

Mumbai Aftermath: U.S. Tilt Toward India Alienates Pakistan and Undermines War Prospects in Afghanistan [Updated]

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The rhetoric of the Global War on Terror appears to have lost its old magic.

In the aftermath of the horrendous Mumbai attacks, it seems there were just as many articles saying this *wasn't* Mumbai's 9/11 as there were efforts to raise the bloody flag of America's catastrophe over the carnage.

The most conspicuous example of 9/11 exhaustion is Pakistan.

According to the GWOT mythology, Pakistan experienced its galvanizing moment in the suicide bombing of the Islamabad Marriott Hotel in September 2008, and the people and government of Pakistan now stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's democracies to combat extremism.

However, after the initial shock of the Mumbai attack wore off in Pakistan—and the international narrative that the attackers were Pakistani coalesced—there was an immediate and emotional rejection of the idea that long-suffering Pakistan should be further destabilized under U.S. and Indian insistence that the miscreants be pursued inside Pakistan's borders.



The Taj Mahal Hotel in flames

A common theme in Pakistan's media is that the Mumbai attack was carried out by Hindu extremists, or even was a false flag operation carried out by India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) to provoke a conflict with Pakistan.

One commenter opined, Maybe this wasn't India's 9/11. Maybe it was India's Oklahoma City.

That's very bad news for the United States and its covert struggle inside Pakistan against government and public apathy concerning the Western struggle to stabilize Afghanistan, and to neutralize pro-Taliban and pro-al Qaeda elements in the notorious Inter Services Intelligence directorate (ISI).

Pakistan's Zardari government, which is eager to please the United States, is nervously playing word games about cooperating with India as the United States demands, while dragging its feet in order to keep in step with its domestic constituency.

The Grand Bargain and the U.S. Dilemma

The U.S. is fully aware of the fragility of the Zardari government, and popular resistance to U.S. aims in the region, and is trying to tread carefully, eschewing the rhetoric of the war on terror.

That approach is necessary because inside Pakistan the war on terror is irretrievably linked to the United States, its failed strategy, its dubious objectives...and Islamabad's coerced participation in a U.S.-orchestrated military, political, economic, and security drama that threatens to rip Pakistan apart.

The result is skewed narratives, distorted policies, an unavoidable but counter-productive American reliance on arm-twisting instead of persuasion, and a visceral Pakistan opposition to U.S. policies that is reaching the point of desperate revulsion.

And, triumphant Democrats be warned, it doesn't look like things will improve in an Obama administration.

The Mumbai attacks have revealed fissures and conflicting alliances across Asia, provided new headaches for the United States, and are an ill augury for the "Grand Bargain" that experts hoped would replace the America's faltering military strategy for Afghanistan.

The "Grand Bargain" as formulated by Professor Barnett Rubin and journalist Ahmed Rashid and purportedly embraced by General David Petraeus, is meant to rescue the situation in Afghanistan by re-establishing the relations of the key South Asian stakeholders on the basis of cooperation and enlightened self-interest.

It is hoped that the U.S. would broker a genuine rapprochement between India and Pakistan, sealed by a deal over Kashmir. Pakistan's civilian democracy would thereby be strengthened vis a vis the military and conservatives and, in its turn, make sincere efforts to crush al Qaeda and refractory Taliban elements in eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan. Chastened moderate Taliban would be welcomed into the Afghan government in a spirit of reconciliation, The Afghan government, possibly with U.S. diplomat (and Afghan-born) Zalmay Khalilzad as its new president, and assisted by the democracies of Pakistan and India, would become a bulwark of stability in the region.

However, the aftermath of the Mumbai attack reveals that the ambitious goals for this vigorous exercise in multilateralism are probably unattainable. The problems are too big—and the abilities of the United States and its international allies to project virtuous power into the region too small—to prevent violence from driving the outcome.

The horror perpetrated in Mumbai might be the work of al Qaeda, Kashmir separatists, some previously unknown Islamic extremist group indigenous to India, or an obscenity committed by Indian gangsters or Hindu ultra-nationalists.

Pakistan and the Mumbai Attacks

But to me it appears to be blowback from the U.S. campaign to rein in Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) apparatus and orchestrate an anti-Taliban/anti-al Qaeda united front of democracies stretching from

Kabul to Islamabad to New Delhi.

If the Mumbai massacres were organized or condoned by the ISI as a provocation, I suppose we could say “mission accomplished”.

The fundamental hostility between India and Pakistan has been strengthened, the inability of the PPP government to back up its U.S.-mandated good wishes toward India with meaningful action has been exposed, and the willingness of the ISI to meet challenges to its power with brutal violence has been revealed.

And by targeting Americans, Britons, and Jews, the attack was overtly linked, not to the never-ending squabble between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, but to the U.S.-led security policy for Afghanistan and South Asia

According to Pakistan’s [The News](#), the Taliban in western Pakistan responded to the heightened tensions with India with a suspiciously prompt and unanimous offer (met with a suspiciously prompt and positive response from the Pakistani military) to cease operations so that Pakistan’s army could shift its resources to the east:

All main militant groups fighting in Fata [Federally Administered Tribal Areas], from South Waziristan to Bajaur and from Mohmand to the Khyber Agency, have contacted the government through different sources after the Mumbai bombings and have offered a ceasefire if the Pakistan Army also stops its operations.

And as a positive sign that this ceasefire offer may be accepted, the Pakistan Army has, as a first step, declared before the media some notorious militant commanders, including Baitullah Mehsud and Maulvi Fazlullah, as

“patriotic” Pakistanis.

These two militant commanders are fighting the Army for the last four years and have invariably been accused of terrorism against Pakistan but the aftermath of the Mumbai carnage has suddenly turned terrorists into patriots.

