

CHAPTER 8
POST BIN LADEN: THE SAFETY AND
SECURITY OF PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR
ARSENAL

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There is great concern across the world about the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, and Pakistan goes to great lengths to assure the world that its weapons will not fall into the hands of extremist groups. This chapter assesses the threat to Pakistan's nuclear weapons from within the country. In this context it will be important to understand the forces that shape attitudes within the Pakistan military, as well as those which are operative within the general public.

Broadly speaking, Pakistan's nuclear weapons face four categories of potential threats:

- From India and the United States: either independently or together. Israel is a distant possibility but not to be ruled out.
- From outside: Islamic militants attacking a nuclear storage site or facility with the purpose of capturing a nuclear weapon, or a sizeable amount of HEU that could be fashioned into a crude nuclear device.
- From inside: Islamic elements in the army who have responsibility for protecting and operating nuclear sites, facilities, or fissile materials.
- From inside and outside: a collaborative effort.

Before 11 September 2001, there was little urgency to safeguard Pakistan's nuclear weapons. But, faced with George W. Bush's ultimatum, General Pervez Musharraf had to choose between 'are

you with us or against us'. Thereupon he made his famous U-turn and abandoned the Taliban. Acceding to U.S. demands was necessary, said Musharraf in his public address to the nation; else Pakistan would have lost its nuclear assets and its Kashmir cause.¹ The weapons that were supposed to defend Pakistan now had to be defended.

The subsequent history is well-known: efforts to persuade Mullah Omar refused to break with Al Qaeda failed, and Pakistan joined the U.S. in its 'war against terror'. Foreseeing opposition to this new alliance, Musharraf removed two of his close former associates. Both were strongly Islamist generals: the head of Pakistan's ISI intelligence agency, Lt. General Mehmood Ahmed, and Deputy Chief of Army Staff, General Muzaffar Hussain Usmani. Multiple new dangers were created. Although the government insisted that its nuclear weapons were safe, it did not take chances. Several weapons were reportedly airlifted to various safer and more isolated locations within the country.

Keeping nuclear weapons away from predators is now an overriding concern for the Pakistan Army, which is the custodian of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Who could these predators be and why would they want nuclear weapons?

It is likely that those currently fighting the Pakistan Army—Muslim extremists of various persuasions with various levels of sophistication and weaponry—want the bomb. Their motives can only be guessed. Some may want a weapon, perhaps deliverable by truck or ship rather than by aircraft or missile, for use against some U.S. or European city. Targets could also include Western economic interests in the Gulf and neighbouring areas. But other groups may consider attacking an Indian or Pakistani city desirable. This is not implausible: truck bombs have been frequently set off in crowded city locales in Pakistan. There is no obvious taboo against the use of a larger bomb in a South Asian city, perhaps hidden inside a container truck. This would not only be logistically easier but could ignite total war between Pakistan and India. Such a goal would be consistent with the apocalyptic vision of Al Qaeda type groups which

have, as a matter of strategy, frequently targeted other Muslims (as well as Shi'as or those considered infidels). In the extremist mindset, it is preferable if only enemies are killed but collateral Muslim deaths are acceptable. On this matter, one notes that Osama bin Laden appears to be a man of peace when compared to his bloody-minded deputy, Aiman Al-Zawahiri.²

Recognizing that new concerns had to be addressed, General Pervez Musharraf formally instituted a nuclear command and control mechanism in February 2000. This comprised of the National Command Authority (NCA), Strategic Plans Division (SPD), and Strategic Forces Command. The SPD acts as a secretariat for the National Command Authority (NCA) and has a security division with a counter-intelligence network. Employing at least 12,000 personnel, the SPD has physical custody of the weapons. Through one of its outreach publications, *Pakistan Defense*, it provides the following self-profile:

PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR CONTROLS*

- 10 member National Command Authority in charge of all Nuclear Facilities.
- The president will be the authority's chairman and the prime minister its vice-chairman. The authority will include ministers of foreign affairs, defense, interior, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, chiefs of army, navy and air force, and director-general of the Strategic Plans Division. The director-general of the Strategic Plans Division will be the authority's secretary.
- Standard 'Two Man Rule' to authenticate access to nuclear release codes.
- Nuclear Warheads 'de-mated' from missiles or bomb casings, and components are to be put into operation only with the consent of a National Command Authority.
- Pakistan has developed its own version of 'Permissive Action Links', or PALs, a sophisticated type of lock the U.S. uses to prevent unauthorised launching.

* <http://www.defence.pk/forums/wmd-missiles/>

- A comprehensive, intrusive Personnel Reliability System (along the lines of one in the U.S.) that monitors employees, before, during and after employment.
- A ten-thousand-member Security Force, led by a two-star General, dedicated to guarding the Nuclear facilities.
- Possible 'phony bunkers and dummy warheads' to deter raids, by internal and external threats.
- Possibly between 100 to 200 nuclear warheads (Number of Missile Delivery Systems unknown).

Publically, Pakistan has consistently denied that its nuclear weapons have ever been under threat. On many occasions the Foreign Ministry has emphatically stated that, 'our [nuclear] assets are 100 per cent secure, under multiple custody.' In June 2011, Interior Minister Rehman Malik went a step further by declaring them to be '200 per cent safe'.³

Trust us, says the SPD. But the crux of the problem lies in the following: whatever the procedures and equipment Pakistan may adopt, they can only be as good as the men who operate them. Mindsets and intentions matter more than anything else. Certainly better weapons—or more personnel deputed to protect him—could not have prevented Governor Salman Taseer from being gunned down by his own security guard.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

At one level every country that possesses nuclear weapons is a feared entity because of the catastrophic destruction that it could unleash against an adversary. This could be by design, and may be initiated by extreme emotions or fears existing in a severe crisis. But some wars in history have happened although neither side wanted it. Human error, misjudgment, and miscalculation are impossible to rule out. This could be catastrophic if countries also have nuclear weapons. During the Cold War it was seen that in spite of every possible precaution, false information can be provided by radar and other detection systems, aircraft carrying nuclear weapons can crash, test missiles can veer off course, and so forth. These are

'normal' fears. But Pakistan must deal with another possibility as well: that of nuclear weapons or fissile material escaping the protective custody of the SPD and the Pakistan Army. The fear of loose weapons comes from the fact that Pakistan's armed forces—army, navy, and air force—harbour a hidden enemy within their ranks. Today all bases, installations, headquarters, and residential colonies are protected by massive barricades and sand-bagged machine gun nests. But this has not been enough. Those wearing the cloak of religion freely walk in and out of top security nuclear installations every day.

The fear of the insider is ubiquitous and well-founded. Pakistan's current crop of generals know they are faced with Islamic militant groups fixated upon attacking both America and India, and a heavily Islamicized rank and file brimming with seditious thoughts. Some want to kill their superior officers; they achieved near success when General Musharraf was targeted twice by air force and army officers in 2003. A military court sentenced the mutineers to death, and a purge of officers and men associated with militants was ordered. But in a spectacular jail break at Bannu in May 2012, Musharraf's would-be assassins escaped a death sentence together with at least 384 other prisoners.⁴ It is also reported that prison guards stood aside and then raised slogans in support of the Taliban attackers and imposition of Shar'ia law.

