

Bin Laden killing roils US ties with Pakistani army

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US deputy special envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan Frank Ruggiro arrived in Islamabad on Monday, as the latest in a series of visits to Pakistan by US administration officials since the US killing of Osama bin Laden on May 1. These visits aim to press Islamabad and particularly the Pakistani army to toe the US line and continue waging war on the Pakistani population, in accordance with the needs of the US “war on terror.”

Pakistani Foreign Ministry officials told the *Express Tribune* the purpose of Ruggiro’s visit was to allow “interaction with Pakistani officials to resume strategic dialogue.” This so-called strategic dialogue began this March to force Pakistan to obey Washington’s commands more closely; however, discussions scheduled for May had to be postponed due to new frictions between two countries, notably US accusations of Pakistani complicity in hiding Bin Laden. However, military sources told the media there was no sign of such a dialogue taking place “in a near future.”

Sections within the ruling elite in Washington have questioned whether the US should continue providing aid to Pakistan, citing the fact that elements in the army support militant Islamic groups—though other US officials defended US relations with Pakistan as critical to Washington’s strategic interests in the region.

Last week, outgoing Defence Secretary Robert Gates stated: “We need each other. And we need each other more than just in the context of Afghanistan. Pakistan is an important player in terms of regional stability and in terms of Central Asia.” Gates shrugged off accusations that Pakistan was hiding information on Islamic militants from the US: “I would say based on 27 years in the CIA and four-and-a-half years in this job, most governments lie to each other. That’s the way business gets done.”

It is clear, however, that all factions of the US political establishment intend to force further concessions from the Pakistani government. While it appears likely that

elements of Pakistani intelligence knew where Bin Laden was hiding, Washington’s implicit position—that Pakistan was unusual in turning a blind eye to Bin Laden—is entirely hypocritical. The Obama administration itself knew since last August that bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad, and killed him, cold-bloodedly and in a military operation that violated Pakistani sovereignty, at a time of its choosing.

Ruggiro’s visit took place just one week after CIA Director Leon E. Panetta’s unannounced visit to Islamabad for talks with army chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and the head of Pakistan’s military intelligence service (Inter-Services Intelligence, ISI), General Ahmed Shuja Pasha.

According to a *New York Times* report of June 11, Panetta confronted Kayani and Pasha over several points. Panetta told Pasha that the CIA provided information to the ISI on bomb-manufacturing facilities located in North and South Waziristan used by Islamic groups and asked them to raid them, as these groups were attacking US forces in Afghanistan. However, when the army arrived, the militants had fled.

Panetta told Kayani and Pasha that some elements within the army must have tipped them off. Pakistan has denied this allegation.

Panetta also questioned Pakistan’s arrest of four CIA informants who allegedly provided details on Bin Laden, demanding their release. According to the *Washington Post*, among those arrested was Major Amir Aziz, a doctor in the Pakistan Army Medical Corps who lived next to bin Laden’s residence in Abbottabad for several years. The Pakistani military denied that the officers had been arrested.

An article in the *New York Times* last week titled “Pakistan chief of army fights to keep his job,” pointed to deep divisions inside the Pakistani army after killing of bin Laden. The secret US operation stunned not only the

Zardari government but especially the army. The army brass has bemoaned it as a blow to its “prestige,” although it works closely with US forces.

The eleven corps commanders that run the Pakistani army issued a long statement in early June trying to defend the army and to imply, despite all evidence, that it does not have a close relationship with the US military. The statement noted it had “never accepted any training assistance from the United States except for training on the newly inducted weapons and some training assistance for the Frontier Corps only.”

According to the *Times*, army commanders have become wary of Kayani, who is considered too visibly close to Washington. It added, “Washington, with its own hard line against Pakistan, ha[s] pushed General Kayani in to a defensive crouch.” It warned, however: “If the General was pushed out, United States would face a more uncompromising anti-American army.”

Kayani was particularly damaged politically by revelations that he requested US help in bombing parts of Pakistan targeted by the Pakistani army at the US’s request. WikiLeaks cables revealed that in a meeting on January 22, 2008 with US CENTCOM Commander Admiral William J. Fallon, General Kayani asked Washington to provide “continuous Predator coverage of the conflict area” in South Waziristan.

Facing challenges from other commanders, Kayani reportedly visited a dozen garrisons and mess halls to try to rally support of the rank and file and to defend his role.

Kayani has admitted the Pakistani army’s client relationship, in a session at the National Defence University. According to the notes of a participant in the session, “General Kayani acknowledged that Pakistan had mortgaged itself to the United States.” Kayani reportedly added: “If a person gave his house against a loan and was unable to pay back the loan, the mortgage holder would intervene,” and said: “We are helpless. Can we fight America?”

The Pakistani daily *The Nation* reported that the Army chief told Panetta that they were unwilling to reverse a decision cutting the number of US troops allowed in Pakistan. One hundred US advisors have been sent back.

The *Times* reported that the Pakistani corps commanders also demanded that “General Kayani get much tougher with the Americans ... even edging toward a break,” also questioning whether Kayani and Pasha should keep their jobs.

These incidents are the latest in a series of deepening tensions between in the corrupt relations between

Washington and Islamabad. The Pakistani army has supported the US colonial war against Afghanistan, while the US supplied a lifeline for it with aid and loans. Washington has provided at least \$US2 billion a year in aid to Pakistan’s military.

Escalating US attacks, extending the Afghan war into Pakistan, have deepened the crisis of the Zardari government and the military, however. The CIA has made a series of attacks on targets in Northwest Pakistan since 2004 using Predator drones. More than 2,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed by such attacks in Northwest Pakistan.

Millions of Pakistanis have also been displaced in Pakistani army campaigns against Islamic militant groups carried out at Washington’s demand.

On top of these, in February Washington twisted the arm of Islamabad and obtained the release of CIA agent Raymond Davis, who faced murder charges, before violating Pakistani sovereignty to kill Bin Laden in May.

The Pakistani army previously had close relations with Afghan Taliban groups. Sections of the military and the ISI doubtless retain close connections with Islamic extremist groups. However, in the 1980s US nurtured these groups, including Al Qaeda, through the Pakistani army and ISI against the Soviet army in Afghanistan.

Reports emerged Tuesday in Pakistan of the arrest of army Brigadier Ali Khan, on charges of having ties to the banned Islamic group, Hizb-ut-Tahrir. On Wednesday four more army majors have been taken for “questioning” regarding links with Khan. This group has demanded military to oust Zardari government.

Khan’s lawyers told the BBC that he has been victimised for criticising the army hierarchy after the US killed bin Laden.



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