

## A Pakistani Fifth Column? The Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate's Sponsorship of Terrorism

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### **Abstract**

The current struggle in Afghanistan has highlighted many challenges facing strategies for waging and winning a global war on terrorism. The mission in Afghanistan has morphed over the course of a decade from a mission set reliant on defeating and toppling the Taliban, waging a counter insurgency campaign and to the current focus on defeating al-Qaeda. The Obama administration has emphasized the need for the United States and Western allies to focus not on nation building but on dismantling al-Qaeda and disrupting the ability of the Taliban to facilitate its operations. However, the key to this strategy rests not on the ground in Afghanistan but within the neighboring borders of Pakistan. Within those borders, al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other extremist networks are facilitated by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), which serves as a figurative "fifth column" to cooperative efforts and negotiations with the Pakistani government. This paper outlines the origins of the ISI, argues that the ISI is directly engaged in sponsoring extremist networks and highlights the degree of influence ISI maintains within the nuclear armed state of Pakistan.

**Key words:** International Terrorism, Pakistan, Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate, International Security

### **Introduction**

During the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, a Nationalist General named Emilio Mola Vidal, marched his army on the city of Madrid. He announced that four columns of his force would be supported by a covert "fifth column" comprised of militant supporters. This fifth column was defined as a "clandestine group or faction of subversive agents who attempt to undermine a nation's solidarity by any means at their disposal. Their principal tactic would be the infiltration of sympathizers into the entire fabric of the nation under attack and, particularly,

into positions of policy decision and national defense (Britannica). Within Pakistan a fifth column has been operating for decades; permeating through all echelons of the Pakistani government and clandestinely sowing the seeds of terror through unsavory organizations across the globe.

Nine years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the global war on terrorism has claimed the lives of thousands of combatants and cost the international community over \$1 trillion dollars. It has reached every corner of the globe, from the cities of Europe and Africa to the Pacific islands and border areas of South America. The United States (U.S.)-led war on terrorism has set the precedent that state sponsors of extremism and terrorism are intolerable enemies of the international community. After close to a decade of increased intelligence gathering, counter-terrorism efforts, and military operations across the globe-the world is still left with extremely real and tangible threats. Pakistan has become an essential ally to counter-terrorist operations in Southwest Asia, providing airspace, logistical access and supply routes for coalition personnel. For the international community, Pakistan has become a centerpiece and critical node for defeating Islamic extremism and countering future attacks against worldwide interests. Yet, within the ranks of Pakistan's military, society, and population lives a widespread web of terrorism, fundamentalism, extremism, and Islamic jihad, promoted and fostered by a shadowy intelligence organization.

The Pakistani state has been left at an impasse: appeasing the extremist divisions of its population to prevent domestic upheaval and also cooperating with the international community's efforts to defeat transnational terrorism and violent fundamentalism. The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) serves as the state's foreign intelligence and counter-intelligence organization-but is also deeply embedded in domestic politics and foreign policy initiatives. The ISI...has often been called a 'rogue' agency or a 'state within a state'... but it operates at the behest of the government, civil and military (Nawaz xli). Truly, the ISI has become the fifth column of Pakistan's military. The agency specializes in utilizing terrorist organizations as proxies for Pakistani foreign policy, covert action abroad, and controlling domestic politics. The ISI is deeply entrenched in the Pakistani state as well as within unsavory networks spanning the globe. For more than two decades the ISI [has] sponsored Islamic militancy to carry out its secret wars (Hussain 12). Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Directorate is a clandestine sponsor of worldwide extremism and transnational terrorism. The fragile nature of military centric politics, deeply entrenched religious foundations, and a nuclear arsenal in Pakistan makes the ISI the foremost terrorist threat and non-state sponsor of terrorism in the international community.

### **Origins of a Pakistani Spy Agency**

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, or Pakistan, achieved its initial independence in 1947 when the British divided the colonized Indian sub-continent based on religious lines. Pakistan was centered on the religion of Islam, drawing geographically separated regions out of Muslim population centers in the West (West Pakistan) and the eastern portion of Bengal (East Pakistan). The Indian state catered to the Hindu faith and resided between the two newly formed Pakistani provinces. The British divisions forced the relocation of millions of people on all sides, creating poverty, destruction, and casualties in its wake. Partitions along ethnic lines usually result in

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mutually inflicted violence, but the politicians of that time had no understanding of the magnitude of what they had prepared (Ali 30). After the dust and blood had settled, the world embraced a newly emerged Muslim state, drawn from loosely constructed boundaries and ethnic divisions.