The Pakistani military officer who once strode proudly in uniform in public is now restricted to wearing his uniform in the cantonment areas only. The directive to not wear military uniforms was officially given to personnel following numerous assassinations and assassination attempts on them. Even though the military continues to be the most powerful force in the country, its public profile has had to be substantially lowered.

Islamabad's residents recall the times when the Pakistan Day parades and fly-pasts were held in the capital and a full range of armoured carriers, tanks, and missiles were displayed. The tank treads would damage road surfaces, which were therefore carpeted with stronger and more expensive materials. The armoured columns

passed by the presidency where especially constructed viewing arrangements had been made for thousands of spectators. But post-9/11, fearing attack by the Taliban or other extremists, or perhaps an attack of the type that led to the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981, such parades suddenly stopped. The implausible excuse offered was austerity and cost.

Recently an army enthusiast wistfully remarked: 'Once remembered for an annual graceful congregation of National Armed Forces marking Pakistan Day with a full-fledged display of armaments, Parade Avenue at D-Chowk in the Red Zone area adjacent to the President House on Jinnah Avenue in Islamabad presented a deserted look with a few policemen around heavy barricades and barbed wires.'⁵

Quite naturally, the army has sought to downplay the high level of radicalization within the ranks. But some insider attacks have been impossible to hide. Extremists led by Dr Usman, formerly of the Army Medical Corps, demonstrated their strength with a brazen attack in October 2009 on the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi.⁶ This was followed by a gruesome massacre on 4 December 2009 of forty-two army personnel and their family members at the Parade Ground mosque adjacent to the General Head Quarters (GHQ).⁷ Those eventually traced to have masterminded the attack turned out to have links within the Army.**

There have been devastating attacks on ISI regional headquarters in Rawalpindi, Multan, Peshawar, and Faisalabad. The suicide bombers had apparently been informed by insiders.

Yet another dramatic exhibition of extremist penetration was provided by the attack on Karachi's Mehran naval base. Three weeks after the U.S. raid on Osama bin Laden's house in Abbottabad on

**Among those picked up for this and other bombings by the intelligence agencies was my former colleague at Quaid-e-Azam University, Raja Ehsan Aziz. Known for his close links with the Jamaat-i-Islami, Aziz often bragged that he had fought along with the mujahideen in Afghanistan against the Soviets. His wife ran a *dars* school for women and is a well-known journalist. See, 'The curious case of Amira Ehsan', *The Friday Times*, 24–30 June 2011.

2 May 2011, which resulted in his killing, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed the Mehran naval base attack as revenge for the loss of a great *mujahid* (it also claimed responsibility for an attack upon the Saudi Arabian embassy in Karachi a few days later as revenge).⁸ As millions of Pakistanis watched on their TV sets, flames devoured one of the two \$36 million aircraft bought by the Pakistan Navy, an anti-submarine P3C Orion. The number of attackers remains disputed but is said to be between six and twenty. However, they had successfully battled hundreds of security forces for eighteen hours, a fact that pointed to both the ineptness of the defenders and the hidden hand inside which replenished the attacker's ammunition supplies. Subsequently, the military authorities arrested from Lahore a former Special Services Group commando of the Pakistan Navy, Kamran Ahmed, and his younger brother Zaman Ahmed.⁹ Attempting to disprove that this was a mutiny, a hurriedly convened official inquiry claimed that DNA tests 'proved' the attackers at Mehran Base were *not* Pakistanis. To quote: 'The DNA test result revealed that four terrorists who attacked PNS Mehran Base in Karachi were foreigners, officials said on Saturday. . . . Those terrorists were Anglo-Indians and have blood relations, could be cousins.'¹⁰ But, naval officials told the Standing Committee on Defense of the National Assembly during an in-camera briefing that 'insiders' were involved in the attack.¹¹

It is difficult to find another example where the defense apparatus of a modern state has been rendered so vulnerable by the threat posed by military insiders. Following repeated attacks on naval personnel and facilities, fear of a terrorist attack caused Pakistan's fleet of modern warships to flee their home base in Karachi in June 2011.¹² The Navy did not deny this; for months the ships did not return. When asked to comment on this, retired Vice Admiral Tanvir Ahmed said that one of the golden rules in warfare, especially when facing a threat from an unknown enemy, is to disperse your assets in as many bases as you can. 'Never put all your eggs in one basket,' he said.¹³ Wise words, perhaps, but surely a fighting force unsafe and

insecure in its own home is certainly not well equipped to fight wars hundreds of miles out to sea.

In spite of the fact that most radicalized officers are often quietly discharged and do not come into public view, it is hard to stop information from leaking out. Some senior military officials have proven ties to religious extremists. For example, motivated by a cleric, Qari Saifullah, a coup attempt was initiated against Benazir Bhutto in 1995 and the Chief of Army Staff, General Waheed Kakar. The plotters, Major General Zahirul Islam Abbasi and Brigadier Mustansir Billa, were arrested together with thirty-six other army officers. More recently, in June 2011, the army investigated Brigadier Ali Khan for his ties to militants of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a radical organization that seeks to establish a global caliphate and believes its mission should begin from nuclear Pakistan. The highest ranking officer so far arrested, Ali Khan belongs to a family with three generations of military service and is said to have a strong professional record. Reportedly, General Kayani feared a backlash and was initially reluctant to take this step. Four army majors were also investigated.

Although no nuclear facility has yet been attacked by extremists, recent developments suggest that this could be just a matter of time. A high ranking military officer currently serving at the Khushab nuclear complex was quoted in a Pakistani newspaper as saying that 'D.G. Khan houses one of the largest nuclear facilities in the country, and has faced the first-ever serious security threat from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).' The police is said to have recovered bodies of three suicide bombers who accidentally detonated themselves in a building about 30 km away from the Khushab site. When the TTP attacked the Kamra Air Base in August 2012, they had also announced their intent to attack nuclear installations in as revenge for the killing of their South Punjab head, Abdul Ghaffar Qaisrani. Newspapers that take a strong anti-American and pro-bomb position, and which generally promote conspiracy theories, were quick to suggest that the TTP had been infiltrated by

'outside elements'. But this ostrich-like act is merely yet another futile effort to deny reality.

PAKISTAN'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The emergence of violent Islamist groups, both pro- and anti-establishment, is a product of the steady radicalization of Pakistan's society and military. Almost invariably this is blamed on to General Zia-ul-Haq and his impositions of orthodox Islam. While there is little doubt that he had accelerated this process, the roots actually lie deeper.

Islam created Pakistan but religion now divides Pakistan. Fuelled by ideological passions, diverse social and religious formations inhabit different parts of the country. This tension within Pakistani society and the military owes fundamentally to an underlying confusion about national purpose and identity. Six decades after Partition, key questions stand unresolved. Are we Arabs or South Asians? Is there a Pakistani culture? Should the country be run by Islamic law? Can Hindus, Christians, and Ahmadis be proper Pakistanis? In a bid to definitively resolve these existential questions, for decades Pakistani school children have learned a linguistically flawed (but catchy) rhetorical question. The question is chanted together with its answer: *Pakistan ka matlab kya? La illaha illala!* (What is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no god but Allah!). But the problem remains unresolved.

