

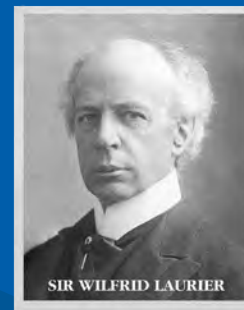
Ending Pakistan's **PROXY WAR** in Afghanistan



Chris Alexander

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Executive Summary

After two decades of international support, Afghanistan is today portrayed as an “endless war”; the peace process is moribund. Yet the persistent conflict has a single underlying cause: Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is waging a covert proxy war in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s aim is to break Afghanistan’s post-2001 constitutional order by installing a Taliban-led coalition to replace the current government, which ISI sees as a stalking horse for India.

Pakistan’s military supports the Taliban as part of a national strategy for Afghanistan and Kashmir that Pakistan has pursued consistently since 1947 when Kabul voted against Pakistan’s membership in the United Nations. Today’s conflict is effectively the result of a sustained failure, over nearly three-quarters of a century, to achieve a comprehensive political settlement between Islamabad and Kabul, including with regard to borders.

As the chief spoiler now undermining peace and stability in Afghanistan, the ISI is undoing gains that Afghans had made following two decades of unprecedented international support. After 9/11, Afghanistan hosted the UN’s largest political mission and NATO’s largest out-of-area operation. Over 70 countries supported the new government with aid; more than 50 NATO allies and partners provided troops. Afghanistan’s national economy rebounded, legitimate institutions were restored, a free media blossomed, and women and girls reclaimed their rights.

These achievements are now at risk. After welcoming Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders into Pakistan in 2001-02, the ISI re-launched Pakistan’s covert proxy war in 2003. It has since cost at least 124,000 lives. While most Afghans and growing numbers of Pakistanis are aware of this reality, no international organization or state has yet made it a matter of policy to acknowledge or condemn publicly the facts concerning Pakistan’s covert proxy war.

On the contrary, US policy towards the ISI has been ambiguous since 2001, partly because of an enduring legacy of bilateral cooperation carried over

from the Carter and Reagan administrations that persists even today. Since the 1980s, both the US and UK have, to varying degrees and at different times, indulged Pakistan's policy of "strategic depth" by which it interfered in Afghanistan and Central Asia to counter perceived Indian influence – a doctrine in turn rooted in the Raj defence of the North-West Frontier, the Durand Line Agreement of 1893 (and subsequent demarcation surveys), and the 1879 Treaty of Gandamak.

Today's drivers of continuing conflict are nevertheless plain to serious observers. Instead of working to achieve stability in Afghanistan under democratic institutions chosen by Afghans themselves, Pakistan's post-9/11 military leaders, starting with President Pervez Musharraf, have sheltered Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda while working to scale up military and terrorist campaigns prosecuted by the Taliban's Quetta Shura, the Haqqani Network, and other groups.

“ *The ISI is undoing gains that Afghans had made following two decades of unprecedented international support.* ”

This covert proxy war is waged principally through suicide attacks, planned mass killings of civilians, intimidation and targeted assassinations, as well as information operations aimed at stoking fear in the Afghan population and undermining the credibility of the Afghan government, parliament, media, and other institutions, including its international partners. The ISI's clandestine Directorate S continues to deliver comprehensive support to these groups, marshalling additional backing as required from other branches of Pakistan's military and civilian institutions. Without ISI support, the Taliban-led proxy war would end quickly.

Pakistan's runaway military spending, repressive policies in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, reduced GDP growth rates, setbacks for education, religious minorities, freedom of expression and the rule of law, and disappearances of thousands of missing persons, including prisoners of conscience, human rights defenders, and journalists, are a direct consequence of this covert proxy war, which is being conducted under the nose of Pakistan's international partners.

Russia has faced heavy sanctions for its 2014 invasion and illegal occupation of Crimea and Donbass. Most democracies have sanctioned Iran for its nuclear weapons program. Many have sanctioned both Iran and Syria for state sponsorship of terrorism, engaging in proxy wars, and using chemical weapons. China now faces a growing array of sanctions in response to its crackdown in Hong Kong, genocide against the Uyghur people, suppression of other minority groups, and persecution of political opponents. To achieve peace and protect the credibility of international law nearly two decades after the fall of the Taliban regime, every serious partner of Afghanistan now has a duty to enact far-reaching sanctions against those individuals and agencies in Pakistan responsible for this covert proxy war in Afghanistan.

Ten strategic recommendations

The following actions are required to bring peace to Afghanistan:

1. publicly call on Pakistan to end its covert proxy war;
2. ensure that states enact wide-ranging sanctions against Pakistani officials supporting the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, the Haqqani Network, and other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and revise the United Nations Consolidated List (of entities subject to measures imposed by the Security Council) accordingly (United Nations Undated);
3. list Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism and add it to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) blacklist until it ends its covert proxy war in Afghanistan;
4. suspend further talks with the Taliban pending an unconditional ceasefire;
5. suspend further US or NATO force reductions in the region pending an unconditional ceasefire and an end to Pakistan's covert proxy war;
6. debate the "situation in Pakistan" at the United Nations Security Council to make it clear that ISI support for the Taliban and other terrorist groups is a threat to international peace and security;
7. expand the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to include civilian and military monitoring of cross-border security threats, including the entry of Taliban and other fighters from Pakistan;

8. convene genuine peace negotiations between Kabul and Islamabad on non-interference; ending sponsorship of armed proxies; and demarcation, delimitation, and full recognition of the common border between the two countries;
9. replace the principle of “positive symmetry” with new, verifiable commitments by the Security Council’s five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US), NATO member states, and all six of Afghanistan’s neighbours to end assistance to illegal armed groups; and
10. document the crimes of the past; identify and support victims of terrorism and other atrocities; disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former combatants; destroy ammunition and explosives; and engage Afghans in a broad-based effort to bring about reconciliation and transitional justice.

Sommaire

Malgré toute l'aide internationale accordée à l'Afghanistan depuis vingt ans, ce pays est aujourd'hui décrit comme un territoire de « guerre perpétuelle »; le processus de paix a abouti à une impasse. Le conflit endémique est pourtant essentiellement limité à seule cause : la guerre par procuration menée par le service des renseignements militaires du Pakistan (ISI). Le Pakistan cherche à briser l'ordre constitutionnel afghan établi dans l'après-2001 en remplaçant le gouvernement actuel, considéré comme le cheval de Troie de l'Inde, par une coalition dirigée par les talibans.

Le soutien de l'armée pakistanaise aux talibans s'inscrit dans le cadre de la stratégie nationale inlassablement poursuivie par le Pakistan à l'égard de l'Afghanistan et du Cachemire depuis 1947, lorsque Kaboul a voté contre son adhésion aux Nations Unies. Le conflit actuel résulte effectivement des échecs successifs, pendant près de trois quarts de siècle, vers un règlement politique global entre Islamabad et Kaboul, notamment en ce qui concerne les frontières.

Principal fauteur de troubles, l'ISI compromet maintenant la paix et la stabilité en Afghanistan : il est en voie d'annihiler tous les progrès réalisés par les Afghans par suite de deux décennies d'aide internationale sans précédent. Après le 11 septembre 2001, l'Afghanistan a accueilli la plus importante mission politique de l'ONU et la plus importante opération hors zone de l'OTAN. Plus de 70 pays ont apporté leur aide au nouveau gouvernement et plus de 50 alliés et partenaires de l'OTAN ont envoyé des troupes. L'économie nationale afghane a rebondi, les institutions légitimes ont été restaurées, la presse libre a rayonné et la population féminine a recouvré ses droits.

Ces progrès sont aujourd'hui menacés. Après avoir attiré au Pakistan, en 2001 et 2002, les dirigeants d'Al-Qaïda et des talibans, l'ISI a, en 2003, relancé la « guerre par procuration », qui a coûté la vie à au moins 124 000 personnes. La plupart des Afghans et un nombre croissant de Pakistanais sont conscients de cette réalité, mais aucune organisation internationale ou entité politique n'a encore fait le choix stratégique de reconnaître ou de condamner publiquement la guerre par procuration menée par le Pakistan.

Bien au contraire. La politique américaine à l'égard de l'ISI est demeurée ambiguë depuis 2001, en partie à cause de la coopération bilatérale héritée des administrations Carter et Reagan et transmise durablement jusqu'à ce jour. Depuis les années 80, tant les États-Unis que le Royaume-Uni, à des degrés divers et à des moments différents, se sont montrés complaisants à l'égard de la politique de « profondeur stratégique » qui a permis au Pakistan de s'immiscer en Afghanistan et en Asie centrale pour contrer l'apparente influence indienne – une doctrine à son tour enracinée dans la défense du Raj à la frontière du nord-ouest, dans l'Accord de la ligne Durand de 1893 (et les démarcations de frontières ultérieures) et dans le Traité de Gandamak de 1879.

Les moteurs actuels du conflit toujours en cours sont clairs pour tout observateur attentif. Dans l'après-11 septembre, plutôt que d'œuvrer à la stabilité de l'Afghanistan dans le cadre d'institutions démocratiques choisies par les Afghans eux-mêmes, les dirigeants militaires pakistanais, à commencer par le président Pervez Musharraf, ont abrité Oussama Ben Laden et Al-Qaïda tout en s'efforçant d'intensifier les campagnes militaires et terroristes de la Choura de Quetta (organisation talibane), du réseau Haqqani et d'autres groupes.



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Cette guerre par procuration est principalement livrée sous forme d'attentats suicides, de massacres planifiés de civils, d'intimidations et d'assassinats ciblés, ainsi que d'opérations d'information visant à alimenter la peur au sein de la population afghane et à saper la crédibilité du gouvernement, du parlement, des médias et d'autres institutions afghanes, y compris des partenaires internationaux. La Direction clandestine S de l'ISI continue d'appuyer ces groupes à fond, en mobilisant, lorsque requis, d'autres secteurs des institutions militaires et civiles pakistanaises. Sans le soutien de l'ISI, la guerre par procuration menée par les talibans prendrait rapidement fin.

Les dépenses militaires excessives du Pakistan, les politiques répressives au Baloutchistan et au Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, la croissance réduite du PIB, les revers pour l'éducation, les minorités religieuses, la liberté d'expression et

l'État de droit, et les milliers de personnes disparues, notamment des prisonniers d'opinion, des défenseurs des droits de la personne et des journalistes, découlent directement de cette guerre par procuration menée sous le nez des partenaires internationaux du Pakistan.

L'invasion et l'occupation illégale de la Crimée et du Donbass en 2014 ont valu à la Russie de lourdes sanctions. Si la plupart des démocraties ont sanctionné l'Iran pour son programme d'armes nucléaires, elles ont, par ailleurs, été nombreuses à l'avoir fait à la fois pour l'Iran et la Syrie en raison de leur soutien au terrorisme, de leur participation aux guerres par procuration et de leur recours aux armes chimiques. La Chine fait maintenant face à un éventail croissant de sanctions en réaction à la répression à Hong Kong, au génocide des Ouïgours, à l'oppression d'autres groupes minoritaires et à la persécution d'opposants politiques. Pour parvenir à la paix et protéger la crédibilité du droit international près de deux décennies après la chute du régime taliban, tous les partenaires sérieux de l'Afghanistan ont maintenant le devoir d'imposer des sanctions extrêmes contre les individus et les agences au Pakistan à l'origine de cette guerre par procuration contre l'Afghanistan.

Dix recommandations stratégiques

Les actions suivantes sont indispensables pour ramener la paix en Afghanistan :

1. publiquement appeler le Pakistan à mettre un terme à sa guerre par procuration;
2. veiller à ce que les États adoptent une série de sanctions contre les responsables pakistanais qui soutiennent les talibans, Al-Qaïda, le réseau Haqqani et d'autres groupes terroristes opérant en Afghanistan et fassent réviser en conséquence la liste récapitulative des Nations Unies (des entités soumises à des mesures imposées par le Conseil de sécurité) (Nations unies, sans date);
3. inscrire le Pakistan sur la liste des États qui parrainent le terrorisme et l'ajouter à la liste d'interdiction du Groupe d'action financière (GAFI) jusqu'à ce qu'il mette fin à sa guerre par procuration en Afghanistan;
4. suspendre la poursuite des pourparlers avec les talibans dans l'attente d'un cessez-le-feu inconditionnel;
5. suspendre toute nouvelle réduction des forces américaines ou de l'OTAN dans la région dans l'attente d'un cessez-le-feu inconditionnel et de la fin de la guerre par procuration menée par le Pakistan;

6. débattre de la « situation au Pakistan » au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies pour qu'il soit clair que le soutien de l'ISI aux talibans et à d'autres groupes terroristes constitue une menace pour la paix et la sécurité internationales;
7. élargir le mandat de la Mission d'assistance des Nations Unies en Afghanistan pour y inclure le contrôle civil et militaire des menaces transfrontalières à la sécurité, y compris en ce qui a trait à l'entrée des talibans et d'autres combattants en provenance du Pakistan;
8. organiser de véritables négociations de paix entre Kaboul et Islamabad sur la non-ingérence; mettre fin au parrainage de milices armées; et procéder à la démarcation, la délimitation et la pleine reconnaissance de la frontière commune entre les deux pays;
9. substituer au principe de « symétrie positive » de nouveaux engagements vérifiables de la part des cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité (Chine, France, Russie, Royaume-Uni et États-Unis), des États membres de l'OTAN et des six voisins de l'Afghanistan pour mettre fin à l'aide aux groupes armés illégaux;
10. documenter les crimes du passé; identifier et soutenir les victimes du terrorisme et d'autres atrocités; désarmer, démobiliser et réintégrer les anciens combattants; détruire les munitions et les explosifs; et mobiliser les Afghans au profit d'un vaste effort de réconciliation et de justice durant la période de transition.