A structural contradiction lay at the heart of the new country. "Religious affinity was the only rationale for uniting West Pakistan and its Muslim majority provinces – Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and North-West Frontier – with East Pakistan, which was the Muslim majority slice of Bengal (32). The new state was led initially by the Governor-General Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, who sought cooperative relations between the newly divided Hindu and Muslim states, but was challenged over the contested territory of Kashmir. A poorly established border between India and Pakistan left Kashmir contested between both nations, as well as the Chinese. The disputes over the small region resulted in the 1947 Indo-Pakistani war and the birth of the modern day ISI.

The ISI stemmed from the Pakistani desire to streamline intelligence collection and dissemination between its military branches in the time of conflict. After the 1947 Indo-Pakistani war over Kashmir, the ISI was created as a separate entity from the intelligence bureau (IB) to meet this function and expand Pakistan's collection capabilities. "The agency was initially charged with performing all intelligence tasks at home and abroad – its scope of operation extended to all areas related to national security" (Hussain 13). Originally, the role of the ISI was crafted to focus the efforts of the agency on foreign intelligence collection and the dissemination of national security concerns. However, in the 1970s, the ISI's responsibility took a new shape as it was given additional responsibilities including the oversight of domestic politics. "Ironically, it was a civilian leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who created the ISI's internal wing which played a critical role in the ousting of his government a few years later. [The ISI] was to cast a heavy shadow over the country's politics in later years" (13).

Beginning with Bhutto's creation of the internal wing, set to monitor domestic security threats and political trends, the ISI began to take on the shape of a "big brother" entity. However, the seeds of militancy, religious fundamentalism, and clandestine terrorist support were planted when Bhutto appointed General Zia al-Haq as the army chief in 1976. General Zia was a devout Muslim, and Bhutto thought he would never betray his trust (Coll). "Once elevated to the top position, the General did not take much time to develop secret contacts with hard-line religious groups and conspired with them to overthrow his benefactor" (13). In 1977, General Zia al-Haq took the seat of power from Bhutto, with strong support from the ISI and religious groups, and immediately began to instill Islamist fundamentalism and teachings throughout the Pakistani military. Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the largest Islamic political party, gained strength and momentum and fostered extremist leadership within the military ranks under Zia's guidance. "The main objective of the JI was to penetrate the army and use it to seize state power. The practice introduced by General Zia of sending combat officers to universities in Pakistan, in which the JI often had pervasive influence facilitated the party's [Islamic] objective" (Hussain 20). The ISI began to take shape as a mediator, facilitator, representative, and liaison for militant Islam, extremism, and Pakistani covert action.

During the Cold War, Pakistan proved to be a strategic ally for the U.S. due to its geographic location and inherent rivalry with India which drove an automatic anti-Soviet stance. The ISI was leveraged by Western intelligence services, including the Central Intelligence

Agency (CIA), to undermine Soviet action in the region and provide an outlet for the sharing of intelligence between Pakistan and the U.S. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in the 1980s the CIA and ISI embarked on one of the largest covert campaigns in history: financing and arming the Mujahedin, comprised of Islamic extremists, for their efforts in Afghanistan. Zia did not allow the CIA or any other foreign intelligence agency to aid the Mujahedin directly, enter Afghanistan, or plan the Mujahedin's battles and strategy. That became the prerogative of the ISI, which, with its newfound wealth and American patronage, had become a state within a state, employing thousands of officers in order to run what was now also Pakistan's Afghan war (Rashid 10).

While increased funding and motivation from the West poured through the ranks of the ISI to bolster the capabilities of the Mujahedin in Afghanistan, Zia mandated strict Islamic and religious training and indoctrination for the military and agency. The ISI's training of guerrillas was integrated with the teaching of Islam. The prominent theme was that Islam was a complete socio-political ideology under threat from atheistic communists. The Afghan war produced a new radical Islamic movement (Hussain 17).

