

Pakistan's Military-Militant Cabal ¹

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Pakistan has for long been running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. While it has been a key partner of the international community in the war against terror, elements in Pakistani military establishment have been hand in glove with the very same terror outfits they are supposed to fight. This paper seeks to put a laser focus on the Janus-faced Pakistan and discuss Pakistan's duplicitous conduct in dealing with the jihadists. A prime example of the Pakistani strategy in dealing with terror outfits is the Haqqani network which has been discussed in depth here. This paper also takes into account the recent tensions between the United States and Pakistan on the terror issue.

Pakistan's Duplicitous Strategy on Terrorism

Pakistan's worst kept secret of the nexus between terror outfits and Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) was out long ago. Now Islamabad finds itself in the line of fire of the United States-led international community. The blunt question that the international community once again is asking Pakistan is: Are you with *us* or with *them*? A decade ago, the Pakistani leadership was asked the same question by the then US president George W Bush.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton minced no words in warning Pakistan at her joint press conference with Pakistan foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar in Islamabad on October 21, 2011 that Pakistan cannot keep snakes in its backyard. Clinton pushed the envelope further by suggesting that Pakistan government should force the Haqqanis into peace talks, disclosing that the US had started direct talks with the Haqqani network and already held one round of exploratory talks with them several months ago "We think for a variety of reasons that Pakistan has the capacity to encourage, to push, to squeeze ... terrorists including the Haqqanis and the Afghan Taliban ... to engage in the Afghan peace process. So that is what we are looking for,"² she said in Islamabad

Clinton was even harsher in Kabul, before she emplaned for Islamabad, when she said that Washington would act unilaterally if necessary to attack terror groups that have routinely been using Pakistani territory for their operations. She stated that "This is a time for clarity", and "There's no place to go any longer".³ Both remarks

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were obviously aimed at the Pakistani leadership. The tough Clinton speak makes one thing very clear: the American patience with Pakistan is once again wearing thin a decade after and the trouble-making baby is back to his old ways which is unacceptable to Washington.

The US wants Pakistan to take concrete action against the Haqqani network that has been working feverishly against the American interests in the Af-Pak region. The Americans have been goading the Pakistan government to take military action against the Haqqanis soonest. But the problem is that the Pakistani leadership, particularly the military leadership, has been bluntly refusing to do so citing military problems. Pakistan has been expressing its inability to take on the Haqqanis militarily because thousands of its troops are already fighting a grim battle against the Pakistan Taliban and their cohorts in the lawless tribal regions along the Afghanistan border.

The military-militant cabal is the main problem of Pakistan today. The Abbottabad raid and the Mehran Naval Base attack in May this year were strong enough pointers in this direction. The two incidents were symptomatic of a large malaise that has been eroding the army's professionalism for quite some time. The signs of this malaise could be seen in the army leadership's obstinate hatred towards India, which has been driven primarily by paranoia and self-interest. This fear and hatred towards an adversary which, has been extending olive branch despite extreme provocations, have made the leadership even more vulnerable to domestic pressure. The people of Pakistan are not buying the theory that the enemy was on the eastern border when terrorists bred and nurtured by the army and ISI were attacking and killing Pakistanis every now and then. Pakistan suffers more from terrorism than perhaps even Afghanistan and the irony is that the attackers and the victims both swear by the army and Allah.

What has compounded this vulnerability is the public anger against the US for violating their country's sovereignty with such impunity. They are also shocked and greatly disheartened by the failure of the army and ISI to protect their country's sovereignty and honour. What has riled the people even more is the army's close proximity with the US military and political leadership. This has put the army on the defensive—on the one hand they were deceived by their "strategic partners" and on the other hand, their traditional enemy was talking peace. This has upset the army's calculus as never before. Perhaps the last time they were left at sea, clutching at straws, was during and after the 1971 war. These predilections have driven the military leadership to take highly irrational decisions.

The second question is whether Pakistan army is unaware of the dangers their proxies are posing to their own existence? The answer is certainly no. Otherwise, they would not launch a limited but strong military offensive against the so-

called Taliban militants in their tribal areas. The military leadership is aware that they cannot allow their own agents who have gone 'rogue' to wreck havoc inside the country. This apprehension has also forced the military to launch a de-radicalisation programme in Swat where it managed to drive away the militants after a prolonged battle that cost them heavily in terms of men and officers. The army has so far lost over 3000 men and officers in various conflicts inside Pakistan since 2001. The recent incidents clearly underline the creeping fear and anxiety among the top leadership in Pakistan army.

