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'Hidden Hands' in Pakistan

RAW, India's external spy agency, is routinely charged with all sorts of machinations in Pakistan. What's really at work?

By **Prem Mahadevan**

On May 29, 1988, a senior official of the Pakistan Intelligence Bureau was abducted in Islamabad. His abductors were not a criminal gang or terrorist organization. Rather, they were personnel from the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). According to their own account of the incident, narrated in the news magazine *Herald*, they beat up the IB official until he revealed the location of a secret telephone exchange that was

monitoring calls made by military dictator Zia-ul-Haq. Zia had recently decided to dismiss his civilian prime minister, Muhammed Khan Junejo. To ensure his plans were not interfered with, he tasked the ISI with preemptively shutting down the civilian IB's surveillance of his telephone lines. Since the ISI did not know where the IB's listening post was located, it resorted to direct methods to find out. And thus continued the tradition of "managed democracy" in Pakistan.

Pakistani leaders, military, and civilian, often blame a "foreign hand" – and especially an Indian hand – to cover up bureaucratic turf warfare and inept governance. English-language Pakistani media reports elucidate instances of this over the years. After digging into more than two decades of press coverage on the so-called "foreign hand" in Pakistan, what emerges is a portrait of the intellectual failure of the country's political elite to face up to reality: They have no one to blame for Pakistan's problems with terrorism except themselves. The Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW, but often abbreviated RAW), India's external spy agency, is thus little more than a "MacGuffin" in Pakistan's domestic political drama. But unlike a Hitchcockian drama – indeed, Alfred Hitchcock mainstreamed the term – there is no end to the suspense. The Pakistani military is utterly determined to retain its privileged status in the country, come what may, and civilian politicians are too craven to resist.

The present-day obsession with Indian spies did not always exist in Pakistan. Columnist Ayaz Amir, himself a former army officer, explicitly noted the shift in 1990. Amir observed that RAW was becoming an instrument in political games played within and between the Pakistani civilian establishment and the army. Previously, it had been fashionable to accuse the Soviet KGB of orchestrating all of Pakistan's problems, including Pashtun and Baloch separatism. But with the end of the Cold War, "To the dismay of the [Pakistani] secret service, the KGB... lost all credibility as a figure of secrecy and terror. But into this great void, created by the ignominious retreat of the KGB... stepped another shadowy presence: RAW – the Research and Analysis

Wing of the Indian secret service. If, previously, the KGB was spreading the seeds of subversion in Pakistan, now it is RAW.”

Amir is a known sceptic of the Pakistani military’s inclination to undermine civilian governments, but his views are no less informed for the fact. During the Soviet-Afghan War, the KGB and KHAD (Afghanistan’s communist-dominated intelligence agency) were blamed for bombings in Pakistan. Since police investigators could rarely identify, much less arrest, the perpetrators of these attacks, theories of a “foreign hand” slowly gained credibility. A secondary focal point for frightening the population and rallying it against an imaginary external threat was the Al-Zulfikar Organization (AZO). Led by supporters of slain Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and allegedly penetrated by the ISI at an early stage, the AZO was a convenient tool with which the army could enact measures to suppress the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). To add to the group’s notoriety, India was projected as a sponsor of AZO. In the three decades since, little evidence has emerged to support such allegations despite plenty of traces that Afghan, Libyan, Syrian, and Palestinian support was provided to the militants.

Fabricated Confessions, Incompetent Agencies

On rare occasions, Indian accusations of ISI involvement in specific terrorist attacks have been strengthened by forensic analysis conducted with the help of third-country investigators. But comparable Pakistani claims have lacked any such proof. Instead, such claims have focused on deliberately conflating espionage with terrorism, thereby morally equating the two forms of clandestine activity. They also depend entirely on confessions that were quite possibly obtained under duress. For example, in 2012, a Pakistani non-commissioned officer (NCO) charged with spying for RAW described how a false statement was thrashed out of him: “They tortured me and forced me to confess that I had been going to India with Khan [the NCO’s maternal uncle], providing maps and documents to RAW.” Despite this admission of guilt, the espionage charge was later dropped when the defendant’s mother proved she had been embroiled in a long-

running land dispute with her brother and that her son could not have worked for someone opposing his own mother's interest. The NCO left the army once he was cleared of spying, asking, "How could I work for those who suspect my loyalty to my country?"

