

[www.indiandefencereview.com](http://www.indiandefencereview.com)  
ISSN 0970-2512 Jul-Sep 2019 Vol. 34 (3)

# INDIAN DEFENCE REVIEW

Editor : Lt Gen JS Bajwa



# UNVEILING THE ISI-TERRORIST NEXUS

— Philip B Haney & JM Phelps —

To unveil the ISI-terrorist nexus, intelligence agencies, counter-terrorism experts and foreign policy makers must acknowledge the ISI's continued support of terrorist organisations, as well as the dangerous undercurrent of AQIS and the Deoband movement.

**A**FTER 18 YEARS OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN (since October 07, 2001), the loss of 2,216 American soldiers and 20,053 wounded, plus 3,500 US-led coalition (NATO) casualties, loss of 62,000 Afghan soldiers including police officers 24,000 Afghan civilians and over 85,995 Taliban-affiliated fighters, all at a cost of nearly \$1 trillion, the final withdrawal of US coalition forces from Afghanistan is now being discussed in Doha, Qatar. During the week of July 10, 2019, Taliban leaders and Afghan officials issued a "Roadmap to Peace." The same day, as diplomats continued negotiations with former Taliban fighters, Zalmay Khalilzad, US Envoy for Afghan Reconciliation, stopped in Beijing, for multi-lateral talks before continuing to Washington, DC to report on the process. As the sixth round of the Doha Dialogue continued, it emerged that all sides were close to a draft deal to ensure Afghanistan does not become a terrorist haven for groups such as Islamic State (IS), thus paving the way for further talks on the final withdrawal of American and NATO troops.

During a surprise visit to Kabul on June 25, 2019, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo announced that the US and the Taliban had made "real progress" and were almost ready to draft an agreement to ensure that Afghan soil "never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists," while underscoring the Trump administration's commitment to the four-issue agenda outlined by Envoy Khalilzad namely counter-terrorism, presence of foreign troops, dialogue between Afghan ethnic groups and factions and permanent cease-fire.

The problem with this approach is that while intelligence agencies, counter-terrorism experts and foreign policy makers focus on the Gulf region, the Near East and Africa, they have overlooked an enormous coalition of Deoband-linked organisations and their fighters who do not come from the Arabic-speaking Near East, with affiliations to Muslim

Brotherhood groups and/or IS/ISIS/ISIL, but from the greater Indian (Asian) subcontinent and Far East, with multi-generational cultural, linguistic and tribal allegiances to the Pashto/Urdu-speaking Deoband Movement. In fact, while talks continue in Qatar, the Taliban and non-Afghan *jihadist* allies have ramped up a campaign of violence in Afghanistan, while recruiting thousands of fighters from the vast network of Deobandi *madrassas* and affiliated organisations in countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Xinjiang Province and the Philippines.

Keeping in mind that Deoband Islam is the religion of the Afghan Taliban, this remains a severe myopia - a fatal flaw in our Afghan Policy and in our ongoing negotiations with the Taliban (see Part IV below). Notice that during the Peace Talks, not a word has been said, either in the media or in any official statements from Qatar, about the deep, 20-year alliance between the Afghan Taliban and a vast coalition of Salafi resurgence organisations who recently pledged allegiance to a new coalition known as Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Thus, while negotiators in Qatar focus on gaining assurances that the Taliban will sever its alliance with the Islamic State (aka IS/ISIL/ISIS), virtually nothing has been said about its alliance with AQIS and/or with a roster of Deoband groups throughout the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Failure to address this "elephant in the room," this emerging centre-of-gravity in the Global Islamic Movement (GIM), will ultimately be seen in the West as an inexplicable, massive diplomatic failure. To the contrary, it will be seen as an incredible victory, not only by the Taliban, but to its myriad allies throughout the Islamic world.

