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## Pakistan Rebuffs U.S. on Taliban Crackdown

By Jane Perlez

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**Mr. Haqqani is considered more of an asset than a threat by the Pakistanis.**

ISLAMABAD — Demands by the United States for Pakistan to crack down on the strongest Taliban warrior in Afghanistan, Siraj Haqqani, whose fighters pose the biggest threat to American forces, have been rebuffed by the Pakistani military, according to Pakistani military officials and diplomats.

The Obama administration wants Pakistan to turn on Mr. Haqqani, a longtime asset of Pakistan's spy agency who uses the tribal area of North Waziristan as his sanctuary. But, the officials said, Pakistan views the entreaties as contrary to its interests in Afghanistan beyond the timetable of President Obama's surge, which envisions drawing down American forces beginning in mid-2011.

The demands, first made by senior American officials before President Obama's Afghanistan speech and repeated many times since, were renewed in a written demarche delivered in recent days by the United States Embassy to the head of the Pakistani military, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, according to American officials. Gen. David Petraeus followed up on Monday during a visit to Islamabad.

The demands have been accompanied by strong suggestions that if the Pakistanis cannot take care of the problem, including dismantling the Taliban leadership based in Quetta, Pakistan, then the Americans will be resorting to broader and more frequent drone strikes in Pakistan.

But the Pakistanis have greeted the refrain with official public silence and private anger, illustrating the widening gulf between the allies over the Afghan war.

Former Pakistani military officers voice irritation with the American insistence daily on television, part of a mounting grievance in Pakistan that the alliance with the United States is too costly to bear.

“It is really beginning to irk and anger us,” said a security official familiar with the deliberations at the senior levels of the Pakistani leadership.

The core reason for Pakistan’s imperviousness is its scant faith in the Obama surge, and what Pakistan sees as the need to position itself for a major regional realignment in Afghanistan once American forces begin to leave.

It considers Mr. Haqqani and his control of broad swaths of Afghan territory vital to Pakistan in the jostling for influence that will pit Pakistan, India, Russia, China and Iran in the post-American Afghan arena, the Pakistani officials said.

Pakistan is particularly eager to counter the growing influence of its archenemy, India, which is pouring \$1.2 billion in aid into Afghanistan. “If American walks away, Pakistan is very worried that it will have India on its eastern border and India on its western border in Afghanistan,” said Tariq Fatemi, a former Pakistani ambassador to the United States who is pro-American in his views.

For that reason, Mr. Fatemi said, the Pakistani Army was “very reluctant” to jettison Mr. Haqqani, Pakistan’s strong card in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Pakistanis do not want to alienate Mr. Haqqani because they consider him an important player in reconciliation efforts that they would like to see get under way in Afghanistan immediately, the officials said.

Because Mr. Haqqani shelters Qaeda leaders and operatives in North Waziristan, Washington was opposed to including Mr. Haqqani among the possible reconcilable Taliban, at least for the moment, a Western diplomat said.

In his reply to the Americans, the head of the Pakistani military, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, stressed a short-term argument, according to two Pakistani officials familiar with the response.

Pakistan currently had its hands full fighting the Pakistani Taliban in South Waziristan and other places, and it was beyond its capacity to open another front against the Afghan Taliban, the officials said of General Kayani’s response.

The offensive has had the secondary effect of constraining the Haqqani network in North Waziristan and driving some of its commanders and fighters across the border to Afghanistan, senior American military officials in Afghanistan said.

But implicit in General Kayani’s reply was the fact that the homegrown Pakistani Taliban represent the real threat to Pakistan. They are the ones launching attacks against security installations and civilian markets in Pakistan’s cities and must be the army’s priority, General Kayani argued, the officials said.

For his part, Mr. Haqqani fights in Afghanistan, and is considered more of an asset than a threat by the Pakistanis. But he is the most potent force fighting the Americans, American and Pakistani officials agree.

He has subcommanders threaded throughout eastern and southern Afghanistan. His fighters control Paktika, Paktia and Khost provinces in Afghanistan, which lie close to North Waziristan. His men are also strong in Ghazni, Logar and Wardak provinces, the officials said.

Because Mr. Haqqani now spends so much time in Afghanistan — about three weeks of every month, according to a Pakistani security official — if the Americans want to eliminate him, their troops should have ample opportunity to capture him, Pakistani security officials argue.

As a son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, a leading mujahedeen fighter against the Soviets who is now aged and apparently confined to bed, Siraj Haqqani is keeper of a formidable lineage and history.

In the early 1970s, the father attended a well known madrassa, Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqaniya in the Pakistani town of Akora Khattack in North-West Frontier Province.

In the 1980s, Jalaluddin Haqqani received money and arms from the C.I.A. routed through Pakistan's spy agency, the Inter Services Intelligence, to fight the Soviets, according to Ahmed Rashid, an expert on the Afghan Taliban and the author of "Descent Into Chaos."

In the 1990s, when the Taliban ran Afghanistan, Jalaluddin Haqqani served as governor of Paktia Province.

The relationship between the Haqqanis and Osama bin Laden dates back to the 1980s war against the Soviets, according to Kamran Bokhari, the South Asia director for Stratfor, a geopolitical risk analysis company.

When the Taliban government collapsed at the end of 2001 and Qaeda operatives fled from Tora Bora to Pakistan, the Haqqanis relocated their command structure to North Waziristan and welcomed Al Qaeda, Mr. Bokhari said.

The biggest gift of the Pakistanis to the Haqqanis was the use of the North Waziristan as their fiefdom, he said.

The Pakistani Army did not appear to be assisting the Haqqanis with training or equipment, he said. More than 20 members of the Haqqani nuclear family were killed in a drone attack in North Waziristan last year, showing the limits of how far the Pakistanis could protect them, Mr. Bokhari said.

Today Siraj Haqqani has anywhere from 4,000 to 12,000 Taliban under his command. He is technically a member of the Afghan Taliban leadership based in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's Baluchistan Province.

That leadership is headed by Mullah Omar, the former leader of the Taliban regime. But Mr. Haqqani operates fairly independently of them inside Afghanistan.

Siraj Haqqani maintains an uneasy relationship with the Pakistani Taliban, said Maulana Yousaf Shah, the administrator of the madrassa at Akora Khattack.

Mr. Haqqani believed the chief jihadi objective should be forcing the foreigners out of Afghanistan, and he had tried but failed to redirect the Pakistani Taliban to fight in Afghanistan as well, he said.

Ismail Khan contributed reporting from Peshawar, Pakistan; Pir Zubair Shah from Islamabad, and Eric Schmitt from Kabul, Afganistan.