A top security official told a group of senior journalists on Saturday: “We have no big issues with the militants in Fata. We have only some misunderstandings with Baitullah Mehsud and Fazlullah. These misunderstandings could be removed through dialogue.”

Pakistan’s normally fractious [media](#) has also circled the wagons on the nation’s behalf in denigrating the Indian allegations, earning rare praise from the military:

The change in the attitude of the Pakistani military establishment is remarkable. Thanks to India, the security officials, who used to criticise the Pakistani media, are now praising its role in the recent days, saying: “You have proven that you are patriotic Pakistanis.”

Last year, the same officials were part of a decision to impose a ban on many Pakistani TV channels because of their alleged anti-state behaviour. Meanwhile, Army Chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has made it clear to President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani that if India escalates tensions, then Pakistan has to move its troops from the tribal areas to the eastern borders and it would not be possible to continue

the war against terrorism.

Top military officials conveyed the same message to the media representatives on Saturday.

Even if the Mumbai attack was not choreographed by elements within the ISI to generate a confrontation with India and give Pakistani elite and popular opinion an excuse to back out of the bloody and unpopular campaign it is pursuing at America's behest in FATA, the result appears to be the same.

As The News reported:

The Indian allegations against Pakistan have suddenly forced the military establishment in Pakistan to finally accept that they are not fighting an American war inside the Pakistani territory.

On another level, the parliamentary leader of the 12 Fata members in the National Assembly, Munir Orakzai, has expressed optimism in this regard, saying: "I see a bright ray of peace in the tribal areas and if we come out of the American pressure, I can guarantee that there will be peace in the tribal areas in a few days and we will be ready to fight against India on the eastern border along with the Pakistan Army."

Any proven involvement by Pakistani state institutions in the Mumbai attack would be a calamity for Pakistan-India relations and, by extension, America's strategy for South Asia.



Ceremonial changing of the Pakistani guard at the Wagah India-Pakistan Border

It would provoke the immediate shift of Pakistan's military focus and resources away from a conflict it detests—the U.S. imposed counterinsurgency in west Pakistan's Frontier and Tribal Areas (FATA)—to an arrangement much more comfortable for Pakistan's army: the familiar display of ritualized hostility and the deployment of a conventional order of battle on the eastern border with India.

A U.S., Pakistan, Indian Consensus?

Therefore, despite some hard-to-explain anomalies, there is a determined effort by the United States, with the obliging assistance of the media, the approval of the Pakistani government, and, it appears now, the grudging acquiescence of the Indian government to squeeze the Mumbai attack into a conventional South Asian narrative: a brutal episode in the struggle over Kashmir, with militants of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) Kashmir independence organization perpetrating the latest outrage.

Indeed, LeT's fingerprints are apparently all over the operation. The single captured terrorist, Ajmal Amin Kamal, has been identified as a Pakistani citizen and LeT fidayeen. A satellite phone that had made calls to the LeT operations chief was allegedly recovered. According to details of [Kamal's testimony](#) leaked to Indian media, he was

trained and indoctrinated in LeT camps.

However, analysts are undoubtedly wondering why the LeT attackers, while slaughtering almost 200 random Indian victims, ostentatiously targeted Americans, Britons, and Jews.

And they are wondering why the attackers made no mention of Kashmir.

The e-mail taking responsibility for the attack, ostensibly from a previously unknown group, the Deccan Mujahideen, and a cell phone conversation between an attacker and Indian media during the incident both couched the incident in terms of the Hindu-Muslim relationship inside India proper: the alleged mistreatment of the head of a radical Islamic group, the [Students Islamic Movement of India](#), one Abul Bashir Qasmi, by the Indian police; the provocative destruction of a mosque, Babri Masjid, by Hindu nationalists; and the plight of “mujahideen” languishing in Indian prisons.

The Deccan Plateau is, perhaps conveniently, at exactly the other end of India from Kashmir.

A possible answer to these puzzling questions goes well beyond Kashmir and has disturbing implications for U.S. policy in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The Logic and Precision of the Attack

The Mumbai operation was carefully planned over an extended period—perhaps a year—apparently in Pakistan.

Targets were carefully scouted ahead of time—the owner of the Taj Mahal Palace hotel said the attackers knew the layout of the hotel, its kitchens, and service areas better than the Indian commandoes—and apartments and rooms were rented ahead of time.

The circumstances of the alleged transit from Pakistan’s main port of Karachi to Mumbai

indicate a chilling level of planning, resources, capability, ruthlessness, and a professional fighter’s talent for improvisation.

From [The Hindu](#):

Based on the continuing interrogation of arrested Lashkar terrorist Ajmal Amir Kamal, investigators believe the 12 terrorists who left Karachi on a merchant ship hijacked a fishing boat to facilitate their final assault on Mumbai.

According to Kamal, the group hijacked the Porbandar-registered Kuber to avoid detection by Indian Navy and Coast Guard patrols, which had a considerable presence in off Mumbai.

While one group of terrorists used the hijacked boat to land at Sassoon Docks on the eastern coast of Mumbai, a second group used a fibreglass lifeboat to row west to the Cuffe Parade fisherman’s colony.

Before leaving the fishing boat, the terrorists beheaded its captain, who Gujarat authorities have identified as Balwant Tandel, from Una village in the Union Territory of Diu. There is no word on the fate of the remaining crew of five.

To recap: the terrorists had an entire merchant ship at their disposal, as well as an arsenal of weapons. Their complex plan to evade detection by the Indian military involved locating and hijacking a suitable vessel. They got their vessel, executed the hapless captain (and apparently his crew), and continued on their mission.

Further reports indicate that the attackers left timed explosive charges in the two taxis they took to reach their targets, in order to kill the drivers and further cover their tracks.

