

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3369  
September 26, 2011

## U.S. Should React Strongly to Pakistan's Involvement in Attack on U.S. Embassy

*Lisa Curtis*

Credible U.S. press reports yesterday revealed that cell phones found on the attackers in the September 13 attack on the U.S. embassy in Kabul were linked to Pakistani intelligence officials. The U.S. has long known that Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), works closely with the Haqqani insurgent network, which has been responsible for some of the fiercest attacks against U.S. and coalition soldiers in Afghanistan. But if media reports on the cell phone links are accurate, this would be the first time the U.S. has a "smoking gun" on Pakistani involvement in a direct attack on U.S. civilian interests.

If Pakistani leaders maintain their defiance in light of the new information on the cell phone links of the attackers to Pakistani intelligence, the U.S. should begin to take punitive steps toward Islamabad that could presage a breakdown in U.S.–Pakistan diplomatic relations.

**Attempts to Salvage Relationship Prove Fleeting.** U.S.–Pakistan relations have been severely strained since the May 2 raid that killed Osama bin Laden. The Obama Administration had advocated for maintaining diplomatic relations and aid programs to Pakistan amidst growing doubts on Capitol Hill about the merits of continuing the engagement. Members of Congress suspected that parts of the Pakistani security establishment had helped protect bin Laden and had grown increasingly frustrated with Pakistan's resistance to cutting links to Afghan insurgents attacking U.S. and coalition forces. The Administration's argument for engagement seemed

to be justified, however, when Pakistan recently signaled that it would welcome back some of the U.S. military trainers that had been kicked out of the country shortly after the bin Laden raid.

But yesterday's bombshell changes everything. Unless Pakistan agrees to take recourse against those ISI officials involved in the September 13 attack and to work more closely with the U.S. in confronting the Haqqani network, the U.S. will have to recalibrate its policy toward Pakistan, despite the potential negative repercussions for other U.S. interests in the region. As *The Wall Street Journal* noted in one of its editorials today, "The U.S. cannot be seen before the world, or more especially by the American people, turning a blind eye to Pakistan's complicity in the murder of U.S. citizens serving in Afghanistan."

In the event that Pakistan maintains its defiant attitude and refuses to take action against the perpetrators of the attacks on the U.S. embassy, the U.S. must move forward with the following plan of action:

**Suspend all assistance programs to Pakistan, including civilian aid.** Even though it is the military and intelligence establishment that bears responsibility for the attack, it would be nearly impossible

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3369>

Produced by the Asian Studies Center

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

to provide effective civilian aid programs without its cooperation. If the U.S.–Pakistan military relationship becomes more hostile, U.S. aid officials and contractors would be even less safe than they are already, and, since Pakistani civilian leaders have been unable to forge independent counterterrorism policies from the military, the U.S. would find it increasingly difficult to justify any aid to the government, parts of which are involved in attacking the U.S.

- **Recall the American ambassador to the U.S. for consultations on future policies toward Pakistan.** The Obama Administration has seemed paralyzed over its policy toward Pakistan ever since the bin Laden raid. The intelligence linking Pakistan to the attack on the U.S. embassy should shake the Administration out of this paralysis. The attack shows that the U.S.'s inability to bring change to Pakistan's counterterrorism policies is risking the entire NATO war effort in Afghanistan and the international community's ability to defeat global terrorism.
- **Readjust the U.S. force structure in Afghanistan and prioritize finding alternative routes to cope with a disruption or even cutoff in supply routes through Pakistan.** The U.S. has been able to increase the amount of supplies it sends through the Northern Distribution Network over the last five years, and it should prioritize building up this network further. A cutoff in the supply chain running through Pakistan would almost certainly gravely impact the U.S. ability to sustain military missions in Afghanistan. This is a price the U.S. would have to pay and adjust to.
- **Immediately list the Haqqani network as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.** While this may have little practical effect in terms of cutting funding to the organization, it sends a clear signal that the U.S. does not tolerate attacks on its citizens. Pakistan has been trying to push for a role for the Haqqanis in reconciliation talks in Afghanistan. But the U.S. cannot countenance negotiating with groups that are attacking U.S. civilians. Such a policy would demonstrate weakness and encourage other U.S. adversaries to try to extract concessions from the U.S. through violence.
- **Step up drone strikes on Haqqani targets in Pakistan's tribal areas.** The increased tempo in drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas has severely downgraded the al-Qaeda leadership and disrupted its ability to attack the U.S. Washington should pursue the same kind of aggressive drone campaign against the Haqqani network in North Waziristan and parts of the Kurram Agency, where some Haqqani forces have recently relocated.
- **Reverse U.S. withdrawal plans from Afghanistan.** Part of the reason the Pakistanis continue to support the Haqqani network (and other Taliban proxies) is that they believe the U.S. will withdraw from Afghanistan before the situation is stabilized and that the Haqqanis constitute the best chance to secure their interests in the country. The recent upsurge in Taliban attacks inside Afghanistan—especially the assassination of former Afghan president and head of the High Peace Council Burhanuddin Rabbani—demonstrates that the hard-line Taliban leadership has no interest in reconciliation talks and believes it can chase U.S. forces out of the region. The U.S. should demonstrate that it is committed to never allowing Afghanistan to serve as a base for international terrorists again. This can be done only by ensuring that U.S. military commanders have the troops and resources they need to complete the mission in Afghanistan and to finally force the Taliban into genuine negotiations.
- **Consult with European allies on ways to move Pakistan away from the dangerous path it is pursuing.** While the U.S. and NATO allies work closely on the mission in Afghanistan, the U.S. has been virtually the sole player in seeking to effect change in Pakistan. The Europeans argue that they have little concrete leverage in the country, but they could reinforce U.S. messages and show solidarity with the U.S. position on Pakistan. Demonstrating solidarity between the U.S. and European and other allies toward Pakistan would disabuse the Pakistani government of any notion that it can play the U.S. and its allies off of one another and thus relieve international pressure on it to pursue different policies.

**Time Running Out for Pakistan to Change Course.** While there are risks inherent to going

down a more punitive path with Pakistan, the recent information on ISI links to the attack on the U.S. embassy leave the U.S. with no other option. There is still time for Pakistan to chart a different course. Pakistan's military leaders can begin changes within the security establishment that punish individuals involved in attacks on the U.S. and close down ISI

operations that support the Haqqani network. Their choices within the next few days will determine the future course of the U.S.–Pakistan relationship.

—*Lisa Curtis is Senior Research Fellow for South Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.*