## PART I - BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: IT IS ALL ABOUT AFGHANISTAN

On July 22, 2019, President Donald Trump met at the White House with Pakistani Prime Minister

Imran Khan, Army Chief Qamar Jawed Bajwa and Faiz Hameed, Director-General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). As noted by the press in Pakistan, this was the first time that a Pakistani PM was accompanied by the top military and ISI generals for such a high-level meeting. A July 19, 2019 Washington Post article stated that the purpose of the trip was to "discuss counter-terrorism, defence, energy and trade," while adding that many in Islamabad hoped the visit would accomplish something more: a reset in Islamabad-Washington ties, which have been strained by President Trump's impatience with Islamabad's inability to rein in Islamic terrorist groups active in South Asia, especially in Afghanistan. Additional insights were provided in a July 21, 2019 article in The New Indian Express, which revealed that in addition to separate meetings with President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo, PM Khan was also scheduled to hold meetings with IMF Acting Chief David Lipton and World Bank President David Malpass.

According to Arun Singh, former Indian ambassador to the US, who also covered the Pakistan desk in India's foreign ministry, "Clearly the focus of the visit relates to US demands and expectations with relation to Afghanistan. It helps PM Khan to have the Army Chief accompany him as any commitments that are made," and that the presence of the two Chiefs also ensures that, "they hear directly from the US President what his expectations and demands are." During their meeting at the White House, Prime Minister Khan stated, "We have links which go back to the time Pakistan became independent [on August 14, 1947]. You know, we have been fighting wars together; first, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan was a frontline state, allied to the US. And then, against the War on Terror, which was after 9/11." The media also reported that President Trump had "voiced optimism that PM Khan could help broker a political settlement to end the nearly 18-year-old US war in Afghanistan, and held out the possibility of restoring aid to Islamabad." Despite his apparent optimism, President Trump also said, "...We're working with Pakistan and others to extricate ourselves. Nor do we want to be policemen, because basically we are the policemen right now. And we are not supposed to be policemen. We've been in Afghanistan for 19 years. It is ridiculous. And I think Pakistan helps us with that because we don't want to stay as policemen." During a subsequent July 22, 2019, interview with Bret Baier of FOX News, PM Khan stated that the ISI provided information to the CIA which

helped the US track down and kill Osama bin Laden. This was a surprising revelation, since Islamabad had always denied any knowledge of bin Laden's whereabouts, even after he was killed by a US Navy SEAL team in Abbottabad on May 02, 2011. Moreover, PM Khan's statement does not mesh with the fact that a leaked 2013 Pakistani government report revealed that bin Laden had arrived in Pakistan during the spring-summer of 2002, just months after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and that he had been living in Abbottabad since at least August 2005. During the same FOX interview, PM Khan made it clear that Pakistan will continue supporting the Taliban, "People in Afghanistan

have suffered four decades of conflict. The last thing Afghanistan needs is more violence and it needs peace. The Taliban should become a part of the political process, so then you would have a government which will represent the people of Afghanistan."

**While talks continue in Qatar, the Taliban and non-Afghan *jihadist* allies have ramped up a campaign of violence in Afghanistan...**

While speaking at the United States Institute of Peace on July 23, 2019, PM Khan also pledged that he would "meet the Taliban and try his best to get them to talk to the Afghan government so that the elections in Afghanistan is inclusive where the Taliban also participate in it," while cautioning that persuading the Taliban to hold negotiations with the Afghan government to secure a political settlement to the civil war will not be easy. Plainly, PM Khan's hopeful intentions are based on the fragile premise that the Taliban will actually follow through on its pledge to prevent international terrorist groups such as AQ and/ or IS from operating in Afghan territory.

