

Pakistan Aids Insurgency in Afghanistan, Reports Assert

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Americans fighting the war in Afghanistan have long harbored strong suspicions that Pakistan's military spy service has guided the Afghan insurgency with a hidden hand, even as Pakistan receives more than \$1 billion a year from Washington for its help combating the militants, according to a trove of secret military field reports made public Sunday.

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The documents, made available by an organization called WikiLeaks, suggest that Pakistan, an ostensible ally of the United States, allows representatives of its spy service to meet directly with the Taliban in secret strategy sessions to organize networks of militant groups that fight against American soldiers in Afghanistan, and even hatch plots to assassinate Afghan leaders.

Taken together, the reports indicate that American soldiers on the ground are inundated with accounts of a network of Pakistani assets and collaborators that runs from the Pakistani tribal belt along the Afghan border, through southern Afghanistan, and all the way to the capital, Kabul.

Much of the information — raw intelligence and threat assessments gathered from the field in Afghanistan— cannot be verified and likely comes from sources aligned with Afghan intelligence, which considers Pakistan an enemy, and paid informants. Some describe plots for attacks that do not appear to have taken place.

But many of the reports rely on sources that the military rated as reliable.

While current and former American officials interviewed could not corroborate individual reports, they said that the portrait of the spy agency's collaboration with the Afghan insurgency was broadly consistent with other classified intelligence.

Some of the reports describe Pakistani intelligence working alongside Al Qaeda to plan attacks. Experts cautioned that although Pakistan's militant groups and Al Qaeda work together, directly linking the Pakistani spy agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, with Al Qaeda is difficult.

The records also contain firsthand accounts of American anger at Pakistan's unwillingness to confront insurgents who launched attacks near Pakistani border posts, moved openly by the truckload across the frontier, and retreated to Pakistani territory for safety.

The behind-the-scenes frustrations of soldiers on the ground and glimpses of what appear to be

Pakistani skullduggery contrast sharply with the frequently rosy public pronouncements of Pakistan as an ally by American officials, looking to sustain a drone campaign over parts of Pakistani territory to strike at Qaeda havens. Administration officials also want to keep nuclear-armed Pakistan on their side to safeguard NATO supplies flowing on routes that cross Pakistan to Afghanistan.

This month, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in one of the frequent visits by American officials to Islamabad, announced \$500 million in assistance and called the United States and Pakistan “partners joined in common cause.”

The reports suggest, however, that the Pakistani military has acted as both ally and enemy, as its spy agency runs what American officials have long suspected is a double game — appeasing certain American demands for cooperation while angling to exert influence in Afghanistan through many of the same insurgent networks that the Americans are fighting to eliminate.

Behind the scenes, both Bush and Obama administration officials as well as top American commanders have confronted top Pakistani military officers with accusations of ISI complicity in attacks in Afghanistan, and even presented top Pakistani officials with lists of ISI and military operatives believed to be working with militants.

Benjamin Rhodes, deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, said that Pakistan had been an important ally in the battle against militant groups, and that Pakistani soldiers and intelligence officials had worked alongside the United States to capture or kill Qaeda and Taliban leaders.

Still, he said that the “status quo is not acceptable,” and that the havens for militants in Pakistan “pose an intolerable threat” that Pakistan must do more to address.

“The Pakistani government — and Pakistan’s military and intelligence services — must continue their strategic shift against violent extremist groups within their borders,” he said. American military support to Pakistan would continue, he said.

Several Congressional officials said that despite repeated requests over the years for information about Pakistani support for militant groups, they usually receive vague and inconclusive briefings from the Pentagon and C.I.A.

Nonetheless, senior lawmakers say they have no doubt that Pakistan is aiding insurgent groups. “The burden of proof is on the government of Pakistan and the ISI to show they don’t have ongoing contacts,” said Senator Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat on the Armed Services Committee who visited Pakistan this month and said he and Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, the committee chairman, confronted Pakistan’s prime minister, Yousaf Raza Gilani, yet again over the allegations.

Such accusations are usually met with angry denials, particularly by the Pakistani military, which insists that the ISI severed its remaining ties to the groups years ago. An ISI spokesman in Islamabad said Sunday that the agency would have no comment until it saw the documents. Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States, Husain Haqqani, said, “The documents circulated by WikiLeaks do not reflect the current on-ground realities.”

The man the United States has depended on for cooperation in fighting the militants and who holds most power in Pakistan, the head of the army, Gen. Parvez Ashfaq Kayani, ran the ISI from 2004 to 2007, a period from which many of the reports are drawn. American officials have frequently praised General Kayani for what they say are his efforts to purge the military of officers with ties to militants.

American officials have described Pakistan's spy service as a rigidly hierarchical organization that has little tolerance for "rogue" activity. But Pakistani military officials give the spy service's "S Wing" — which runs external operations against the Afghan government and India — broad autonomy, a buffer that allows top military officials deniability.

