

By Cindy May

Following the September 11th attacks, the United States and the coalition forces have fostered an alliance with Pakistan that has included over 11 billion dollars (USD) in defence aid. Given that many Al Qaeda and Taliban members have relocated to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the North Western Frontier Province, Pakistan's cooperation is critical to coalition efforts in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan has a long history of connections with the Taliban and other extremist groups in the region. Pakistan, along with the United States, provided logistical, training, and financial support to the mujahedeen in its fight against the Soviet Union. Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops, many of these mujahedeen fighters merged into what became the Taliban, and Pakistan continued its close relationship with the group.

Pakistan has pledged its support for the War on Terrorism and publicly denounced terrorism. Nevertheless numerous reports from Western intelligence agencies and from Taliban leaders indicate that Pakistan, especially its Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI), has not given up its ties to these groups and is in fact still closely working with the Afghani Taliban and other insurgents in the region. This poses many problems and security risks for coalition countries and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Consequently, Pakistan and its surreptitious activities have become a security threat that coalition countries can no longer afford to ignore.

A report produced by Matt Waldman and the London School of Economics indicates that the connections between the ISI and the Taliban may be stronger than suspected. Waldman interviewed numerous Taliban leaders about ISI involvement with the Taliban. The insurgents indicated that the Afghani Taliban receives support in the form of weapons, training, money, and logistical planning from the ISI. The leaders even indicated that ISI members are represented on the Quetta Shura, the Taliban's supreme council. Furthermore, they revealed that the ISI was actively involved in the planning and implementation of attacks, including transporting and ensuring safe passage of insurgents and weapons between the Pakistan and Afghanistan borders. Furthermore, classified documents that were recently leaked on the website WikiLeaks also paint the picture of Pakistani intelligence personnel working alongside Taliban members to plan attacks. Consequently, such evidence indicates that the long standing assumption that linkages between the ISI and insurgent groups were isolated to individual members working outside of official channels is inaccurate. Instead, there appears to be a systematic relationship between Pakistan and insurgent groups that has become official ISI policy and extends throughout the ranks of the organisation.

This relationship poses grave risks for coalition countries for several reasons. First, Pakistan's nuclear capability is cause for concern that nuclear materials could be passed to terrorists for use in an attack against coalition forces, or even removed from the region and used in a terrorist attack abroad. Although Pakistan insists that it has a reliable system in place for securing its

nuclear technology against attack and theft from terrorists, the possibility remains that a terrorist group could acquire nuclear material through inside assistance from the very Pakistani military personnel that are tasked with protecting it. Many members of the ISI and the Pakistani military are already sympathetic to the insurgents.

Moreover, Pakistan has a vested interest in maintaining the insurgency and instability in Afghanistan. Not only is Pakistan receiving billions of dollars in financial backing from the West for its support for the war, but it is also worried about the close relationship that India has with the Karzai government. As a result, Pakistan is concerned that once coalition forces leave Afghanistan the country will fall under India's influence, leaving Pakistan with adversaries on both its Eastern and Western borders. Thus given that the ISI is already providing the Taliban with conventional weapons and insurgency training, it is not unreasonable to imagine that it might also transfer more dangerous weapons, including radiological material, especially if the ISI believed that doing so would promote its security agenda.

Though it is unlikely that the ISI or a member of the Pakistani military would pass a nuclear weapon to terrorists, there is the potential for the components of a radiological dispersal device being transferred. Currently, numerous radioactive sources are being used for research and development, medical, commercial, and industrial purposes in Pakistan. Abdul Mannan, an official from the Pakistani Nuclear Regulatory Authority has indicated that it is not known how many orphaned radiological sources there are in Pakistan. Such sources are sufficient to pose a radiological risk, but they exist outside the Pakistani regulatory system. Therefore, it would be unknown to Pakistani authorities if one of these sources were to come under the control of a terrorist group. Such sources may not be as lethal as a nuclear device, but they possess enough radioactive material that if used in a dirty bomb would endanger public health and cause widespread panic in Western societies.

In addition, not all major points of exit from Pakistan contain radiation detection devices. Consequently, once radiological material was acquired by a terrorist organisation it would be feasible for it to be transported across Pakistan's porous borders into Afghanistan or Iranian Baluchistan, a common entry point into Pakistan for insurgents coming from abroad, where it could then be transported out of the region for use in any number of locations including Europe and the United States.

Next, the prospects of the ISAF defeating the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other insurgent groups in the region becomes ever more improbable so long as they have Pakistani backing. The insurgent leaders interviewed by Waldman indicated that they had been trained by the ISI in camps in Pakistan. The leaders asserted that the Taliban would not be able to amass the level of resistance that it currently maintains without the financial support of the ISI. This funding along with the training and tactical support the insurgents are receiving from the ISI enable the insurgents to carry out attacks against coalition forces. Thus it is counterproductive for Western nations to continue to support a country that is training its enemies.