Another 20 serving and retired servicemen from Sindh were arrested on similar charges from 2008 to 2010. The fact that prosecutors in Pakistani military courts are not required to provide defense lawyers with copies of trial proceedings or show evidence against the accused allowed incompetence on the part of investigating personnel to be covered up. There was little chance that defendants could prove their innocence through a transparent legal process. With the Pakistani military taking increased responsibility for anti-terrorism trials since 2014, there is currently no way of objectively assessing whether a defendant is actually guilty of either "espionage" or "terrorism." It also does not help that most Pakistani media reports treat the two words synonymously.

In this context, it's worth exploring the ongoing Pakistani accusations leveled against ex-Indian Navy officer Kulbhushan Jadhav. These accusations rest on yet another confession made in Pakistani custody. Islamabad claims that Jadhav is a serving Indian Navy officer working for RAW. One must logically question why an Indian spy would allow himself to be caught on Pakistani territory while supposedly still in military service. There is a practice called sheep-dipping in the intelligence business, wherein a military man tasked with covert operations officially resigns from his parent service before taking on a contract with a private employer, essentially becoming a deniable freelancer. ISI operatives who plan specific terrorist attacks, such as ex-Major Sajid Majeed (the 2008 Mumbai attacks mastermind, who enjoys ISI protection despite being designated an international terrorist by the United States), are examples of this. According to testimony by David Headley, a Pakistani-American convicted for his involvement in the Mumbai attacks, there were other ex-military personnel besides Majeed who supervised the attacks. Combat training was allegedly imparted by members of the Pakistani army's Special Services Group. Considering that standard

operating procedure in covert actions is to arrange a notional “retirement” of military personnel before they are sent overseas, it defies logic that a serving Indian naval officer would enter Pakistan on a clandestine assignment while supposedly carrying identification papers issued in his real name. The official Pakistani account of Jadhav’s capture just does not hold up to scrutiny.

A look at the Middle East provides some intriguing clues regarding what may have actually happened. With Jadhav, the ISI seems to have emulated what the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah did in October 2000: kidnapping an ex-military officer of a hostile state while he was in a third country and smuggling him to their own territory before parading him as a “spy” who had been arrested locally. Hezbollah used an Israeli Arab named Qais Obeid to lure the targeted officer, a former Israeli army colonel, Elhanan Tannenbaum, to a meeting in the United Arab Emirates.

Tannenbaum was overpowered and clandestinely shifted to Lebanon, where his capture was made public. The fact that Obeid and Tannenbaum had been childhood friends and even business partners had caused the Israeli to lower his guard. He did not know that his “friend” had been bribed by Hezbollah to the tune of \$150,000 to deliver him into their hands. Tannenbaum’s capture was depicted as a humiliation of the Israeli intelligence service Mossad and provided Hezbollah with negotiating leverage in a future prisoner swap with Israel.

In the case of Jadhav, Islamabad conflated the word “spy” with “terrorist” to construct an artificial resemblance to the capture of Lashkar-e-Taiba gunman Ajmal Kasab during the November 2008 Mumbai attacks. The fact that Kasab was seen on television shooting dozens of civilians in public while Jadhav was unheard of until the ISI revealed him as a catch was conveniently not mentioned. An Indian security official who spoke to the author noted that Jadhav was in all probability abducted from the Iran-Pakistan border through an ISI “honey trap” (female lure). This technique is common among crime syndicates in Pakistan, who abduct rich businessmen for ransom, using women as the initial contacts. The subsequent effort to portray Jadhav as a terrorist on

the same level of Kasab demonstrates that if the RAW's current restraint is only being abused.