The migration of Pakistani workers to the Middle East in the early 1970s was a first major impetus for change. It brought millions into contact with a kind of Islam different from the one they had known. Piety was redefined, and religious practices changed. Mosque preachers received grants from the Saudis to supplement or establish madrassas. Thus, Wahabi and Salafi ideology, with the help of petro-dollars, was imported into a culture that had been carried on from pre-Partition and was a fusion of subcontinental, Sufi and Bareilvi influence.

Wahabism, which originated in the eighteenth century in Arabia, is as a revivalist movement initiated by Muhammad ibn Abd al-

Wahhab (1703–1792). Wahabis are ultra conservative in their outlook and believe in a strictly formal and ritualistic religion, promoting a view of Islam that is diametrically opposite to the Sufi view—which considers religion largely a matter between Man and Maker. In its early years, Wahabism succeeded in destroying almost all shrines, together with historical monuments and relics dating to the early days of Islam for fear that they might take the status of shrine worship.

Also influential are the Salafis—who seek the ‘purification’ of Islam by returning to the pure form practiced in the time of Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] and his Companions. Among the most extreme manifestation of Salafism is Takfir-wal-Hijra. In 1996 the group is said to have plotted to assassinate Osama bin Laden for being too lax a Muslim. Pakistani Deobandis, who were the closest ideologically to the Wahabis and Salafis, generally take a harder line than Indian Deobandis. They do not condemn suicide bombings; are strongly pro-Taliban; and many hard-core ones are heavily armed. Muslims of the Deobandi-Salafi-Wahabi persuasion decry the syncretism of popular Islam, claiming that it arises from innovation (*bidat*) and ignorance of Qura’nic teachings.

Inspired by hard-line groups and the search for Islamic roots, many young Pakistanis have adopted a pseudo Arab identity: the ‘abaya’ (coat like outer garment) for women did not belong to the South Asian wardrobe nor to the Urdu lexicon but is now ubiquitous on campuses; the Arabic ‘Allah’ has replaced the Persian ‘Khuda’ in ordinary discourse; music and dancing at weddings are discouraged; and religious rituals are given disproportionate importance.

Drawing conclusions from a 2009 British Council survey conducted on the role of religion in Pakistani society, *The Daily Telegraph*, a British newspaper, says:

One-third of Pakistanis aged 18 to 29 who were surveyed believe in Shar’ia, or Islamic law; half have ‘a great deal of confidence’ in religious-based education; and more than 60 per cent have faith in the army—the only widely trusted institution of the state. They believe they do not have adequate skills for the workplace and little anticipation of being able to

compete fairly for jobs. The report found that three-quarters of respondents identified themselves foremost as Muslims, with just 14 per cent describing themselves primarily as a citizen of Pakistan. Only 10 per cent have a great deal of confidence in national or local government, the courts or the police and just one third advocate democracy for the country.¹⁴

Corroborating the above survey, a survey conducted by *The Express Tribune*¹⁵ found that a majority of Pakistan's internet users say that they consider themselves as 'Muslims first' (49%), 'Pakistani' second (28%), while 23% voted as 'other'.

In the Pakistan military, the Tablighi Jamaat religious movement, which formally abjures politics,¹⁶ has made big inroads and may well be the most influential of all religious organizations. Headquartered in Raiwind near Lahore, it has grown enormously. Annual congregations rank in size second only to that of the Haj pilgrimage. With an estimated following of 70–80 million people of Deobandi persuasion, it is spread across Southwest Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. In France it has about 100,000 followers and by 2007, Tabligh members were situated at 600 of Britain's 1350 mosques. Tablighis also despise mystical Islam, which they equate with idolatry and ancestral worship.

The Tablighi Jamaat represents only the tip of the religious iceberg. Attendance at mosques has skyrocketed, as has adherence to prayers, fasting, and other rituals. In Pakistan, an observer who grew up in a military family notes that, 'until the late 1970s, the mosques located at the armed forces bases (military, air force and navy) were 90 per cent Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaa't (Sufi), 8 per cent Deobandi, and 0 per cent Salafi. Currently 85 per cent of the mosques are Deobandi or Salafi, and less than 10 per cent are Ahle Sunnat Wal Jama'at.¹⁷ This is an enormous transition, and has strong implications for what Pakistan's military will become in the future. Steadily, the culture of the mosque is defeating the culture of the shrine.

MILITANT GROUPS

Pakistan's Army is confronted today by a multitude of hostile Islamist militant groups, each with its own agenda. Their genesis can most often be traced back to the early 1980s U.S.-backed crusade against Soviet Russia. Pakistan thereafter became a central hub attracting a multitude of Islamists from Europe to West and Central Asia to Indonesia. Since there were multiple agendas, Pakistan morphed from the bastion of anti-communism and anti-atheism that it once was into something far less coherent. It would be a mistake to think that today's militant groups only draw upon madrassa graduates—there are large numbers of school and college graduates who fill their ranks.***

All groups target the 'U.S. Empire', which explains why Pakistan was the refuge of choice for Osama bin Laden and the ones that received the greatest backing from Pakistan's establishment, such as the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) focus on freeing Kashmir from India. They have not openly challenged the state and appear to be dependent on it for financial and logistical support. Still other groups, like the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba, are sectarian warriors seeking to purge Islam of the Shi'a and other minorities, while the fighters of Khatm-e-Nabuwat desire to exterminate 'Qadianis', the slur they use to denigrate the Ahmadiyya sect, whose nineteenth-century founder was born in the town of Qadian. Sectarian outfits dispatch suicide bombers to target mosques, shrines and markets, murdering religious leaders and prominent figures in the various minority communities. They are united only in support of the killing of such 'blasphemers' and those who seek to protect them. Pakistan's Christian, Hindu, and other religious

***Over the years, I came to know many students in my physics classes at Quaid-e-Azam University who had received military training from jihadist groups before coming to the university. These were the ones who had decided not to go further with militancy and become general job-seekers; others presumably put their training into practice.

minorities cower in fear. The rich among them have mostly fled the country.

The army's fiercest enemy today is the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). It has killed thousands of Pakistani soldiers and policemen. Displaced by an army operation from the Swat valley, it has found refuge in Afghanistan. The TTP does not appear to fully accept Mullah Omar's authority, having refused to release Colonel Imam and Brigadier Khalid Khwaja after kidnapping them from Waziristan. Colonel Imam, whose real name was Brigadier Sultan Amir Tarar, was a Pakistan army officer who served in the ISI and was responsible for training the Afghan mujahideen during the anti-Soviet jihad. Khwaja was also an ISI officer and had direct liaison with Mullah Omar. Both officers, who had retired but continued to help the militants, were killed in captivity after being accused of being Qadianis and American agents. This was a dramatic example of the virulent sectarianism that prevails within the various militant groups.

Why has Islamic radicalism become such a powerful force with the masses as well as in the Pakistan military? In part, it is due to the anger that has been generated among the Muslim populace of the Western military invasions of Muslim countries such as Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan. Greed for natural resources has imposed U.S. hegemony in much of the Arab world and stunted their natural growth. But anger at oil-hungry imperialism cannot be the entire story. Surveys show that the U.S. is disliked more in Muslim countries than in Cuba, Iraq, and Afghanistan—all countries that have been attacked by America. A private survey carried out by a European embassy based in Islamabad found that only 4 per cent of Pakistanis polled speak well of America; 96 per cent against them. While this depends on several imponderables, the U.S. can potentially displace India as Pakistan's principal adversary.