On July 22, 2019, these legitimate concerns about the Taliban's credibility were noted by C Raja Mohan, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, who wrote that "although Army Chief Bajwa badly needs to improve ties with Washington, it is by no means clear if the Pakistan Army has the will and ability to deliver a seemingly insolent Taliban." In the same editorial, Director Mohan also observed, "In Delhi, though there is entrenched cynicism about the prospects for genuine change in Pakistan, there is also a persistent fear that the US will once again be taken in by Pakistan's political dissimulation. Yet, Delhi needs to keep an open mind on the new phase of engagement between

the US and Pakistan." On July 25, 2019, it was reported that PM Khan returned home from Washington "after a visit seen by supporters as a major diplomatic success, saying he felt like he had when he came back after winning the cricket World Cup." At a press conference at the Islamabad airport, PM Khan also stated that the presence of Army Chief Bajwa and ISI General Hameed was a strong signal that the US mistrust of Pakistan's security establishment had eased, while adding, "Those optics are optics of rehabilitation, re-engagement on a strategic level."

#### **EVENTS IN PERSPECTIVE**

The July 22, 2019 meeting between President Trump and PM Khan must be viewed from the context that firstly, for years, the US has held doubts about Pakistan's ambivalent commitment to the War on Terror, largely because Pakistan appears to consider several US-designated Islamic terrorist groups (i.e.,

**PM Khan stated that the ISI provided information to the CIA which helped the US track down and kill Osama bin Laden...**

he pointed out that at least 20 US-designated terror groups were operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan, while also criticising Pakistan's unreliable policies on terrorism. On November 25, 2017, President Trump insisted Pakistan must "demonstrate its commitment to civilisation, order, and to peace," and on January 01, 2018, he threatened to roll back military aid to Pakistan until it shut down Islamic terrorist organisations, which he actually did on January 04, and then again on September 02, 2018.

During a November 18, 2018 interview with Chris Wallace of FOX News, President Trump said, "We give Pakistan \$1.3 billion a year, bin Laden lived in Pakistan, we're supporting Pakistan, we were giving them \$1.3 billion a year - which we don't give them anymore, by the way. I ended it because they don't do anything for us, they don't do a damn thing for us." President Trump reiterated this position during a July 22 White House meeting. Finally, in a gesture of good faith which was overlooked, President Trump made an unexpected move on July 02, 2019 and rewarded Pakistan's (and by extension, China's) cooperation

in the ongoing Peace Talks by placing the Pakistan-based Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) on its Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) list.

#### **PART II - ISI IS THE PAKISTANI GODFATHER**

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency was founded on January 01, 1948, by British Major-General Sir Robert Cawthome, then Deputy Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army, during the 1947-1948 Indo-Pakistani War (aka the First Kashmir War). Headquartered in Islamabad, the ISI was originally established to gather intelligence for the armed forces and to enhance Pakistan's national security. This mandate was soon expanded to include protecting Pakistani regional interests, surveilling political opposition and supporting Pakistan's military command structure. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, the ISI partnered with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to provide financial support, arms, training and intelligence for the *mujahideen* soldiers fighting against the Red Army, but soon began firing on American border posts to provide cover for the Taliban to infiltrate back into Afghanistan, while also supporting terrorist activity against the interests of India, America and Israel — as called for in the AQIS Code of Conduct.

Since the founding of the Taliban on October 10, 1994, Pakistan and the ISI have held more influence over the group than any other country or intelligence service in the world, while providing critical safe havens and sanctuary to the group's leadership, advice on military and diplomatic issues and financing. For example, Pakistan and the ISI supported Mullah Mohammed Omar, when he founded the Taliban in Kandahar and provided training in the 1980s at one of its camps for *mujahideen* who fought the Soviet Army. Pakistan was one of only three countries that recognised the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan when it was established in September of 1996 with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It ceased to exist on December 17, 2001. By 2001, Pakistan was providing the Taliban hundreds of personnel and oil to operate its artillery, tanks and aircraft. Personnel included thousands of Pakistani Pashtuns for its infantry and even small units of Special Services Group commandos (aka the Maroon Berets) to help fight against the US-backed, anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. All of this occurred, despite a string of UN Security Council resolutions calling on all parties to cease aid to the Taliban because of human rights violations and because it was harbouring Osama bin Laden and AQ.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