Simultaneously, Zia took steps to turn Pakistan into an Islamic state, obedient to a strict interpretation of Sharia law (Islamic law), and used the ISI as the face of enforcement and religious cultivation.

[Military] units were required to take non-combatant mullahs with them to the front line. Soldiers were encouraged to attend Tablighi (Deobandi movement within Pakistan) gatherings. The purpose was to indoctrinate cadets and young officers with an obscurantist interpretation of Islam. Many of those cadets later rose to positions of power and took control of sensitive institutions, including ISI. (20)

The Afghan war created a leviathan and powerful intelligence agency in the ISI while Zia mandated Islamic fundamentalism and Deobandism (a strict interpretation of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam) into their shadowy ranks. With aid from the U.S. and a pivotal and violent struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan, the ISI cultivated a relationship with extremists from across the globe, including al-Qaeda. While being forced to adhere to fundamental Islam from the Pakistani state, the ISI itself became recognized in the international system and feared within domestic society. Throughout the 1990s, the ISI maintained its relationship with extremist networks and militants that it had established during the Afghan war to utilize in its campaign against Indian forces in Kashmir. The ISI had become a state-mandated and Western-built sponsor of contemporary and fundamental terrorism.

## **An Unsavory Past**

Many high-profile terrorist incidents, ranging from the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington to the July 7, 2004 subway bombings in London to the November 2008 assault on Mumbai, have had direct connections to individuals and groups operating in Pakistan (Ganguly and Kapur 47). The sponsorship and recruitment of terrorist and guerilla movements against the Soviets in Afghanistan is paramount when examining historic ties between terrorism and the ISI. However, the agency also took part in, and was responsible for, numerous international operations and violent acts across the globe. The instilled radicalization from Zia and the campaigns in Afghanistan and Kashmir vetted and emboldened the ISI. Yet the

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agency's clandestine operations and sponsorship for violence and Islamic extremism abroad generated the attention of the international community.

The most notable and dangerous connection to transnational terrorism is the ISI's cooperation and support for al-Qaeda (AQ) and its leader, Osama bin-Laden.

During the 1980s, militants poured into Pakistan from the Muslim world, including Palestinian teacher and preacher Abdullah Azzam, who had taught in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, preaching Muslims' duty to wage jihad. One of his students was Osama bin-Laden. Azzam created Maktab al-Khidmat (Services Office or MK) in Peshawar to recruit Arabs and raise funds. Bin Laden, with ISI ties, was a key MK organizer. Under bin Laden, MK transformed into al-Qaeda. ISI Directory General Akhtar Abdul Ramna personally met with him many times, providing money and intelligence. (Roberts 105)

AQ and the ISI enjoyed a close relationship in the 1980s when Muslims from across the globe shared bases of operations in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

The tribal regions, governed strictly by Pashtun tribal codes, were considered a safe haven for militants, foreign fighters, and terrorists. Following the Afghan war, the U.S. essentially lost interest in the region, cutting ties with the Islamic militants who fought across the border and also losing influence over the large population of refugees created by the fighting. The refugee population was a virtual breeding ground for Islamic extremism, spearheaded by the ISI and its network of madrassas. "The Taliban (the word literally means 'students') were children of the Afghan refugees and poor Pathan families -educated in the madrassas in the 1980s" (Ali 136).

The same Taliban controlled and supported by the ISI harbored today's most wanted terrorist: Osama bin-Laden. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf observed:

We helped created [sic] the mujahedin, fired them with religious zeal in seminaries, armed them, paid them, fed them, and sent them to jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. We did not stop to think how we would divert them to productive life after the jihad was won. This mistake cost Afghanistan and Pakistan more dearly than any other country. Neither did the United States realize what a rich, educated person like Osama bin Laden might later do with the organization that we all had enabled him to establish. (Roberts 106)

Leading up to the attacks of September 11, the ISI had a working relationship with Osama bin-Laden and his militant network and had a supportive and controlling relationship with the Taliban, which was then firmly in control of Afghanistan. "In 1996, Osama bin Laden settled in Afghanistan. He met an ISI representative, who proposed an alliance between bin-Laden's network and the Taliban, which won the Afghan civil war in 1996, achieving ISI's aim of a sympathetic government in Kabul" (106). Following the Afghan war, the ISI directly sponsored, controlled, and orchestrated the Taliban's movement into Afghanistan. They brokered a relationship between al-Qaeda, Osama bin-Laden, and the Taliban and sponsored the terrorist state which had been established. "In 1997, the ISI asked Saudi intelligence for permission to

sponsor bin-Laden...only four short years before the deadliest terrorist attack the international community had ever experienced (106).