Introduction

Many observers worldwide perceive Afghanistan as an “endless war.” After two decades of heavy engagement by the UN, NATO, and the United States, alongside at least 75 donor or troop-contributing states, including Canada, a shaky peace process is staggering under the weight of daily explosions, brutal assassinations, and rising violence. Nationwide support for the empowerment of women and girls as journalists and legislators, entrepreneurs, and police officers, is now under threat. Since 2001, Afghanistan and its partners have attempted to implement successive policies of counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, and reconciliation: none has succeeded in ending attacks by the Taliban and their terrorist allies. The conflict looks doomed to continue, with Afghans the main victims of a war that has dragged on, virtually without interruption, since 1978.

In the mission to stabilize and develop Afghanistan, Canada has lost 168 military and civilian lives.¹ By choosing not to join the disastrous and divisive invasion of Iraq, Canada instead championed a mission that had unanimous United Nations Security Council support. When the Taliban threat revived in 2005-06, Afghanistan became the first battlefield in NATO history where NATO land forces engaged in battalion-level combat operations.

With many of our key allies preoccupied in Iraq, Canada invested heavily in battle groups and military enablers; army and police training; disarmament and demobilization of illegal militias; de-mining and destruction of surplus ammunition stocks; justice reform and human rights monitoring; programs to train women entrepreneurs, officials, and police leaders; education, schools, and curriculum development; constitutional reform and elections; and national programs to revive the rural economy. The United States, the European Union (then including the United Kingdom), Japan, India, and countless others made major contributions, military and civilian, to end the Taliban menace, to feed, educate, and stabilize the country, and to support a government capable of meeting the aspirations of Afghan citizens.

Yet the war to rid the country of Taliban tyranny never stopped. After early military successes by the US-led coalition in 2001-02, terrorism spiked in 2003 and the Taliban resumed widespread conventional attacks in 2005-06. The violence resumed for one reason.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Pakistan has been planning and waging a covert proxy war against the new Afghan government and its international partners. Pakistani military and civilian support for armed Islamist groups began in the 1960s, scaled up in the mid-1970s, and has remained consistent ever since. Since 2002, 158 Canadian Forces members, as well as six Canadian aid workers, a diplomat, two private contractors, and a journalist, have died as a result of Pakistan's proxy war. Since 2001, 2355 US soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan; the UK has lost 456. Twenty-eight other NATO members and partners have lost a total of 534 lives. Dozens of UN officials and aid workers have been killed. American, Indian, and other donor missions have been repeatedly targeted; an Emirati ambassador was slain with five of his colleagues. This paper will not discuss the international mission in Afghanistan. It will examine why Pakistan has waged its covert proxy war in Afghanistan since 2001, and discuss what can be done to end it.

Reviving Afghanistan together

There was a time, not long ago, when all eyes were on Afghanistan. On September 11, 2001 (9/11), Al-Qaeda operatives carried out the most lethal attack on the US mainland since the war of 1812. They planned it from Afghanistan, where they enjoyed safe haven under the protection of the Taliban. Less than one month after the 9/11 attacks, the US Air Force began to bomb Al-Qaeda and Taliban targets in Afghanistan. Ten days later, the CIA and Special Forces were on the ground in the country. Just two months after the 9/11 attacks, on November 12, 2001, Kabul fell to opposition forces. The Taliban and its terrorist allies had seemingly been consigned to the dustbin of history.

Here was an opportunity, at the dawn of the 21st century, to remake a country flattened by a quarter century of war. The circumstances were tragic: the 9/11 attacks had killed nearly 3000 people. But Afghanistan – by almost every indicator, one of the world's poorest and least developed countries – was now to be a deserving beneficiary of concerted international action. After all, it had been the battlefield in the 1980s that had sent the Red Army into retreat, feeding and amplifying new thinking that had led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union in 1991.

Devastated by 25 years of war, Afghanistan after 2001 was both an opening and an obligation. A closed, highly repressed and isolated society under the Taliban was now accessible to the world. The international community had an

opportunity to work with the Afghan people to repair the damage caused by a long jihad against the Soviets that was made worse by a harsh five-year civil war and six years of repression under the Taliban. Like Korea and Vietnam, Afghanistan had been a casualty of Cold War rivalries. For free and democratic societies, the opening in 2001 was a chance to redeem a debt of honour owed to Afghans who had, over a decade of fighting, undone the Soviet totalitarian behemoth.

The task was monumental. The Afghan economy had been smashed; government institutions were obliterated. Opium and heroin were the new currency of power; legitimate, legal exports had been reduced to a negligible pittance. Highways had become rutted tracks, airports were hollow shells. Fertile fields, once rich with raisin or pistachio plantations, were now filigreed with mines that exploded frequently and maimed kids. Complex, ancient irrigation systems, suffering years of neglect, were clogged; years of famine had reduced once prosperous farms to subsistence agriculture.

From Panjshir to Herat, the landscape was studded with steel carcasses of Soviet fighting vehicles and tanks – an open-air museum of rusting armoured vehicles for reconnaissance (BTR), infantry (BMP), and airborne (BMD) troops, as well as T-54 and T-55 tanks, most hit by RPG-7s and RPG-18s (rocket-propelled grenades) fired in the 1980s. District offices were deserted, school windows had no glass. No uniformed police or military units patrolled the streets; even militias had gone home to lick their wounds and start again from zero. Up to April 2002, wireless service was non-existent. An immensely proud people had seen their country sink into penury and desolation.

Into this under-governed space streamed an influx of well-meaning humanitarians, a returning Afghan diaspora, including future presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, as well as countless experienced professionals across almost every field. In only a few years, five million returning refugees poured into Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran – the largest post-conflict repatriation since the Second World War. By 2003, schools had reopened for boys and girls in every province.

Mine clearance and exploded ordnance disposal teams swept across the country. Work began on the ring road around the Hindu Kush; within a few years, major sections had been paved and re-opened. They carried surging commercial traffic around the country, including along crucial highway connections to border posts at Torkham, Khost, and Chaman (gateways to Pakistan to the east) and at Islam Qala and Zaranj (gateways to Iran to the west). These crucial arteries were rebuilt and re-paved, even as trade with northern neighbours remained limited.

Indomitable, entrepreneurial Afghans got to work bettering their lot. Bazaars re-filled with pomegranates, pistachios, eggplant, butchered sheep carcasses,

and the kaleidoscope of local spices. Lights powered by generators went back on in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. Phalanxes of girls in black tunics walked to school with pride. Villagers dug new wells. War-weary Afghans heaved sighs of relief and got back to work.

Nowhere was the clamour for permanent peace more insistent and more principled than among Afghan women and girls. They found their voice in radio stations and community councils delivering the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), which supported local rebuilding priorities in almost every village. They became members of the new *Wolesi Jirga*, the lower house of parliament where women had one-quarter of seats under the 2004 constitution. They enrolled as officers and constables in the reforming national police.

“
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The Taliban had not only been explicitly misogynist. They had denied women and girls access to education entirely, systematically violating basic rights and freedoms while inflicting violence and even death on those who dared to defy male Taliban domination. The demise of the Taliban regime had above all been an opportunity to restore these basic rights. There was no more powerful rebuke to the Taliban’s abuses than to see girls back in school.

Women emerged quickly among Afghanistan’s most effective new leaders. Massouda Jalal was a candidate for president in 2004; two more women ran in 2010. Dr. Sima Samar, a former deputy chair of the emergency *loya jirga* (legal assembly) in 2001 and the transitional government in 2002, served for 16 years as chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), where another woman, Shaharзад Akbar, succeeded her. Across many sectors of the resurgent economy a new generation of women entrepreneurs began to flourish.

For more than a decade after 2001, Afghanistan witnessed one of the greatest acts of sustained international cooperation since the Second World War. More than a third of the world’s independent states committed funds, some offering aid for the very first time. The entire UN family deployed – over 30 agencies, funds, and programs – to lead de-mining work, welcome refugees, immunize children, and back constitutional and electoral reform.

With the full backing of the United Nations Security Council, which unanimously renewed every mandate after 2001, supported by NATO, the world's most successful military alliance, over 50 nations deployed their forces to Afghanistan to establish a safe and secure environment for Afghans and their new government, while training the Afghan National Army (ANA). Together with US-led coalition forces the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) concentrated first on Kabul, then took responsibility for the north (2004), west (2005), and south and east (2006) through combat bases and civil-military provincial reconstruction teams.

This was never an occupation or an invasion: it was an exercise in restoring the legitimacy of Afghan institutions, backed by the full weight of Afghan sovereignty, democratic consent, and international law. The whole world wanted Afghanistan to succeed. Afghans were rightly impatient to enjoy peace for the first time in a generation. At conference after conference, usually under UN auspices, Afghanistan's neighbours and partners repeatedly and unanimously pledged their support for peace.

Pakistan's covert proxy war

Given such widespread and comprehensive support, Afghanistan's prospects were in principle excellent – except for one external factor: Pakistan.

Without fanfare but with logistics support from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in late 2001 thousands of members of Al-Qaeda and fighting units of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (better known as the Taliban) slipped across the border from Afghanistan into Baluchistan in the south or the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to the east, which were then still part of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). In Afghanistan they faced fierce US aerial bombardment; once they crossed into Pakistan they knew they would be safe.

The Taliban melted quickly into training camps run by Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM) or Lashkar-e Tayiba (LeT), ISI-backed terrorist outfits operating in Kashmir or other parts of India, as well as a network of over 300 madrassas and schools run by Jamat-ud-Dawah (JuD), LeT's political arm. Pakistani transports leaving Kunduz airport airlifted thousands more to Pakistan.

By January 2002, Osama Bin Laden himself had crossed the hilly border from Tora Bora in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province into Kurram Agency in Pakistan's FATA, where he remained for several months before reuniting with family in Peshawar. Later he moved to the Swat Valley, then on to Haripur, a

village near Islamabad, before his final move to the compound at Abbottabad. These were all densely populated areas of Pakistan. Bin Laden's movements were not the actions of a desperate wanted man on hostile turf: he was fully aware that Pakistan would protect him and his followers, giving them a chance to reconstitute, resume, and even expand Al-Qaeda's terrorist activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

With ISI support, the Taliban military command regrouped quickly under the Quetta Shura, their leadership council, as well as the Haqqani network in Waziristan, and Hezb-i Islami which operated from the Peshawar area. Through 2002 the Taliban remained focused on repatriating fighters from Afghanistan, relaunching finance, logistics, and training structures, and assessing US and allied intentions in Afghanistan and the region.

By 2003, the Taliban were returning to the offensive. On March 27, Ricardo Munguia, a 39-year-old water supply engineer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was murdered on a road in Oruzgan province on the orders of Mullah Dadullah "Lang" Akhund, a Taliban commander who would lead the movement's military resurgence, particularly in southern Afghanistan, until his death in 2007. A string of attacks against aid workers followed through 2003 and 2004.

Although many members of the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network appeared on UN and Al-Qaeda sanctions lists after 2001, they continued to operate with impunity throughout Pakistan. Their assets were never frozen; their ready access to arms, funds, and munitions never cut. On the contrary, their families lived in relative comfort while ISI minders prevented journalists, investigators, and other officials from pinpointing their whereabouts in Pakistan. For years Pakistan's political and military leaders swore up and down that no Taliban leader had ever set foot in their country. It was a prodigious lie.

When the Taliban, with comprehensive support from Pakistan's military, ramped up operations over 2005-06 into a full-blown offensive threatening to overwhelm Afghan government defences and seize provincial capitals, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, under increasing US pressure, brought his egregious fabrications to Kabul during his second visit to the country. (His first had been on April 2, 2002.) In a September 7, 2006 speech to Afghan leaders and parliamentarians, Musharraf again pleaded ignorance: "We have to see where their command structure is, who is their commander, and we must destroy the command structure.... When you attack the command structure, the thing falls" (Gall 2006). Musharraf was playing dumb. Pakistan has never, then or later, moved against its Taliban proxies.

In this regard Pakistan's policy of proxy war, as managed almost entirely by the ISI, has been utterly consistent: Pakistan's security forces have never sought to reduce the Taliban's capabilities to launch attacks in Afghanistan. On the

contrary, from Benazir Bhutto's second term as prime minister, when the Taliban was formed, through Nawaz Sharif's first term; during Musharraf's coup, military rule, and brief stint as a civilian president; right down to the more recent governments of Asif Ali Zardari, Nawaz Sharif's second term, and now Imran Khan, the Taliban and their allies have received unstinting support from Pakistan's military. In fact, as Bhutto and others have attested, any attempt by civilian leaders, then or now, to question Pakistan's comprehensive military support for the Taliban and associated groups has resulted in dire consequences for those challenging the orthodoxy.