As the *Washington Post's* David Ignatius observed, "The ISI is above all a paramilitary organization. It doesn't do all that much collection of intelligence. It's not a very good spy agency, but it's good at running covert action." In contrast, the RAW is an intelligence collection agency whose core expertise lies in technical rather than human penetration; lately, however, RAW has reportedly seen some big successes in old-fashioned spying too. The spate of so-called snatch operations conducted against jihadists based on foreign soil since 2008 suggest that the Indian agency is improving its human intelligence capability besides coordination with overseas partners. RAW's technical prowess was demonstrated during the 1999 Kargil crisis, when an Indian listening post intercepted highly indiscreet conversations between members of the Pakistani high command. Likewise, during the Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008, Indian and Western agencies were able to listen to real-time instructions relayed from the terrorist control room in Karachi's Malir cantonment. The digital trail leading to Pakistan was insufficient to prevent the attack, but helped in identifying the masterminds.

Pakistani commentators who reflexively insist that terrorism in their country is the work of RAW might wish to ponder the deeper implication of such statements. By their logic, *fidayeen* or "suicide squad" raids on strategic facilities such as the Army General Headquarters and the Kamra airbase have been preceded by RAW penetration. During such raids, the attackers demonstrated surprising familiarity with the internal layout of these supposedly secure buildings, suggesting they had inside help. Now, if the ISI and Military Intelligence of Pakistan are so incompetent as to allow Indian spies into places where army and intelligence brass regularly meet, or where nuclear weapons are stored, then they can only blame themselves. Rather than wallow in escapism, it would be more productive to face up to hard facts: The preventive security and investigation apparatus of Pakistan has been heavily compromised from within by jihadist sympathizers.

As a 2009 account by Umer Farooq notes, even when investigators have traced the perpetrators of a bombing or gun assault, such as the November 2007 attacks in Rawalpindi, prosecution witnesses produced by the ISI have failed to identify the accused in police lineups. In this regard, the comedic value of policemen in Pakistani Punjab cannot be underestimated. The force has been quick to excuse its own performance failures by citing RAW's supposedly ubiquitous presence. In one instance in October 2004, an unexploded briefcase bomb was described by police spokesmen as being of "Indian make." Pakistani journalists who observed the security cordon around the bomb questioned how its origins could have been so swiftly ascertained since no policemen had ventured near the briefcase. Instead, it was federal officials who took sole possession of the device. A few weeks later, reports noted that the bomb had actually been assembled by the Sunni sectarian group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and all previous speculation of Indian involvement was quietly forgotten.

In terms of investigatory competence, the Punjab police remain stuck in a Twilight Zone that demarcates worldly reality from bureaucratic absurdity. In 2014, its personnel indicted a nine-month-old infant of being a gas thief, participating in a riot, and attempting to murder police officers. Facing criticism, police officials initially tried to concoct "evidence that would support a false charge sheet, before opposition from the [civilian] judiciary eventually killed the investigation."

Between April 1987 and May 1996, according to the *Herald*, more than 170 bombings took place in Punjab, of which 169 were attributed to unknown persons allegedly working for RAW. Only in one instance was any arrest made. In other words, RAW sponsorship was reflexively suspected whenever no proof was found and no suspects could be traced. Interestingly, these incidents yielded a remarkably low death toll of 380 persons over nine years. If, as Pakistani authorities like to claim, RAW was indeed responsible for the bombings, one cannot fathom why the Indian agency did not use military-grade explosives to reciprocate the destruction being caused at the time by the ISI in India. The 1993 bombings in Mumbai alone killed 257 people in a single day.

If the dreaded RAW could only manage a kill rate of two to three fatalities per incident in response to the scores of civilians being blasted or gunned down in Indian Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, it would signify a notable lack of aggressive instinct, especially since the ISI was pumping massive quantities of arms and explosives into India during this same period (1987-96). The South Asia Terrorism Portal has published several journal articles on the history of such Pakistani cross-border operations, together with statistics indicating the very high number of Indian civilian casualties caused.

