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OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**  
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

# RSIS COMMENTARIES

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## **Strains in US-Pakistan Security Cooperation: Implications for Afghanistan**

By Sajjad Ashraf

### **Synopsis**

*US-Pakistan cooperation in counter-terrorism operations have taken a dip over US drone attacks and actions of CIA operatives. Such strained relations could have an impact on the war in Afghanistan.*

### **Commentary**

UNITED STATES-PAKISTAN relations have taken a dip following a series of diplomatic disputes over the modality of their cooperation in counter-terrorism operations. There has been a virtual halt in joint operations by the intelligence services of the two countries in the northwestern region of Pakistan, Waziristan, also known as the Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Previous close cooperation between the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had seen operations resulting in several high profile arrests and elimination of alleged terrorists in South Waziristan. However in recent months the ISI has become wary of the unfettered access that the CIA had to various regions of Pakistan.

### **Influx of Americans**

The government has imposed restrictions on the issuing of visas to American nationals by Pakistani diplomatic missions, which are now required to first obtain clearance from headquarters (meaning the ISI). Until a year ago there had been reports of US personnel arriving in Pakistan without going through immigration formalities and renting a large number of houses in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and other cities. This influx of Americans alarmed the government.

The Pakistani military has also been under US pressure for several months to launch a military operation in South Waziristan, where the Americans believed much of the support for Afghan resistance emanated from. The Pakistani military maintained that they knew how to tackle such problems in their land. The military, which has suffered thousands of casualties in operations in the north, felt it could not spread itself too thin, and was conscious of the costs and social ramifications of such operations. In this the military could count on public support.

Meanwhile, the US has resumed drone attacks in the northwest regions, killing 45 civilians in one attack on 17 March 2011, a day after the release of a CIA contractor, Raymond Davis, from a Lahore prison. The Pakistani Army Chief, General Ashraf Kayani, for the first time, was obliged to issue a strong condemnation of the attack,

while the tribes in Waziristan declared jihad against the US. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry announced a boycott of a trilateral meeting on Afghanistan.

The US responded by making public the administration's bi-annual report to the US Congress questioning the Pakistani Army's direction and commitment in the 'war on terror'. The report also criticised the 'culture of impunity' towards human rights violations by the Pakistani Army.

### **Drone Attacks**

In an effort to repair the damage Lt-Gen Ahmad Shuja Pasha, Chief of ISI, went to Washington on 10 April 11 and met CIA Director Leon Panetta. He left the next day for Turkey to brief President Asif Ali Zardari, who was on a visit there. By that time US drones had made two more missile attacks on Pakistani territory, killing six. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry, in another first, lodged a strong protest with the US Ambassador.

While a CIA spokesman described the meeting between the ISI and CIA chiefs as "productive" reports from Islamabad said Pasha had made two demands: first, stop the drone attacks on tribal territories, and second, identify all covert CIA operatives in Pakistan. Earlier reports said Pasha would call for the withdrawal of 300-350 CIA operatives from Pakistan. Clearly the action of one CIA contractor in killing two Pakistani agents in Lahore last December had caused widespread anger among the military.

The US drone attacks, which had killed 940 civilians in 2010, have also been extremely unpopular and drawn the public, government and military to the same side. The Army claimed that the drones infringed on Pakistani sovereignty. Prime Minister Reza Gilani told Parliament that Pakistan was seeking support from friendly countries to persuade the US to stop the attacks. The Army high command has in private briefings hinted that they were only awaiting the government's decision to shoot down the drones. However Pakistan has also asked the US to share the drone technology so that its military would lead and conduct the operations, a request that the US is unlikely to accede to.

The dip in US-Pakistani security cooperation has implications for the war in Afghanistan. The latest strains come barely three months before the declared US withdrawal from Afghanistan is due to begin. President Zardari has commented that after 12 years of US involvement in Afghanistan, everybody's patience was on edge, especially the American public. He blamed the war in Afghanistan as an undermining factor in the restoration of democratic institutions and economic prosperity in Pakistan.

Nevertheless, as the two countries need each other to sustain a government friendly to both in Kabul, restoring the level of trust between the US and Pakistan is crucial.

*The writer, a member of Pakistan's foreign service for 36 years, was High Commissioner to Singapore from 2004 to 2008.*