The Pakistani army's disastrous provocation of India in the Kargil conflict in 1999 and Musharraf's fateful coup that same year were both intended to thwart Nawaz Sharif's moves to bring about rapprochement with India, which had reached its high-water mark with the February 1999 *Labore Declaration*. Even the August 2001 Agra Summit, which Musharraf attended to repair damage caused by Kargil, was quickly followed by Lashkar-e Tayiba's attack on the Indian parliament. Since that time, no Pakistani civilian or military leader has managed to curb ISI's continuing use of the Taliban or other proxies as crucial assets in a continuing multi-front irregular war, as they see it, with India, their perpetual main adversary.

Sustaining this deception has required astonishing levels of effrontery from Pakistan's leaders – as well as eye-watering degrees of credulity on the part of Pakistan's interlocutors. After visiting Kabul, Musharraf took his propaganda campaign to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on September 25, 2006, where he said:

Quetta is the capital of Baluchistan. Quetta has today a provincial assembly functioning. We have a military corps headquartered there with two divisions there. There is no question that any Taliban headquarters there. This is the most ridiculous statement and it is the most ridiculous that the Taliban headquarters can be in Quetta. (Synovitz 2006)

It was another audacious falsehood. Despite mounting US pressure, Afghan anger, and international skepticism, Pakistan chose to keep backing the Taliban to the hilt by providing funds and training, intelligence, and weapons. Ever true to this campaign of disinformation, Pakistan's army and ISI not only failed to undertake a single operation targeting Taliban units based in Pakistan: they shielded the Taliban and their terrorist allies while threatening to place those reluctant to do the ISI's bidding on lists of Al-Qaeda targets that they furnished to their US allies. In other words, Pakistan's military afforded those willing to fight in Afghanistan every support, while arresting, kidnapping, or killing those who were unwilling to fight.

The day after his brazen lies to the Council on Foreign Relations, President Musharraf took his tour of deception to *The Daily Show*, where on Tuesday,

September 26, 2006, Jon Stewart dead-panned, “Where’s Osama bin Laden?” Musharraf unctuously replied, “I don’t know. You know where he is? You lead on, we’ll follow you.” It was a low-point both for Pakistani dissimulation and American innocence.

During 2006, Canada lost 32 soldiers killed in action and four more who died away from the battlefield. The US lost 98 soldiers, the UK 39. At the same time, Washington and US cable television rolled out the red carpet for the top commander who was providing safe haven, financial, logistic, and other enabling support to the enemy forces that was killing allied soldiers. This entire episode was emblematic of a breathtaking failure on the part of the US, and, more broadly, the international community, to grasp the real nature of the conflict. There has probably never been a more blatant case of democratic political and military leaders indulging the fantasies and egos of hostile leaders by treating them as allies, while the latter actively waged war against the military forces of those same democracies.



Pakistan’s military afforded those willing to fight in Afghanistan every support.

Within five years of the 9/11 attacks, Osama Bin Laden’s new host, the chief sponsor of the Taliban’s renewed war against US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, was the toast of the Republican Party and a prime-time hit on Comedy Central. While Jon Stewart was cracking jokes with Musharraf, who then bluffed his way through meetings at the White House, Bin Laden had been living for months in a multi-story compound at Abbottabad, less than a mile from the Pakistan Military Academy, where every Pakistani army officer is trained.

This hideout represented a hero’s welcome, bestowed with the full knowledge of Musharraf, then still Chief of the Army Staff, as well as his principal subordinates in the military chain of command at the time – ISI Director-General Lieutenant General Parvaz Ashfaq Kayani, Director General of Military Operations Lieutenant General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, and others (Riedel 2012). While the “Authorization for Use of Military Force,” a joint resolution passed by the US Congress on September 18, 2001, authorized the President to launch military operations against “those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons” (United States Congress 2001), it was not until nearly a decade later that it became the basis of a military operation against Bin Laden’s compound at Abbottabad in Pakistan.

Between 2003 and 2020, Pakistan resumed its covert proxy war. This military campaign was sponsored by Pakistan's army and intelligence services with support from drug barons and Gulf donors, and resulted in over 40,000 civilian deaths. (US-led air and ground operations to oust the Taliban in 2001-02 killed over 1000 civilians.) Even larger numbers of Taliban militants – a credible estimate is 70,000 – usually young men recruited and trained in Pakistan, have met their deaths in this war.²

Since 2006, at least 1000 Afghan national police or army members have been killed every year in fighting; in some years, 2000 or more were killed. The ISI oversees the launch of a suicide bombing campaign in Afghanistan that has resulted in over 1000 attacks and about 5000 deaths. Over 3500 coalition, ISAF, NATO ISAF, and NATO Resolute Support members have lost their lives in Afghanistan, two-thirds of them from the US. Many more of all categories have been wounded.

ISI's covert proxy war has killed a total of about 124,000 people to date – more than half of them Taliban fighters and nearly one third Afghan civilians. The post-2001 phase of Afghanistan's long war has been one of the bloodiest of the early twentieth century. The inability of the principal international players to focus on Pakistan's role in the conflict has also meant it has also been one of the most protracted and (so far) most futile.

In recent years Pakistani leaders have made almost no pretense of denying their involvement in this proxy war (Iyengar 2016, Siddique 2016). General Kayani has referred to the Haqqani Network as a "strategic asset" (Institute for the Study of War Undated; Romaniuk and Webb 2015). Multiple ISI officers, active and retired, have detailed Pakistan's sponsorship of the Quetta Shura, military wings of Hezb-i-Islami and even Al-Qaeda (Alim 2020, Khattak 2018, Dulat, Sinha, and Durrani 2018). Yet Pakistan's military leaders have incurred virtually no direct costs for this covert proxy war that is undermining the most ambitious post-war stabilization and development mission supported by the entire international community – the first ever undertaken on this scale to benefit a low-income country.

In 2006 President George W. Bush invested significant time and political capital to mediate between Afghan President Karzai and Pakistan's General Musharraf. In March he visited Afghanistan and Pakistan, becoming the last US president to travel to Islamabad. In September he ensured that Musharraf visited Kabul. Then he arranged for both leaders to visit the United States, where Musharraf spun his deadly web of lies for the Council on Foreign Relations, Jon Stewart's *Daily Show*, and others. Bush even hosted an awkward White House dinner where Karzai and Musharraf hashed out their differences. Bush oversaw the response to the 9/11 attacks, including the "Authorization for Use of Military Force," which remains a US statute to this day. Starting in 2001, it has provided the legal basis for US military operations in dozens of

countries. But Bush never took action robust enough to curb or end Pakistan's covert proxy war, which has been killing Afghans, Americans, and other NATO soldiers ever since. Instead, in 2008, his last year in office, he scaled up CIA drone strikes against targets in Pakistan, which did nothing to alter the overall course of the war.

Ducking accountability

As outlined above, Pakistan sponsors proxies to fight in Afghanistan as part of its longstanding rivalry with India. When a referendum was held in North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) in July 1947, on the eve of partition, voters were given two options: to join India or Pakistan. Of the 51 percent of eligible voters who cast ballots, the vast majority opted for Pakistan. However, on the eve of the referendum, a *loya jirga* of Pashtun leaders in NWFP endorsed the Bannu Resolution, which called for an “independent state comprising all the Pashtun territories in British India.” Others in both NWFP and Afghanistan favoured giving the province's voters the option to become a part of Afghanistan. When the British Raj ignored these proposals, NWFP chief minister Dr. Khan Sahib and his brother Abdul Ghaffar Khan (known as “Bacha Khan”), leader of the nonviolent Pashtun *Khudai Khidmatgar* movement, boycotted the referendum.

As a result, chief minister Dr. Khan Sahib was dismissed. Early in 1948 Bacha Khan pledged allegiance to the new state of Pakistan, but he and his brother were nevertheless arrested. On August 12, 1948, a large number of *Khudai Khidmatgar* supporters were killed at the Babbra Massacre. The movement was later outlawed. Dr. Khan Sahib joined Pakistan's government in 1954, causing a break with his brother. In 1958, Dr. Khan Sahib was assassinated.

In 1947, Afghanistan had become the only member state to oppose Pakistan's admission to the United Nations, causing tensions to rise along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. At the urging of a *loya jirga* in Afghanistan in 1949, the Afghan government declared that it recognized “neither the imaginary Durand nor any similar line” (i.e., the international border between the two countries) and declared all previous agreements concerning demarcation of borders to be void. For the next quarter-century, a vocal minority in Afghanistan championed the idea of Pashtunistan, triggering several uprisings against the Pakistani government in NWFP. To oppose this nationalist challenge, Pakistan, in turn, began to recruit and train Afghan Islamists starting in the mid-1960s – an effort they enlarged in the mid-1970s.

A similar conflict began in 1947-48 when the Khan of Kalat, whose territories now form the central part of Pakistan's Baluchistan province, sought to re-

main independent. When the Khan finally acceded to Pakistan on March 27, 1948, his brother fled to Afghanistan where he launched an armed resistance to Pakistan that continued until 1950. This first conflict has been followed by three further periods of armed Baluch separatist activity, mostly of low intensity, with sporadic support from authorities in Afghanistan, India, and elsewhere.

In short, Afghans in Pakistan and their principal political allies in Afghanistan opposed the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan, while championing a version of the 1947 Bannu Resolution and occasionally providing support to Baluch separatists. In response, Pakistani authorities have suppressed Pashtun nationalist movements domestically, while supporting Islamists in Afghanistan. As a result, there has never been an extended period of peace along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Early tensions in 1947-50 over the fate of NWFP, Pashtunistan, and the Khanate of Kalat were followed by Afghan Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud Khan's disastrous attempt to capture NWFP's Bajaur district in 1960-61 and, following his return to power in a 1973 *coup d'état* against the king, his sponsorship of anti-Pakistan nationalist militants.

“ *Islamabad's preoccupation with Afghanistan grew in the wake of its defeat in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war.* ”

In short, Afghanistan has backed nationalist Pashtun and Baluch movements in Pakistan since the late 1940s. In response, Pakistan has backed Islamists in Afghanistan since the 1960s. Islamabad's preoccupation with Afghanistan grew in the wake of its defeat in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war when East Pakistan achieved independence as Bangladesh. Pakistani generals such as Mirza Aslam Beg, haunted by the loss of East Pakistan but buoyed by Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988-89, propounded the concept of “strategic depth,” according to which Pakistan would best India in the region by “making the Pashtuns a nation that extends beyond the Durand Line to Hindukush Mountains, to Amu Darya” (*Daily Times* 2017). According to this doctrine, Pakistan's irregular warfare in Afghanistan would result in a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul and, in the more expansive version of “strategic depth,” pro-Pakistani Islamic states in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

In other words, Pakistan's covert proxy war in Afghanistan is aimed at (1) countering Indian influence, (2) suppressing Pashtun and Baluch national-

ism; (3) preventing the emergence of a strong Afghan state, and (4) pursuing a neo-colonialist agenda in Central Asia. The doctrine of strategic depth is used to this day to justify an endless proxy war, where regular Pakistani army and intelligence members increasingly serve alongside Taliban and other militia, with only one obvious result: another generation of conflict for Afghanistan, a country with the same population as Canada that has not known peace since Jimmy Carter was in office.

Since 1947, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have regularly interfered in the internal affairs of the other country, including by backing armed groups. In the 1980s, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan provided a pretext for Pakistan to scale up its proxy war in Afghanistan with the support of the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and other partners.

Pakistan's proxy war in Afghanistan since 2001 has neither any basis in international law nor any visible support from any other state. If Pakistan continues to enjoy full impunity in pursuing this policy, we can expect the following: millions of Afghans will again be displaced; thousands of civilians will continue to die every year together with thousands more combatants killed on both sides; Afghan institutions will remain corrupt; the national economy will stagnate; and education, health, and quality of life will decline, causing a chronic humanitarian crisis.

In other words, further acquiescence in Pakistan's covert proxy war in Afghanistan threatens to undo gains made since legitimate institutions were re-established in Afghanistan after 2001. Moreover, the consequences of Pakistan's continuing destabilization of Afghanistan do not stop at the country's borders. Over the past 20 years, the United Nations has deployed every instrument in its toolbox to Afghanistan – from humanitarian assistance, reinforced human rights reporting, resettlement for refugees and reintegration of disarmed militias to peacebuilding, support for justice and the rule of law, and improved public sector financial management. It has done this with the Security Council's unanimous support on the basis of generous contributions from almost every member state offering aid or deploying troops abroad. For many years after 2001, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) was the UN's largest political mission anywhere in the world.

But in Afghanistan the United Nations has yet to take one key step that would fulfill its first and still primary purpose “to maintain international peace and security” (United Nations 1945, Chapter 1, Article 1). The United Nations as an organization, as well as its most influential member states, have neither acknowledged Pakistan's covert proxy war in Afghanistan, nor taken effective action to stop it. In fact, by focusing solely on the “situation in Afghanistan” and ignoring the “situation in Pakistan,” the UN has been complicit in Pakistan's covert proxy war. By turning a blind eye to this aggression, UN members have prolonged a conflict they claim to wish to end.

The same is true of NATO. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Resolute Support have been defining missions for the Alliance, opening the door to new, innovative, and unprecedented partnerships in the Gulf, Ukraine, Central Asia, and elsewhere. But public support for NATO's first and largest out-of-area mission waned when casualties rose without tangible signs of peace. Citizens wanted honest answers to straight questions.