ONE ARMY OR TWO?

In parallel with the profound social changes discussed above, the Pakistan Army's character and ethos have also changed. Post-

independence, it was a tightly disciplined, modern force fashioned along British lines that could boast of non-Muslim heroes in the 1965 and 1971 wars with India. But its secular culture steadily dissipated as Gen. Zia-ul-Haq turned the army into 'a defender of Pakistan's ideological frontiers'. This oft-repeated phrase was to portend a major transformation. The culture of the army messes changed, alcohol was forbidden in the 1980s, officer's wives could no longer accompany them to official parties, and prayers were encouraged. It began to matter whether you were Shi'a or Sunni, Barelvi or Wahabi, Ahl-e-Hadith or Ahl-e-Sunnat. The last of the Ahmadis left the military, and today there are few, if any, Christians serving in the military. Recruiting stations across the country were festooned with big banners with '*Iman, Taqwa, Jihad fi Sabilillah*' (Faith, Piety and Fight for Allah) on them. Jihad, rather than defense of national borders, became a way to manage morale and draw recruits. If military personnel were questioned today whether they considered themselves primarily as soldiers of Islam or of Pakistan, one can almost guess what their answer would be. This is why such a dangerous question cannot (and perhaps should not!) be asked.

Currently, it might be more accurate to consider the Pakistan Army to be consisting of two armies. The first is headed by Gen. Kayani; let us call it Army-A/ISI-A. This army considers the protection of national borders its primary goal. It also seeks to maintain the status quo, giving the army extraordinary powers in national decision-making and financial privileges. The second, Army-B/ISI-B—is Allah's army. It is silent, subterranean, currently leaderless but inspired by the philosophy of Abul Ala Maudoodi and Syed Qutb. Possessed by radical dreams, it seeks to turn Pakistan into a state run according to the Shari'a.

The B-types are inspired by groups like the Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), which claims an estimated global following of about one million. It believes that the Pakistani state must be sufficiently weakened, after which its final blitzkrieg will follow and a global caliphate will spring into being. Hizb-ut-Tahrir has been engaged in penetrating the military although the extent of penetration is unclear. In 2009,

former commanding officer of Shamsi Air Force Base Colonel Shahid Bashir, a retired PAF Squadron Leader and lawyer Nadeem Ahmad Shah and U.S.-educated mechanical engineer Awais Ali Khan were arrested for their HuT connections and for leaking 'sensitive' information to this organization. As remarked earlier, the Mehran base attackers are also said to have been HuT inspired.

The B-types were unknown before Musharraf's 9/11 U-turn and were not apparent in the first year or two. But simmering tensions exploded into view in the tribal areas in the years after 9/11 when soldiers were ordered to fight a war in Waziristan, which had effectively turned into an Islamic emirate under the control of the Taliban who had fled Afghanistan after Tora Bora. Fighting co-religionists, who claimed to be engaged in jihad for Islam, was a non-starter. Morale sank, with junior army men openly wondering why they were being asked to attack their ideological comrades. Local clerics refused to conduct funeral prayers for soldiers killed in action. The 'peace accord' in North Waziristan of September 2006, where the Pakistan Army was to show its 'iron fist' softened into a pulpy handshake. In fact it turned out to be a surrender because many soldiers refused to go into battle. The reported reluctance of some military units to confront the Taliban during the 2010 South Waziristan operation is said to have shocked senior officers and limits the range of battle options in North Waziristan.

There is, of course, a strong commonality between Army-A/ISI-A and Army-B/ISI-B. Both were reared on the Two-Nation Theory, the belief of Mohammed Ali Jinnah that Hindus and Muslims could never live together in peace. Both absorb anti-Indianism during their early days in army cadet colleges at Petaro and Hasan Abdal. They also share contempt for Pakistani civilians. This attitude has resulted in Pakistan spending half its history under direct military rule.

But the differences are also significant. Most A-type officers are 'soft Islamists' who are satisfied with a fuzzy belief that Islam provides solutions to everything, that occasional prayers and ritual fasting in Ramzan is sufficient, and that Sufis and Shi'as are

bonafide Muslims rather than *mushriks* (idolators) or apostates. They take the position that fundamentalism is okay, but extremism is not. For A-types, defending the Sunni states of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, or the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) is not considered a priority. But, should a well-paying overseas posting in any of these countries be offered, it would be welcomed. While harbouring a dislike for U.S. policies, they are not militantly anti-American.

On the other hand, B-type officers are soldier ideologues who have travelled further down the road of Islamism. They have ensured that the preachers of Tablighi Jamaat, a supposedly non-political religious organization which has a global proselytizing mission, are allowed open access into the army. More severe in matters of religious rituals than their A-colleagues, they insist that officers and their wives be segregated at army functions. An eye is kept out for officers who secretly drink alcohol, and do not pray often enough. Their political philosophy is that Islam and the state should be inseparable. Inspired by Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi, who preached that 7th century Arab Islam provides a complete blueprint for society and politics, they see capturing state power as a means towards creating the ideal society along the lines of the medieval Medina state. Some B-types are beardless, hence harder to detect. Even if they are fundamentally anti-science, they could be computer savvy. For them, modern technology is a tool of battle, not a triumph of the human imagination.

Generally, A-type officers trivialize the dangers posed by the other side. Mutineers are considered as isolated individuals. Thus, Mumtaz Qadri, the renegade bodyguard who murdered Punjab's Governor Salman Taseer out of religious passion, is seen as an inconvenient aberration rather than a representative of a larger subterranean force. In general, religious terrorism is seen as a passing, relatively inconsequential threat. This is in spite of the fact that such terrorism has claimed more Pakistani lives than were lost in all wars with India, and that captured soldiers are subject to extreme torture followed by a video-taped decapitation. A Taliban video showing seventeen beheaded Pakistani soldiers received scant public media

coverage, and disappeared from the news coverage after a day or two.¹⁸ It has subsequently been followed by other mass beheadings of soldiers, none of which have drawn strong reaction either in the army or the public.

The fact that the military stands divided, while obvious, is nevertheless one that must never be publically articulated. Saleem Shahzad, an investigative journalist, paid for his outspokenness with his life for revealing the existence of Al Qaeda groupings within the Pakistan Navy after the Mehran Base attack.¹⁹ That was the first part of a two-part *Asia Times* article series. Part-two, which promised to reveal similar cells in the army and air force, was never published. Shahzad was tortured and kicked to death after being abducted from one of the most secure parts of Islamabad. His mobile phone records are said to be untraceable, and tapes of closed circuit cameras around the abduction area went mysteriously missing. If true, then his murder could not be the work of hunted organizations like the Pakistani Taliban or Al Qaeda. But then was it the ISI-A or ISI-B? Either could have been responsible but the truth may never be known. Admiral Mullen, who was the first top U.S. leader to publicly link the killing to Pakistan's government, stopped short of blaming the ISI for Saleem Shahzad's murder.²⁰

THE ARMY—POPULAR BUT WEAKER

The army is far more popular in Pakistan than the country's political parties and its elected leaders. When asked whether they would prefer civilian or military control over nuclear weapons, the preference is towards the military. *The Express Tribune* columnist Aakar Patel expresses puzzlement on the army's continuing popularity:

Why is an army that imposed dictatorship on Pakistanis four times (1958, 1969, 1978 and 1999), displaced governments Pakistanis elected another three times (1990, 1993, 1996) and hanged a prime minister still popular? Why do Pakistanis love the ISI, an institution whose former chief Lt. General Asad Durrani says on oath that it meddles in elections and spent \$1.6 million to see the PPP defeated? Why do

Pakistanis hold their politicians responsible for the nation's problems when Pakistan's budget, its foreign policy, its security policy and its Balochistan policy are run by the army? Why do Pakistanis like an army whose chiefs arbitrarily grant themselves extensions (since 1947, India has had 26 army chiefs, while Pakistan has had only 14) because they can?