The subsequent assault culminated in near simultaneous attacks on multiple targets and a protracted siege at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel where the attackers held off Indian commandoes for sixty hours.

LeT or ISI?

Efforts to paint the attack as a free-standing LeT initiative are less than convincing.

The [New York Times](#) dutifully reported the spin provided by “U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism officials” concerning the Kashmir angle, while admitting that the targets of the Mumbai attack—Americans, Britons, and Jews—don’t quite fit with the supposed objective of advancing TeL’s military and political objectives in Kashmir:

Lashkar-e-Taiba is not known to have singled out Westerners in past terrorist attacks, as the gunmen in Mumbai seem to have done. But one counterterrorism official said Friday that the group “has not pursued an exclusively Kashmiri agenda” and that it might certainly go after Westerners to advance broader goals.

As to how LeT could cobble together a boat hijacking and a commando-style amphibious operation:

An American counterterrorism official said there was strong evidence that Lashkar-e-Taiba had a “maritime capability” and would have been able to mount the sophisticated operation in Mumbai.

Kashmir is, as that counterterrorism official is undoubtedly aware, landlocked.

No wonder that people are thinking that al Qaeda or Pakistan’s ISI are the only two organizations that could have carried out such a massive, well-planned assault.

Clearly, the elephant in the room is Pakistan’s ISI, which has nurtured, protected, and exploited LeT as a proxy in its struggle with India, primarily in Kashmir.

Asia Times’ veteran South Asia reporter and analyst, Syed Saleem Shahzad, has presented a [highly circumstantial account](#) of the background of the Mumbai attack, including a narrative of al Qaeda Bangladesh hijacking plans for an ISI-organized, LeT-executed outrage in Kashmir and transplanting it to Mumbai:

Zakiur [LeT’s Commander in chief] and the ISI’s forward section in Karachi, completely disconnected from the top brass, approved the plan under which more than 10 men took Mumbai hostage for nearly three days and successfully established a reign of terror.

However, one can be forgiven if one wonders if the narrative presented is possibly a self-serving attempt by the ISI to shirk responsibility for an attack organized not only under its nose but by its own officers and shift responsibility for the incident that has aroused global outrage to the broad shoulders of al Qaeda.

Historically, the ISI has not only had its own agenda; it’s also had its own political strategy and foreign policy and the tools with which to carry them out.

Domestically, its political section cobbled

together a ruling coalition of conservative parties in the 1980s and has been routinely accused of injecting itself into Pakistan's rare general elections to promote and even select suitable candidates. Internationally, the ISI nurtured the Taliban in Afghanistan and LeT in Kashmir as suitable allies and proxies for Pakistan's interests.

By its own bloody standards, the ISI has ample justification for intervening in the plans for a Pakistan-India rapprochement and redoubled Pakistani efforts against the Taliban and al Qaeda on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

The ISI must be especially unhappy that the United States has abandoned any pretense of even-handedness in the Pakistan-India relationship.

The U.S. Tilt Toward India

Washington has overtly tilted toward New Delhi. An eyebrow-raising nuclear giveaway negotiated bilaterally between the U.S. and India allowed India to normalize its relationship with the international nuclear and non-proliferation community even while the Bush administration denied the same option to Pakistan.

Even more dangerously, the United States has chosen to allow India to establish itself in Afghanistan—Pakistan's only regional geopolitical asset and ally, at least when it was controlled by the Taliban—at Pakistan's expense, thereby coupling a long-term American presence and the fate of the Karzai regime with New Delhi's continued influence inside Afghanistan.

Now that the battle in eastern Afghanistan has become desperate and Taliban have been exploiting their safe havens in Pakistan's tribal areas, the U.S. has been pulling all the political, military, and economic levers at its command in order to compel Pakistan's active and effective cooperation in the struggle, and

to force Islamabad to accept a security condominium in South Asia by which the U.S. is the dominant power, India its ally, and Pakistan a disrespected client of dubious loyalty and reliability.

A wake-up call for Pakistan was undoubtedly the American response to the suicide bombing of India's embassy in Kabul in July 2008.

Rather than tacitly understanding Pakistan's right to punish Indian meddling in its Afghan/Muslim back yard, or just shrugging its shoulders at yet another episode in the brutal South Asian dance of death between New Delhi and Islamabad, the United States came down openly and unequivocally on India's side, dispatching a CIA official to confront Pakistan over the matter and, significantly, leaking the news of intelligence linking the ISI to the attack to the New York Times.

With the fall of Musharraf, the U.S. disenchantment with Pakistan appears to have intensified.

When Musharraf was forced from office despite concerted U.S. measures to prolong his reign, the United States lost a relatively capable ally with strong links to his country's military and intelligence services. Instead, it now finds itself forced to work through a willing but undeniably feckless and unpopular civilian government led by Benazir Bhutto's widower, Asif Zardari.

Recognizing Zardari's weakness, the United States has apparently made the decision to insert itself more directly into Pakistan's internal affairs.

Pakistan's sovereignty has been eroded by the United States to a degree that is not generally appreciated in the U.S.

It's not just the U.S. military incursions into Pakistan, and the drone attacks that have recently spread beyond the tribal regions to

take out Taliban and al-Qaeda elements in the North West Frontier Province.

It also involves the United States asserting more and more overt direction of events inside Pakistan in order to compensate for Pakistan's manifest lack of enthusiasm for a polarizing and high-stakes battle against the Taliban in Pakistan's west.

It is difficult to look at the public humiliation that the United States has subjected Pakistan to on the issue of an IMF loan without wondering if it is part of a plan to bring the civilian government to heel.