Yet despite abundant evidence, no NATO leader has ever publicly stated that the main belligerent in this proxy war is Pakistan. Only two have come close to telling the truth. In remarks to the UN-led conference on Afghanistan in Paris in 2008, French President Sarkozy named Pakistan as the Taliban's home base:

I want to send a simple message to these groups in Afghanistan or Pakistan: we will not let you negate our achievements of the past few years. We will not let the schools that we financed be burned down or ransacked by people who have no respect for anything. And you will not, I say to these groups, undermine the determination of the international community. But if the Afghans who engage today in violent confrontation accept dialogue and reconciliation, I am confident that they will occupy a central place in the new Afghanistan. It is up to the legitimate Afghan authorities to define the terms under which they can make a return to democracy in Afghanistan. As for Pakistan, the country has the responsibility to do everything it can to ensure that supporters of violent action do not find on its soil a safe haven allowing them to undermine our efforts in Afghanistan. We need Pakistan to make a strong commitment to a free Afghanistan. (Sarkozy 2008, translated)

However, instead of confronting Pakistan over its sanctuaries and support for terrorism, the international community began to focus at conferences in The Hague (2009) and London (2010) on supporting reconciliation by pledging to support Afghan efforts to offer "an honourable place in society to those willing to renounce violence, participate in the free and open society and respect the principles that are enshrined in the Afghan constitution, cut ties with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and pursue their political goals peacefully" (United Nations 2009, European Parliament 2010).

Yet again there was no move to ensure Pakistan would face serious consequences if violent groups continued to find, in Sarkozy's words (translated), "on its soil a safe haven allowing them to undermine our efforts in Afghanistan." By ignoring Pakistan's proxy war, the international community has in fact given Pakistan an incentive to scale up its spoiler behaviour.

Nearly a decade after Sarkozy's speech, in former President Trump's first tweet of 2018, he wrote that Pakistan had "given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists

we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!” (Trump 2018). Yet once again there was no follow up. In fact, Trump’s outburst had been prompted by the presence in his administration of several generals who had seen the reality of the Afghan conflict; within a year of the tweet above, all had resigned. The “peace process” Trump launched failed to end the conflict, bestowed undue legitimacy on the Taliban, undermined Afghanistan’s elected leaders, reduced international leverage, and strengthened the impunity of Pakistan’s proxy warlords.

“ *Pakistan remains a threat to international peace and security in Afghanistan and beyond.*

The United Nations was created to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” (United Nations 1945, Preamble). The signatories to the North Atlantic Treaty reaffirmed “their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments” (NATO 1949). In Article 5 they agreed that “an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all” and in such an event each would take “such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area” (Buckley 2006). In other words, if any ally were attacked, Article 5 would oblige all allies to take military action against the attacker in order to restore international peace and security and protect their home territory.

The 9/11 attacks were the first occasion on which Article 5 was invoked – a move first suggested by Canada. On the basis of Article 5 and the “the inherent right to individual and collective self-defence” (Article 51 of the UN Charter), the US and its NATO allies launched combat missions in Afghanistan, which continue to this day, albeit in reduced form. Yet they failed to prevent the architects of the 9/11 attacks and their Taliban allies from withdrawing into Pakistan, where they have enjoyed Pakistani state protection for two decades. The political “action... necessary” to stop Pakistan’s covert proxy war against NATO allies has never been taken; instead, Pakistan remains a “partner” country of NATO (Majumdar and Kolga 2016, 16). Despite countless promises of military success by NATO commanders leading combat and training missions, none has had the courage or mandate from allies publicly to condemn Pakistan’s covert proxy war in Afghanistan. As a result, nearly two decades after the mission began, Pakistan remains a threat to international peace and security in Afghanistan and beyond.

By failing explicitly to identify Pakistan as the source of the military threat to Afghanistan – through proxies that include the Taliban itself, the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaeda, and other groups – both the UN and NATO have seriously degraded their mandates, reputations, and credibility. They have weakened the principles of non-interference and inviolability of borders, which almost all democracies take for granted. They have also issued a standing invitation to Russian President Vladimir Putin, China’s President Xi Jinping, Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, and other belligerent irredentists the world over to try their luck by prosecuting proxy wars or seizing neighbouring territory by force.

This strategic reticence represents a stunning retreat from time-honoured principles that have underpinned the long peace after 1945, during which irredentist (or territory-reclaiming) wars were mostly prevented. In failing to cite Pakistan as a belligerent, every state participating in these missions, every member of the international organizations that authorized them, starting with the US, has brought some degree of dishonour upon itself.

But why has it been so hard to tell the truth about Pakistan’s role in fuelling this war?

First, Pakistan is a large country with extensive bilateral relationships. No state has yet been willing to precipitate a diplomatic crisis with Pakistan, especially when so many other states would almost certainly be willing to exploit such an opportunity for competitive advantage.

Second, neither the UN nor NATO has had a mandate for Pakistan, which would powerfully resist an enlarged role for either organization. The narrow regional mandate authorized for those agencies beyond Afghanistan was deliberate, given extensive US, UN, and NATO reliance on Pakistan for logistic and other forms of support for their principal activities in Afghanistan, which they have been reluctant to jeopardize.

Third, since 1947 there has been a recurring tendency in diplomacy, which persists in many quarters, to apply the principal of parity to India and Pakistan. In other words, the conventional wisdom has been to avoid reproaching either of them for fear of tipping the balance of power and, in so doing, triggering a hot war.

Finally, up to 2008, most allied capitals were flying blind in that they relied on guesswork and inaccurate intelligence with regard to Pakistan’s proxy war both because they lacked insight into ISI and because they credulously accepted reporting from missions in Islamabad, many of which had gone “native.” Moreover, many states were reluctant to question Pakistan’s sincerity for fear of interrupting bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation, which ISI was careful to deepen with most major democracies in the wake of 9/11.

In other words, for too long diplomats and other officials doing business with Islamabad tended to believe the lies disseminated by ISI and its associated agencies. They also mistakenly assumed that if Pakistan were backing the Taliban, the US would have known about it and ended the practice. Yet these explanations for international acquiescence in Pakistan's proxy war – it is a large country; they had a narrow mandate; they didn't want to jeopardize parity between India and Pakistan; they were relying on credulous diplomats in Islamabad; they over-relied on the US – pale in significance when compared with a larger factor that has been decisive in postponing any reckoning over Pakistan's role.

For two decades, US and NATO policy-makers have failed to follow the 9/11 attacks to their root. For many years, even seasoned observers of the region dismissed mounting evidence of Pakistan's role as the product of Afghan paranoia or wild conspiracy theories. Despite continuous warnings from the best-informed analysts about Pakistan's covert proxy war, they persisted in treating Pakistan's military leaders as reliable friends and allies, if increasingly erratic ones. Why this suspension of disbelief? The stage for Pakistan's covert proxy war was set long before 9/11 by earlier American and British Raj history in the sub-continent.

Brzezinski, Reagan, and Geneva

Following the Korean War, Turkey and Pakistan concluded a Pact of Mutual Cooperation and the US and Pakistan signed a Mutual Defence Agreement. In 1955, under strong US impetus, both Pakistan and Turkey joined the Baghdad Pact, which in 1959 became the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), an alliance roughly analogous to NATO dedicated to opposing perceived Soviet influence in India, Afghanistan, Iran, and the Middle East.

President Eisenhower visited Kabul in 1959, but American support for Afghanistan never rivalled that of the Soviet Union, particularly after 1973 when Mohammed Daoud Khan became the president of Afghanistan. Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon nevertheless all made visits to Pakistan in the belief that the country was a lynchpin strategic partner for the US in South Asia.

National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's first trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC), made secretly in 1971 under cover of an official visit to Pakistan, cleared the way for Nixon's the next year. So important was this diplomatic channel to China that the US refrained from criticizing Islamabad for atrocities committed during Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in late 1979, *détente* and

diplomacy took a back seat. President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski visited

Pakistan a month or so after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, for the purpose of coordinating with the Pakistanis a joint response, the purpose of which would be to make the Soviets bleed for as much and as long as is possible; and we engaged in that effort in a collaborative sense with the Saudis, the Egyptians, the British, the Chinese, and we started providing weapons to the Mujaheddin ... (Brzezinski 1997, part II)

From 1979 to 1988, the United States led a proxy war in Afghanistan with Pakistan's unstinting support. Support for Afghan militias based in Pakistan, fighting with US and ISI support, became a hallmark of President Reagan's strategy for countering Soviet influence worldwide.

On February 2, 1983, Reagan met in the Oval Office with Muhammad Omar Babarakzai, an Afghan judge, Mohammad Ghafoor Yousefzai, an Afghan theologian and resistance leader, three elders from Logar province who recounted Soviet atrocities, and Farida Ahmadi, a Kabul medical student tortured by Soviet-backed security services. Throughout the 1980s, Pakistan's goal of countering Indian influence aligned fully with the US objective of ejecting the Soviet Union from Afghanistan by force, through the use of proxies.

On March 1, 1985, Reagan addressed the Annual Dinner of the Conservative Political Action Committee to celebrate his second inauguration. He had achieved a landslide 525-13 Electoral College victory over Walter Mondale, one of the strongest mandates in US history and the most decisive since FDR's win in 1936. The war in Afghanistan was a centrepiece of his remarks:

Throughout the world the Soviet Union and its agents, client states, and satellites are on the defensive – on the moral defensive, the intellectual defensive, and the political and economic defensive. Freedom movements arise and assert themselves. They're doing so on almost every continent populated by man – in the hills of Afghanistan, in Angola, in Kampuchea, in Central America. In making mention of freedom fighters, all of us are privileged to have in our midst tonight one of the brave commanders who lead the Afghan freedom fighters – Abdul Haq. Abdul Haq, we are with you.

They are our brothers, these freedom fighters, and we owe them our help. I've spoken recently of the freedom fighters of Nicaragua. You know the truth about them. You know who they're fighting and why. They are the moral equal of our Founding Fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance. We cannot turn away from them, for the struggle here is not right versus left; it is right versus wrong. (Reagan 1985)

By comparing US-funded anti-Sandinista fighters and Pakistan’s Afghan proxies to Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Adams, Madison, and Jay, Reagan was placing them on the highest possible moral pedestal in the eyes of Americans. Yet today, more than 35 years later, the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua remains intact. Some of the “Afghan freedom fighters” that Reagan considered the “moral equal of our Founding Fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance” joined the restored Afghan government after 2001. Others have continued the fight in the groups Pakistan sponsors to continue killing Afghan, US, and other NATO forces in Afghanistan.

On December 12, 1985, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, political leader of Hezb-i Islami, the largest mujahidin group at the time, announced that a new “resistance shura” would form a government-in-exile. On June 16, 1986, Reagan met, again in the Oval Office, with representatives of this council, including future president Ustad Burhanuddin Rabbani, Hazrat Sibghatullah Mojadeddi, Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, and Pir Sayyid Ahmed Gilani. On this occasion, the US side denied recognition to the government-in-exile, disappointing the Afghans and their Pakistani sponsors.



*Admiral Michael Mullen
described the Haqqanis as
a “veritable arm” of the ISI.*

Six years later, Mojadeddi and Rabbani became presidents, and Nabi vice-president, of a short-lived mujahidin government that the Taliban ousted in 1996. All three played key roles in the Bonn process designed to rebuild the state of Afghanistan after 2001. After stoutly opposing the Bonn Agreement and remaining allied with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda for 15 years, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was pardoned by the Afghan government and returned to Kabul in 2016. On November 12, 1987, Reagan received a delegation in the Roosevelt Room led by Maulavi Mohammad Yunus Khalis of Hezb-i Islami Khalis – a party separate from Hekmatyar’s. Khalis was speaking on behalf of the just-formed seven-member Islamic Union of Mujahidin of Afghanistan – from which the core of the ill-fated 1992-96 government was drawn.

In 2001, under heavy ISI influence, Khalis, Hekmatyar, and most Hezb-i Islami members declined to join the post-Taliban government. Their top commander, Jalaluddin Haqqani, invited to the White House in 1987 but not present on that occasion, went on with his sons to form the Haqqani Network, a terrorist outfit loyal to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban that pioneered suicide and complex Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT)-type attacks in Afghanistan while also specializing in

assassinations. Outgoing Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen described the Haqqanis as a “veritable arm” of the ISI. Kayani, as noted above, also called them “a strategic asset.” They are responsible for tens of thousands of deaths, including those of hundreds of US and other NATO soldiers.

By 1987 Gorbachev had decided to cut Soviet losses. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Geneva Accords, guaranteed by the US and USSR, were signed on April 14, 1988. They led to the withdrawal of all Soviet military forces by February 15, 1989. But there was a catch: on the day of the signing, US Secretary of State George Schultz made the following fateful statement:

The obligations undertaken by the guarantors are symmetrical. In this regard, the United States has advised the Soviet Union that it retains the right, consistent with its obligations as guarantor, to provide military assistance to parties in Afghanistan. (Shahi 2008, 144)

Instead of putting an end to all military assistance to the warring parties, a principle known as “negative symmetry,” the Soviet Union and the US embraced “positive symmetry” by which they would continue delivering military supplies to their respective proxies. Soviet assistance to the Najibullah government ended with the dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991. For the United States, “positive symmetry” ended even earlier, when the last Soviet soldiers left.

But Pakistan quickly implemented “positive symmetry” – a policy it had advocated. It remains the official pretext Pakistani military and diplomatic leaders privately give, when pressed, to justify their support to Hezb-i-Islami, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Haqqani Network. With its Arab leadership and international makeup, Al-Qaeda itself was founded at the time of the Geneva Accords in 1988 partly to induce Arab donors to compensate for declining US support.