A May 20, 2014 report by the Brookings Institute entitled '*Islamabad Will Not Give Modi Time for Pleasantries*' reveals that without the ISI's help, the Taliban would have never seized most of Afghanistan. The ISI also arranged Mullah Omar's first meeting with bin Laden in 1998, and facilitated the alliance between the Taliban and AQ. After the fall of Kandahar in 2001, Mullah Omar fled to Quetta, Pakistan, where he masterminded the return of the Taliban. During this time, his partner was the Army Chief of Staff and ISI General Director Ashfaq Parvez Kayani. Kayani played a key role in providing the Taliban safe haven in Pakistan, plus training facilities, weapons and securing financial support from the Gulf states. With all of this help over the years, it is no wonder that fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces has intensified since its annual spring offensive began in April of 2019, or that violence is spreading across Afghanistan, with heavy fighting taking place today in the Northern provinces of Badakhshan, Baghlan and Faryab as also Farah in the West.

Nor is it a great mystery that the Taliban violently disrupted national elections as they staged near-daily attacks, while steadfastly refusing to negotiate directly with President Ashraf Ghani (elected on September 21, 2014, after a protracted political stalemate), calling his government nothing but a "puppet" of the West, all while holding peace talks in Qatar with US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

## PROXY WARS AND DEOBAND MUJAHIDEEN

Meanwhile, the ISI continues to support a number of proxy wars against India in Afghanistan, Punjab and Kashmir. In addition, clandestine ISI-sponsored training camps for Deoband groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) have been established in Afghanistan or along the Pakistan-India border, which India has been forced to attack. Thousands of these training camp graduates are either sent back home to countries like Bangladesh (base to more active resurgence groups than any other country) or they are sent to battlefields around the world to fight the global *jihad*.

As discussed in a May 01, 2019 Defence & Security Alert article entitled '*Madrassas Ingrained Worldwide*', thousands of these students (Talibs) are introduced to the Islamic ideology of *jihad* while they attend one of the 40,000-50,000 Deoband *madrassas* salt-and-peppered throughout the subcontinent. And,

despite their continued assurances and promises to cut ties with these Deoband-linked groups, the ISI and the Pakistani military continue to nurture and support a vast domestic network of training camps and *madrassas*, as they continue pursuing their never-ending war against India and her allies.

## PART III - UNDERCURRENT OF AQIS AND THE DEOBAND MOVEMENT

The heart of the issue appears to be an elusive, if not completely missing, piece of a puzzle. One cannot ignore the fact that Pakistan and the ISI continue to nurture and support a vast network of Deoband-linked *jihad* groups, training camps and *madrassas*. What are the names of these Deoband organisations and how long have they been part of the GIM? At least seven Deoband organisations became part of a global coalition known today as AQ, which was founded in Peshwar in August 1988, but burst into global prominence on February 23, 1998, when the World Islamic Front (WIF aka AQ) issued its *Fatwa* to all Muslims, entitled Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - civilians and military - is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim."

These seven original Deoband groups who pledged loyalty to the WIF include the 055 Brigade (aka the Shadow Army, composed of a mixture of mercenary *jihad* fighters from the Middle East, Central Asia and South-east Asia that were integrated into the Taliban from 1995-2001), Uyghur Jihad Groups (Xinjiang Province, Western China), Harkat-ul Mujahideen (Pakistan), Sipah-e-Sahaba (Pakistan), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Afghanistan), Harkat-Ul-Jihad Al-Islami (Pakistan) and the Deobandi Taliban, aka the Afghan Taliban (Afghanistan).

Twenty years later, the April 21, 2019 Easter Day Bombings forced many to acknowledge the emerging threat of AQIS and its nearly endless roster of

Since the founding of the Taliban on October 10, 1994, Pakistan and the ISI have held more influence over the group than any other country or intelligence service in the world...