American officials have rarely uncovered definitive evidence of direct ISI involvement in a major attack. But in July 2008, the C.I.A.'s deputy director, Stephen R. Kappes, confronted Pakistani officials with evidence that the ISI helped plan the deadly suicide bombing of India's Embassy in Kabul.

From the current trove, one report shows that Polish intelligence warned of a complex attack against the Indian Embassy a week before that bombing, though the attackers and their methods differed. The ISI was not named in the report warning of the attack.

Another, dated August 2008, identifies a colonel in the ISI plotting with a Taliban official to assassinate President Hamid Karzai. The report says there was no information about how or when this would be carried out. The account could not be verified.

General Linked to Militants

Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul ran the ISI from 1987 to 1989, a time when Pakistani spies and the C.I.A. joined forces to run guns and money to Afghan militias who were battling Soviet troops in Afghanistan. After the fighting stopped, he maintained his contacts with the former mujahedeen, who would eventually transform themselves into the Taliban.

And more than two decades later, it appears that General Gul is still at work. The documents indicate that he has worked tirelessly to reactivate his old networks, employing familiar allies like Jaluluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose networks of thousands of fighters are responsible for waves of violence in Afghanistan.

General Gul is mentioned so many times in the reports, if they are to be believed, that it seems unlikely that Pakistan's current military and intelligence officials could not know of at least some of his wide-ranging activities.

For example, one intelligence report describes him meeting with a group of militants in Wana, the capital of South Waziristan, in January 2009. There, he met with three senior Afghan insurgent commanders and three "older" Arab men, presumably representatives of Al Qaeda, who the report suggests were important "because they had a large security contingent with them."

The gathering was designed to hatch a plan to avenge the death of "Zamarai," the nom de guerre of Osama al-Kini, who had been killed days earlier by a C.I.A. drone attack. Mr. Kini had directed Qaeda operations in Pakistan and had spearheaded some of the group's most devastating attacks.

The plot hatched in Wana that day, according to the report, involved driving a dark blue Mazda truck rigged with explosives from South Waziristan to Afghanistan's Paktika Province, a route well known to be used by the insurgents to move weapons, suicide bombers and fighters from Pakistan.

In a show of strength, the Taliban leaders approved a plan to send 50 Arab and 50 Waziri fighters to Ghazni Province in Afghanistan, the report said.

General Gul urged the Taliban commanders to focus their operations inside Afghanistan in exchange

for Pakistan turning “a blind eye” to their presence in Pakistan’s tribal areas. It was unclear whether the attack was ever executed.

The United States has pushed the United Nations to put General Gul on a list of international terrorists, and top American officials said they believed he was an important link between active-duty Pakistani officers and militant groups.

General Gul, who says he is retired and lives on his pension, dismissed the allegations as “absolute nonsense,” speaking by telephone from his home in Rawalpindi, where the Pakistani Army keeps its headquarters. “I have had no hand in it.” He added, “American intelligence is pulling cotton wool over your eyes.”

Senior Pakistani officials consistently deny that General Gul still works at the ISI’s behest, though several years ago, after mounting American complaints, Pakistan’s president at the time, Pervez Musharraf, was forced publicly to acknowledge the possibility that former ISI officials were assisting the Afghan insurgency. Despite his denials, General Gul keeps close ties to his former employers. When a reporter visited General Gul this spring for an interview at his home, the former spy master canceled the appointment. According to his son, he had to attend meetings at army headquarters.

Suicide Bomber Network

The reports also chronicle efforts by ISI officers to run the networks of suicide bombers that emerged as a sudden, terrible force in Afghanistan in 2006.

The detailed reports indicate that American officials had a relatively clear understanding of how the suicide networks presumably functioned, even if some of the threats did not materialize. It is impossible to know why the attacks never came off — either they were thwarted, the attackers shifted targets, or the reports were deliberately planted as Taliban disinformation.

One report, from Dec. 18, 2006, describes a cyclical process to develop the suicide bombers. First, the suicide attacker is recruited and trained in Pakistan. Then, reconnaissance and operational planning gets under way, including scouting to find a place for “hosting” the suicide bomber near the target before carrying out the attack. The network, it says, receives help from the Afghan police and the Ministry of Interior.

In many cases, the reports are complete with names and ages of bombers, as well as license plate numbers, but the Americans gathering the intelligence struggle to accurately portray many other details, introducing sometimes comical renderings of places and Taliban commanders.

In one case, a report rated by the American military as credible states that a gray Toyota Corolla had been loaded with explosives between the Afghan border and Landik Hotel, in Pakistan, apparently a mangled reference to Landi Kotal, in Pakistan’s tribal areas. The target of the plot, however, is a real hotel in downtown Kabul, the Ariana.

“It is likely that ISI may be involved as supporter of this attack,” reads a comment in the report.

Several of the reports describe current and former ISI operatives, including General Gul, visiting madrasas near the city of Peshawar, a gateway to the tribal areas, to recruit new fodder for suicide bombings.