The ISI has remained foursquare behind all these groups. The military response to the Soviet invasion championed by Brzezinski in 1979 became a proxy war waged by Afghans with Pakistani, US, and Saudi support. After 1989 Pakistan took exclusive ownership of this proxy war, using “positive symmetry” as a pretext. It has never stopped.

The British Raj, missing borders, and strategic depth

The US strategy in the 1980s of jihad from bases in Pakistan had deep roots. For nearly a century up to the 1930s, strategists of the British Raj and empire considered the sprawling north-west frontier – India’s border with Afghanistan – the most critical defensive zone in their global web of realms, dominions, and colonies. To protect it from attack by Russia and ensure Afghanistan remained a neutral buffer state, they lavished exorbitant sums on layered defences west of the Indus River, and invaded Afghanistan three times.

By May 1879, the mid-point of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the Amir had fled Kabul. Under duress, his son and heir Amir Mohammad Yaqub Khan accepted the punitive Treaty of Gandamak, which required him “to conduct his relations with Foreign States in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British Government. His Highness the Amir will enter into no engagements with Foreign States, and will not take up arms against any Foreign State, except with the concurrence of the British Government. On these conditions the British Government will support the Amir against any foreign aggression with money, arms, or troops, to be employed in whatsoever manner the British Government may judge best for this purpose” (*New York Times/Gazette of India* 1879)

In other words, Afghanistan was to be a British protectorate, with no foreign policy of its own. This arrangement endured until full Afghan independence was resumed in 1919 following the Third Anglo-Afghan War. But the Treaty of Gandamak was controversial from the start: the new British resident at Kabul, the haughty Sir Louis Cavagnari, was killed on September 3, just four months after the treaty was signed, triggering the war’s second phase. Yaqub Khan was replaced by his brother, Ghazi Mohammad Ayub Khan, the victor of Maiwand, then in 1880 by their nephew Amir Abdurrahman Khan, who retained power for two decades.

Abdurrahman Khan, the “Iron Amir,” confirmed the Treaty of Gandamak by formally surrendering Afghan territories around Peshawar and Quetta, which formed the nucleus of Pakistan’s future North-West Frontier and Baluchistan provinces after 1947. Many Afghans still consider these lands integral to their national identity and claim that the new territorial divisions decided at Gandamak were never recognized as international borders.

They argue that when Sir Mortimer Durand demarcated the 2670-kilometre line dividing Afghanistan from India in 1893 (the Durand Line), it was not a recognized international border between independent states but rather a dividing line between the British Raj and a British protectorate. With the par-

tition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the issue of formally recognizing this border went unresolved. Instead, Afghanistan sought to orchestrate the return of their lost provinces, while initially opposing Pakistan's membership in the United Nations.

Since 1947, successive Afghan *jirgas* (traditional assemblies) and governments have denounced the Durand Line and have continued unsuccessfully (particularly in 1960-61) to try to coax parts of Pakistan's Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into re-joining Afghanistan. It is no exaggeration to say that the Treaty of Gandamak is hated in Afghanistan to this day. No bilateral agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan has ever resulted in mutual recognition of a demarcated border; advocates of irredentism persist on both sides.

British policy had a major hand both in the genesis of these border issues and the creation of Pakistan. In the run-up to partition, Churchill (then in opposition but still influential) and other British politicians backed the creation of an independent Pakistan, partly out of longstanding pique and antipathy towards Gandhi, Congress and their allies, which included the *Khudmai Khitmatgar*, whose leader Bacha Khan was considered "Sarhadi Gandhi" – the "border Gandhi" – both for his embrace of non-violence and his affinity for Congress.

The frontier policy that led to three Anglo-Afghan wars, as well as dozens of smaller military incursions into Afghanistan by forces of the Raj, became a founding doctrine for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan after 1947. ISI itself was co-founded by Australian-born British army officer Robert Cawthome in 1948; its initial headquarters were in Karachi. Major General Cawthome, who also founded the Pakistan Army Corps of Signals, served a nine-year tenure as director general, which remains a record for the agency (International News 2014). For Pakistan, the dream of dominating neighbouring Afghanistan has deep Anglo-Indian roots.

Stages of self-delusion

Instead of recognizing that Pakistan was systematically backing the Taliban and seeking to confront it politically over this fundamental violation of international law and longstanding threat to international peace and security, Afghanistan's international partners have often sought other explanations for the persistent conflict. The following is not a complete list:

Pakistan has nuclear weapons and is a more important country (2001+): This argument is incoherent. Most democracies took strong action in response to Putin's invasion of Ukraine even though Russia has the

world's largest nuclear arsenal (40 times that of Pakistan). Iran, Venezuela, Syria, China, and other states are subject to wide-ranging sanctions for violations of international law ranging from the use of chemical weapons to genocide. Pakistan's war in Afghanistan has cost 124,000 lives since 2003. It has also put at risk huge investments that the US, UN, NATO, and dozens of other countries have made, yet to this day no coordinated policy has been pursued aimed at ending Pakistan's costly interference in Afghanistan through armed proxies.

The Taliban should have been invited to the Bonn talks (2003): This complaint conveniently overlooks the reality that the ISI was determined to prevent the Taliban from joining talks where Islamabad would not be in *de facto* control.

The Taliban are an insurgency (2006): An insurgency is generally defined as an "armed popular rebellion or uprising against authority." The Taliban are not popular: they rely on bribery, fear, and violence to control rural areas. Through them Pakistan is prosecuting its vicious, covert proxy war against legitimate, relatively popular state structures and civil society institutions in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Sanctions are working (2007): The expert group that advises the UN Taliban and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee has long included an ISI officer. This sanctions regime has never been serious because Pakistan comprehensively flouts it.

Pakistan no longer supports the Taliban (2008): Senior officials in many capitals (including Washington) up to 2008, and UK officials for far longer, have made this false claim.

We are at a turning point (2009): This claim, made almost annually by coalition and ISAF commanders, has always under-estimated the determination and institutional depth of the Taliban's ISI sponsors who have been able to field large, capable forces even after incurring steep losses. Such misguided optimism was most disastrous when the 2009 Obama surge, which stabilized southern Afghanistan over several years, was later followed by drastic drawdowns, without any compensatory political effort to force Pakistan to end its covert proxy war in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government is corrupt (2009-10): US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke decided early in his tenure that Afghan President Hamid Karzai was corrupt and sought to ensure he was replaced as president. As a result, Holbrooke pressed for a second round of the close-run 2009 presidential election in Afghanistan. In the end, Karzai remained president until 2014. Holbrooke himself died, most tragically, on December 13, 2010. But the dispute depleted reservoirs of trust on all sides,

opening deep rifts between the government of Afghanistan and its international partners, which the ISI has sought to exploit.

Osama’s Bin Laden’s death changes everything (2011): Apart from a few rocky years and several episodes of the TV series *Homeland* (broadcast on Showtime from 2011 to 2020) that highlighted Pakistan’s duplicity, which may have been uncomfortable viewing for ISI brass, Osama Bin Laden’s death on May 1, 2011, changed virtually nothing in US-Pakistan relations. Al-Qaeda leader Al-Zawahiri remains at large in Pakistan. Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and their ilk continue to operate at will in Afghanistan – and do so with comprehensive Pakistani support. There is also increasing evidence that the “Khorasan Province” branch of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which also operates in Afghanistan, is also an ISI creation intended to draw US attention away from Taliban networks. The mistaken notion that the Taliban can be persuaded to sever ties with other terrorist groups ignores the obvious fact that they have the same task-masters.

Pakistan’s real order of battle

The most remarkable fact about the Afghan war from 2001 until the present remains that, in public debate and government policy-making, the principal belligerent has mostly gone unnamed. There is no major international document that clearly identifies Pakistan’s aggression as a threat to Afghanistan. The UN and NATO, as well as individual member states, have notably failed to find the candour to acknowledge Pakistan’s covert proxy war as the primary factor thwarting their objectives in Afghanistan. This reticence remains a principal obstacle to peace.

Pakistan’s military has worked assiduously to keep their involvement out of public view. Operational security to keep the prying eyes of journalists and intelligence officers away from Directorate S, the unit responsible for Pakistan’s covert proxy war, has been a top priority for ISI, even an organizing principle – one to which they have rigorously and for the most part successfully adhered. With so many unaware of Pakistan’s covert war, the ISI has focused – for many years successfully – on preventing any substantiated narrative linking them to this war from emerging in media, in multilateral fora, in think tanks, or other venues.

Several very capable analysts and journalists have shed light on Pakistan’s role.³ But journalists and other researchers based in Pakistan seeking to expose ISI support for the Taliban have been, almost without exception, attacked, expelled, intimidated, tortured, or killed. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 57 Pakistani journalists have been killed since 2001

(CPJ Undated). Foreign correspondents who do not toe the line are asked to leave or are unable to obtain visas. In Baluchistan and FATA, an elaborate system of local checkpoints prevents facilities crucial to the war in Afghanistan from being scrutinized or investigated. The ISI units responsible for operations in Afghanistan operate in civilian clothing, in well-guarded facilities, often in remote locations. They are often indistinguishable from the militants they train, finance, arm, and support. As an outsider, it is virtually impossible to get near them. As a result, Pakistani news organizations stay away. The remaining serious international news outlets with correspondents in Pakistan also tend to skirt around ISI-related issues in order to remain open, to retain accreditation, and to ensure visas are renewed.



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The ISI has lavished painstaking operational effort on active measures, camouflage operations, and disinformation to prevent partners from obtaining a full picture of Pakistan's covert war. As a result, the prevailing US view towards Pakistan in general and the ISI in particular, already ambiguous in 2001, remains murky and ill-defined even today. The following is a summary of Pakistan's Afghanistan policy since the Geneva Accords in 1988.

When US funding for the mujahidin evaporated, the ISI and others in Pakistan welcomed and partly facilitated the creation of Al-Qaeda, founded at Peshawar in 1988. It was both a home for Arab and other foreign fighters and a fundraising tool used with donors in the Gulf, who became Taliban sponsors in the 1990s, substituting for lost US revenue. Once the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in 1996, the ISI ensured the Taliban cooperated with Al-Qaeda, while the ISI's training machinery continued to churn out tens of thousands of fighters.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, known by his *nom de guerre* "Mokhtar," was the architect of the 9/11 conspiracy. A Pakistani national from Baluchistan, he served as an assistant to Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, leader of one of the seven Afghan mujahidin parties that had united at Pakistan's impetus in late 1985. Mokhtar was also an ISI asset. After 9/11 and the withdrawal of Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces from Afghanistan, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad arranged for Osama Bin Laden to visit one wife in Karachi before Mokhtar himself was arrested on March 1, 2003.⁴

From late 2001 to early 2003, the ISI organized the reception of repatriated Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other Islamic Emirate fighters in madrassas, safe houses and training facilities run by Jaish-e Mohammad, Lashkar-e Taiba, and other terrorist outfits. They arrested only operatives considered expendable – enough to convince the US that Pakistan’s agencies were cooperating. For instance, Pakistan arrested Mokhtar just prior to the arrival in Washington of a delegation led by General Mohammad Yusuf Khan, Vice Chief of the Army Staff of Pakistan.

This delegation also included General Kayani, who was then Director General of Military Operations (Coll 2018, 149-150). The visiting Pakistanis found US military and intelligence leaders in Washington preoccupied with the forthcoming invasion of Iraq, mollified by the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, and without major additional demands for Pakistan. In my assessment, based on conversations with actors who had direct knowledge of ISI decision-making at the time, it is reasonable to assume that ISI calculated at this point that hostilities inside Afghanistan could resume given that US attention was focused elsewhere. Towards the end of March 2003, new Taliban orders issued to field commanders in Afghanistan resulted in the killing of Red Cross delegate Munguia.



The ISI kept the US preoccupied “hunting for Al-Qaeda” and protecting its supply lines.

Over the next three years, Pakistan’s covert proxy war scaled up its capacity to attack targets throughout Afghanistan (2004), dominate rural areas of southern Afghanistan (2005), and seek to take and hold district and provincial capitals (2006). While ISI failed to achieve the latter goal, the renewed intensity of Taliban attacks was an unpleasant surprise for Afghan and NATO forces alike. In 2004, the revamped Haqqani Network launched a campaign of suicide bombing from a training facility in Miramshah, North Waziristan, in Pakistan’s FATA. Among the first targets was Canadian Cpl. Jamie Brendan Murphy, killed in Kabul on January 27, 2004. In October of the same year Kayani became ISI’s director-general, leading Pakistan’s covert proxy war in this position until 2007, then as Chief of the Army Staff until 2013.

A close reading of Steve Coll’s *Directorate S* and the memoirs of principal US policy-makers involved in the mission shows that Pakistani leaders stuck with their covert proxy war policy in part because wide-ranging US cooperation with them never stopped even as the scope and intensity of Taliban operations and Pakistani support were scaled up dramatically. Moreover,

Pakistan remained the principal logistics hub through which US and other NATO forces shipped the bulk of their supplies. In effect, the ISI kept the US preoccupied “hunting for Al-Qaeda” and protecting its supply lines while it re-launched a military campaign in Afghanistan through Taliban, Haqqani Network, and other proxy forces whose links to ISI remained deniable and largely invisible to intelligence operatives, journalists, and researchers.

