulawi Rahmatullah Wahidyar for Martyrs and Refugees; Arifullah Arif for Finance; Maulawi Rahimullah Zurmati for Information and Culture). That made it possible for the area to be governed by Zurmat's themselves, not by Kandaharis, which earned it the

nickname 'Little Kandahar' – as the second Taleban stronghold outside Southern Afghanistan.

Watching the beginning decline of the Taleban regime as a result of its increasing international isolation and its increasing aggressiveness inside Afghanistan where sporadic resistance against forced recruitment of fighters broke out even amongst Pashtuns already before the events of 9/11, Harakat announced in Quetta in July 2001 that it would resume its own activities.<sup>24</sup> After the fall of the Taleban regime, many former Mansur commanders associated themselves with the Karzai government. While this provided the Mansur network with links into the government camp, it also weakened its firepower significantly. It was assumed that some of these commanders were playing in both camps.

This led to another split in Harakat since the Mansur family did not follow this course. Nasrullah Mansur's eldest son Saifurrahman stayed in Shahikot after the fall of the Taleban regime in November 2001. In March 2002, he led the embittered resistance of over a thousand fighters, including his own men, those from the Haqqani networks, Arabs, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Chechens, against a large US military operation, codenamed Anaconda, during which his and Haqqani's forces were pushed out of the area.

Khuddam ul-Furqan, meanwhile, was publicly revived in December 2001 in Pakistan after the Taleban temporarily disintegrated as a result of the US-led intervention when. Its core group – including all four on the HPC - announced the establishment of a 'moderate Taleban' party under the old name of Jamiat-e Khuddam ul-Furqan in Pakistan and declared its support of the peace process. It tried to register as a political party in Afghanistan several times between 2002 and 2004 when it sent delegations to Kabul which also met President Karzai. In February 2002, KhF representatives requested UNAMA's good offices to support these attempts. The registration was, however, rejected under US influence who then had ruled out any 'talks with terrorists'.

The Mansur network became militarily active again in Zurmat only in late 2006, after about a year of

<sup>23</sup> According to another version, Mansur was killed by members of the Eastern Shinwari in revenge for atrocities committed against this tribe by Andar earlier in the conflict.

<sup>24</sup> After the death of its leader Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi in 2002, his son Ahmad Muhammadi took over the party's lead and allied it with President Karzai. A weak leader and accused of mental problems by its own members, he was voted out of office – but the party continued to decline nevertheless. It attempted a comeback as an independent organization in 2009 with its own presidential candidate; but his withdrawal in favour of Karzai prevented this again.

preparations. In the same year, Mansur fighters re-established their base in Shahikot.<sup>25</sup> The remaining members of the Mansur family mainly stay in Pakistan from where they direct their fighters.

Currently, the Mansur network is the second biggest insurgent network in Southeastern Afghanistan, or Loya Paktia, after the Haqqani network. It considers itself as part of the Taleban movement, recognizes Mulla Muhammad Omar as its Amir ul-Mo'menin, i.e. spiritual leader, but operationally largely acts autonomously from the Quetta leadership council's guidance.

Its operational area stretches over areas in north-eastern Ghazni, south-western Paktia and pockets in Logar province, the so-called central corridor from Sarhauza district in Paktika and this province's most populated areas (around its capital Sharana and the district of Mata Khan) through Zurmat to Khawar district in Logar. It also includes an area towards Paktia's provincial centre of Gardez. In Zurmat and Shahikot, it overlaps with the Haqqani network's area of influence. While the Shahikot Mountains in Zurmat constitute the Mansur network's main base and staging area, the districts of Khawar (Logar) and Dehyak (Ghazni) – almost devoid of any even token government presence – are other safe havens.

With many of its leading representatives killed over the last few years, it has been weakened considerably. These losses have diminished its autonomy from the 'Kandahari' Taleban core. The Haqqani network – which previously had never been able to operate in 'Mansur' areas – has coopted a number of Mansur commanders into its own structures. However, by the fall of 2010, there still was a number of local commanders operating in Zurmat district known as belonging to the Mansur network, and the network reportedly had representatives in areas of Loya Paktia that are controlled by other Taleban networks.

Nevertheless, the current head of the family, Abdullatif Mansur, still seems to be a member of the Taleban's Leadership Council and the current Taleban provincial shadow governor of Paktia – despite the network's weakness. This is a reflection of the Taleban leadership's interest to keep it on board and utilizing the local fame that the name 'Mansur' still commands.

It remains to be seen whether the 'Khuddam ul-Furqan' members of the High Peace Council will be able to reach out to this network or whether they, through the Mansur family, even can open a channel to the Taleban's leadership.

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<sup>25</sup> Interviews with members of the Paktia provincial administration, Gardez, Oct. 2007.



## **ABOUT THE AFGHANISTAN ANALYSTS NETWORK (AAN)**

The Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) is a non-profit, independent policy research organisation. It aims to bring together the knowledge and experience of a large number of experts to inform policy and increase the understanding of Afghan realities.

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## **AUTHOR BIO: THOMAS RUTTIG**

Thomas Ruttig has a diploma in Afghanistics from Humboldt University, Berlin (Germany). He speaks Pashto and Dari and has been working on Afghanistan for some 25 years, almost ten of them living in the country and in Pakistan. Thomas has worked for the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1985-90, as a journalist from 1990-2000, for the UN as respectively UNSMA head of office in Kabul, adviser to the Afghan Independent Emergency Loya Jirga Commission, and UNAMA head of office in Islamabad and Gardez 2000-03, as the Deputy to the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan 2003-04 and as Political Adviser to the German Embassy in Kabul 2004-06. In 2006-08 he was a Visiting Fellow at the German think-tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik/German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP). Since 2008 he is an independent political analyst, author and consultant, including for the Netherlands Embassy in Kabul with frequent visits to Uruzgan. His long list of publications on Afghanistan includes academic articles, policy papers and newspaper articles.