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Pakistan Must Act Against Network That Shielded bin Laden

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New information has revealed contacts between members of Pakistani terrorist group Harakat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and Osama bin Laden's courier. These revelations show that Pakistan's segmented approach to terrorism contributed to bin Laden's ability to live undetected in a military town deep inside Pakistan.

Pakistan has long sought to distinguish between Kashmir-focused terrorist groups—which it allows to operate freely in Pakistan as a buffer against India—and al-Qaeda. U.S. officials should reject this distinction and make clear that they view any individuals who facilitate al-Qaeda as threats to America. If Pakistan fails to take action against terrorist organizations affiliated with al-Qaeda, Washington should withhold security aid to Islamabad.

Unsurprising Links. The links between HuM terrorists and al-Qaeda are not surprising. When the Clinton Administration bombed al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan in response to the attacks on two U.S. embassies in Africa in August 1998, several of the people killed in those camps were Pakistani HuM members. What is surprising is that Pakistani authorities have allowed HuM leader Fazlur Rehman Khalil to live freely on the outskirts of Islamabad.

It is unknown whether any officials in Pakistan's intelligence service (known as ISI) knew about HuM's contact with bin Laden's courier. Failure on Islamabad's part to take action against the group and its leader in light of the new revelations, however, would fuel suspicion in the U.S. that Pakistani officials played a role in hiding bin Laden. U.S.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Members of Congress on Thursday that a review of intelligence has turned up no information indicating that top Pakistani leaders knew about bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad. Clinton added that it was possible that lower-level Pakistani officials were involved in protecting the international terrorist.

Pakistani military and intelligence officials continue to believe that terrorist groups like the HuM and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), which is responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, constitute their most effective assets to counter Indian regional influence and to pressure New Delhi over Kashmir. They have little concern about these groups' links to international terrorism and the questions these links raise about Pakistan's overall commitment to fighting terrorism.

Pakistani officials continually cite the loss of Pakistani life at the hands of terrorists as proof of their commitment to fighting terrorism. But in light of the new information, average Pakistanis may begin to question why their military would tolerate groups that facilitate al-Qaeda's ability to attack Pakistani citizens. U.S. officials understand that Pakistan has fought three wars with India and that Pakistani military leaders find it difficult to look beyond the

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Indian threat. But Washington can no longer tolerate Pakistani failure to shut down groups that help al-Qaeda and its agenda.

U.S. Should Push Pakistan to Crack Down on Al-Qaeda Affiliates. Given that the U.S. now possesses evidence that Pakistan-based terrorist groups with ISI links helped harbor bin Laden, Washington should get tougher with Islamabad and insist that these groups be shut down. While U.S. officials should not expect the terrorist organizations to dissolve overnight, they should expect Pakistani authorities to take specific actions to break up the groups and punish individuals who were involved in harboring bin Laden. More specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Insist that Pakistan detain Khalil.** Khalil lives comfortably and openly near Islamabad. The U.S. should insist that Pakistani officials arrest him and any of his colleagues who had contact with al-Qaeda and make them available to the U.S. for questioning.
- **Link Pakistan's approach to dealing with al-Qaeda affiliate organizations such as HuM and LeT with future security assistance to the country.** U.S. security aid to Pakistan is already legally tied to its counterterrorism efforts against al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. In March, Secretary Clinton certified to Congress under the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 that Pakistan was, among other things, making progress in "preventing al-Qaeda...from operating in" its territory. The Administration should review that certification in light of the new information about the network that supported bin Laden.
- **Reject Pakistani officials' arguments that they are incapable of taking on these groups.** Pakistani officials privately argue to U.S. officials that local terrorist groups such as HuM or LeT are too powerful and pervasive for the military establishment to handle. These arguments are specious and merit testing. Former President Pervez Musharraf repeatedly told U.S. interlocutors that he could "better control" or "keep tabs on" the terrorist groups if his intelligence agencies retained links to them. However, if HuM was in contact with the world's most wanted terrorist

without the Pakistani military's knowledge, then who is keeping tabs on whom? The U.S. should no longer settle for Pakistani excuses for avoiding a full-throttle approach against these terrorist groups and instead demand that Pakistan be accountable for the activities of all terrorist groups on its soil.

- **Avoid allowing India to become part of the equation.** The U.S. should be consistent and firm in its expectations that Pakistani authorities act against individuals that were part of bin Laden's support network. Since some of these individuals are likely also involved in attacks against India, Pakistan may try to equate U.S. demands with a "pro-Indian" agenda. This is a false notion and merely a Pakistani negotiating tactic. Pakistani officials are well aware of the importance that the U.S. attaches to defeating al-Qaeda and its affiliate organizations.
- **Continue diplomatic engagement and allow civilian aid to flow.** Despite the severe differences between Islamabad and Washington over the terrorism issue, it is in the interest of the U.S. to maintain engagement with Pakistani leaders and demonstrate U.S. interest in the development of a prosperous and moderate Pakistan free of the terrorist scourge. If the U.S. cuts aid to Pakistan altogether or degrades its diplomatic engagement with the country's leadership, the assistance that Pakistan does provide in fighting terrorism will dry up completely.

A Difficult but Necessary Relationship. The breach over the bin Laden operation has brought to the surface the vast differences between America's and Pakistan's fundamental strategic objectives in the region. But it is in neither country's interest to allow the relationship to implode.

The best course for U.S. officials is to maintain consistent and firm messages with their Pakistani counterparts. Only time will tell whether Pakistani officials chart a course of remaining engaged with Western countries or choose a more risky path of shunning the U.S. and clinging to terrorist proxies that prefer a weak and unstable Pakistan.

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