Pakistan took a similar approach with the UK. When several members of the July 7, 2005, cell that attacked London were found to have received training in the Malakand district of Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (re-named Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in 2010), the UK’s overriding priority in its relations with Pakistan became preventing new attacks in Birmingham, Bradford, or Glasgow, each with large British Pakistani communities from which thousands visited Pakistan every year. To prevent further terrorist incidents at home, Westminster relied upon the ISI to provide actionable intelligence about radicalized British nationals. The UK was determined to keep these intelligence channels with ISI open to the exclusion of almost any other issue. The ISI, recognizing it enjoyed such a massive domestic leverage in the UK, carried on with its covert proxy war against NATO unhindered, inflicting heavy casualties on British forces deployed to Helmand province and elsewhere.

As a new tide of violence engulfed Afghanistan in 2006-07, yielding solid gains for the Taliban, Musharraf and Kayani became embroiled in domestic scandals. In early 2007 Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry agreed to hear cases involving up to 400 “missing persons” alleged to have disappeared at the hands of ISI or the Federal Investigation Agency, Pakistan’s national law enforcement body. (Non-governmental organizations today have identified over 5000 such “missing person” cases.) Musharraf responded by suspending Chaudhry, triggering the “Adliya Bachao Tehreek” (“Save the Judiciary Movement”), which generated immense domestic pressure for Chaudhry’s reinstatement, which took place later that year. When Musharraf declared a state of emergency on November 3, 2007, Chaudhry was again dismissed and a nation-wide crackdown on lawyers began. This generated even larger “Lawyers’ Movement” protests.

In the meantime, Pakistan’s army had in July 2007 attacked *Lal Masjid* (the “Red Mosque”) a mutinous madrassa in Islamabad that had been associated with the mujahidin in the 1980s. In retaliation for this attack, *Lal Masjid*’s leaders, who had previously supported Pakistan’s undeclared proxy war in Afghanistan, now joined Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (“The Taliban Movement in Pakistan”), a terrorist militia mobilized by ISI to oppose US drone strikes in FATA, in announcing that it would henceforth attack Pakistani government targets as well. While the attack on the Red Mosque was the beginning of the end for Musharraf, ISI lost no time in exploiting this turn of events as proof that Pakistan was a victim (and not the principal sponsor) of the Taliban and other terrorist groups.

Throughout 2006 and 2007 the US and UK had been pressing for the “restoration of democracy in Pakistan” by shifting Musharraf into a civilian role as president and manoeuvring Benazir Bhutto into position as his prime minister. In October 2007, Bhutto finally returned to Pakistan from exile just as Musharraf was about to doff his uniform. But her political dreams were cut short and Anglo-American illusions rapidly shattered. After a number of unsuccessful attacks, Bhutto was assassinated by a suicide bomber on December 27, 2007, at Liaquat National Bagh, where another prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, had been killed in 1951. Bhutto’s own father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, also at one time a prime minister of Pakistan, was executed in 1979 at Adiala prison in Rawalpindi, where ISI is headquartered today, only 15 kilometres to the south of Benazir Bhutto’s assassination.

Bhutto’s Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) nevertheless won the ensuing spring elections, combining with Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League to push for impeachment proceedings against Musharraf, which resulted in his resignation on August 18, 2008. Three weeks later, Bhutto’s widower, Asif Ali Zardari, was sworn in as president. As a result, democratic practice was superficially resumed, but in a manner conducive to continuing ISI pre-eminence and control, which Bhutto (had she lived) would almost certainly have challenged. With the TTP occupying much of Swat for two years starting in mid-2007, the ISI could plausibly claim to US and UK interlocutors that it was “fighting escalating terrorism” within its own borders.

In reality, Pakistani support for Taliban proxies in Afghanistan was increasing, with no public objection from the US or other NATO allies. The UK’s dependence on actionable intelligence for counter-intelligence purposes at home, the Anglo-American joint effort over two years to restore civilian government and democracy in Pakistan (amid mounting domestic crises in Pakistan), and the continuing distraction of the costly war in Iraq had provided cover for the ISI to escalate its covert proxy war.

In the year after the *Lal Masjid* attack, Pakistani militants began to Talibanize parts of the North-West Frontier Province. By August 2008, Pakistan’s army was completing operations *Rab-e-Haq-II* and *Sberdil* to clear TTP militants from Swat. Lieutenant-General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, a Kayani *protégé*, became Director General of ISI in October 2008. By February 2009 TTP had regained control of 80 percent of Swat district; the Pakistani response was *Operation Black Thunderstorm*, which returned control of Swat and other districts to the army by May 2009.

These operations against TTP in Swat and elsewhere displaced large civilian populations. Militants in Pakistan were attacking convoys bound for Afghanistan with US military supplies. Pakistan’s own ambassador to Afghanistan was kidnapped by the Taliban in February 2008 and held for three months. On September 20, 2008, the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad was bombed – the same

month Afghanistan's ambassador-designate to Pakistan was also kidnapped. In a briefing with President Obama on September 30, "They all agreed that Pakistan required another huge infusion of American aid to help the country defeat its own Taliban insurgents" (Coll 2018, 403).

Meanwhile, Pakistan's covert proxy war in Afghanistan continued unabated. CIA drone strikes inside Pakistan, initiated under the Bush administration, did little to hinder Taliban operations. With TTP militancy on an upswing in Pakistan, the ISI induced the US to target TTP leaders, drawing the drone campaign away from covert proxy war assets. Kayani and Pasha both repeatedly promised action against Taliban and Haqqani leaders, but took none. With Obama's "heart not in" the Afghan mission and US disenchantment growing with Karzai, who was facing elections in August 2009, the main political partner for US engagement in the region was effectively no longer Afghanistan, but Pakistan.

“ *All available evidence confirms that the war in Afghanistan remained the ISI's principal priority.* ”

As Coll (2018) makes very clear, under the Obama administration America's strategy in the region was siloed and inward-looking. The CIA focused on anti-Al-Qaeda counter-terrorism, mainly using drones to hit cross-border targets; the Pentagon ramped up time-limited counter-insurgency; and the State Department under Holbrooke reached out to the Taliban. As US and European contacts with the Taliban multiplied, the ISI moved to restore discipline among their proxies by arresting half the Quetta Shura, all on Pakistani soil, in early 2010.

This catch-and-release program captured top commanders Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zakir (a former Guantanamo detainee), Mullah Abdul Rauf, Mullah Abdul Qabir, and explosives expert Akhundzada Popalzai, also known as Mullah Muhammad Younis (Mazzetti and Filkins 2010, Amhad 2010, Tellis 2010, Filkins 2010). In March 2010 ISI arrested Agha Jan Mohtasim, the Taliban's principal financial agent, again inside Pakistan (Filkins and Shah 2010). Abdul Qayyum Zakir almost immediately became the Taliban's top military commander in southern Afghanistan – a position he retained until 2014.

All available evidence confirms that the war in Afghanistan remained the ISI's principal priority. In 2011, Pasha wrote to TTP leader Maulana Wali-ur-Rehman Mehsud suggesting that if he re-directed his fight towards NATO in Af-

ghanistan he would enjoy financial and logistical support from the ISI (Ehsan 2020). When Mehsud refused, he was killed in a 2013 US drone strike.

Over this entire period, from 2005 to 2011, Osama Bin Laden was living with family members in Abbottabad, where he was visited by former ISI Director General Hamid Gul and Fazlur Rehman Khalil, founder of Harkat-ul Mujahideen, yet another ISI-backed terrorist outfit operating mostly in Kashmir in the 1980s and early 1990s (Sood 2018, 232-33). When Bin Laden was killed on May 1, 2011, Pakistan protested, then to deter Pakistanis from proffering further intelligence to the US about Al-Qaeda, Taliban, or Haqqani assets in Pakistan, the ISI arrested all those involved in the hunt for Bin Laden, including Dr. Shakil Afridi, the doctor who helped run a fake hepatitis vaccine program in Abbottabad to gather DNA to confirm Osama bin Laden's presence in the city, who remains in prison in Pakistan.

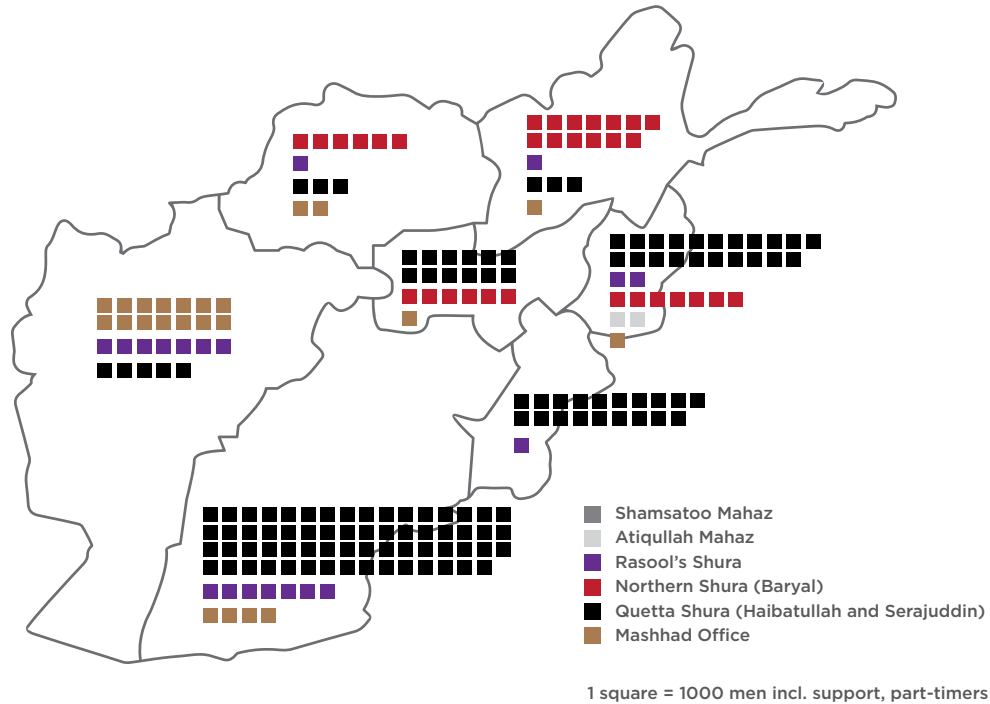
As payback for Bin Laden's killing, Pakistan's proxies were ordered to assassinate Ustad Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former Afghan president then heading Hamid Karzai's High Peace Council, who was killed on September 20, 2011, at his home in Kabul. ISI also stepped up insider attacks on NATO officers and soldiers who were training Afghan counterparts. With Obama's draw-down of troops in the region and NATO's transition in 2014 to a training mission, ISI calculated that a return path to power in Kabul lay open to their proxy war allies. By ruthlessly exploiting post-2009 rifts between the US and Karzai, they have made him and several other prominent Afghan leaders regular critics of US policy in the region and advocates for the cause of "reconciliation" with the Taliban, which ISI seeks to promote.

Since 2014, the ISI, through its proxies, has resumed high-level support for opium cultivation to fund Afghan operations. It has multiplied targeted assassinations and intimidation of Afghan government officials at every level. In 2014-15, it orchestrated the fall of Kunduz. It has also encouraged leaders and operatives of both Al-Qaeda and ISIL-Khorasan province, nominally a branch of TTP, to relocate to parts of Afghanistan under Taliban control.

In so doing, the ISI objective has been to discredit the elected government in Kabul, distance the most high-profile terrorist groups from their logistics bases and sponsors in Pakistan, and focus remaining US military capacity more narrowly on global terrorist targets, leaving the wider field open to Taliban, Haqqani, and other networks to prosecute the main campaign even as they engage in "peace talks" with the Afghan government.

Today the ISI remains a force of 25,000 uniformed and non-uniformed personnel overseeing active military campaigns in Afghanistan and Kashmir, as well as irregular forces in dozens of conflicts around the world. Over several years, their political department orchestrated Imran Khan's rise to become prime minister in 2018. ISI's Directorate S remains the core structure leading

MAP 1: STRENGTH OF THE TALIBAN SHURAS BY REGION



Adapted from: Giustozzi 2017.

Pakistan's covert proxy war-fighting capabilities in Afghanistan. Professor Owen Sirrs's 2016 book *Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate: Covert Action and Internal Operations* describes this unit as

A secret cell planted within an intelligence agency that has tight compartmentalization, rigid communication security procedures, and a network of former intelligence officers to aid militant groups and conduct plausibly deniable operations. (quoted in Bonin 2019, 2)

Directorate S is effectively a command structure for unconventional warfare with an overlay of ISI enablers, including present and former ISI officers operating out of uniform, who direct operations of the Quetta Shura and its subordinate Taliban combat units. Directorate S also provides the battlefield, financial, intelligence, logistical, medical, training, and weapons system support needed for their war. As ISI's main military effort, Directorate S involves thousands of operatives who have in turn trained and supported tens of thousands of Taliban fighters engaged in operations in Afghanistan (see Map 1), or supported them from Pakistan.

ISI deploys a sophisticated digital presence, pervasive information operations, and discrete, well-funded lobbying efforts in Washington, London, and elsewhere. One of the ISI's most crucial but fragile successes has been to prevent this proxy war from making headlines. To achieve this, the ISI employs robust teams inside Pakistan and abroad to monitor social media, prevent unwelcome investigations, derail adverse news or opinion pieces by journalists and columnists, and respond when very occasionally the truth spills out into the public realm.

