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Pakistan, US look across the border

By Syed Saleem Shahzad
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ISLAMABAD - [Pakistan's](#) ongoing cooperation in the "war on terror" in the past few months has played a part in it being granted an additional loan of US\$3.2 billion from the International Monetary Fund, raising the total loan to \$11.3 billion, or 6.3% of the country's gross domestic product. [1]

At the same time, the [United States](#) special representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, is due to visit Pakistan from August 15-18 to press for Islamabad's further cooperation in tackling the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, the main Taliban militant umbrella group in Pakistan primarily in conflict with the central government. Its leader Baitullah Mehsud is reported to have been killed in a US Predator drone attack last week, and many other militants have died in subsequent such raids.

The US wants Pakistan to help bring the conflict in Pakistan and Afghanistan to an end through mediation by soliciting the Taliban for talks with the aim of incorporating them into the Afghan political mainstream.

"The real plan is not the elimination of any individual, rather it is to root out al-Qaeda's headquarters, situated at the crossroads of the South Waziristan and North Waziristan [tribal areas in Pakistan], which is causing massive instability in the whole region of Pakistan, Afghanistan, [India](#) and Iraq," an Islamabad-based senior Pakistani security official told [Asia Times Online](#) on the condition of anonymity.

The officer showed ATol highly secret documents which reveal how al-Qaeda-linked groups have been involved in several high-profile robberies, assassinations and other activities in a network that has been broadened from North Waziristan all the way to [Mumbai](#) in India, where a massive attack was launched on that city last year by 10 Pakistani-linked militants. More than 150 people were killed.

Pakistan is not believed to have given the US specific information on Baitullah, who has a \$5 million bounty on his head, but they have shared detailed [maps](#) of the region where the drone

attack took place in South Waziristan last week.

An active network based in the Pakistani capital Islamabad, comprising several senior Pakistan police officials, intelligence officials with a military background and members of the American intelligence community, now meet daily to discuss targets and to assess the results of strikes.

On Tuesday, drones acting on information supplied by Pakistan targeted Maaskar, a militant training facility in the Kaniguram area of South Waziristan, run by Arab militants. Several people were killed.

That morning, militants carried out an intense rocket attack on Peshawar, the capital of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Almost a dozen rockets were fired, killing two civilians. The attack appeared random and without a specific target, indicating a touch of desperation on the part of the militants in the face of the bombardment they are taking from drones.

Also on Tuesday, militants destroyed 10 schools and a health center in Buner, in Malakand Division. This came as the government claimed that everything had returned to normal in Dir and Swat in NWFP and also in Buner.

Despite Tuesday's militant attacks, the security forces do appear to have stabilized the situation that a few months ago saw the Taliban seemingly on the march to Islamabad.

The Pakistani security official added, "This is the ideal situation [for the government] as the so-called Taliban emirates in Bajaur [Agency] and Mohmand [Agency] and Swat have been abandoned and they [Taliban] are on the run in North Waziristan and South Waziristan. The situation would be even better if things were back to normal in Afghanistan as this [militancy in Pakistan] is a spillover of the Afghan war."

Top US commander in Afghanistan General [Stanley](#) McChrystal on Tuesday vowed that coalition forces would prevail in the war, but re-affirmed he was open to reconciling with rank-and-file insurgents.

"I would absolutely be comfortable with fighters and lower-level commanders making the decision to re-integrate into the Afghan political process under the Afghan constitution," McChrystal said. As for reconciling with higher-level insurgent leaders, McChrystal said, "That's clearly up to [Afghan President Hamid Karzai]."

Karzai made his intentions public Tuesday by saying he would double the size of Afghanistan's security forces and push for peace talks with the Taliban if he is elected for a second term in polls due this month.

Meanwhile, Taliban leader Mullah Omar has urged the Afghan Taliban *shura* (council), believed to operate from around Quetta in southwestern Pakistan, to intervene to protect vital South Waziristan militant assets. This it could do by installing a new chief of the Taliban in the Mehsud area in South Waziristan. This is regardless of whether Baitullah is alive or dead, the aim being to prevent any internecine conflict between various factions.

The *shura* includes Mullah Bradar, the Taliban's supreme commander in Afghanistan; Mullah

Hasan Rahmani, a close aide of Mullah Omar and a governor of Kandahar province in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime in the late 1990s; and other prominent figures of the Afghan Taliban from the Kandahari clans.

Should it be decided to install a low-profile Taliban chief - as opposed to the aggressive and uncompromising Baitullah - the road towards an end game in the region would be made considerably smoother.