So if they know the dangers that such an incestuous relationship poses to their country and they are not as incompetent as the Pakistani media projects them to be, then why is the army leadership refusing to delink with the terrorist groups? Are they incapable of doing so or are they following a different pied piper?

It is not difficult to contain the terror networks that have grown across Pakistan. What the army needs is the will power and determination to do so. It cannot take a half decision. If terrorists are enemies, then they are not strategic assets. Even after realising this, at least to some extent, the army leadership is not willing to go the entire way to decimate the terrorist groups because they believe that they will become irrelevant to the Western countries and their patrons in Saudi Arabia if they were to become a normal, professional fighting force? Who will fund them, supply them with modern weapons and over look their terrorist activities? The biggest, and fatal, flaw in Pakistan army and its leadership is that they are both driven solely by the instinct of self preservation, self interest and not by national interest.

The most worrisome question for the international community is how much it can trust this mercenary army with nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons in Pakistan today are under threat from radical elements within and outside Pakistan but also from regular Pakistan army itself which is even more rogue than all of its rogue proxies.

Jihadists' Free Run

Despite loud claims made by the Pakistan army about fighting terrorism, several jihadi groups are not only active in different parts of the country but also freely gathering funds and recruiting youngsters to their cause without any hindrance.

Many groups have taken advantage of the global attention on Lashkar-e-Taiba, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and Al Qaeda to quietly expand their infrastructure and cadre, all with the blessings of the army and ISI. One such group which was exposed recently was the Harkat-ul Mujahideen (HuM), based quite close to Rawalpindi, for its involvement in sheltering Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad.

Documents and computer hard drives and caches discovered by the US Special Forces team which killed Laden in an amazing operation on May 2 this year showed that the Al Qaeda leader and his family were looked after by the HuM leadership and cadre. HuM is led by Fazlur Rahman Khalil, who had been a close associate of Laden during the Afghan jihad and one of the clerics who vowed jihad against the US. Khalil was part of the International Islamic Front and ran HuM from Afghanistan and Pakistan for decades till the Soviet Union collapsed.

Khalil, however, failed to measure up to the expectations of his patrons in Pakistan army when his group's attempts to launch a jihad in Kashmir sputtered and failed. The ISI then splintered his group and created the Harkat-ul Ansar and Jaish-e-Mohammad to do its bidding in Kashmir. Khalil, despite being marginalised, remained a key ISI strategic asset because of his links with the Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders. Khalil kept a low profile and confined himself to his madrassa near Rawalpindi. He re-emerged on the scene during the Lal Masjid crisis in 2007 when the army brought him in to negotiate with the recalcitrant pro-Taliban clerics who ran the radical madrassa in the heart of Islamabad. Khalil, however, failed to convince the clerics.

One of Khalil's disciples and confidant was Masood Azhar who came out of Binori mosque in Karachi and launched into terrorist activities at the behest of ISI. Azhar had missed out the jihad in Afghanistan and was committed to making a name as a frontline jihadi for Pakistan. Following his release from India in 1999 December, after he and two other terrorists, were swapped for the passengers of hijacked IC 814 airliner, Azhar set up Jaish-e-Mohammad, fully supported by the ISI. His handler was Brigadier Ijaz Shah, the ISI station chief of Punjab. Azhar, however, fell out with the establishment after his men were found to be behind the assassination attempt on Musharraf in December 2003.

But because he was such a key asset, the ISI kept him sheltered in Bahawalpur, a major city near the Indian border which was developed by the army as a buffer zone. Away from global scrutiny, Azhar beefed up his cadre and terrorist infrastructure in Bawalpur, carving out a city within city for his terrorist group where the police and civil administration writ did not run. With the help of ISI, Azhar also set up a base in Peshawar after he set up few training camps in Dir and Upper Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in 2006 to train the Taliban cadres for the agency.

Today, away from international scrutiny, Azhar runs his terrorist outfit with the help of proxy charities like Al Rehmat Trust with a presence throughout Punjab, Sindh, PoK and KP. Azhar and others like him have adopted ingenuous methods to dodge any scrutiny and prosecution by projecting themselves as preachers and social

welfare organisations. For instance, JeM is projected as Tehreek-e-Khuddam-ul-Islam and the group uses the Al Rehmat Trust for recruitment and fund raising. As part of this programme, the Trust, for instance, has launched a nationwide session to disseminate the meaning of Quranic verses on jihad. Recently, one of the Trust members Maulana Ghulab Shah lectured on the subject in Malakand division's Upper Dir district. The meeting was attended by a large number of people. The cleric explained the meaning of 558 Quranic verses. The audience was told about the significance of jihad and the possible rewards for taking the path of jihad.