When energy and food price bubbles, the global recession, and gross government mismanagement and inaction pushed Pakistan to the brink of defaulting on its foreign debt in November 2008, the United States forced Pakistan into the arms of the IMF—considered inside Pakistan a symbol of national humiliation that compromises its status as a proud regional power.

Indeed, in an event that is either the sign of the ever-increasing militarization of U.S. foreign policy or a signal that international aid to Pakistan must conform to America's security strategy—or both—none other than the head of the U.S. Central Command, General Petraeus, discussed [Pakistan's needs](#) at the IMF annual meeting.

The IMF conditions for its \$7.6 billion loan, including a slate of price and tax increases in a severe recessionary environment seem certain to exacerbate the crisis and force Pakistan's government to become even more dependent on the so-called "Friends of Pakistan", the group of nations that the U.S. has corralled to control the flow of further international assistance to Pakistan.

Since Zardari's backing from the army is almost non-existent, the U.S. has apparently also taken military matters into its own hands,

coordinating its anti-Taliban strategy—and delivering its demands for actionable intelligence—in direct meetings with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff Ashfaq Kayani, most memorably summoning the general to a meeting on board the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln with Admiral Mullen and General Petraeus in August of this year.

As Syed Saleem Shahzad pointed out in a recent article in *Asia Times*, a U.S. decision to bypass the Foreign Ministry and brief Pakistani legislators directly raised some eyebrows:

Last week [mid November 2008—ed], the NATO commander in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, visited Islamabad to brief parliamentarians, but several of them, including those of the dominant Pakistan People's Party and Federal Minister Raza Rabbani, refused to attend.

They called the meeting a serious breach of Pakistan's sovereignty as no military official of another country is supposed to approach parliamentarians without the Foreign Office's mediation.

Pakistan's ISI and the Military

The riskiest element of the U.S. strategy is an effort to rein in the notoriously independent and pro-Taliban ISI. Taliban sympathizers inside and outside the ISI have presented roadblocks to U.S. efforts to pursue Taliban insurgents and al-Qaeda assets aggressively, and the United States has been looking for ways to bring the refractory intelligence service to heel.

The Zardari government is apparently not up to the task. Prior to his state visit to the United States in August—during which he received a

pointedly-leaked “charge sheet” from a deputy director of the CIA describing ISI—Taliban links—Pakistan Prime Minister Gilani proudly announced that the ISI would henceforth report to the civilian cabinet.

It was an assertion that he was forced to retract in the most humiliating and public matter imaginable within 24 hours.

As [Shahzad reports](#), reining in the ISI and its supporters is a consistent U.S. objective:

High-level meetings between US intelligence and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) have already been held at different levels to devise plans to cripple the support systems of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan.

Two prominent names came under discussion at these meetings: retired Lieutenant-General Hamid Gul and a former ISI official, retired Squadron Leader Khalid Khawaja.

Gul, a former head of the ISI, is suspected of providing political and moral support to the Taliban-led resistance in Afghanistan. Last year, former premier Benazir Bhutto named him as a suspect for the October 18 attack on her life in Karachi. She was subsequently assassinated in December.

Khawaja was the first person in the country to assist the displaced families of Arab fighters who fled to Pakistan after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. He fought their cases in court, arranged temporary housing for them and assisted them in departing to their countries. Khawaja is active in the

cause of missing people (those detained without trial for years) and wants to register cases against the former chief of army staff and president, General Pervez Musharraf, and his military aides for abuses allegedly committed during their eight years in power.

Tightening the noose around people such as Gul and Khawaja and the like is one way to cut off support for the Taliban.

The battle has begun in earnest in preparation for next year's showdown



Hamid Gul

The ISI, Afghanistan and the Taliban

Maybe the showdown over the ISI’s more-than-tacit support for the Taliban began a little earlier than expected—in November 2008 in Mumbai.

[Hamid Gul](#), the ISI advocate mentioned in Shahzad’s article, is a genuine hard case.

Gul headed the ISI from 1987 to 1989, during the height of the mujihadeen insurgency against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. He has spent 20 years organizing insurgencies and terrorism in Afghanistan and Kashmir. He conceived and executed the ISI's successful campaign to organize a right wing Islamacist party to oppose the PPP in the 1980s. In a letter written in late 2007, Benazir Bhutto named him as one of the three likely organizers of her anticipated assassination. He's violently anti-Indian and the architect of the Kashmir insurgency. In the aftermath of America's abandonment of Afghanistan in 1989 and U.S. sanctions on Pakistan's nuclear program, he's passionately anti-American, turning against Musharraf when he became, in Gul's view, too accommodating to the United States' Global War on Terror demands.

In retirement, Gul speaks for a powerful conservative political and military constituency that values Pakistani independence, a hard line against India, and disdain for the anti-Taliban policies the United States is pushing on the PPP civilian government.

Unfortunately, the strength of the ISI is more than an object lesson of the hazards of battling a ruthless, extra-legal elite at the heart of the Pakistani state.

Gul's off-the-wall views probably resonate more with Pakistani public opinion than the pro-U.S./India-accommodating policies of the Zardari government.

U.S. Attacks on the Taliban in Pakistan

The United States, presumably in an attempt to weaken the Taliban and improve the U.S. negotiating position, has gotten aggressive about going after Taliban and al Qaeda safe havens in western Pakistan.

That may prove to have been the costliest strategic blunder in a decade that has seen more than its share of American mis-steps.

The anti-Taliban campaign has never been popular inside Pakistan. Neither is the anti-Taliban Karzai government. The Pakistani Taliban responded to U.S. attacks by retaliating against foreign and government targets inside Pakistan, most conspicuously in the [suicide bombing](#) of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad on September 20, 2008.