Aside from the strong influence and sponsorship of terrorism exemplified in Afghanistan, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda, the ISI has also focused a great deal of effort on fostering terrorist organizations in the Kashmir region. Kashmir sits at the top of Pakistan, bordering both India and China. All three nations dispute the territory as falling under their sovereign control. Historically, the region has been a catalyst for three wars and repeated military exchanges involving guerilla action, artillery fire, and high-altitude fighting.

The ISI has actively sought to enhance, finance, and promote terrorist organizations which serve to undermine the Indian influence in Kashmir. In 1990, ISI operated 30 training camps for Kashmiri militants. By 2002, there were 128 ISI-sponsored camps training militants to fight in Kashmir. Approximately, 1,000 members of Harakat-ul-Mujahideen [(HUM)], Jaish-e-Muhammad (JEM), and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) received training each year (107). The lessons learned by the ISI, including its strategy of low-intensity conflict in Afghanistan were applied in the Kashmiri campaign. The ISI served as Pakistan's liaison and training force for HUM, JEM, and LET, equipping and planning operations against Indian targets. Aside from attempting to seed Islamic extremism into the Kashmiri movement, the ISI also sought to pre-occupy Indian forces in Kashmir, limiting India's ability to utilize them elsewhere and undermining their control of the military (Weaver). The ISI enabled HUM, JEM, and LET, hard-line Islamic groups, to lead the terrorist action in Kashmir, and change the complexion of the struggle (Hussain 25).

Many of those Islamic groups expanded their terrorist operations outside of Kashmir and into neighboring India. In 2008, the city of Mumbai fell under siege at the hands of heavily-armed LET militants. Using assault rifles and explosives, a handful of LET terrorists killed almost 200 people on Indian soil. Indian officials implicated the ISI [for the attack]. India's foreign ministry said the ISI had links to the planners of the attacks, the banned militant group [LET], which New Delhi [blamed] for the assault (Bajoria 2009). The men were later found to be controlled by operators within Pakistan using cellular phones. While Pakistan has denied all of the Indian allegations that the ISI was involved, it is likely that the ISI's connection with LET remains strong, even following the attacks in Mumbai.

Outside of the Southwest Asian sphere of influence the ISI, has maintained an active influence over the operations of terrorist organizations and guerilla movements, most notably with the expansion of ISI operations and sponsorship overseas under the leadership of General Javid Nasir. A member of the proselytizing Tablighi Jamaat, Nasir had become a devout Muslim with a flowing white beard. And he had no intelligence background (Nawaz 452). After his appointment to lead the ISI, Nasir oversaw covert action across the international community.

The ISI's involvement was not limited to India, however. Under General Nasir's instructions, the ISI violated the UN embargo on supplying arms to the warring parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina and airlifted heavy weapons and missiles for the Bosnian Muslims. In 1993, several Arab countries, including Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, had complained about General Nasir extending support to radical Islamic movements in their countries. (Hussain 27)

After Zia's extremist indoctrination and Nasir's expansion of the ISI, the agency continued to expand its influence across borders and among terrorist organizations worldwide.

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The ISI's track record for sponsorship of terrorist organizations is extensive and stretched far beyond the conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The links it established to al-Qaeda and other global Islamic movements during the Soviet-Afghan war enabled its actions in other nation states. "At least two former ISI chiefs, General Hamid Gul and General Javid Nasir, remained actively involved with Islamic radical movements. Both promoted pan-Islamism and strove for an Islamic revolution that would free Pakistan from perceived western, and particularly American, cultural and political influences" (22). Those relationships and motivations within the ISI remain strong today and continue to threaten the stability and counter terrorist goals of the international community.

