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PAKISTAN'S ISI: THE DEVIL'S OWN – ANALYSIS

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The well organized and systematic covert network of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in India, has been under the Indian intelligence radar for a long time. Over the past two weeks, however, this has led to a number of arrests not only in India, but in Malaysia as well. On May 14, 2014, a Special Branch Counter Terrorism Unit in Kuala Lumpur arrested a Sri Lankan national, believed to be an associate of suspected ISI agent Sakir Hussain, who had been arrested in Chennai (Tamil Nadu) on April 29, 2014. Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Malaysia, Bakri Zinin, disclosed that the Sri Lankan was believed to be involved in a plan to attack foreign consulates in Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and Bangalore (Karnataka) in India. The Malaysian Police also stated that they were probing possible al Qaeda links to the arrested person.

Sakir Hussain was arrested by the 'Q' Branch of the Crime Investigation Department (CID) of the Tamil Nadu Police in Chennai, along with photographs of vital installations and Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN). According to Police sources, "He was planning to sabotage many important structures in Chennai, including the US Consulate. He was planning attacks in other parts of the country." Following his arrest, a case was registered against him under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967, and the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Police included the names of two Pakistan diplomats in Colombo, Amir Zubair Siddiq, Counsellor (Visa) at the Pakistan High Commission in Colombo, and his associate 'Boss' alias Shah in the First Information Report (FIR). Siddiq and Shah allegedly engaged Hussain to gather information on vital installations in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Following Hussain's arrest, Q Branch Police arrested another two people from Choolaimedu and Sowcarpet areas of Chennai, on April 30.

Hussain's interrogation brought out that he had been making attempts to establish a widespread network to carry out activities, including circulation of FICN in South India. As reported on May 5, central security agencies claimed that, during interrogation, Hussain accepted that ISI had plans to carry out terror attacks on US and Israeli Consulates in India, and backed his claims with evidence. The Tamil Nadu Police told a Court in Egmore, Chennai, on May 5, that Hussain was also working on a plan to sabotage the Indian Navy bases at Kochi (Kerala) and Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh).

After Police received information, on May 6, that ISI agents could infiltrate India from Sri Lanka via Palk Straits, a new security system has been put in place and Coastal Security Group (CSG) units have been deployed off Rameswaram to block infiltration through sea. On May 8 three Naval patrol vessels were stationed at the Navy jetty at Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu. Jyoti Basu, in-charge of CSG, Rameswaram, disclosed that CSG had been deployed in the area, and that the measure has been taken to strengthen the coastal security mechanism.

ISI's involvement in terrorism in India has long been evident and recent incidents are only the tip of the iceberg. ISI's role has repeatedly been documented, particularly with regard to the printing and circulation of FICN, engaging itself in terror-funding activities, and also providing ideological and material support as well as safe haven and training to terrorist organizations.

The ISI, headquartered, in the Pakistani capital city of Islamabad and currently headed by its Director General, Lieutenant General Zaheer ul-Islam (who assumed office on March 9, 2012), has acquired increasing notoriety even within Pakistan. Amidst growing concerns of political machinations, human rights violations, 'disappearances', and widespread intimidation, a Bill was introduced in the Senate (Upper House) of Pakistan, in July 2012, to make the ISI more accountable to the Parliament and Government. Unfortunately, the Bill was quickly withdrawn on the grounds that Farhatullah Babar, the spokesman of then-President Asif Ali Zardari, had not secured the approval of a Special Committee of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) headed by Law Minister Farook H. Naek. No subsequent attempt has been made to revive the Bill, or in any other manner impose greater accountability on the ISI.

According to partial data compiled by the Institute for Conflict Management (ICM), at least 144 ISI-related modules have been neutralised in India since 2004. 38 such modules were neutralised in New Delhi, followed by 19 in Punjab, 15 in Uttar Pradesh, 13 in West Bengal, 10 in Andhra Pradesh, nine in Maharashtra, eight in Gujarat, seven in Rajasthan, six in Karnataka, four in Madhya Pradesh, three each in Uttaranchal, Bihar, Tripura and Tamil Nadu, and one each in Goa, Haryana and Assam.

ISI has been covertly funding terrorist activities against India through various channels. Crucially on September 7-8, 2012, the Delhi Police noted that Indian Mujahideen (IM) "has Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) patronage". Further, a January 2014 Intelligence Bureau (IB) alert indicated that ISI provided the IM and its associates about INR 800 million to carry out

terrorist strikes in India. Separately, according to a March 2014 report, intelligence intercept by central intelligence agencies in India revealed that ISI gave around INR 26 million to IM operative Riyaz Bhatkal over the last three years, for anti-India operations. Bhatkal, based in Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh in Pakistan, used to send funds to Yasin Bhatkal, Assadullah Akhtar, Tehsin Akhtar alias Monu, Zia-ur-Rehman alias Waqas, Shaquib and others, all of whom are now in Indian custody, through Western Union money transfer and hawala (illegal money transaction) dealers. An unidentified intelligence officer revealed, “He used to send Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 lakh depending on the demand but he had received a huge chunk of money from ISI for operations.”