One report, labeled a “real threat warning” because of its detail and the reliability of its source,

described how commanders of Mr. Hekmatyar's insurgent group, Hezb-i-Islami, ordered the delivery of a suicide bomber from the Hashimiye madrasa, run by Afghans.

The boy was to be used in an attack on American or NATO vehicles in Kabul during the Muslim Festival of Sacrifices that opened Dec. 31, 2006. According to the report, the boy was taken to the Afghan city of Jalalabad to buy a car for the bombing, and was later brought to Kabul. It was unclear whether the attack took place.

The documents indicate that these types of activities continued throughout last year. From July to October 2009, nine threat reports detailed movements by suicide bombers from Pakistan into populated areas of Afghanistan, including Kandahar, Kunduz and Kabul.

Some of the bombers were sent to disrupt Afghanistan's presidential elections, held last August. In other instances, American intelligence learned that the Haqqani network sent bombers at the ISI's behest to strike Indian officials, development workers and engineers in Afghanistan. Other plots were aimed at the Afghan government.

Sometimes the intelligence documents twin seemingly credible detail with plots that seem fantastical or utterly implausible assertions. For instance, one report describes an ISI plan to use a remote-controlled bomb disguised as a golden Koran to assassinate Afghan government officials. Another report documents an alleged plot by the ISI and Taliban to ship poisoned alcoholic beverages to Afghanistan to kill American troops.

But the reports also charge that the ISI directly helped organize Taliban offensives at key junctures of the war. On June 19, 2006, ISI operatives allegedly met with the Taliban leaders in Quetta, the city in southern Pakistan where American and other Western officials have long believed top Taliban leaders have been given refuge by the Pakistani authorities. At the meeting, according to the report, they pressed the Taliban to mount attacks on Maruf, a district of Kandahar that lies along the Pakistani border.

The planned offensive would be carried out primarily by Arabs and Pakistanis, the report said, and a Taliban commander, "Akhtar Mansoor," warned that the men should be prepared for heavy losses. "The foreigners agreed to this operation and have assembled 20 4x4 trucks to carry the fighters into areas in question," it said.

While the specifics about the foreign fighters and the ISI are difficult to verify, the Taliban did indeed mount an offensive to seize control in Maruf in 2006.

Afghan government officials and Taliban fighters have widely acknowledged that the offensive was led by the Taliban commander Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, who was then the Taliban shadow governor of Kandahar.

Mullah Mansour tried to claw out a base for himself inside Afghanistan, but just as the report quotes him predicting, the Taliban suffered heavy losses and eventually pulled back.

Another report goes on to describe detailed plans for a large-scale assault, timed for September 2007, aimed at the American forward operating base in Managi, in Kunar Province.

"It will be a five-pronged attack consisting of 83-millimeter artillery, rockets, foot soldiers, and multiple suicide bombers," it says.

It is not clear that the attack ever came off, but its planning foreshadowed another, seminal attack that came months later, in July 2008. At that time, about 200 Taliban insurgents nearly overran an

American base in Wanat, in Nuristan, killing nine American soldiers. For the Americans, it was one of the highest single-day tolls of the war.

Tensions With Pakistan

The flood of reports of Pakistani complicity in the insurgency has at times led to barely disguised tensions between American and Pakistani officers on the ground.

Meetings at border outposts set up to develop common strategies to seal the frontier and disrupt Taliban movements reveal deep distrust among the Americans of their Pakistani counterparts.

On Feb. 7, 2007, American officers met with Pakistani troops on a dry riverbed to discuss the borderlands surrounding Afghanistan's Khost Province.

According to notes from the meeting, the Pakistanis portrayed their soldiers as conducting around-the-clock patrols. Asked if he expected a violent spring, a man identified in the report as Lt. Col. Bilal, the Pakistani officer in charge, said no. His troops were in firm control.

The Americans were incredulous. Their record noted that there had been a 300 percent increase in militant activity in Khost before the meeting.

"This comment alone shows how disconnected this particular group of leadership is from what is going on in reality," the notes said.

The Pakistanis told the Americans to contact them if they spotted insurgent activity along the border. "I doubt this would do any good," the American author of the report wrote, "because PAKMIL/ISI is likely involved with the border crossings." "PAKMIL" refers to the Pakistani military.

A year earlier, the Americans became so frustrated at the increase in roadside bombs in Afghanistan that they hand-delivered folders with names, locations, aerial photographs and map coordinates to help the Pakistani military hunt down the militants the Americans believed were responsible.

Nothing happened, wrote Col. Barry Shapiro, an American military liaison officer with experience in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, after an Oct. 13, 2006, meeting. "Despite the number of reports and information detailing the concerns," Colonel Shapiro wrote, "we continue to see no change in the cross-border activity and continue to see little to no initiative along the PAK border" by Pakistan troops. The Pakistani Army "will only react when asked to do so by U.S. forces," he concluded.

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