The answer to the puzzle has two parts. First, the unapologetic theft of public assets by political leaders has seriously damaged Pakistani democracy. But surely this cannot be the whole story. The corruption of Indian politicians like Jayalalitha, Mulayam Singh Yadav, and Mayawati is legendary. They can strongly compete with Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, or Asif Ali Zardari. Yet, their actions have not ever led to the threat of an army coup in India.

The difference is to be found elsewhere: a big majority has internalized the belief that Pakistan's enemy is purely external—India. A Pew poll²¹ in 2012 found that nearly three-quarters of Pakistanis have an unfavourable view of their neighbour. Little changed from 2011 but this view was significantly up from 2006, when only 50 per cent expressed negative feelings. Only 19 per cent of Pakistanis thought the enemy was internal. Fear of religious extremists and support for army action against the Taliban, which reached a peak after the TTP briefly captured power in Swat in 2009, declined in 2011. The currently rising star of Pakistani politics, Imran Khan, has hitched his popularity to anti-Indian and anti-West attitudes.

The consequence of such views has been to encourage militarism. Therefore as of 2012—and likely to continue until something cracks—a score of Islamic militant outfits remain based in Muridke, Bahawalpur, Mansehra and elsewhere. Hafiz Saeed storms across the country making fiery speeches, while Fazlur Rahman Khalil who heads the banned Harkat-ul-Mujahidin, lives comfortably in Islamabad. Malik Ishaq, the self-professed Shi'a-killer continues his business. The mullahs of the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid), who had declared open war upon the state and engaged the Pakistan Army in

full-scale battle, have been reinstated and rewarded with the choicest land in Islamabad for a new madrassa.

Only a razor's edge separates the Pakistan Army from the ones they fight. By official doctrine the army supports fundamentalism and expression of Islamic symbols. However, it is also in mortal combat with religious extremists who have taken their faith still more seriously and are convinced into that the army represents the forces of *kaafir* (infidels). Thus an uncomfortable equilibrium exists between the Pakistan Army and the various *armies of God*.

The delicate equilibrium slips, as may be expected, from time to time. Pakistan has joined a list of countries that have suffered blowbacks after recruiting non-state actors for accomplishing foreign or domestic policy goals. Examples are aplenty: Contras promoted by Ronald Reagan in Nicaragua; Tamil Tigers supported by Rajiv Gandhi; and Bhindranwale's Khalistanis supported by Indira Gandhi.

The attacks from within have diminished the military's moral power and authority. Although still powerful and popular, its authority and ability to control events have steadily slipped. Absence of charismatic leadership, the privileges enjoyed by family members, and the evident accumulation of property and wealth has led to overt criticism that earlier on would have been unthinkable. In the public perception the army lacks commitment to the values it espouses, and has sought to double-deal both the Americans as well as the Islamists. In September 2012, while confirming that Al Qaeda's deputy Abu Yahya al-Libi had been killed by a drone in North Waziristan on 4 June, Aiman Al-Zawahiri, declared that Pakistan had a 'government for sale and an army for rent'. Many in Pakistan, particularly among those who oppose the U.S., would agree strongly. The army's policy of strategic duplicity has been unwittingly unmasked time and time again. In this regard, the drone attacks stand out.

DRONE DECEPTIONS

Officially, the army condemns drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas, which became no-go areas shortly after 9/11 when there was a massive cross-border influx of Mullah Omar's Talibans. But American drones have also removed some of the most ferocious of the army's enemies, such as Baitullah Mehsud who headed the TTP. Although attacks against its allies, such as the Haqqani group in North Waziristan is certainly resented, there is little question that the army sees the utility of drones when they are used against its enemies. This led the media to question the sincerity of the army's routine condemnations. WikiLeaks'ed documents obtained by the English daily *Dawn*, confirmed that these suspicions were well-grounded.²²

These secret cables, accidentally revealed, include internal American government documents showing that the drone strikes program within Pakistan had more than just tacit acceptance of the country's top military brass. In fact, as far back as January 2008, Pakistan's military was requesting the U.S. for greater drone back-up for its own military operations. In a meeting on 22 January 2008 with United States' CENTCOM (Central Command) Commander Admiral William J. Fallon, Pakistan's Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani requested the Americans to provide 'continuous Predator coverage of the conflict area'²³ in South Waziristan where the army was conducting operations against militants. The request is detailed in a cable marked 'secret', sent by the then U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson on 11 February 2008. Around 3–4 March, in a meeting with U.S. Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, Kayani was asked for his help 'in approving a third Restricted Operating Zone for U.S. aircraft over the FATA.' The request—detailed in a cable sent from the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad on 24 March clearly indicates that two 'corridors' for U.S. drones had already been approved earlier. Instead of acclaiming that drones were an effective weapon against a common enemy, it instead chose safety by hiding its role and criticizing the Americans instead.

Until finally ordered to be closed down in December 2011, drone bases had been located at several places inside Pakistan, such as Jacobabad and the Shamsi Air Base in Balochistan.²⁴ Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's) are slow moving targets, easily destroyed by Pakistan's supersonic fighter aircraft, or perhaps by ground-to-air missiles if supplied secretly to the Taliban (this possibility was hinted at by Dr A.Q. Khan in September 2012 while speaking at a rally organized by his newly-formed party's supporters). Their unhindered operation over Pakistani skies would have been impossible without the army's consent.

Other confidential American diplomatic cables, also obtained by *Dawn*, revealed that collaboration with the U.S., strenuously denied by the army, was in fact true and that U.S. special operation forces had been embedded with Pakistani troops for intelligence gathering by the summer of 2009. They were subsequently deployed for joint operations in Pakistani territory by September 2009. Ambassador Anne Patterson reported to the State Department in May 2009 that, 'We have created Intelligence Fusion cells with embedded U.S. Special Forces with both SSG and Frontier Corps (Bala Hisar, Peshawar) with the Rover equipment ready to deploy.'

But cooperation with the Americans was sharply limited. It was confined to the top tiers, was uncertain, had to be deniable, and often some in the military leadership were unaware of what position had to be taken. The tenuous nature of the alliance became acutely obvious once Osama bin Laden came into American cross hairs.