Instead of providing a rallying cry for muscular moderates determined to defend Pakistan's democracy and face down extremists, the attacks seem to have achieved their purpose—reminding the Pakistan public how much they detest both the U.S. campaign in South Asia and its blowback.

The Pakistani public dislikes the U.S. led military incursions and drone attacks targeting insurgent havens in the Pashtun areas of western Pakistan, and many resent America's insistence that the Pakistan army mount destabilizing counter-insurgency operations in support. This is especially true when they consider that all this humiliation, suffering, and danger is in the service of a U.S. cause—victory in Afghanistan—that the United States itself seems to have abandoned in favor of a negotiated settlement involving Taliban elements.

In reviewing its South Asia policy—and trying to keep the fragile rapprochement of the Indian and Pakistan governments from shattering into a million bloody pieces in the aftermath of the Mumbai attack--the Bush administration may be acquiring a belated understanding of how failure in Afghanistan, its overt pro-India tilt, and heavy-handed approach toward Pakistan have combined to create an atmosphere inside Pakistan charged with bad things: feelings of persecution, humiliation, encirclement, and peril.

With this strong undercurrent of public anger, it does not appear that anyone—inside or outside of Pakistan—can treat the ISI or Hamid Gul lightly.

The equivocal and delicate position of the ISI—and a popular Pakistani hostility toward India and, by extension, the United States that goes well beyond “ambivalent”—was strikingly demonstrated even before the Mumbai siege had ended.

India-Pakistan Clash Over Mumbai and the ISI

On November 28, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked his Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani to dispatch the Director General of ISI, one Lieutenant General Shuja Pasha, to India to receive Indian findings concerning the TeL links of the attackers and “share information”.



ISI head Maj. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha (right) with Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen (left) in an August 27, 2008 meeting.

Gilani agreed.

This request does not seem unreasonable, given that Pakistani citizens had apparently turned the center of India’s greatest city into a three-day abattoir. Nevertheless, the request—ineluctably morphing into an intolerable “Indian demand” in Pakistani news reports—ignited a political firestorm inside Pakistan. The dominant civilian party in opposition, Nawaz Sharif’s PML-N, questioned the government’s decision to send the DG. Islamicist parties lambasted the idea.

Even Gilani’s own cabinet **piled on**, in the process displaying its exasperation that India was getting a chance to play the victim card even as Pakistan was in danger of coming apart at the seams:

On the domestic level, thanks to the uncalled for Indian allegations, some ministers of the Yousuf Raza Gilani cabinet got an opportunity to criticise their prime minister on his face for giving an assurance to India that the ISI chief will go to New Delhi without consulting even his cabinet colleagues.

Angry ministers told Gilani clearly in Saturday’s cabinet meeting that his decision was not good and he should concentrate on “institutionalised decision-making” rather than going for solo flights in the future. Gilani was forced to change his decision. The cabinet, after discussing the Mumbai carnage and the Indian allegations in detail, also advised the prime minister that no ISI official should be sent to India in the near future.

It was discussed in the meeting as to why the militants made a ridiculous demand of liberating the Hyderabad Deccan (Andhra Pradesh). This issue was never raised by any hardline Muslim militant in India or Pakistan in the past. Why did they not demand the liberation of Kashmir, which was the prime objective of banned Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan?

The Indian government claimed that these militants reached Gujarat from Karachi by boat through a 500-km sea route. Why

did the Indian Navy fail to stop this boat? The cabinet unanimously agreed that Pakistan will not come under any Indian pressure but efforts will also be made to decrease tensions without annoying the public opinion.

One minister was of the view that the Indian media war against Pakistan had helped Islamabad indirectly as the local media ignored all the domestic political issues and got involved in the tension created by India.

And who was there to throw another anvil the government's way? None other than [Hamid Gul](#).

"Former military dictator Pervez Musharraf had bowed down to the US immediately after 9/11 and had let the nation down and now the sitting rulers have humiliated the nation by bowing down to India," said Lt-Gen (retd) Hamid Gul, former chief of ISI, while commenting on the development.

"We are losing our position. The decision of sending the ISI director-general to India should have been taken through diplomatic channels," he added.

Saying the preliminary information suggested that "some elements" in Pakistan were responsible for the terror strikes in Mumbai, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Friday asked his Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani to send ISI chief to Delhi to share information on Mumbai terror attacks.

...

The former top spymaster of the country said India should not have demanded Pakistan to send the ISI chief to New Delhi. He said had Pakistan needed help of the Indian intelligence chief, they would have never allowed it.

"It seems there is no authority in Pakistan. It is not information-sharing but in fact an interrogation of the ISI chief and the United States is doing this behind the scenes," he said. "Washington wants India and Pakistan to wage its so-called war on terror," he remarked.

Lt-Gen (retd) Hamid Gul said in view of his experience as top spymaster of the country, he could say confidently that it (the Mumbai attacks) is an inside job to pressurise Pakistan. "The summoning of the ISI chief is a pretext that is part of the greater objective of getting the ISI dissolved," Hamid Gul said. "It is a credible institution of Pakistan and sentiments of the Pakistani nation are being hurt by making a mockery of this institution," he said.

The former ISI chief said he would also raise the issue in the next meeting of the Pakistan Ex-Servicemen Society because the rulers could not be allowed to play around with an institution like the ISI.

Gul used the Pakistan Ex-Servicemen Society as a platform in his campaign to bring down

Pervez Musharraf, a fact of which Asif Zardari is certainly uncomfortably aware.

After the Pakistan government backed down on the issue of dispatching the ISI DG, there was a further flurry of activity seemingly designed to incrementally heighten tensions with India—and reassure the army and the ISI that the civilian government wouldn’t sell them down the river for the sake of relations with India and America’s military needs.