### **Both Sides of the Fence?**

The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the U.S. response in Afghanistan changed the nature of the game for Pakistan and the ISI. President George Bush enacted a policy of preemption, mandating the international community cooperate or stand in his way. In October 2001, the U.S. began conventional military strikes in Afghanistan. Before those air strikes began, the ISI and the state of Pakistan was presented a list of demands from the U.S. government, outlining their future role in the emerging global war on terrorism. Ultimately, Pakistan had little choice if it wished to remain in Washington's good graces and off of the list of state sponsors of terror. Pakistan agreed to the terms. However, since the attacks of September 11, the ISI has sought to undermine the U.S. relationship with Pakistan and remove the Pakistani state out from under Western control. Quite literally, the ISI has been playing both sides of the field: cooperating with the U.S. when convenient and beneficial for the agency, but continually supporting terrorist organizations and cross-border operations against North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Afghanistan.

In 2009, Admiral Michael Mullen, the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), traveled with CIA officers to Islamabad to present intelligence to ISI officers, linking them to militant groups in Afghanistan. Mullen was interviewed by PBS correspondent Martin Stewart and expressed his concerns over the ISI's links to terrorist organizations and militants. Rehman Malik, the Interior Minister of Pakistan, was asked the following:

Martin Smith: The Defense Intelligence Agency, the CIA, U.S. military and Afghan intelligence all points to ISI and Pakistani cooperation and support for segments of the Taliban. Are they all lying?

Rehman Malik: I think it's outdated intelligence. They must be talking of the past. We are cooperating. ("Frontline: Obama's War")

Many members of the Pakistani state, including top government officials are influenced by the ISI and maintain professional, yet clandestine, relationships with militant leaders in the tribal areas of Pakistan. These relationships are evident when examining the past record of Pakistani and ISI cooperation with CIA, FBI, and U.S. Special Forces in capture/kill operations, counter-terrorist operations, and investigative ventures within Pakistan.

In 2002 an investigative journalist for the Wall Street Journal named Daniel Pearl was abducted by Pakistani militants and brutally beheaded. Pearl was investigating the links between the ISI and terrorist organizations in Pakistan when he was abducted outside of Islamabad. "After one of his assassins surrendered to his ISI 'handler,' authorities waited a week before

notifying the United States, highlighting the ISI support for regional and Kashmiri militant groups. The incident called attention to the possible involvement of ISI, or its client JEM, in Pearl's abduction and murder, raising questions of [the Pakistani state's] control over ISIö (Roberts 109).

In 2006 Rashid Rauf was captured in Northwestern Pakistan on suspected ties to al-Qaeda and specifically a plot involving the bombing of multiple international airliners. Rauf was identified as a financier and logistical node for al-Qaeda operations. The CIA and British intelligence were eager to interrogate and extract intelligence from Rauf, who would have undoubtedly proven lucrative for information on al-Qaeda and future operations. However, before his trial and his likely extradition from Pakistan, Rauf escaped. öOn the way back to jail from a court hearing...his police drivers apparently stopped their van and visited McDonald's for a bite to eat, allowing Rauf to enter a mosque to pray. They never saw him againö (Moreton and Buncombe).

It is apparent that the ISI and Pakistan are willing to only cooperate with counter-terrorism operations superficially, only to appease the international community. There have been a number of successful operations to capture terrorists within Pakistan, and with Pakistani assistance. Yet none of these operations were triggered by actions on the part of the ISI or Pakistani military.

In March 2002, Abu Zubaydah, a senior al-Qaeda member, was captured in Faisalabad. Ramzi bin al-Shibh, a deputy leader of the task force that coordinated the September 11 attacks, was captured in Karachi in September 2002. And in March 2003, another task force leader, Kahlid Sheikh Mohammad, was picked up in Rawalpindi. Other prominent captures include those of communications expert Naeem Noor Khan, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani (linked to the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Africa), and Abu Farj al-Libi , believed to be the head of al-Qaeda operations in Pakistan. (Friedman and Bokhari 2005)