BIN LADEN AT KAKUL

On the midnight of 2 May 2011 an elite squad of helicopter-borne American Navy SEALs quietly slipped into Pakistan from Afghanistan a little past midnight. They found Osama bin Laden inside his house in Abbotabad near the Pakistan Military Academy at Kakul, killed him and then dispatched him to his watery grave hours later. It was only when the Americans had exited Pakistan's airspace that air defenses were scrambled.

As the story broke on Pakistani news channels, the elected government shuddered. Too weak, corrupt and inept to take initiatives, it awaited instructions. The Foreign Office and government officials appeared tongue-tied for many hours after U.S. President Obama had announced the success of the U.S. mission. The silence was finally broken when the Foreign Office declared that, 'Osama bin Laden's death illustrates the resolve of the international community including Pakistan to fight and eliminate terrorism.'²⁵ Hours later, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani described the killing as a 'great victory'. Thereupon, Pakistan's High Commissioner to the UK, Wajid Shamsul Hasan, rushed to claim credit: 'Pakistan's government was cooperating with American intelligence throughout and they had been monitoring [bin Laden's] activities with the Americans, and they kept track of him from Afghanistan, Waziristan to Afghanistan and again to North Waziristan.'²⁶

But this welcoming stance was reversed hours later once the Pakistan Army had decided to condemn the raid. Praising bin Laden's killing was now out of the question—rapid somersaults followed as officials ate words uttered hours earlier. Official spokespersons became inchoate and contradictory. Without referring to the statement he had made that very morning of 3 May, Wajid Shamsul Hasan abruptly reversed his public position, now saying: 'Nobody knew that Osama bin Laden was there—no security agency, no Pakistani authorities knew about it. Had we known it, we would have done it ourselves.'²⁷ For thirty-six hours, Pakistan's president and prime minister awaited pointers from the army. But they knew simple obedience was not enough.

Desperate to seek help from the Obama administration and avert a military takeover, the Pakistani government, represented by Ambassador Hussain Haqqani, allegedly approached the Americans by using the services of a Washington insider, Mansoor Ijaz, and sent a secret memo to Admiral Mike Mullen. The memo, whose existence had initially been doubted, was published in November 2011, leading to the resignation of Ambassador Haqqani and the ongoing Supreme Court investigation. The case became known as

'Memogate' and stirred strong emotions. After many months, with the Zardari government's support, and evading the intelligence agencies, Haqqani somehow successfully made it back to the U.S. and resumed his teaching position at Boston University.

Faced with a disaster, the military had opted to raise anti-U.S. sentiment for having violated Pakistan's sovereignty, the question of how Osama bin Laden had found refuge was side-lined. Gen. Kayani announced his unhappiness with Zardari's government: 'Incomplete information and lack of technical details have resulted in speculations and mis-reporting. Public dismay and despondency has also been aggravated due to an insufficient formal response.'²⁸ The threat was thinly veiled. The government must proactively defend the army and intelligence agencies, else be warned.

A full eight days after the Osama's killing, Prime Minister Gilani broke his silence. He absolved the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and army of 'either complicity or incompetence'. Before an incredulous world, he claimed in a statement that both suggestions were 'absurd'. Attempting to spread the blame, he declared in Paris, before his meeting with French President Sarkozy: 'This is an intelligence failure of the whole world, not Pakistan alone.'²⁹

With criticism all around, in the days that followed, Gen. Pervez Ashfaq Kayani toured the garrisons to raise morale. He was asked why the invaders had not been challenged and destroyed, as well as who might have sheltered bin Laden who, together with Al Qaeda, were Pakistan's declared enemies. *The Express Tribune* quotes an un-named young military officer who told the army chief: 'Sir, I am ashamed of what happened in Abbottabad.' Replied General Kayani, 'So am I.'³⁰ He promptly went on to hold Zardari's government responsible for allowing Pakistan to get such bad press.

The bin Laden operation revealed the distrust the U.S. had in the Pakistan Army. Earlier instances had been tense as well. Leon Panetta, chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, left Islamabad fuming after an apparently fruitless meeting with Generals Kayani and Pasha.³¹ According to U.S. media reports, Panetta shared with the military leadership some video and satellite imagery of militants

hastily leaving two IED (Improvised Explosive Device) factories in Waziristan. It wanted Pakistan to take action against the two sites. But Panetta alleged at the meeting that the information was leaked within 24 hours of sharing and by the time the raiding teams reached those places, the militants had melted away.

In principle the bin Laden episode could have been used by the military high command to fully investigate and crack down upon the B-types within the military in Abbottabad and elsewhere. The cost would, however, have been high and the establishment preferred to remain in its comfort zone. But, it seemed, that a delicate balancing act—the doctrine of strategic duplicity—was over. Would the A-types now join up with the B-types in wanting to quit the alliance with the United States?

This almost—but not quite—happened just a few months later. On 26 November 2011, twenty-four Pakistani soldiers had been killed by NATO/American forces inside Pakistani territory at Salala, an incident which the U.S. said was by error but refused to apologize for. It said their Pakistani counterparts had supplied incorrect coordinates for their forward posts but Pakistan rejected this explanation.

Thereafter the DPC (Difah-e-Pakistan Council), a spontaneous conglomeration of jihadist and other anti-American groups, suddenly emerged and was given permission to take centre-stage in country-wide protests. This umbrella coalition of more than 30 Pakistani quasi-political religious parties included the Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, while cricketer Imran Khan, now Pakistan's most popular political leader, lent his party's support. The DPC pushed for closing NATO supply routes to Afghanistan and called for revoking the Zardari government's decision to grant India the MFN (Most Favoured Nation) status. Within weeks it held mammoth anti-U.S. and anti-India rallies in Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, and other cities. Few doubted that the army had agreed to let loose these street-level forces, and once again it appeared that the army was contemplating 'strategic defiance' against the United States. However this time it would be a go-it-alone

effort. Changed circumstances meant that it could not be along the lines of a regional Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran compact as advocated by General Mirza Aslam Beg in the early 1990s.

As the protests grew, in early 2012, Pakistan announced that it would no longer allow NATO supplies to transit the country, causing extra expenditure of about \$2.1 billion to the U.S. for the longer route that required passage through Central Asian countries. But, eventually, pressed for release of the Coalition Support Funds (CSF), Pakistan accepted a rather ragged apology from Hilary Clinton. Expectedly, the DPC called for protests against this 'treasonous act'. In July 2012, a 'Long March' moved from Lahore to the front of Parliament House in Islamabad taking two days. Tens of thousands moved by truck, bus, car and bicycle. They were led by Sami ul-Haq, who claims to be a father of the Taliban and a friend of Mullah Omar, and retired Gen. Hamid Gul, one-time head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, and other prominent 'America Haters'.³² Nevertheless, NATO supplies started trickling through. The DPC disappeared as miraculously as it had appeared.

For now the A-group had prevailed; the B-group would have to bide its time.

GUARDING THE NUCLEAR ARSENAL

Defending nuclear weapons against other nations as well as internal enemies poses a difficult security dilemma. Pakistan would like to keep them hidden from India, the U.S., or Israel. On the other hand, army insiders are already in the know. The fear is that, perhaps in collusion with an external Islamic group, they could be plotting some move unknown to the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA), the Strategic Plans Division (SPD), or the Chief of Army Staff.