The actions were perhaps a demonstration that Pakistan’s government would be willing to respond with prompt—and popular—escalation to any Indian efforts to threaten Pakistani sovereignty, prerogatives, or elites with an investigation that strayed too far from the comfortable assumption that the attackers were non-state LeT actors who happened to be Pakistani.

First, there was a bizarre kaffuffle over an allegedly threatening call from India’s Foreign Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, to President Zardari, demanding action on the anti-terrorist agenda “within 48 hours”. Secretary Rice tried to defuse the situation by passing the message to Pakistan that the phone call was a hoax.



Manmohan and Zardari

However, Minister of Information Sherry Lehman, the Benazir Bhutto lookalike who is the guardian of Zardari’s political fortunes and the relationship with the United States, refused to let the matter rest, declaring that caller-ID technology revealed that the offending call had indeed originated in India’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provoking an exasperated [denial](#) in turn from Mukherjee.

Then Pakistan’s High Commissioner in Britain, Wajid Shams-ul-Hasan, [pitched in](#) with the unhelpful comment that an Indian offensive against Pakistan targets was “likely”.

The most interesting and revealing element of Pakistan’s campaign of what one might characterize as provocative resistance has been l’affaire Hamid Gul.

The U.S. Into the Breach

Over the weekend of December 6-7, 2008, the

Pakistan media was electrified by the news that the United States was presenting Hamid Gul's name, along with four others, to the UN Security Council for sanctions as an international terrorist...or that the United States was demanding that Gul be arrested and sent to India.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi, rushed to condole with Gul and promised—in the inimitably squishy manner of the Zardari government—to “look into it”.

Interestingly, the only sourcing for the report of this astonishing and seemingly ill-timed escalation of pressure on Pakistan by the United States and India came from inside Pakistan.

Gul himself made the most of the rumored action, painting himself and Pakistan as the injured party, framing the incident as proof of the Indo-Israeli-American conspiracy against Pakistan and, in the process wrapping himself and his agenda in the Pakistani flag while clutching the Koran and straddling the ultimate symbol of pride and power—Pakistan's atomic bomb.

Certainly, the U.S. has daggers drawn for Hamid Gul, and a [charge sheet](#) against him reported by the Pakistani media sounds genuine.

However, it's doubtful that the charge sheet is a recent development. The assumption that the U.S. government would raise the Hamid Gul matter with Pakistan—or take the inflammatory step of forwarding his name to the U.N. for inclusion on the terror list—in the aftermath of the Mumbai attack is open to question.

In addressing the [allegations](#), Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani said the U.S. made an abortive move to put Gul's name on the U.N. Terror list “soon after our government was formed”—which would have been over six months ago.

When contacted by The News —one-stop shopping for all the reporting on the Gul sensation—the [U.S. State Department](#) basically said that Gul's name had not been sent to the U.N.:

In Washington, the State Department's Deputy Spokesman Robert Wood had declined to comment on earlier reports that such a list had been sent to the UN. “If we decide to send names, we will let the media know,” he responded to a question on the subject on Thursday.

Well, what about the report that, among other things, India and the United States wanted Gul arrested within 48 hours?

That made it to the Washington Post.

But the sourcing?

*Pakistan has agreed to a 48-hour timetable set by India and the United States to formulate a plan to take action against Lashkar and to arrest at least three Pakistanis who Indian authorities say are linked to the assaults, **according to a high-ranking Pakistani official**. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of diplomatic sensitivities, said India has also asked Pakistan to arrest and hand over Lashkar commander Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhwi and former ISI director Hamid Gul in connection with the investigation. [emphasis added]*

This allegation was promptly [denied](#) by Secretary Rice and the Pakistan government.

Nevertheless, the WaPo report occasioned another [outburst](#) of vintage Gulism:

"It is nonsense, it is disinformation because (Secretary of State) Condoleezza Rice and America want my name to be included," [Gul] told a private Indian channel over phone from Rawalpindi.

...

Citing a top unnamed Pakistani official, the Post said among the people India asked Islamabad to arrest and hand over is the former ISI Director Gul.

"They (the US) don't like this loud voice in which I condemn them, their aggression, their oppression, their invasion over Afghanistan and lies in Iraq. I expose them, their 9/11 was a fraud, it was an inside job," he told NDTV.

"I want to say to the Indian public and the Indian leadership please don't fall into their trap, look at what they have done to us, they are deceitful and they will use you for their own purpose," he said.

Indian and Pakistani Maneuvers

In the December 8 New York Times, in a well-written (and presumably ghost-written) op-ed entitled, [The Terrorists Want to Destroy Pakistan, Too](#), President Zardari adroitly reframed the issue away from Pakistani culpability and managed to make the terrorist attacks by Pakistanis that turned the center of India's financial capital into a war zone all about the suffering of Pakistan...and Asif Zardari.

With his trademark solipsism, Zardari related

the Mumbai outrage to his own travails (while subtly pointing out that attacks that kill and injure hundreds inside Pakistan somehow just become mere blips on the international radar, while similar attacks on India turn into global cause célèbres):

THE recent death and destruction in Mumbai, India, brought to my mind the death and destruction in Karachi on Oct. 18, 2007, when terrorists attacked a festive homecoming rally for my wife, Benazir Bhutto. Nearly 150 Pakistanis were killed and more than 450 were injured. The terrorist attacks in Mumbai may be a news story for most of the world. For me it is a painful reality of shared experience. Having seen my wife escape death by a hairbreadth on that day in Karachi, I lost her in a second, unfortunately successful, attempt two months later.

...

Pakistan is shocked at the terrorist attacks in Mumbai. We can identify with India's pain. I am especially empathetic. I feel this pain every time I look into the eyes of my children.