Deoband-linked groups, including Harkat-Ul-Jihad Al-Islami, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Jamaat Ul-Ahrar, Jamaat-Ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Tablighi Jamaat, Tamil Nadu Sunnath Jamaath, Tehrik-e-Taliban Balochistan, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Thowheed Jamaat and the Afghan Taliban. On September 03, 2014, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who is globally recognised as the Emir of the original AQ, announced the formation of a new coalition, called Qaedat Al-Jihad Fi Shibhi Al-Qarrat Al-Hindiya, aka Al-Qaeda of the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). The primary goals (strategies) and authorised tactics of this ominous new ISI-supported coalition are described in a 20-page document, entitled the 'Code of Conduct' which was released in English in June

## Pakistan and the ISI continue to nurture and support a vast network of Deoband-linked *jihad* groups, training camps and madrassas...

2017. Careful comparison will show the goals in the 'Code of Conduct' are exactly the same as the goals in the WIF's 1998 Fatwa, and that, just like the Muslim Brotherhood's 1991 An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Brotherhood in North America, the 2017 Code of Conduct reveals the Sharia-authorised tactics to accomplish these goals and that they intend to fight against any opposition to these goals.

In summary, the 1991 Memorandum, 1998 WIF Fatwa and 2017 Code of Conduct should all be seen as explicit warnings to the West i.e., the non-Islamic world that ought to be taken at face value by those who wish to defend sovereignty and liberties from the influence of the GIM.

## PART IV - FATAL FLAWS IN AFGHANISTAN POLICY

There are a number of fatal flaws in the current Afghan Policy. These include firstly, chronic failure to recognise that Deoband Islam is the religion of the Afghan Taliban, secondly, a new center-of-gravity in the GIM has emerged under the banner of AQIS

and thirdly, Pakistan and the ISI have been actively supporting this process from the very beginning. An example of this myopia, the Afghan Taliban, one of seven Deoband groups that pledged loyalty to the 1998 WIF Fatwa, is now expected to guarantee that Afghanistan does not become a terrorist haven for AQ/IS fighters. However, on May 21, 2019, the Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan confirmed that AQ is "already operating across the country and is not confined to one region." Then, on June 13, 2019, AQIS Emir Asim Umar released a statement praising the Taliban's "victory in Afghanistan," while claiming that America's "defeat" proves that its superior technology is no match for the *jihadists'* faith and that America no longer wants to fight. On the very same day, an IS branch known as Khorasan Province (ISKP) claimed responsibility for a bombing that killed at least nine people and wounded 13 at a checkpoint in Jalalabad in Eastern Afghanistan. In conclusion, a July 03, 2016 bombing at an Eid Al-Fitr event at the Holey Cafe in the Kishoreganj district, Dhaka, Bangladesh, led to several ominous discoveries, including the fact that [1] AQIS was the creation of ISI, [2] several well-known AQIS members were also linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba, [3] the brother of one of the June 30, 2007 Glasgow, Scotland bombers was a key AQIS leader, and that [4] AQIS members were being given safe passage without passport stamps for training in Pakistan. It was also discovered that [5] Abdur Rehman, an AQIS leader involved in the Dhaka bombing, met with UN-designated terrorist Hafiz Saeed (leader of the November 26-29, 2008 Mumbai attacks) and with Lashkar-e-Taiba General Council member Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi (on India's Most Wanted List).

Tying it all together, Rehman also confessed that he and AQIS Chief Asim Umar had once studied together at a Darul-Uloom Deoband *madrassa* and that he had sent other young men to Pakistan for training. To unveil the ISI-terrorist nexus, intelligence agencies, counter-terrorism experts and foreign policy makers must acknowledge the ISI's continued support of terrorist organisations, as well as the dangerous undercurrent of AQIS and the Deoband movement.



Philip B. Haney is a founding member of the US Department of Homeland Security and author of See Something, Say Nothing, a best-selling exposé of the Obama Administration's submission to the goals and policies of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups around the world.



J.M. Phelps is a counter-terrorism expert and freelance journalist, focusing on national security for OneNewsNow.com. In 2018, he received a certification for an intense online self-study through the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya, Israel.