The SPD claims that an efficient system of sensitive material control and accounting along U.S. national laboratory standards exists. This is impossible to check. Nor is it possible to verify the claim that Pakistan's nuclear weapons are protected by a two-man or three-man rule that requires simultaneous actions by officers in different places before a weapon can be launched. Similarly, it is

impossible to check if weapons have been de-mated from their delivery systems and stored separately. If these claims are true, then there is indeed a higher margin of safety.

On the other hand some public claims made directly by the nuclear authorities, or at their behest, are simply unbelievable. For example,

Another [precaution] is the training of a wide variety of personnel from all major organizations. The training involves nuclear security, physical protection, emergency preparedness, detection equipment, recovery operations, and border monitoring. The organizations involved in training are the Coast Guard, Frontier Corps, Pakistan Rangers, Customs, Emergency & Rescue Services, National Disaster Management Cell, intelligence services, law enforcement agencies, and all strategic organizations including offices from the SPD.³³

The organizations mentioned above are well-known to be beset by chronic problems of incompetence, cronyism, and corruption. Performing their regular duties lies beyond the capacity of most, what to say about extraordinary matters such as nuclear security or detection equipment. Even though it is relatively easy to apprehend ordinary smuggling and lawlessness, the arrest rate is extremely small. A thousand gruesome murders in Karachi over three months of 2012 have gone unsolved and unpunished, while air and rail crashes are un-investigated. It is rare for terrorists to be caught, and still rarer to be punished.

Claims relating to the security of nuclear materials, such as the following one, sometimes pose a challenge to the imagination:

Nuclear security emergency centres and procedures to secure orphan radioactive sources and to secure borders against any illicit trafficking have been put in place. Rigorous inspections are one key element of the PNRA's activities to strengthen controls. Another is the training of a wide variety of personnel from all major organizations. The training involves nuclear security, physical protection, emergency preparedness, detection equipment, recovery operations, and border monitoring.³⁴

Pakistan's borders, especially with Afghanistan, are porous as a sieve. Smuggling of goods and weapons has historically been a major occupation for tribes on both sides of the border. No serious person could conceive of installing nuclear detection equipment there.

SAFETY MEASURES—ADEQUATE?

As early as December 1999, Pakistan had requested senior U.S. officials visiting Islamabad for Permissive Action Links (PALs) that are directly integrated into the firing mechanism and electronics of a nuclear weapon, as well as Environment Sensitive Devices (ESDs), in order to enhance protection against unauthorised use or accidental nuclear detonations. At that time, the U.S. had declined. These devices make it possible for the weapons to be maintained at a higher state of alert for the same level of safety, thereby increasing the threat perceived by India. But subsequent to the big improvement in Pakistan's relationship with the U.S. immediately after 9/11, it is possible that the U.S. may have acceded to Pakistan's request without demanding that Pakistan reveal the location or details of its nuclear weapons.

David Albright, a U.S. nuclear security analyst, prescribed the following forms of additional assistance that could be given to Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of 9/11: Generic physical protection and material accounting practices; theoretical exercises; unclassified military handbooks on nuclear weapons safety and security; more sophisticated vaults and access doors; portal control equipment; better surveillance equipment; advanced equipment for materials accounting; personnel reliability programs; and programs to reduce the likelihood of leaking sensitive information. In addition, aid could focus on methods that improve the security of nuclear weapons against unauthorised use through devices not intrinsic to the design of the nuclear weapon or through special operational or administrative restrictions. Excluded assistance would include nuclear weapons design information aimed at making more secure, reliable or safer nuclear weapons or devices, PALs, coded launch control devices, and environmental sensing devices.³⁵

According to an ISIS (Institute for Science and International Security) report,³⁶ after 9/11, U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, had offered nuclear protection assistance to Pakistan. The U.S. knew that Pakistan was determined to stay on its nuclear course and inducements to do otherwise were futile. Thereafter, one initiative originating from Washington was to encourage Pakistan to enhance the safety of its nuclear weapons. This fitted well with the army's needs especially that now it faced an insider threat. Earlier offers to Pakistan were rejected; the offered technology was said to be quite rudimentary. Later there was grudging acceptance of some safety devices under the condition that the end point usage would remain opaque. Other aspects of the assistance included training courses for Pakistani nuclear weapons personnel in U.S. laboratories where they were instructed on nuclear safety and security issues.

After A.Q. Khan's global nuclear entrepreneurship came to light in 2004, Musharraf's government sharply reversed its earlier policy of keeping all nuclear matters under wraps and accelerated its efforts to assure the world that Pakistan's nuclear weapons were in safe hands. With American help, many safety measures were put in place. These improvements had been paid for out of the \$100 million dollar fund created by the Bush administration.³⁷ The measures were praised by various international visitors to Pakistan. Joseph Lieberman, U.S. Senator, and at the time a presidential hopeful, who also chaired a Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee, left reassured after a briefing by SPD's head, Lt. Gen. (retd.) Khalid Kidwai. Lieberman declared in a subsequent press conference: 'Overall I felt reassured . . . and I will take that message back to Congress.'³⁸ Two months after the bin Laden episode, Admiral Mike Mullen gave soothing comments. Mullen, the highest ranking officer in the U.S. military stated that Pakistan's control over its nuclear weapons appears tight enough to protect against the possibility of seizure by extremist sympathizers who might infiltrate the nation's army or intelligence service.³⁹

A stream of highly placed Pakistani officials made a beeline for Washington's think-tanks and military colleges across the United

States. A few years earlier this would have been unthinkable. Visits by top SPD officials to the U.S. became routine. Significantly, the Director General of the SPD, Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai, was also a visitor to U.S. institutions. In a special guest lecture given in 2006 to the faculty, students, and guests of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, he sought to debunk the notion that Pakistani weapons could fall into the hands of religious extremists, were on hair-trigger alert, or be used irresponsibly.⁴⁰ Other Pakistani military officers associated with the nation's nuclear program were paid by U.S. funding sources for writing reports and papers for U.S. think-tanks and research institutes. Still others began writing books claiming to reveal the 'true history of the Pakistani nuclear program'. Cooperation with U.S. agencies on nuclear weapon safety appears to have continued, at least until 2011, in spite of the rocky Pak-U.S. relationship.

A basic question relates to the *extent* that nuclear weapons can be made safe. Some safety mechanisms suggest themselves. Chances of nuclear sabotage and accident decrease if readiness levels are reduced. It certainly helps if the fissile core and bomb mechanisms are stored separately in safely guarded vaults, and if it takes some appreciable amount of time to assemble the pieces together. If command is centralized, rather than delegated to local commanders, there is less likelihood of an individual or group initiating nuclear hostilities. At the same time, this calls for a command and control system that is protected against decapitation or disruption of communication facilities.

But safety inevitably competes against readiness. A perfectly safe nuclear weapon is also one that cannot be used and hence, by definition, is useless. In times of crisis and war, when casualties and passions run high, there will be a strong urge to weaken the safety mechanisms in place. One can easily imagine that PALs (Permissive Action Links) would be weakened by over-riding software instructions or, as an extreme, disabled by some secret switch.