The involvement of the ISI in capturing terrorists within Pakistan is a front, motivated by the agency's resolve to appear cooperative in international counter-terrorism operations. After a decade-long manhunt for al-Qaeda leadership, largely living within Pakistan, the ISI and Pakistani state has little to show. This lack of success presents alarming questions and highlights the ISI's capability to operate on both sides of the fence:

How is it that al-Qaeda's mostly Arab leadership is able to evade detection in a country with very few Arabs? More important, how can a foreign non-state actor evade detection, when he is known to be in a certain region, with massive global search and destroy operations hunting him, unless he is granted succor and protection from some members of the local security and intelligence organizations [read: ISI] closest to the front? (Friedman and Bokhari 2005)

The international community is unable to rely on or trust the ISI to operate independently to track down terrorists or militants. The same militants and terrorist leaders the international community wishes to bring to justice are invited to drink tea with ISI officers. Given the track record of the ISI, and the agency's haphazard and selective participation in counter-terrorist operations, the international community must assume that the ISI is more of a hindrance than an ally.

### **The ISI and Pakistan's Nuclear Security**

The current war in Afghanistan has highlighted the challenges faced by the international community in containing Islamic extremism in Pakistan and stopping the proxy relationship between the Taliban and ISI. While succeeding in Afghanistan is critical for contemporary American foreign policy, the largest security threat lies in the export of Islamic extremism from Pakistan and the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. The ISI has proven it is willing and able to provide aid to terrorist organizations and orchestrate their actions abroad. Its shadowy network has penetrated all ranks of the Pakistani government and military. The presence of al-Qaeda and terrorist organizations within close proximity to potentially insecure Pakistani nuclear weapons presents the foremost threat of nuclear terrorism to the international community.

Little is known in open sources about Pakistan's nuclear [arsenal]. Current estimates suggest that Pakistan has approximately 60 nuclear weapons, stored in at least six locations throughout the country (Jagdish 206). Pakistan's security protocols surrounding its nuclear arsenal include separation of components, three-person review, cryptologic launch codes, and underground facilities (Pakistan Nuclear Weapons). Islamic extremists [or foreign terrorist organizations] desiring to steal a Pakistani nuclear weapon must have sufficient intelligence [and technical competence] to differentiate between storage sites that house shields and storage sites that house fissile cores (227). The security practices surrounding Pakistan's nuclear facilities demands that any successful terrorist attempt at acquiring a nuclear weapon would necessitate the cooperation and involvement of the ISI or senior level Pakistani officials.

The world was shaken at the discovery of Pakistan's founding scientist for nuclear technology Abdul Qadeer Khan's nuclear proliferation network, spanning from Libya to North Korea. Khan was the leading scientist for nuclear weapons and a top advisor and technical expert for the Pakistani state. Although there is no evidence suggesting that Khan sold nuclear technology to Islamic extremists, some authors note that Khan was able to bypass the weak Pakistani export controls with the full knowledge of the Pakistani government and operate a private-sector nuclear bazaar offering all the necessary equipment to create a nuclear device (235).

Following the discovery of A.Q. Khan's proliferation network, the Pakistani state is widely believed to have implemented further nuclear protection policies. Most notably is the establishment of a lengthy security clearance and investigation process for all individuals working in sensitive positions or in nuclear facilities. However, the Pakistani ISI remains vitally embedded in the clearance process. Clearance investigations are reportedly conducted by approximately 8,000 personnel from four agencies, including the [Strategic Planning Directorate], the ISI, the Intelligence Bureau, and Military Intelligence (233). The ISI undoubtedly has a presence in all three of the other agencies and intelligence divisions responsible for granting access to Pakistan's weapons.