The Pakistani “Deep State,” like its Arab and Turkish counterparts, has gained considerable expertise at discourse manipulation. This has been especially true since Zia’s days. Projecting itself as the nation’s indispensable defender against Indian conspiracies is its core message in the current era of “managed democracy.” As one Pakistani army officer told the journalist Ahmed Rashid in 1990, it is the media and not politicians who forge public opinion. Controlling the output of newspapers and television (especially the Urdu press, which enjoys a much wider readership than English newspapers) is thus a vital part of the ISI’s political toolkit. Such antics do not go unnoticed by more respected media outlets, who make some effort to avoid being contaminated by the offerings of the gutter press. One journalist noted in 1995, when Islamabad was in a new wave of RAW hysteria, that:

“Newspapers are ... riddled with speculative or obviously fabricated despatches quoting highly placed intelligence sources saying highly unintelligent things. For instance, one Lahore paper, citing intelligence sources, ran a story claiming there are currently 30,000 Indian agents in the country, and gave a province-wise breakdown. However, it failed to ask the obvious question: if government agencies have such detailed information about these agents, why have they not arrested them?”

Partisan Politics, Wild Accusations

More often than not, accusations of being a RAW agent are used to smear political opponents in Pakistan. In the process, the position of the ISI and the Pakistani army as the ultimate arbitrators of domestic power is consolidated. As the MRD gathered momentum in the mid-1980s, the Zia regime insisted that RAW was destabilizing Pakistan's so-called soft underbelly in Sindh. By a happy coincidence for the regime, Sindh also was the home province of the dissident Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Sindh thus became the focal point of a hidden crackdown on political opponents of the military, ostensibly in the name of combating Indian subversion. Media commentators controlled by the regime floated stories that 500 to 600 specially trained bandits had been infiltrated by RAW into Sindh to destabilize the province. The standard accusation made against any pro-democracy supporter, especially from the PPP, was of being a RAW agent. Hundreds of party workers were also listed as members of Al-Zulfikar, with the most senior being specifically accused of RAW ties. However, cooperation with the military could and did lead to the accusation magically disappearing. One example of such opportunism was Jam Sadiq Ali, who went on to become chief minister of Sindh. Ali had been labeled a RAW agent by the army until he became useful as a political counterweight to Benazir Bhutto.

Benazir herself, upon becoming prime minister in 1988, continued the Deep State's tradition of labelling political opponents as RAW agents, eventually deciding that the coterie around her brother (and political rival) Murtaza Bhutto also merited the term. To justify his murder in September 1996, a faction within the ISI disseminated a fantastical story that Murtaza was harbouring up to 150 RAW agents in his palatial residence in the middle of Karachi. This blatantly nonsensical claim was discredited almost immediately, but it served the tactical purpose of providing politico-legal cover for his assassination. Benazir herself was soon toppled by intra-government intrigue that followed her brother's killing, thus paving the way for the army to once again "manage" a power transfer to more pliant politicians.

Exaggerated and populist RAW agent scares may have sprung up during the struggle for legitimacy between the army and the PPP, but it soon spread to other parties and provinces. In the early 1990s, former Punjab Governor Ghulam Mustafa Khar was named in the press as a RAW agent. Khar insisted he was being set up by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) of Nawaz Sharif, in order to preempt any alliance between himself and Sharif's then-arch-nemesis Benazir. As Khar threatened Sharif's votebank in south Punjab, he needed to be kept under pressure through a concocted accusation of treason. There is an alternative theory as well, that he was an incidental victim of turf warfare between two rival intelligence agencies within Pakistan. This idea is not implausible: at the time, in 1992, the ISI and Military Intelligence were backing hostile factions of the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM) in Karachi, producing a bloody civil war that cost hundreds of lives. Having created the MQM as a counterweight to Sindhi nationalism and the MRD in the 1980s, the ISI along with the civilian Intelligence Bureau in summer 1992 engineered a split in the group and shifted its patronage to the dissident faction. But in a case of path dependency, the MI continued to support the main body of the MQM for some time.