Another JeM preacher, Abdul Hafiz Amirpuri, who writes about jihad, said the best knowledge was the knowledge of jihad and the best act was that of jihad. He invited people to attend the jihad sessions launched by their group across the country. He said the preachers were trained by Masood Azhar.

Behind this façade, the Trust has been supporting terrorist activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and providing financial and logistical support to foreign fighters. In 2009, the US agencies and military found the Trust members openly recruiting students to assist the Taliban fighting the NATO forces in Afghanistan. It has raised funds for the Taliban and Al Qaeda groups operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Trust has also been gathering money to set up a 'martyrs' fund. In 2008, JeM had renewed its recruitment campaign by putting up posters all over Pakistan featuring a call from Azhar to join the fight against the American forces.

Karachi is a microcosm of the snake pit that Pakistan finds itself in currently. It is indeed a supreme irony that the most troubled place in Pakistan today is Karachi as the Pakistani military brass used Karachi in a big way for planning and executing anti-India activities. Karachi also happens to be the place from where ISI and Pakistan army ran most of their anti-India jihad. Groups like Harkat-ul-Ansar and Jaish-e-Mohammad operated freely out of ISI safe houses and madrasas in Karachi. The Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was given safe facilities and training grounds to train and launch terrorists to attack Mumbai in November 2008. The LeT member David Headley has since disclosed that he was working in close liaison with Pakistan army and ISI officials based in Karachi to facilitate the Mumbai attacks. Several other attacks he said, were planned in Karachi.

Unsurprisingly, Karachi was chosen by Osama bin Laden as one of the staging posts for the Al Qaeda. This decision was taken when a group led by Jamaat-e-Islami leaders went to Khartoum in Sudan to meet Laden, with the blessing of the then prime minister Benazir Bhutto. Karachi saw Al Qaeda setting up shop in Pakistan with Ramzi Yousef running a safe house for al Qaida recruits passing through Pakistan to the terrorist training camps in Afghanistan.

ISI's Nexus with the Haqqani Network

The one terror outfit that America fears the most today, is not the Al Qaeda or the Taliban; it is the Haqqani network. Founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a battle-hardened jihadi active for last 30 years, it is now under the operational control of his son Sirajuddin who is more rabidly fundamentalist and closer to Al Qaeda and Taliban ideology than Jalaluddin. The father is now seen to be the “spiritual” head of the network.

Western experts put the strength of its armed cadres to 12,000 men, an impressive figure considering that these highly trained and motivated cadres are skilled in such diverse fields as bomb-making, guerrilla fighting and planning and executing terror attacks. Some of the cadres are even adept at suicide bombing. Though the Haqqani network initially started as one of the multiple terror streams under the over-arching umbrella of Taliban, it has been maintaining its individual identity for about a decade now. Since 2002, the Haqqanis have been expanding and reconstituting their operations, mainly in the east of Afghanistan—in Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Ghazni Wardak and even Kabul. They have assumed menacing proportions for the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan since 2008.

The biggest role that the Haqqani network has been performing for the last three decades is as an enabler for other like-minded jihadi outfits. It has long been a vital cog in the wheel for Pakistan as well as the Al Qaeda and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban. The Pakistani state has been dependent on the Haqqani network for gaining access to the TTP leadership and managing the conundrum of multiple jihadi outfits in the FATA region of Pakistan. Whenever Pakistan military feels the need to launch terror attacks against Indian interests in Afghanistan the Haqqani network has been the one-stop shop for Rawalpindi. The bloodiest attack on Indian embassy in Kabul in 2008, in which 53 people including the Indian defence attache, were killed, was executed by the Haqqani network. The group was responsible for the audacious attack on the US embassy in Kabul in September 2011. Some of the recent major attacks by Haqqani network's against US interests are given below:

Haqqani Network's Recent Attacks

US Embassy Kabul and NATO Headquarters, September 12, 2011: At least 16 people were killed, including 5 Afghan police officers and 11 civilians, including at least 6 children in an attack on the embassy and NATO headquarters compound. US administration officials, including General Allen and Ambassador Crocker hold the Haqqani network responsible for the attack.⁴

Combat Post Sayed Abad, Wardak Province, Afghanistan, September 10, 2011: Over 77 US soldiers and 17 Afghans were injured. Another five Afghans were killed in a powerful truck bomb attack against Combat Post Sayed Abad.⁵

Hotel-Intercontinental Kabul, June 28, 2011: Twelve Afghans were killed and eight were wounded during a brazen night time attack on the Hotel-Intercontinental Kabul, a spot popular for Westerners and Afghan elite. This raid was one of the first in which Taliban and Haqqani insurgents engaged in a night time commando attack.⁶