Pakistan's mulish insistence on playing the victim card appears to have [resigned](#) the United States to lowering the bar for an acceptable Pakistani response to rather a low level:

United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said that there is evidence of involvement "somehow" on Pakistan soil in the

Mumbai terror attacks and pressed Islamabad to act quickly to arrest suspects to ensure there is no “follow-on attacks.”

Rice’s statement suggests that the U.S. has given up hopes of a genuinely muscular response by the Zardari government to dismantle Pakistan’s terrorist infrastructure and neutralize its sponsors within the government.

No further attacks and a few cosmetic arrests may be enough to close the books, at least publicly, on Mumbai.

The recent [raid](#) on a LeT camp in Kashmir, the arrest by Pakistan of LeT commander Zakiur Rehman Lakhwi (whose potential extradition to India will undoubtedly serve as a valuable pawn in the negotiations with India), and a promised conciliatory message from the Zardari government to be delivered by Pakistan’s High Commissioner to India in a few days may suffice.

The “non-state actor” narrative now appears to be sufficiently entrenched that India will confine itself to [insisting](#) that the LeT itself and its nominally independent political wing, Jamaat-ud-Daawa (or JuD) be taken out.

Since the ISI apparently anticipates and even predicates its strategy upon the eventual sacrifice of its extremist pawns in the never-ending struggle with India, it will presumably acquiesce to the sacrifice of significant LeT and JuD elements.

So Secretary Rice can breathe easier that Pakistan has not been quite able to upset America’s rickety apple cart in South Asia for the time being.

However, if the contagion of violence hasn’t quite spread to India yet, the lackluster measures of the United States and the Zardari

government will allow it to fester inside Pakistan and perhaps encourage the ISI to take another crack at destroying Pakistani-Indian rapprochement through another bloody outrage.

And the Indians may decide that the demonstrably meager benefits of forbearance are insufficient to deter them from retaliating next time.

That there will be a “next time” is a distinct possibility as the one surviving LeT attacker apparently [told his interrogators](#) the Mumbai squad comprised only ten of the thirty LeT fedayin who received the same intensive training to mount sustained assaults on Indian targets.

If another outrage occurs, India may disregard American calls for restraint and independently demand U.N. sanctions against the ISI and not just LeT miscreants.

That would be bad news for the success of the U.S. adventure in Afghanistan.

The real danger for U.S. interests is that, as the U.S. and India continue to lean on the weak reed that is the Zardari administration, Pakistan will opt out of a war in Afghanistan and an American security policy for South Asia that is already a disaster for Pakistan’s military, economy, and society.

Pakistan and the Taliban

In a recent article, Asia Times’ Shahzad [presents](#) a worst-case scenario for Pakistan bailing out of the anti-Taliban effort that is as bad as it gets for the American adventure in Afghanistan and western Pakistan:

The situation in NWFP is spiraling out of control, with militancy spilling over from the tribal areas into this province.

In the past four days, militants have abducted a record 60 people from the provincial capital Peshawar, most of them retired army officers and members or relatives of the Awami National Party (ANP), which rules in the province. The Taliban have butchered many people with affiliations to the ANP or those with relatives in the security apparatus.

Meanwhile, North Atlantic Treaty Organization supply convoys passing through Khyber Agency en route to Afghanistan have come under increasing attacks. In the most recent incident, militants destroyed 40 containers in supposedly secure terminals in the middle of Peshawar.

In this anarchic situation, the Jamaatut Dawa (LET), with its well-defined vertical command structure under the single command of Saeed, could commit its several thousand members, virtually a para-military force, to the cause of the anti-state al-Qaeda-linked Pakistani militants.

What has stopped the anti-India orientated group from doing this is its under-riding loyalty to and support from Pakistan. If the authorities start to mess with the LET, beyond the routine rhetoric, all hell could break loose inside the country.

Similarly, if pressure is placed on the ISI, there could be a severe reaction from the more hardline elements in that organization, as well as in the military.

To date, the authorities have not given any indication of their plans. If they do indeed resist the overtures of Mullen and Rice, it is most likely that the Pakistani armed forces will withdraw from the Swat Valley and Bajaur Agency, leaving that area open for the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan. Militants can also be expected to launch further attacks on India, with dire consequences for whole South Asia region.

Yet the alternative of cracking down on the LET is equally unappealing, and potentially as disastrous.

I doubt that the United States has a Plan B for Afghanistan that involves coping with a Pakistani enthusiasm deficit that is threatening to cross the line from passive resistance to active subversion and possibly open opposition.

But for the time being, as the South Asian players temporize and agonize, it looks less like an emerging Grand Bargain or Great Game, and a lot like business as usual.

This is a revised and expanded version of an article that appeared at [China Matters](#) under the title "Mumbai Paradox" on December 4, 2008. The present article was posted at [Japan Focus](#) on December,12, 2008.

Updated December 15, 2008

The "Made in Pakistan" label is by now pretty firmly affixed to the Mumbai outrage.

The most significant development in the story, however, has been the determined efforts by

the United States, grudgingly supported by India and enthusiastically echoed by Pakistan, to divert any attention from the possibility that state actors e.g. the notorious Inter Services Intelligence directorate or ISI and its supporters in the government and inside Pakistan's elites were implicated in the attack.

The United States has openly stated its fear that an understandable escalation in hostilities between India and Pakistan could provide Pakistan's army the excuse to abandon the unpopular anti-Taliban adventure in the west in exchange for a more traditional and much less destabilizing eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with the Indian military to the east.

Therefore, the line has been drawn, clearly if somewhat arbitrarily, to limit international condemnation to "non-state actors" such as Lashkar-e-Taibi (which supplied the manpower for the Mumbai attacks), while not scrutinizing potential ISI involvement in an attack which was meticulously and expensively planned inside Pakistan and did nothing to try to advance LeT's stated goals in Kashmir.