To meet the insider threat, the SPD's claim is that the Personnel Reliability Program (PRP), named after its model in the U.S., provides adequate security. The PRP involves a battery of checks aimed at rooting out human foibles such as lust, greed or depression that might lead one to betray national secrets. Like the security methods of other nuclear powers, the new Pakistani program delves into personal finances, political views, etc. New recruits are required to take a battery of psychological background checks, and can be watched up to a year. Even after retirement they are monitored by intelligence agencies. According to Feroz Khan, former Strategic Plans Division director, 'The system knows how to distinguish who is a "fundo" [fundamentalist] and who is simply pious.'⁴¹

But this does not really reassure. Those familiar with engineers and scientists working inside the Pakistan's nuclear program know well how things have changed over the decades. Long beards and prayer marks on the forehead are common, and religious zeal is especially apparent during the month of Ramzan. The murder of the U.S. ambassador to Libya, which followed the screening of a blasphemous movie, was greeted with satisfaction by many individuals within the nuclear establishment. Such attitudes make at least some of those in charge occasionally nervous:

One employee recently was booted from the nuclear program for passing out political pamphlets of an ultraconservative Islamic party and being observed coaxing colleagues into joining him at a local mosque for party rallies, said the security official, a two-star general who declined to be identified, citing the sensitive nature of his job. Even though the employee did nothing illegal, his behaviour was deemed too disturbing.⁴²

There is no way of checking whether the SPD's Personnel Reliability Program (PRP) and the Human Reliability Program (HRP) are effective or if its counter intelligence teams have what it takes. In a religion that stresses its completeness, and in which righteousness is given higher value than obedience to temporal authority, there is plenty of room for serious conflict between piety and discipline. It is not possible, even in principle, to devise a questionnaire—or a set

of criteria—that can accurately tell the difference between an extremist who believes that preserving the faith calls for violent action and a peaceful fundamentalist who worries only about the hereafter. To detect religious extremism, especially among those who choose to hide it as a matter of strategy, is a difficult task. At a practical level there is the question of which presiding officer will make the distinction.

There are still other questions. These concern the weapons laboratories and production units. Given the generally sloppy work culture and lack of attention to detail, it is hard to imagine that accurate records have been maintained over a quarter century of fissile material production. So, can one be certain that small, but significant quantities of highly enriched uranium have not already made their way out? Given that A.Q. Khan had successfully arranged for the smuggling of entire centrifuges weighing half a ton each, to keep an open mind on the matter would be wise.

UNITED STATES OPTIONS ARE VERY LIMITED

America's fears about Pakistan's nuclear weapons have not been allayed, nor are they likely to be. A book published in 2012 underscored U.S. worries about Pakistan's nuclear weapons.⁴³ According to its author, David Sanger, who is chief Washington correspondent of *The New York Times*, President Barack Obama told his staff in late 2011 that Pakistan could 'disintegrate' and that Pakistan is his 'biggest single national security concern.' The president is said to have told his senior aides that he had 'the least power to prevent' the potential collapse of Pakistan and that, in the event that Pakistan disintegrates, it would spark a scramble for nuclear weapons, some of which could fall into the hands of Islamic militants.

Obama's remarks were promptly reported in the Pakistani Press⁴⁴ together with other claims reported by Sanger that nuclear officials from Pakistan and the U.S. periodically meet surreptitiously in locales like Abu Dhabi or London to discuss nuclear security and the detection and disablement of atomic weapons in Pakistan.

Excerpts from the book were highlighted by the U.S. media but it assumed an added importance when U.S. officials suggested to Pakistani diplomats, visiting officials, lawmakers and even journalists to read the book.

Such concerns in Washington make it logical to assume that the U.S. must have extensively war-gamed the situation. One assumes that contingency plans exist to either disarm or destroy the weapons, to be put into effect once there is actionable intelligence of Pakistan's nukes getting loose or if a radical regime takes over and makes overt threats. What could these plans be, and could they really work?⁴⁵

According to Jeffrey T. Richelson, a U.S. intelligence historian, there exists a U.S. Nuclear Emergency Search Team (NEST) that is tasked to deal with emergencies such as might arise out of the Pakistani situation. He reportedly obtained an unclassified Power Point presentation titled 'Detecting, Identifying and Localizing WMD' by the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (SOLIC). In it were slides referring to 'clandestine or low-visibility special operations taken to: locate, seize, destroy, capture, recover or render safe WMD,' either on land or sea. He said such a mission has been a Special Operations Forces priority since 2002.

A *New Yorker* article by Seymour Hersh published in November 2009 made waves in Pakistan. Hersh suggested that U.S. emergency plans exist for taking the sting out of Pakistan's nuclear weapons by seizing their trigger mechanisms.⁴⁶ He also claimed that an alarm, apparently related to a missing nuclear bomb component, had caused a U.S. rapid response team to fly to Dubai. The alarm proved false and the team is said to have been recalled before it reached Pakistan. The Pakistan foreign ministry, as well as the U.S. embassy in Islamabad, vigorously denied any such episode.

What should one make of Hersh's claim? Quite likely it is an exaggerated account of some small incident, while it probably had a tiny core of truth it is difficult to believe that the U.S. acted as claimed by Hersh. First, even if the U.S. knows the precise numbers

of deployed weapons, it simply cannot know all their position coordinates—especially for mobile ones. Extensive underground tunnels reportedly exist within which they can be freely moved and there are even reports that warheads are moved by unmarked trucks to locations hidden within cities. Moreover, from afar it is difficult to tell look-alike dummies from the real warhead. India would be of little help to the U.S. in locating nuclear weapons; one imagines it would know even less than the United States. Second, even if a location is exactly known, it would be heavily guarded. This implies many casualties on both sides when intruding troops are engaged, thus making a secret operation impossible. Even a massive use of force is unlikely to net all Pakistani nuclear weapons. Third, attacking a Pakistani nuclear site would be an act of war with totally unacceptable consequences for the United States, particularly in view of its Afghan difficulties, which are expected to last well beyond 2014. All of this suggests that Hersh's source of information was unreliable.

How would the U.S. actually react to theft? Ill-informed TV anchors in Pakistan have often alleged that Blackwater and U.S. forces will descend to grab the country's nuclear weapons. But in a hypothetical crisis that has crossed into the extreme and where the U.S. has decided to take on Pakistan, its preferred military option would not be ground forces. Instead it would opt for precision Massive Ordnance Penetrator 30,000-pound bombs dropped by B-2 bombers or fry the circuit boards of the warheads using short, high-energy bursts of microwave energy from low-flying aircraft. But deeply buried warheads, or those with adequate metallic shielding, would still remain safe. Ground forces would also have to be employed in some situations.

A U.S. attack on Pakistan's nuclear weapon storage sites would, however, be a final act of extreme desperation. Even if by some miracle every one of these weapons was destroyed, the capacity to make more would remain. For actual de-nuclearization of Pakistan, all major nuclear weapon facilities, reactors, and uranium enrichment plants would also have to be eliminated. If this is

perceived as imminent, whether or not India is involved, Pakistan could decide to attack India as a co-conspirator and ally of the United States. This, together with the retribution that would inevitably follow, would be doomsday.

Hence the bottom line: there is no way for any external power, whether America or India, to destroy or seize Pakistan's nuclear weapons. War against Pakistan is simply not an option as it would likely lead to the use of nuclear weapons following which the subcontinent would cease to exist in its present form.

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