Kabul Bank, February 19, 2011: Over 40 people were killed when seven armed gunmen and suicide bombers attacked the offices of a bank in Kabul.⁷

Attacks on US-funded road construction projects across Afghanistan – some led by Indian construction firms: The Haqqani network has led continuous attacks against construction efforts on the Kabul-Gardez road. In May 2011 the Haqqani network killed over 35 security guards, labourers, and engineers at a construction camp outside of Gardez. In March a similar attack against a construction camp killed 24 and wounded 50 in neighbouring Paktia Province.⁸

Attack on Forward Operating Base Chapman, December 30, 2009: Seven Americans, including four CIA officers were killed in a suicide attack by a double agent who claimed to have information on the whereabouts of senior Haqqani leadership.⁹

Attack on Forward Operating Base Salerno, May 13, 2009: A suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attacked FOB Salerno, killing seven civilians.¹⁰

Attack on Khost Governor's office, May 12, 2009: A SVBIED attacked the governor's office while ten gunmen strapped with explosives assaulted the building on foot. American and Afghan forces retook the building, killing all ten gunmen.¹¹

Attack on Forward Operating Base Salerno, May 13, 2009: A pair of SVBIEDs failed to penetrate the perimeter of FOB Salerno. A team of 25-30 militants, many wearing suicide vests, was intercepted after dark in a second wave attack.¹²

Attacks on Afghan Ministries of Justice, Education, and Prison Directorate, February 11, 2009: Haqqani forces using a combination of suicide bombers and gunmen attacked three government offices in Kabul, killing at least 26 and injuring over 60.¹³

Attack on Germany Embassy in Kabul, January 2009: A US soldier and Afghan civilians were killed in a SVBIED attack on the Germany Embassy. American and German civilians were injured in the attack.¹⁴

Attack on Afghan Intelligence Headquarters, Khost, December 2008: Members of the Haqqani network stormed the local headquarters of Afghanistan's Intelligence Directorate killing six.¹⁵

Kidnapping of journalist David Rohde, November 10, 2008: *The New York Times* journalist David Rohde was kidnapped while on assignment outside of Kabul and eventually transferred to Haqqani control.¹⁶

Bombing of Indian Embassy in Kabul, July 7, 2008: A suicide bombing killed 41 and injured over 130 at the Indian Embassy in Kabul. At least four Indian diplomats were killed in the attack.¹⁷

Assassination attempt on Hamid Karzai, April 27, 2008: Three people were killed and eleven were injured at an open-air military ceremony in Kabul. This was the fourth attempt on President Karzai's life.¹⁸

Kidnapping of British journalist Sean Langan, March 2008: Under the guise of a meeting with the Sirajuddin Haqqani, British journalist Sean Langan was captured and held in captivity by members of the Haqqani network for three months.¹⁹

Attack on Sabari district center in Khost, March 3, 2008: Haqqani launched a SVBIED attack in cooperation with the Uzbek-led group Islamic Jihad Union.²⁰

Attack on the Kabul Serena Hotel, January 14, 2008: A Haqqani-led attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul killed seven civilians.²¹

A September 21, 2011 Memorandum to Senator Mark Kirk through Patrick Magnuson entitled "Relationship between the Haqqani network and Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence", better known as the Kirk Memo, explains in great details the militant-military cabal in Pakistan. The Kirk Memo blows the lid off the nexus between the Haqqani network and the ISI. The following paragraph of the Kirk Memo sums up the situation:

The Haqqani network and its attacks against US, Afghan, and allied interests continue to receive support from the ISI in support of this goal. The ISI protects and finances Haqqani's activities, and provides it sanctuary in Haqqani's hometown of Miram Shah in North Waziristan. The ISI also provides the Haqqani network

advance warning of drone attacks against its leadership and operations in North Waziristan, most recently against its bomb-making facilities in Western Pakistan. The Haqqani network's expansion into Kurram Agency, a strategic Pakistani province only 90 kilometers from Kabul and beyond the scope of a majority of US drone activities has gone unchecked by the Pakistani government. There is some evidence to suggest that Pakistani military intervention in Kurram Agency has actually aided the expansion and stabilization of a sanctuary for Haqqani operations. In exchange for this active support, the Haqqani network serves as a proxy force and trusted mediator for Pakistani interests in Afghanistan, and within Pakistan itself. The ISI relies heavily on Haqqani to direct and communicate with Pakistani terrorist organizations such as Lashkar e-Taiba and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, engaged in terrorist attacks against Indian interests in Kashmir and across the subcontinent.²²