In case India and the United States thought that the pro-U.S. Zardari administration could be employed as an effective tool to remove the pro-Taliban/pro-al Qaeda rot inside Pakistan's ruling elite, they were quickly disabused of the notion.

The fallout of the Mumbai siege inside Pakistan was not a wave of sympathy. Instead, there was a series of manufactured outrages blamed on India but apparently generated inside Pakistan that allowed Pakistan to play the victim card (at least in its own eyes) while India was still reeling from the bloody attacks.

Chief among these "incidents" was the apparently groundless rumor propagated by the Pakistani media and its sources that Hamid Gul, the retired head of the ISI who plays the Darth Vader role in the U.S.-Pakistan saga, had

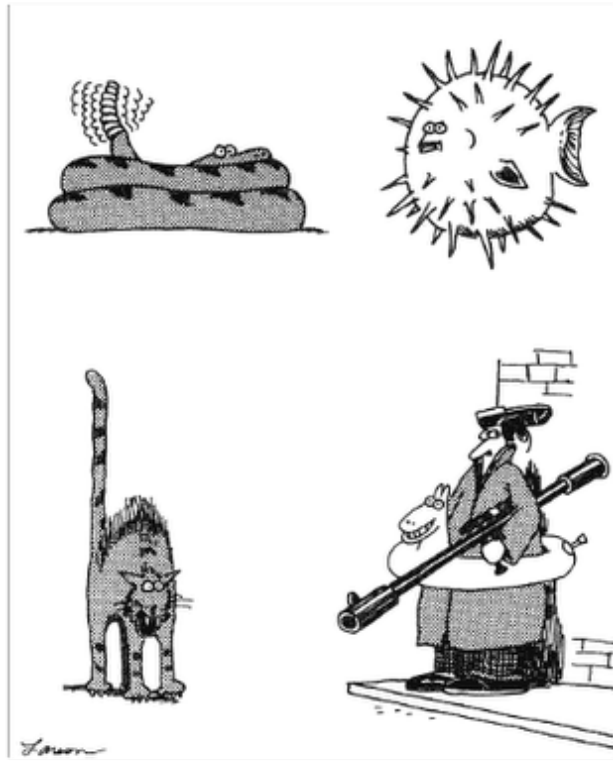
been targeted for arrests or sanctions at the behest of the American and/or Indian governments in the aftermath of the attacks.

The story found its way into the Washington Post before being denied in its various forms by Secretary Rice and Pakistan Prime Minister Gilani.

To me, the primary motive of the Gul story and other rumors appears to be a shot across the bow of the Zardari administration, which had made precipitously conciliatory statements and offers of cooperation with India at the behest of the American government.

Apparently any attempts to treat the Mumbai attacks as a watershed moment in the Pakistani-Indian relationship and Pakistan's role as an anti-terror democracy that might a) infringe Pakistani sovereignty and b) challenge the policy and prerogatives (and deniability) of the ISI would excite powerful popular and institutional opposition within Pakistan.

When I read the stories in the Pakistani media about Gul, accounts that morphed Indian requests into unacceptable "demands", the supposedly threatening phone call to President Zardari from Indian foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee, etc. etc., I recalled the Gary Larson cartoon, "How Nature Says, 'Do Not Touch'".



How nature says, "Do not touch."

To the warning rattle of a rattlesnake, the distended display of a pufferfish, the hiss of an angry cat with its fur on end, and a guy on a street corner dressed in an overcoat, a horsehead swim tube, a shoe on his head, and a bazooka, add the enthusiastic and uncritical fulminations of the Pakistan media concerning affronts to national sovereignty, dignity, and security that haven't even occurred.

The Zardari government played along with the anti-Indian agitation sweeping the media.

I expect it made its own calculation that it could not afford (or survive) a confrontation with its security apparatus on behalf of the Indian government and U.S. policy and, even if it did think about standing up to the ISI, the likely outcome would be a protracted and traumatic process that would, among other things, enmesh Pakistan in the web of U.N. and U.S. sanctions and blacklists reserved for terror states.

For now, at least, the scope of rhetoric and action has been carefully circumscribed to encompass Lashkar-e-Taiba and a Muslim charity. India has publicly applauded Pakistan's actions, while grumbling about President Zardari's weakness.

Before we condemn the Zardari administration's spinelessness and the inexplicable pro-terrorist sympathies of Pakistan's security apparatus, we should remember that the U.S. security policy for Afghanistan has been a catastrophe for Pakistan, corrupting its government, foreclosing its most viable options for dealing with Pashtun unrest, exposing its citizens to terrorist attacks, and contributing to the collapse of its economy.

All this misery has been in the service of a single-track counter-insurgency strategy that hasn't worked in Afghanistan, and the U.S. government is on the brink of abandoning there--but insists on escalating inside Pakistan.

Given this context, we should be saddened but not too surprised that there is a dearth of sympathy inside Pakistan for the United States' Global War on Terror, or for the victims of Mumbai.

For earlier China Hand contributions to Japan Focus on related issues see:

[The Coming Change of Course in Afghanistan](#)

[US Sanctions Send Iran Into the Arms of Asia](#)

For analysis by two leading Indian and Pakistani public intellectuals, see the following articles by novelist Arundhati Roy and physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy:

Arundhati Roy, [9 is not 11. And November isn't September.](#)

Pervez Hoodbhoy, [The Mumbai Massacre and Pakistan's New Nightmares.](#)

Recommended citation: China Hand, "Mumbai Aftermath: U.S. Tilt Toward India Alienates Pakistan and Undermines War Prospects in Afghanistan" The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 50-6-08, December 12, 2008.