In addition, a January 2014 report also reiterated that most of the FICN in circulation is printed in Government-controlled printing presses in Pakistan and the ISI has a major role in the process. According to a senior Indian official, “On the behest of ISI, the FICN are printed in Government-controlled printing presses at Karachi, Multan, Quetta, Lahore and Peshawar. The watermark, Ashoka Pillar, Mahatma Gandhi’s image, the denomination, RBI mark and other security features are very prominent, clear and look real in FICN printed in these presses.” A Crime Branch Officer in Delhi Police also noted, “The FICN are sent to India through several countries, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Middle East, Thailand, Denmark, Holland, Singapore and Sri Lanka. After the Government of Thailand recently imposed restrictions, the ISI started using Vietnam and Malaysia for smuggling FICN to India through Nepal”.

ISI has also provided protection to a multiplicity of India-directed terrorist organisations, prominently including Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT). In its February 11, 2014, charge sheet against LeT operative Abdul Karim Tunda, the Delhi Police stated, “Abdul Karim Tunda along with Pakistan’s spy agency ISI and LeT prepared a team of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian jihadi Muslims and prepared a blueprint of carrying out attacks in India”. And further, “on the anniversary of demolition of Babri Masjid in 1993, Tunda, on the directions of ISI and LeT ‘chief’ Hafiz Sayeed, made a plan to carry out serial blasts on trains in Mumbai.” Tunda was arrested by the Special Cell from the Indo-Nepal border on August 16, 2013. The charge sheet further states that, in 2010, Colonel Imtiaz of ISI and Iqbal Kana had assigned Tunda the task of sending RDX (Research Development Explosive) to India via Bangladesh, to be used by Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) terrorists to target the Commonwealth Games in Delhi. The charge sheet includes details of senior ISI functionaries, whose phone numbers were found in Tunda’s phone, among other evidence of Pakistan’s active involvement in terrorist activities in India. In addition, Tunda was also in regular touch with Brigadier Hameed Gul (Retd.), Colonel Usman and Colonel Abdulla of ISI, and BKI’s Wadhwa Singh, Ratandeep Singh and Lakhbir Singh.

Indeed, the ISI has long been linked to terrorism across the South Asian region, with its support to Sikh terror groups dating back to 1984. On September 1, 2012, following the arrest of a BKI terrorist, Kulwant Singh alias Guddu, from Mohali District of Punjab, an NIA official observed, “ISI is also reportedly keen on forging coordination between Khalistani terrorists, terrorists operating in J&K and some fundamentalist groups and in this process Jagtar Singh Tara who escaped from Burail Jail in 2004 is favoured by the ISI to revive the Khalistan movement.”

All the Kashmir-directed Islamist terrorist formations, moreover, have had explicit ISI support that has been documented over the decades. Most recently, a November 30, 2013, charge sheet filed against Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) ‘chief’ Syed Salahuddin, NIA elaborately details the terror nexus between ISI and HM. The charge sheet noted, “Markazi-e-Shura of HM, a top body of its decision making, in the year 1999 in a meeting chaired by Mohammed Syed Salahuddin... in connivance with the agencies of Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, including but not limited to Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), founded a trust namely JKART [the Jammu and Kashmir Affectees Relief Trust], a frontal organization of HM, with the object to systematically receive, collect and raise funds from different sources in Pakistan and other countries”.

ISI’s links with India’s most wanted terrorist and crime boss, Dawood Ibrahim, are also well documented. Mumbai Police sources stated, in May 2012, “D-company [Ibrahim’s crime syndicate] aides holed up in Pakistan are provided security and shelter by ISI. Dawood and his aides can easily obtain bogus passports issued by Pakistan authorities and travel abroad”. Moreover, in August, 2013, LeT operative Abdul Karim Tunda, also believed to be an ISI recruiter, claimed that Dawood Ibrahim was still in Karachi and under the protection of the ISI.

Indeed, the entire infrastructure of India-directed Islamist terrorism, prominently including LeT, HM, Harkat-ul-Mujahiddeen, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami, IM and numerous lesser formations, have been provided secure operational bases in Pakistan, as well as an elaborate infrastructure for training – often in military facilities – and access to resources, by the ISI, backed by Pakistan’s military establishment.

ISI is also trying to strengthen the terrorist set-up in India’s North-East, in association with various existing insurgent groups of the region. Regarding the security situation in India’s North-east, Assam Director General of Police (DGP), Khagen Sarma asserted, on January 19, 2014, that the ISI was behind the unification bid of Northeastern militants. Sarma stated, “It is the Pakistani ISI and other external forces that are behind the fresh initiative taken by ‘commander in chief’ of United Liberation Front of Assam (anti-talks) to form a common force of all the insurgent groups based in Northeast to fight Indian Security Forces.” Interestingly, on January 21, 2014, the Achik National Volunteer Council-Breakaway faction (ANVC-B) claimed to have evidence of the Achik National Volunteer Council’s (ANVC’s) contacts with the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA), United Achik Liberation Army (UALA) and other terrorist organisations, and Pakistan’s ISI. Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has also claimed that there was a Maoist-ISI nexus in the Northeast. In February 2014, Gogoi stated that CPI-Maoist had entered into an understanding with militants based in India’s northeastern region, as well as with Pakistan’s external intelligence agency ISI, to spread its network in the State.

India continues to fire-fight against the ISI’s terrorist outreach into its soil, but has explored no solution to mount pressure on Pakistan to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism that has maintained the continuous feeder lines across India. Indeed, emphasis on somehow bribing the Pakistani establishment by gestures of goodwill, has only strengthened the ISI’s conviction that it can continue to act with complete impunity.