It is very significant to point out here that Pakistan has been using terrorism as an instrument of state policy for over a quarter of a century. The times have changed now. Even when it comes to Indo-Pak bilateral relations there are some signs of Islamabad showing signs of sane and mature diplomacy. The grant of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) by Pakistan to India on November 2, 2011 is just one such example. Pakistan dithered for 15 long years before doing so as India had granted MFN status to Pakistan way back in 1996. These winds of change are not insignificant. Pakistan should seize this chance to build on such positive policies. Nothing can be more welcome for New Delhi than Pakistan putting a complete stop to using terrorism as an instrument of state policy. One only hopes that one is not living in a fools' paradise in wishing that hard core anti-India elements in Pakistan's military establishment would one day give up their quarter century-old policy and turn off the terror tap.

Conclusion

The international community will have to take a hard-nosed approach to snap Pakistan's militant-military cabal. This is easier said than done because Pakistan of late has shown a propensity towards using the China card in its dealings with Washington. The international community will have to work on China for delivering a firm message of its do's and don'ts to Pakistan. The world has been dealing with North Korea in a similar manner for years. Secondly, the US needs to firmly tell Pakistan that its billions of dollars worth military aid is predicated on Islamabad delivering on its promises. Thirdly, the international community must understand that there is nothing like a "good" terrorist or a "bad" terrorist as all terrorists are "bad". The West cannot just concentrate on terrorism on the western borders of Pakistan and shut its eyes to Pakistan fomenting terrorism on its eastern borders. There is little to suggest that the Pakistani leadership, particularly the military top brass, will have a change of heart on the Haqqanis. At least not until Washington

takes some drastic steps. The US has already squeezed Pakistan hard on the terror issue, but apparently it is not enough. Washington needs to hit where it hurts most to force Pakistan fall in line: by threatening that it would initiate proceedings in the United Nations Security Council to label Pakistan as a terrorist state. Though Pakistan's all-weather friend China will not allow the US to do so, the very fact that the world's sole superpower decides to initiate such a proceeding against Pakistan in the UN should be enough to bring Pakistani leaders, political and military, to their senses. The ball is in the Americans' court.



Notes:

- 1 Wikipedia defines the word 'cabal' as follows: "A cabal is a group of people united in some close design together, usually to promote their private views and/or interests in a church, state, or other community, often by intrigue. Cabals are sometimes secret societies composed of a few designing persons, and at other times are manifestations of emergent behaviour in society or governance on the part of a community of persons who have well established public affiliation or kinship. The term can also be used to refer to the designs of such persons or to the practical consequences of their emergent behavior; and also holds a general meaning of intrigue and conspiracy. The use of this term usually carries strong connotations of shadowy corners, back rooms and insidious influence; a cabal is more evil and selective than, say, a faction, which is simply selfish; because of this negative connotation, few organizations use the term to refer to themselves or their internal subdivisions." "Cabal", available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabal>
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- 5 *Washington Post*, September 12, 2011.
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- 7 "Afghan Fighters Threaten Reprisals over Bank Raid Executions", *Reuters*, June 20, 2011 available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/20/us-afghanistan-execution-idUSTRE75J3CX20110620>.
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- 10 *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, June 30, 2009.
- 11 *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, June 30, 2009.
- 12 *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, June 30, 2009.
- 13 "Coordinated Kabul assault shows Taliban strength", *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 12, 2009 available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2009/0212/p07s02-woap.html>.
- 14 *Ibid.*, and also See "US Soldier, Afghan Civilians Die in Kabul Car Bombing", *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2009 available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/17/AR2009011700947.html>.

- 15 "Haqqani Network Hits Afghan Intelligence", *Special Reports*, UPI, December 5, 2008 available at http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2008/12/05/Haqqani_Network_hits_Afghan_intelligence/UPI-23441228526624/
- 16 "Inside the Haqqani network", *Foreign Policy*, June 3, 2010 available at http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/06/03/inside_the_haqqani_network_0.
- 17 "Suicide Car Blast Kills 41 in Afghan Capital", *The New York Times*, July 8, 2008 available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/08/world/asia/08afghanistan.html>.
- 18 "Pakistan Denies Role in Attack", *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2008 available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/26/AR2008062603379.html>.
- 19 "Allies in War, but the Goals Clash", *The New York Times*, October 9, 2010 available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/weekinreview/10cooper.html>.
- 20 *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, June 30, 2009.
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- 22 "Relationship between the Haqqani network and Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence", Memorandum to Senator Mark Kirk, through Patrick Magnuson, from Brandon Greene, September 21, 2011 available at kirk.senate.gov/files/HaqqaniMemo2.docx