Terrorist organizations with past links to ISI have already expressed interest in acquiring nuclear weapons, including Osama bin-Laden and his al-Qaeda network. Islamists seem to have become concentrated in two areas of senior Pakistani leadership, however, the ISI and...the Pakistani nuclear weapons program. The original emphasis on building an "Islamic bomb" and resentment against the US for sanctions against Pakistan's nuclear program (at a time when India's was more discreet, before the 1998 tests by both countries) may have helped draw

radicals into the nuclear program. Clearly that remains a cause for concern, as senior Pakistani scientists have been interrogated by the government over their visits to Afghanistan. (öThe Pakistani Conundrumö)

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists in 2009 stated:

In an effort to develop access to nuclear technologies, [al-Qaeda] tried, reportedly without success, to discreetly contact the rogue nuclear supplier network run by...A.Q. Khan. Al Qaeda had a bit more success consulting with another Pakistani 'WMD for hire' network called Ummah Tameer-e-Nau, which offered its services to bin-Laden before 9/11. (Mowatt-Larssen 65)

Scientists with access to the nuclear weapons program within Pakistan offered their expertise to bin-Laden before he demonstrated his capability to inflict massive casualties on the American homeland. The iconic status bin-Laden achieved following the 9/11 attacks coupled with the anti-American sentiment within the ISI and many regions of Pakistan is extremely concerning for the future threat of nuclear terrorism.

### **Unique Among State Sponsors**

Across the international system many state sponsors of terrorism exist and foster relationships of violence and extremism. All of these proxies and sponsors of terrorism represent dangers to the international community. Iran's support of Hamas is a well-known and established proxy relationship with a terrorist organization. Syria's support and control of Hezbollah is a further example of notable state sponsorship. However, in relation to the funding, capabilities, and elements of Islamic extremism in the Pakistani ISI, these examples are marginalized. A comparison of the nature, environment, and capabilities of each relationship establishes the ISI as the most dangerous sponsor of terrorism in the international system.

Iran is arguably the most active state sponsor of terrorism on the globe. It has consistently engaged in supporting insurgencies targeting Western forces in Iraq and has historically financed and operated proxy organizations targeting Israel. Specifically, the Iranian Quds Force, which is reminiscent of the Pakistani ISI but more focused on special operations, is a leader of sponsoring terrorist organizations throughout the Middle East. ö[A U.S. congressional report last year] said the Quds Force trained the Taliban on small unit tactics, small arms, explosives, and indirect fire weaponsö (Porter). öIran continues to top the list of state sponsors of terrorism, where it has been since 1984. The list is now down to four since the removal last year of North Korea. Iran is joined by Syria (added in 1979), Cuba (1982) and Sudan (1993). Designation carries sanctions, including bans on arms-related salesö (Goodenough).

While Iran may continue to be the most active sponsor of terrorism, the world has seen Pakistan evade the U.S. state sponsor of terrorism list and has allowed its ISI to clandestinely support the most dangerous terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda. The ISI evades this list of state sponsors because itö characterized as a non-state actor or a östate within a state.ö The number of terrorist attacks in each region exemplifies the increasing danger of ISI-supported groups within Pakistan. Between 2007 and 2008 terrorist incidents in Iraq fell from 6,210 attacks to 3,258. However, in those same years in Pakistan, terrorist incidents climbed by 890 incidents, from 1,340 to 2,239 (Goodenough). The same congressional report which outlined Iran as the most active sponsor of terrorism also alluded to the difference of threats posed by al-

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Qaeda to that of regional terror sponsors such as Iran. Al-Qaeda and related networks, while losing ground, continued to pose the greatest terrorist threat to the United States and its partners in 2008 (Goodenough). The ISI eludes the international list for state sponsors of terror, but actively grants refuge to the world's deadliest transnational terrorist threats in an unstable, mostly lawless region with close proximity to nuclear weapons.

The [above mentioned congressional] report said al-Qaeda and allies had moved into the remote areas of the Pakistani frontier, where they have used this terrain as a safe haven to hide, train terrorists, communicate with the followers, plot attacks and send fighters to support the insurgency in Afghanistan (Goodenough). Asif Ali Zardari, the current President of Pakistan turns a blind eye to a wide range of the ISI's action and sponsorship activities in the FATA. In many cases, Pakistan has been unable to penetrate the tribal regions of the Northwest Frontier Province. However, the ISI moves freely and provides security and cooperation to the Taliban, al-Qaeda, LET and other militant organizations. The growing influence of militant Islam, particularly in the strategically located North West Frontier Province and the western province of Balochistan is ominous. The militants, who fashion themselves on the legacy of Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime have already established rigid Islamic rule in the Waziristan tribal region (Hussain 190). While Iran finances and funds Hamas, the ISI supports and defends a figurative playground for al-Qaeda and Islamic extremists. The ISI represents a larger threat to the international community because of its ability to operate freely within Pakistan, Pakistan's nuclear capability, and the danger of those two paths converging.