No major news organization has ever profiled General Kayani in detail. No public report has assessed Pakistan's ISI to be the principal organization behind Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and their decades of violence inside Afghanistan. Coll's 2018 book is the best account so far of US engagement with Pakistan up to 2014. Coll reports that only one policy-maker proposed sanctions as a response to Pakistan's spoiler behaviour. Yet in Coll's words, "[Kabul Station Chief Chris] Wood's views never attracted a critical mass of cabinet-level allies. (Coll 2018, 536). In fact, the US has not yet taken any tough actions to impose real costs on Pakistan beyond aid and military assistance cuts. In a recent tabulation of the 10 countries on which the US has imposed sanctions in recent years (which includes Iran, Syria, China, Venezuela, and North Korea), Pakistan does not even figure (Peterson Institute for International Economics 2021).

The ISI's proxies in Afghanistan today comprise tens of thousands of fighters, some resident in Afghanistan, most with families in Pakistan. Al-Qaeda and remaining military assets of Hezb-i-Islami remain based in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa around Peshawar. The Haqqani Network, including its assassination squads and complex suicide attack training capabilities, are in FATA (formally integrated into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa since 2018), with key centres around Miramshah. The Quetta Shura is based in Baluchistan, with strong links in Karachi and elsewhere, as well as continuous liaison with LeT, JeM, JuD, and other groups for training and fundraising purposes.

To maintain discipline, prevent splits, and forestall defections, threats to Taliban family members in Baluchistan and elsewhere are commonplace, just as they are among government officials throughout Afghanistan, most of whom live in constant fear of violence or assassination from the Taliban and their proxy war allies. The 2020 Taliban negotiating team under Judge Abdul Hakim, functionary Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, and Anas Haqqani, youngest son of Jalaluddin, is made up of junior place-holders who continue to take their direction from and remain utterly dependent upon their long-time sponsors, the ISI.

Self-defeating trends in Pakistan's proxy war today

Pakistan's covert proxy war has taken a savage toll on all involved. Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff who was perhaps closest to General Kayani, used restrained diplomatic language in his public statements about Pakistan until eight days before his retirement, when he accused the government of Pakistan (meaning principally the ISI) of “choosing to use violent extremism as an instrument of policy” (Solash and Siddique 2011). Yet this war has taken its greatest toll on Pakistan itself.

Pakistanis, like Afghans, are weary of violence and terrorism. A democratic challenge to Imran Khan's government is mounting under an umbrella group of opposition parties. In Baluchistan, a long-running guerrilla war with nationalists has been countered by campaigns of killings and disappearances attributed to repressive agencies of state power, as well as by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. These highly coercive policies, which pre-date even the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, are now creating a forceful backlash, as well as scope for interference through proxies by Afghanistan, India, Iran, and other external players seeking to emulate the ISI model.

In Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the ISI has been unable to prevent a peaceful uprising among Pashtun tribes exasperated by decades of economic pain and violent displacement in districts perennially used as staging grounds for the Afghan war. Founded in 2018, now with representatives in the National Assembly, the Pashtun Tahafuz (“Protection”) Movement (PTM) has generated massive protests demanding the return of missing persons and an end to extrajudicial killings.

In a sign that these gatherings are seen as a major political threat, the ISI and its communications counterpart, the Inter-Services Public Relations (IPR), have gone to great lengths to prevent domestic or foreign coverage of them. As with the many strands of the Baluch resistance movement, PTM has its roots in years of abuses by Directorate S, which has continuously used tribal lands in Waziristan and other parts of FATA, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan as covert staging posts and launching pads for their Afghan war.

The PTM and its Baluch equivalents represent a new generation emerging in Pakistan, with strong representation in Punjab, Sindh, and the Northern Territories, who realize that their country, even more than Afghanistan, has been the principal victim of the senseless, costly proxy war ISI re-launched in Afghanistan in 2003.

The ISI is waging this war because of their ingrained institutional obsession with unconventional war against India. As noted earlier, armed interference through proxies has been a main pillar of Pakistani policy towards India since the 1960s. After the successful jihad against the Soviet Union prosecuted by Afghan proxies on the basis of “positive symmetry” with ISI support, Islamabad considered itself entitled to install a government sympathetic to its interests in Kabul. The Taliban regime that ruled from 1996 to 2001 was the culmination of this abiding ISI dream. With the demise of the Taliban government shortly after 9/11, Pakistan’s military rulers decided to play a long game to see the Taliban re-installed.

To date no one has stopped them. In Pakistan the vast majority of the population is utterly unaware of the violence being committed in their name. Thanks to tightening controls on the media and the suborning of political opposition, Pakistanis have not yet fully made the connection between this covert proxy war, which has imposed such enormous costs on their country, and the distorted shape of the country’s “democratic” politics, with its increasingly naked military wagon-masters. In many respects, Pakistan’s ISI – as much as any other major international actor, and not unlike Russia’s Federal Security Service under Putin – is stuck in a time warp dating back to the pieties of jihad in the 1980s and the impunity of “positive symmetry” after 1988:

It was a clean arrangement where the Americans thought the Pakistanis were in for the same reason – to defeat communism – while the Pakistanis thought they were in the game to get even with India by acquiring strategic depth in Afghanistan and breaking the feared pincer of India and Afghanistan. (Sood 2020, 82)

Replace the word “communism” with “terrorism” and exactly the same statement might be made about the situation today. Some, including former Indian spy chief Vikram Sood (the author of the words above), maintain that Pakistan’s identity is too deeply rooted in hostility towards India for any new model to emerge. Others believe Islamism in the army, corruption in politics, and ISI hubris dictate a policy of containment towards Pakistan as the best course for democratic partners to take. Still others are focused on the security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal and non-proliferation as an overriding concern.

Few have yet fully calculated the costs to Pakistanis of ISI’s misguided proxy war. According to the World Bank, Pakistan’s average annual growth rate (in current US\$ per capita) over the 19 years from 2001 to 2019 has been only two-thirds that of India (4.2 percent for Pakistan versus 6.7 percent for India). Since 2000, Pakistan’s annual per capita GDP (again in current US\$) has barely doubled (\$576 to \$1285), while India’s has more than quadrupled (\$443 to \$2104).⁵ The costs of declining school enrollment and excessive military spending in Pakistan are even greater. A former South Asian economic leader has become a fading laggard.

Many Pakistanis believe that the US imposed jihad and terrorism on them in the 1980s. To the extent that Pakistan did not choose to become a party to one of the key chapters of irregular warfare in the Cold War, they are right. Yet beyond a small minority, Pakistanis have yet to grasp that armed interference in neighbouring Afghanistan, a perennial policy for Pakistan's rulers and their Raj predecessors for nearly two centuries, is the real culprit. It was a nascent commitment to the doctrine of "strategic depth" that made President Zia such a willing partner for Brzezinski and his successors. Pakistan's policy of interference in Afghanistan began long before 1979 and has continued long after Soviet military occupation ended in 1989.

Today, responsibility for Pakistan's illegal covert proxy war in Afghanistan after 2001 lies exclusively with Pakistan's current military leaders, alongside their civilian and business enablers. Facing up to this reality will require truth-telling and accountability on a scale not yet seen in Pakistan, beyond a few courageous voices. In persisting with this covert proxy war, Pakistan has defied the world while inflicting horrific costs on Afghans, including over 120,000 deaths. But the principal casualty has been Pakistan itself – a country rich in talent caught in the vice of a self-defeating war.

A peace settlement to end two centuries of war

Pakistan is engaged in full-scale irregular warfare against a neighbouring country with which it shares a 2670-kilometre land border. It is difficult to imagine any other state treating another in this way without incurring the censure of the entire international community, as well as the full force of economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Pakistan has only dodged these bullets by a unique feat of deception. In the words of one observer, "about the worst example of bilateral intelligence exchange cooperation was between the ISI and the CIA in the new millennium" (Sood 2020, 79).

When Ronald Reagan met Maulavi Mohammad Yunus Khalis in the Roosevelt Room in 1987, a young policy advisor joined the session at the last minute to interpret. Zalmay Khalilzad went on to become US ambassador to Afghanistan, then Iraq, and later to the United Nations. Today he leads the US effort to bring about reconciliation between the legitimate government in Kabul and the ISI's Taliban allies, who continue to target civilians with violence across Afghanistan each and every day.

For two decades starting in 1979 the United States relied on Pakistan to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan and manage the aftermath. The result was 9/11.

Since 2001 the Taliban and other ISI proxies have been fighting and killing Americans, while the US alliance with Pakistan becomes increasingly fraught. The result has been strategic incoherence. There has never before been a case where a great power accorded another state a status equivalent to “major non-NATO ally” – the designation given to Pakistan by the US in 2004 – while that state was simultaneously engaged in a full-scale proxy war against the forces of the great power.

The US must face up to the reality that the scale of Pakistan’s betrayal is unprecedented. By failing to confront this duplicity, the US has seriously diminished its post-war capacity to lead by example, to command the support of allies, and to inspire people around the world who aspire to greater prosperity under democratic government and the rule of law. Pakistan’s self-destructive gambit has cost the US influence, resources, and reputation.

This catastrophic policy failure was of course linked to a monumental intelligence breakdown. The Iraq War diverted resources away from Afghanistan and Pakistan over a crucial period; when the Obama surge finally happened in 2009, the US lacked the political will either to remain committed to Afghanistan or to confront Pakistan. In the end, US and NATO leaders and institutions failed to deliver the unambiguous early intelligence picture of Pakistan’s covert efforts that ought to have been available in 2003. This failure is in several respects worse than that in Vietnam, where US forces at least knew whom they were fighting.

In their 2004 book *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA’s Final Showdown With the KGB*, Milt Bearden and James Risen devote the second half to the mujahidin war of the 1980s. It is deeply ironic that, just as jihad in Afghanistan was intended by Brzezinski and others to repay the USSR in the same coin they had used against the US in Vietnam, so Vladimir Putin has resumed Russian military interference and influence operations in many regions while the US and its allies remain embroiled in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and related theatres.

Putin has invaded Georgia and Ukraine, destroyed Syria, and instigated profound disruptions of democracy across the West – all while Generals McNeill, McKiernan, McChrystal, Petraeus, Mullen, Kelly, Mattis and McMaster, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and a generation of American policy-makers, diplomats, and soldiers fought and laboured bravely to stabilize Afghanistan – only to leave General Kayani’s deceptions virtually unchallenged. We will never know what might have been had a united front of international partners compelled the ISI to abandon its war plans before 2003. But four decades after Geneva and nearly two decades after 9/11, Americans and other NATO country populations deserve to know that Pakistan was the main enemy backing the forces we fought in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's approach has been remarkably consistent, not to mention brazen. Despite decades of demands and countless promises to "do more," the ISI never "closed every training camp," "delivered Al-Qaeda leaders" or "went after Haqqani." For Pakistan, the Taliban was a "stabilizing force" preventing India from having clout in Kabul. The ISI has been clear all along: "The Taliban are a reality," as Kayani often said – one that the ISI improbably considers a vital proxy force in an unceasing battle with India. When US interlocutors decided after 2006 that Karzai had "gone crazy," they were projecting their own misconceptions onto him: Karzai, whose father was killed by ISI, had been among the first to see clearly what they were doing to his country. It vexed Karzai and many other Afghans that his US partners refused to acknowledge this reality.

In the end, the United States has made four crucial mistakes at four key points over the past two decades with regard to Pakistan:

First, after President George W. Bush, speaking on 9/11, said "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them," successive US administrations failed to do precisely that. The US never imposed severe costs on Pakistan for harbouring Al-Qaeda and other terrorist leaders.

Second, when Pakistan resumed its unconventional covert proxy war in Afghanistan in 2003-04, the US again failed to impose costs, preferring to designate Pakistan a "major non-NATO ally."

Third, President Obama's 2009 surge was time-limited and unsupported by action to end Pakistan's covert proxy war – the shape of which was by then mostly known, which ensured that stability in southern Afghanistan, even once restored, would be gradually lost.

Fourth, when Osama Bin Laden was found living in relative comfort near one of Pakistan's top military academies, the Obama administration again failed to take effective measures to end Pakistan's duplicity.

As a result of these failures, a quite unwarranted myth has sprung up portraying the ISI as the world's "premiere intelligence service." In fact, their perverse achievement has been to fight an unconventional war against the United States, while getting Washington to pay for it. They have also avoided sanctions to date, largely because of political capital stored up in London and Washington decades ago, which, as today's Pakistani military leaders are now finding, is finally starting to run dangerously low.

In perpetrating these outrages against their neighbours in Afghanistan, as well as against the US and other allies, Pakistan has so far foregone an immense opportunity to become Afghanistan's key partner in a lynchpin peace

settlement for South Asia. The mirror image of the US failure to confront Pakistan's duplicity has been the ISI's short-sighted, cynical, and ultimately self-defeating covert proxy war, a dangerously old-school, zero-sum battle of attrition that is robbing both Afghanistan and Pakistan of immense potential.