Additionally, supporting Pakistan while it fosters instability in the region through non-state actors has the potential to further destabilise the area by tipping the delicate security balance in Pakistan's favour. Intelligence reports have indicated that the Haqqani network, which receives

support from Pakistan, was behind the 2008 attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul. In addition, India has claimed that Pakistan had links to the perpetrators of the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Consequently, if Pakistan were to be implicated in further attacks against Indian interests, it might promote renewed conflict between India and Pakistan, the results of which could be disastrous given the potential for the use of nuclear weapons by either country.

Pakistan's actions have put the coalition countries in a precarious position. If they hope to stymie the rise of terrorist groups in Afghanistan, they will have to address the source of the problem. Pakistan is playing both sides of the game and the coalition will have to make a decision to either directly confront Pakistan about its involvement with these groups or resign itself to abandoning its efforts in Afghanistan. Clearly neither of these options is propitious for the West, and they both pose their own security concerns, but the coalition cannot continue to work with Pakistan while it backs the very insurgent groups it is fighting. Pulling out of Afghanistan before it is stabilised could result in a civil war in the country that would further destabilise the region and once again endanger the area to being used as a base for terrorism.

However, the former option is also wrought with problems. Simple discussion with Pakistan about its connections with terrorist organisations has little prospect of success as the Pakistani leadership has vehemently denied any accusations of collusion with such groups. However, formal security assurances from the West that extend beyond the departure of coalition forces from Afghanistan in exchange for Pakistan's cooperation may be more productive.

If these approaches fail, the United States and its allies will have to take a harder stance than it has thus far if it hopes to succeed in Afghanistan. They will need to make it clear to Pakistan that continued support for terrorist groups will result in negative consequences for its government. The low end of this spectrum would include proposing to end or reduce military assistance to Pakistan, which would represent a significant financial loss to the Pakistani government. The more extreme end of the spectrum would include the threatened use of sanctions or military force, although this last proposal is unlikely to be utilised given Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and the subsequent risks any military confrontation would entail. Using any of these methods obviously runs the risk of losing the level of cooperation that Pakistan has provided thus far, and possibly pushing it even further in line with the insurgents. However, the coalition is currently fighting a losing battle when its alleged allies are supporting its enemies.

It will be a slow path to ending Pakistan's cooperation with terrorist organisations in the region. In the interim the West needs to adjust its security measures to meet the unique threats that Pakistan's involvement with terrorist groups pose. For example, Europe and the United States need to prepare for a radiological terrorist attack as a real and ever growing threat. While it would be nearly impossible for coalition members to ensure that nuclear or radiological material is not transferred to a terrorist group, they can begin to secure their borders against such a threat. The use of radiation detection devices in areas of vulnerability such as subway systems, large metropolitan areas, airports and other major points of entry into Western countries needs to become more widespread. Furthermore, a greater effort must be made to make Western borders less porous. Although as an island the United Kingdom is relatively well protected from illegal border crossings, a risk still exists for small sea vessels to transport people or weapons undetected. Therefore, border patrols and the use of electronic monitoring systems should be

increased.

Finally, Europe and the United States must begin to examine and prepare its security infrastructure for the tactics already being used by Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. One such example would be the use of children as terrorists. The Taliban is already using children as suicide bombers in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is only a matter of time before children are also used as perpetrators of terrorism in the West. Currently Europe and the United States do not view children as potential threats to security, as they are seldom searched at airports. However, the West must begin to consider this potential security risk. This would mean applying the same security measures that are used for adults to children. While it initially seems improper to subject children to such scrutiny, it is a concern that must be addressed. This scenario is comparable to the situation that Middle Eastern countries have faced with searching women. Security officials in the Middle East are generally male, and cultural norms prevent men from searching women; however, the increased utilisation of female suicide bombers forced Middle Eastern governments to change their security practices. Western governments will have to make similar concessions to its security framework.

Consequently, Pakistan's cooperation with terrorist groups poses unique policy and security concerns for the West. The coalition needs Pakistan's full support to successfully subdue Al Qaeda and the Taliban. It cannot continue to allow Pakistan to publicly support the War on Terrorism and reap the benefits of its alliance with the West, while secretly undermining coalition efforts. It is imperative that the coalition address Pakistan's complicity with terrorist groups and the security threats it poses.

About the author:

Cindy May is a doctoral candidate in international relations at the University of Cambridge. She received her BA (Magna cum Laude) in political science and international relations from Butler University in Indiana and her MPhil in international relations from the University of Cambridge. Her PhD focuses on the United States' use of military force in the Middle East. Other research interests include Islamic terrorism and Middle Eastern politics. She has also worked as an intern on two occasions at the U.S. State Department.

Bibliography

Mannan, Abdul. Preventing Nuclear Terrorism in Pakistan. Henry L. Stimson Center. April 2007.
Waldman, Matt. The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents. Crisis States Discussion Papers, number 18. June 2010.