### Future Engagement with the ISI

When interviewed about the relationship between the West and Pakistan and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, the bestselling author Steven Coll stated:

This could not be a more complicated war. If you think about it, the United States is essentially waging a war against its own ally. The Taliban are a proxy of the government of Pakistan [orchestrated by the ISI]. We are an ally of the government of Pakistan. We are fighting the Taliban. In the end, the Taliban will be defeated strategically when the government of Pakistan makes a strategic decision that its future does not lie in partnership with Islamic extremists. (2009)

Coll pinpoints the root of current and future problems in dealing with the ISI and their clandestine terrorist support networks. In 2009, the U.S. provided close to \$6.5 billion dollars in aid to the Pakistani government; \$300 million of that was dedicated to military spending (Mohammad). The West is figuratively caught between a rock and a hard place. It requires the assistance of Pakistan to successfully prosecute counter-terrorism campaigns in Southwest Asia. Yet, the ISI has infiltrated all ranks of Pakistan's military structure and leverages sympathizers and supporters throughout the Pakistani population. A large amount of that military aid is falling into the hands of the sponsors of the exact networks the West is attempting to defeat.

On February 16, 2010 the Taliban's second in command, Mullah Baradar, was captured in a raid conducted jointly by the ISI and the U.S. Western leaders hoped that this would be a catalyst for strengthening the cooperation between the ISI and Western intelligence agencies and serve as an indication that the ISI would begin dismissing its historical involvement with militants. However, after a close examination into the raid, the New York Times provided:

Relations between the intelligence services, [CIA and ISI], of the United States and Pakistan have long been marred by suspicions that Pakistan has sheltered the Afghan Taliban. The Pakistanis have long denied it. New details of the raid indicate that the arrest of the No. 2 Taliban leader was not necessarily the result of a new determination by Pakistan to go after the Taliban, or a bid to improve its strategic position in the region. Rather, it may be something more prosaic: "a lucky accident..." (Shane and Schmitt) Upon Baradar's capture, ISI officers delayed allowing U.S. intelligence officers to question him and were hesitant in sharing news and information about his detention with the Pakistani press (in fear of casting themselves in a pro-Western light).

The ISI will continue to act out of its own interest. It has grown in size from its inception and now forms a state within the Pakistani state. While it serves as an intelligence agency of the Pakistani government, the Pakistani government is largely unable to control its actions or relationships with terrorist organizations, both domestic and abroad. Ongoing operations to defeat extremists and terrorists places the ISI at a crossroads with Western intelligence agencies and irregular warfare personnel. Without a complete transformation of the ISI's motivations, allegiances, extremist slant, and structure, it will continue to exist as more of an enemy to the West than an ally.

## **Conclusion**

The historic actions of the ISI in sponsoring organizations like al-Qaeda, JEM, LET and HUM, as well as their utilization of the Taliban as a proxy for foreign policy, signals that the ISI is a significant state sponsor of terrorism. "Since Pakistan has terrorism, nuclear weapons, religious extremism, economic instability, and political volatility, easy [foreign policy] answers provide little guidance in a dangerous, fluid environment. If, due to ISI sins of omission or commission, terrorists acquire Pakistani nuclear weapons and there is a nuclear incident or nuclear war, the consequences will be unthinkable" (Roberts 109). These variables set the ISI's sponsorship apart from other international sponsors and make it definitively the most dangerous. A careful policy of continued engagement with the ISI and accountability of Western funding to Pakistan will be essential to secure future stability in the region.

The ISI will continue to be a clandestine sponsor of worldwide extremism and transnational terrorism. The fragile nature of Pakistani politics, the existence of deeply entrenched Islamic foundations, and insecurity surrounding the Pakistani nuclear arsenal make the ISI the foremost terrorist threat and non-state sponsor of terrorism in the international community. The ISI masquerades as a controllable tool of the Pakistani government while covertly supporting enemies of the international community — conclusively acting as a threat to international stability and as a fifth column within the Pakistani state.

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