The ISI owes its ability to persevere in this perilous policy to its singular position in Pakistani society. In the words of Vikram Sood, "there can be no objective comparison between the ISI and any other intelligence agency operating in a democratic environment" (Sood 2020, 86). The ISI's role has become so all-encompassing that almost no one – from Pakistani civilian politicians to four-star US flag officers to Indian spymasters – knows how to change it. As Sood observes, the dozens of terrorist outfits launched by ISI throughout Pakistan in the 1980s, 1990s, and after 2000 have fostered a nationwide case of Stockholm syndrome:

The ISI has a unique position within the country's ruling hierarchy (...) It is like a parallel powerful army strike corps totally loyal to the army ethos with its own chief high in the pecking order. The ISI's forte is in managing the jihad on both frontiers and in managing internal politics. This is the ISI's strategic capability. It is this ability to collect intelligence about politicians and manage, tweak and coerce political parties, the media, Islamists and the terror networks that makes the organization uniquely powerful and dreaded. (Sood 2020, 86)

Today's Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) in Pakistan is unlikely to change course. General Qamar Javed Bajwa graduated from the Pakistan Military Academy at Abbottabad in 1980 and was commissioned into the 16th battalion of the Baluch regiment, which his father had commanded. He later graduated from the Canadian Army Command and Staff College in Toronto and the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He served as a brigade commander with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ("MONUC/MONUSCO") (under an Indian superior) and was later commander in the Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan) and of X Corps in Rawalpindi.

He was selected as COAS in 2016 for his low-key style, his seniority, and reportedly his antipathy to direct military rule, which has marred three decades of Pakistan's 74-year history since 1947. In his selection of the new (since 2019) ISI Director General Faiz Hameed, Bajwa has promoted the architect of Imran Khan's rise to power. Lt Gen Faiz Hameed is an ambitious, hard-line champion of Pakistan's covert proxy war in Afghanistan who is eager to wage unconventional war against India on all fronts. Pakistan's Federal Minister of Interior Brig. (Ret'd) Ijaz Ahmed Shah is a former ISI chief in Punjab and former Intelligence Bureau chief who allegedly secured Osama Bin Laden his 2005-11 living quarters in Abbottabad (Jamal 2011). These are unlikely handmaidens of peace, to say the least.

Yet an organization is only dreaded until it isn't. Pakistan's military is today under new pressures. Many citizens recognize that the military has taken the country in a number of ugly directions. They know India has outpaced them in international profile and economic growth. They see that Baluchistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa are simmering, and even obliging Pakistanis realize that Beijing is less an ally and more a nakedly mercantile overlord. The national economy is stalling. For ordinary people, continued emasculation of democratic freedoms, religious minorities, education, free speech, and the rule of law are unacceptable.

The impetus for ending the ISI's self-defeating war may come from grassroots Pakistanis or from a unified coalition of the principal opposition parties. It may also one day come from the military itself. But Pakistan will change course sooner if a united front of countries imposes sanctions on those in Pakistan responsible for 20 years of betrayal and violence.

“*Yet an organization is only dreaded until it isn't. Pakistan's military is today under new pressures.*”

Such a move by the US, UK, Canada, Japan, Korea, the EU, and other allies, democracies, and regional partners would require far less effort than UNAMA, ISAF, or the Afghan National Development Strategy required since 2001. By placing the main violator of the existing UN Al-Qaeda/Taliban sanctions regime under tangible new forms of pressure, the international community would be ending the normalization of this covert proxy war and preparing the ground for a genuinely historic peace settlement between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

By addressing the “situation in Pakistan,” the world would be putting an end to a dangerous complacency that chose to look the other way while the ISI, thwarting a clear international consensus, waged a crude, covert, neo-colonial war to bring Afghanistan back under its thumb. We owe it to tens of thousands of individual Afghan lives lost, as well as to thousands of American and other NATO soldiers killed, to take the one step remaining to complete, in the words of the 2006 Afghanistan Compact, “Afghanistan's transition to peace and stability.” The only way to justify the sacrifice of 158 Canadian soldiers' lives – and over 3,300 more from the US and other countries – is to finish this job, which of course promises vast, mostly unanticipated benefits for Pakistan as well.

In April 1969, the *Monthly Review*, America's "independent socialist magazine" then championing the New Left, published an article by editor Paul M. Sweezy entitled "Vietnam: Endless War." The next year Sweezy and his co-authors Leo Huberman and Harry Magdoff published a book under the same title. It was followed later in the 1970s and 1980s by two further books about Vietnam, by different authors (Văn Đôn 1978, Harrison 1989), whose titles reprised the same phrase – "endless war." In 2008 Dexter Filkins' book *The Forever War*, focusing mostly on the war in Iraq, became a *New York Times* best-seller. Since then, politicians from Barak Obama on down have fallen over themselves to decry endless wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, that have brought America a great deal of grief since 9/11. "Endless war" and "forever war" have both become stock phrases in Russian disinformation denouncing America's role as the "world's policeman," as well as less pervasive Chinese, Iranian, Pakistani, and other versions of the same agitprop.

The Iraq war was indeed a strategic blunder, compounded by later failure in Syria. US counter-terrorism operations undertaken over the past two decades in many countries of the Middle East and Africa, while mostly unsuccessful, now seem almost absurd given that the authors of the 9/11 attacks were given safe haven so quickly in Pakistan, which remains a "major non-NATO ally" of the United States. The country has faced almost no consequences for sheltering them or for conducting its 20-year covert proxy war to defeat US forces and NATO's largest combat mission, both of which have been authorized from the start by the United Nations Security Council.

In other words, there has only been scope for an endless war, in almost all the wrong places, because of a failure to confront the reality of Pakistan's role. By failing to prevent Pakistan from sheltering Al-Qaeda's leaders and re-launching a covert proxy war in Afghanistan after 2001, the international community has seriously damaged the credibility of its own institutions, including the UN sanctions regime and basic principles of international law such as the inviolability of borders, non-interference, and the prevention and removal of threats to the peace.

Ironically, the clearest expression of Pakistan's role as a Taliban supporter was published by Human Rights Watch on July 1, 2001 – just over two months before the 9/11 attacks:

Of all the foreign powers involved in efforts to sustain and manipulate the ongoing fighting, Pakistan is distinguished both by the sweep of its objectives and the scale of its efforts, which include soliciting funding for the Taliban, bankrolling Taliban operations, providing diplomatic support as the Taliban's virtual emissaries abroad, arranging training for Taliban fighters, recruiting skilled and unskilled manpower to serve in Taliban armies, planning and directing offensives, providing and facilitat-

ing shipments of ammunition and fuel, and on several occasions apparently directly providing combat support. (Human Rights Watch 2001, 23)

This analysis is equally valid today. In Pakistan since the time of Musharraf, particularly in Baluchistan, FATA, and NWFP/Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, there has long been a saying in Urdu: “*Ye Jo Dehsbatgardi hai, iskay peechay wardi hai,*” which translates as “Where there is terrorism, there’s a uniform behind it.” Afghanistan will only be at peace when Pakistan’s covert proxy war ends. Yet this will not occur without strong international action.

Starting in 2001, Afghans have expected their international partners, particularly the US, to end Pakistan’s interference. When Hamid Karzai told then Senator Joe Biden over a tense dinner in February 2008, “your country hasn’t done anything” to help Afghans, he meant the US had failed to stop Pakistan’s covert proxy war (Coll 2018, 307). Afghans welcomed the US and its allies in 2001 as liberators because they expected that decades of armed interference were ending. After 20 years of shared sacrifice, they fail to see why anyone would want this nightmare to continue.



Afghanistan will only be at peace when Pakistan’s covert proxy war ends.

Afghans saw and understood what Pakistan was doing from the start of this latest proxy war. Their international partners have been slow to understand and loathe to take action due to a combination of historical blindness, naive credulity, and wishful thinking. As a result, the world now needs to make a major shift in policy towards Pakistan. For a number of reasons, this may be an auspicious moment: goodwill towards Afghanistan and political will to restore the credibility of the UN, NATO, and collective action in general may now be in greater supply than they have been for some time.

Peace in Afghanistan is inevitable. The ISI war machine on which the Taliban depend is looking more and more like an unstable anachronism. ISI’s proxy war has never had broad popular appeal. Its currency is violence. Its leaders are obscure ciphers. It offers threats and bribes at a time when people in Pakistan and Afghanistan are seeking a better life. Once, albeit briefly, the Taliban were a homegrown Afghan movement. Now they are a hollow, clapped-out proxy export from Rawalpindi. Almost no Afghan embraces the ISI’s delusive vision of strategic depth. A reckoning lies ahead over Pakistan’s relations with Afghanistan.

Pakistan's military and the ISI have a choice. They can decide to endure growing sanctions and deepening diplomatic isolation, which will slow growth and drag Pakistan's economic performance further behind that of its South Asian peers. Or they can embark on a historic settlement with Afghanistan that will give both countries a new foundation of peace while opening a fully demarcated border to a new generation of families and merchants, students and professionals, farmers and craftspeople, boys and girls, who will make both countries one of the world's bright spots for trade and prosperity in a new era of economic advancement. When this covert proxy war finally ends, Pakistan will be the first beneficiary.

In the meantime, Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations will dismiss accounts of this covert proxy war as "anti-Pakistan." The ISI will claim their influence over the Taliban is limited. Yet the costs of inaction to end this war will be highest for Pakistan's military. In the end, Pakistanis may have to make this change themselves, rather than wait for the right leader in uniform to emerge, as the costs of nearly two centuries of conflict – first the frontier policy, then interference and jihad from the 1970s to the 1990s, now a covert proxy war, waged in their names – become clear to people from Karachi to Gilgit.

The regional conflict – and its resolution – is no longer about Afghanistan and Pakistan alone. It is about the credibility of international institutions, including the UN and NATO. It is about international law. It is about renewing the credibility of the United States as a leader of collective action. It is also about the future of proxy war as an instrument of policy – at a time when Russia's Putin, Turkey's Erdogan, Iran's Khamenei, and others are eager to mimic ISI impunity. By acting together, we can create a new anchor of stability for the world in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the benefits of which will be felt for generations to come. The following strategic recommendations are made in this spirit.

Ten strategic recommendations

The following actions are required to bring peace in Afghanistan:

1. publicly call on Pakistan to end its covert proxy war;
2. ensure that states enact wide-ranging sanctions against Pakistani officials supporting the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, the Haqqani Network, and other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and revise the United Nations Consolidated List (of entities subject to measures imposed by the Security Council) accordingly (United Nations Undated);
3. list Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism and add it to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) blacklist until it ends its covert proxy war in Afghanistan;
4. suspend further talks with the Taliban pending an unconditional ceasefire;
5. suspend further US or NATO force reductions in the region pending an unconditional ceasefire and an end to Pakistan's covert proxy war;
6. debate the "situation in Pakistan" at the United Nations Security Council to make it clear that ISI support for the Taliban and other terrorist groups is a threat to international peace and security;
7. expand the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to include civilian and military monitoring of cross-border security threats, including the entry of Taliban and other fighters from Pakistan;
8. convene genuine peace negotiations between Kabul and Islamabad on non-interference; ending sponsorship of armed proxies; and demarcation, delimitation, and full recognition of the common border between the two countries;
9. replace the principle of "positive symmetry" with new, verifiable commitments by the Security Council's five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US), NATO members states, and all six of Afghanistan's neighbours to end assistance to illegal armed groups; and
10. document the crimes of the past; identify and support victims of terrorism and other atrocities; disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former combatants; destroy ammunition and explosives; and engage Afghans in a broad-based effort to bring about reconciliation and transitional justice.

About the author



Chris Alexander was born in Toronto in 1968 in Toronto. He attended Oriole Park Public School and the University of Toronto Schools (UTS) before earning a BA from McGill (history and political science) and an MA at Balliol College, Oxford (PPE). For eighteen years he served as a Canadian diplomat, serving in the Canadian embassy in Moscow under Yeltsin and Putin. From 2003 until 2009, he was the first resident Canadian Ambassador to Afghanistan and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan.

In 2011, he published *The Long Way Back: Afghanistan's Quest for Peace*, winner of the Huguenot Society of Canada Award. He was MP for Ajax-Pickering from 2011 to 2015, serving as Parliamentary Secretary for National Defence and Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

In the latter capacity, he was responsible for introducing Express Entry, reforming and re-launching most economic, international mobility and temporary foreign worker programmes, updating the Citizenship Act for the first time in a generation, making the first commitment by any country to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees, expanding the number of international students coming to Canada and sustaining the then highest levels of immigration in Canadian history. In 2016-17, he ran for the leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada to promote a 'New Canada' driven by entrepreneurship, innovation, inclusion, investment, a larger international footprint and increased trade with markets in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas. He now provides international macro political insights to corporate clients and is a member of a number of company boards.

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Endnotes

- 1 This number is the author's own tally from publicly available information (The Associated Press 2014; The Canadian Press 2014; CBC News 2006; CBC News 2008; CBC News 2009; Dingman 2006; Glinski 2019; Veterans Affairs 2019).
- 2 The figures given in this paragraph and the next draw on United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (UNAMA Undated), as well as Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reports (<https://www.aihrc.org.af>) and other sources, particularly for numbers of Taliban, Afghan, national army, and police members killed each year in the conflict. Numbers of civilians, police, and soldiers wounded were much higher.
- 3 Matt Waldman's "The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents," published in June 2010 when he was with the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Kennedy School, was refreshingly clear. Carlotta Gall's *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001-14* (2014) and Steve Coll's *Directorate S: The CIA and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (2018) also tell important parts of the story.
- 4 This story has been documented in several publications, including several that are in the reference and reading list below, but the liveliest account to date is in chapter 10 of Vikram Sood's 2018 book, *The Unending Game: A Former R&AW Chief's Insights into Espionage*.
- 5 Afghanistan per capita GDP reached a peak of \$642 in 2012 but has since declined to \$502.

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