

Pakistani, US intelligence chiefs discuss US drone attacks

Eric London
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Tensions between the Obama Administration and the Pakistani government remain high amid the first visit to the United States by a high-ranking Pakistani military officer since the US assassination of Osama bin Laden on Pakistani soil in May 2011.

Wednesday's meeting between Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Executive Lt. General Zaheer ul-Islam and official and CIA director David Petraeus at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia was expected to center on two main issues: Pakistan's failure to halt attacks against US forces in Afghanistan launched by the Haqqani network in Pakistan; and the US drone war in Pakistan, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of Pakistani civilians since the program's inception in 2004.

A July 30 article in the *New York Times* highlighted the tense situation before the meeting.

"Inside the [Obama] Administration," the article wrote, "it is a commonly held view that the United States is 'one major [Haqqani] attack' away from unilateral action against Pakistan—diplomatically or perhaps even militarily, one senior official said."

Threats by the United States to respond to Haqqani network raids by attacking its Pakistani "ally" are by no means idle. In November 2011, US helicopters opened fire on the Salala checkpoint in Pakistan, killing 28 Pakistani soldiers and wounding 11. The Obama administration has pointedly refused to apologize for the attack.

Washington is furious with Pakistan's failure to prevent the Haqqani network militia from attacking NATO and Afghan forces from inside Pakistan. The Obama Administration's appointee for Ambassador to Pakistan, Richard G. Olson, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in confirmation hearings on Tuesday that he "will certainly, if confirmed, take it as

a central responsibility and the most urgent of my responsibilities to continue to press the Pakistani authorities on the Haqqani network in every way possible."

The Pakistani government and military, under pressure from civilians and rank-and-file soldiers deeply opposed to the US occupation of Afghanistan, are expected to protest the US drone campaign in the meetings. This opposition has a largely symbolic character, however.

The Pakistani army has repeatedly fallen into line with the dictates of the NATO occupation force. Just as it gave in to US pressure to end its blockade of NATO supplies moving through the Khyber Pass, which was originally meant as a protest to cross-border raids, Pakistan has consistently bowed to political pressures from Washington.

The drone war, which has intensified since Obama took office, is deeply unpopular in Pakistan. Since 2009, the US has carried out 262 drone strikes in Pakistan, compared with 45 in 2004-2008.

The Obama Administration has steadily increased the number of drone attacks since May. In the last week-and-a-half, three drone strikes have killed a total of 21 "suspected militants"—a term used by the Obama Administration to refer to any male of fighting age.

A drone strike on July 23 left 10 dead in Dray Nashtar, while two attacks on July 29 killed 7 and 4 near Mir Ali in North Waziristan.

The US is unlikely to halt the drone attacks, despite the alternatives offered by Pakistani officials, which include using F-16s instead of drones to attack villages, and the transfer of drones from US to Pakistani control. The Pakistani government's position is deeply cynical: it is not opposed to the violence being carried out against its people, but only to the fact that it does not

have the power to carry out such raids itself.

Pakistan is complicit in the brutal attacks being carried out by the US against its population since the Afghan War began in 2001.

Pakistan has had close military ties to American imperialism since the 1950s, when military leaders of the newly formed state of Pakistan courted US military aid in an attempt to arm themselves against India. In the 1980s, relations between the US and Pakistan grew closer as the US funneled money and weapons through Pakistan to the anti-Soviet mujahedin fighters in Afghanistan, including to the forerunner of the Haqqani network.

But both the US and Pakistan helped give the Haqqani network a base of support. It was partially through the funding and arms provided by the CIA that the ISI fostered closer ties to Haqqani and bolstered his fighting capacity.

The Haqqani network is a group of Pashtun tribal fighters founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a prominent mujahedin commander during the Soviet-Afghan war. Haqqani built close connections with the ISI and the CIA during the course of the war, which the ISI now exploits as a tool of its foreign policy interests. Pakistani intelligence hopes to exert political influence inside Afghanistan through the Haqqani network after the withdrawal of US and NATO occupying forces.

Pressure on Haqqani and the ISI has been stepped up in the past year, as the US accused the ISI of being connected to Haqqani's June, 2011 attack on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul and the attack on the US Embassy and International Security Assistance Force Headquarters three months later. Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen denounced Pakistan, saying that the Haqqani network is one of many "extremist organizations serving as proxies of the government of Pakistan."

The United States' criticism of the ISI's connections with terrorism are deeply hypocritical, given the financial and military aid given by the CIA to various "terrorist" organizations worldwide, including Haqqani and the Mujahedeen in the 1980s.

A senior ISI official pointed out the hypocrisy of the US complaint, asking: "doesn't the CIA have contacts with the people it is fighting?"

Wednesday's meeting between the secret service heads of both countries comes as social tensions within

Pakistan are also rising to new highs.

The *New York Times* recently reported that present levels of "turmoil" in the Pakistani Army had not been seen since its humiliating defeat in the Third Indo-Pakistani War, which led to the division of Pakistan, the breakaway of East Pakistan and the creation of the state of Bangladesh. In recent months, the Armed Forces, Supreme Court, and civilian government of President Asif Ali Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party have traded accusations of corruption and coup plotting, highlighting the volatile nature of the nuclear-armed regime.

The tenacity with which the various factions of Pakistan's government, military, and financial elite are attempting to wrest control comes as a direct response to escalating class tensions in Pakistan. Massive demonstrations have occurred over the past two years in response to power cuts and the US drone strikes. In July, workers in many major cities in Pakistan set fire to government buildings, including the offices of the Water and Power Development Authority.



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