Interestingly, the MQM too – and especially its London-based leader, Altaf Hussain – have regularly been accused of receiving Indian support. Few remember that in the late 1980s, they were seen by the ISI as the defenders of the Pakistani army's institutional interests against a resurgent PPP. The shift in agency patronage occurred once Hussain began to criticize the military's interference in politics and its expanding commercial interests. During operations against MQM strongholds in Karachi, the Pakistani army and paramilitary Rangers often sought to manufacture cases against arrested activists through torture. Even local government officials were not exempt from arbitrary arrest. One police officer detained by the Rangers was allegedly subjected to a 12-hour beating. He later recounted to a journalist: "They kept telling me to call myself a Hindustani [Indian] while they hit me, and finally, after I don't know how many hours of this they asked

me who I was and I said, 'You've been telling me I'm a Hindustani so that's what I must be.'"

In June 2015, a report by the *BBC* stated that the MQM may have obtained funds from India. Pakistani officials seized upon this and added an unsubstantiated canard that MQM activists had also been trained in terrorist tactics by RAW. What nobody bothered to ask was why the British themselves had hosted Altaf Hussain for over 20 years, resisted Pakistani demands for his extradition, and granted him British citizenship in 2002. The answer may lie in a surprisingly forthright comment made by U.K. conservative politician Michael Howard, when he visited Pakistan in late 1995 as British home secretary. On being asked whether London had adopted double standards by claiming to oppose terrorism, but also insisting that Pakistan had not proved the MQM leader was linked to any terrorist activity, Howard said: "If there are two ways in which we can comply with our international obligations, one of which damages our national interest and one which doesn't, we are perfectly entitled to choose the way which doesn't damage our national interest." He dismissed any comparison with other cases when, to secure lucrative trade deals, the British government had jettisoned its respect for international human rights and deported foreign activists. For its part, the United States too dallied for a while with both factions of the MQM, liberally granting visas to their leaders. This continued until the ISI-sponsored dissident group was found to be little more than a thuggish street gang with no popular support. But, as journalist Zafar Abbas observed in 1995, while American interest in building up contacts with the MQM had lasted, rumor mills in Karachi were flooded with stories of sinister U.S. activities that supposedly fueled the city's high crime rate.

For conspiracy-mongers, the United States has become a favorite suspect since the 2003 invasion of Iraq and rising Shia-Sunni tensions in the Middle East. This is because as far as a credulous domestic audience is concerned, any foreign scapegoat would do as long as Pakistani officials do not have to take responsibility for their own security lapses. One scholar, Mehtab Ali Shah, noted this trend in 2005, after a bloody massacre at a Shia mosque in Quetta:

“The coincidence of killings in Quetta and Iraq provided an easy excuse for the Pakistani press, particularly the Urdu press, to place the blame squarely on the USA. The Chief Minister of Balochistan accused the Indian intelligence service’s Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of responsibility for the killings and resulting sectarian tension. This accusation was disproved by a police investigation. It transpired that it was Daud Badani, an active member of the LJ, along with 10 accomplices, who carried out these attacks on the Shia in Quetta, at the instigation and with financial support from the top LJ terrorist, Riaz Basra.”

(LJ here refers to the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Pakistani Punjabi terrorist group implicated in literally scores of bombings.)

When it suits the interest of the security apparatus, blame-shifting has not been limited to just India and the United States. Israel, Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia too have been held responsible for sectarian terrorism in Pakistan. According to a 1999 government assessment that was “leaked” to the media, the latter two countries were fighting a proxy war on Pakistani soil by funding Shia and Sunni militias respectively. Iranian cultural centers across Pakistan were further accused in 2003 of providing terrorist training to Shia militants. Even Taliban-ruled Afghanistan was allegedly a part of this Shia-Sunni “Great Game,” in which the Pakistani government was a supposedly helpless spectator.

Distinct from well-known trope of the “foreign hand,” a theme that sometimes emerges in Pakistani media commentary is that of the “hidden hand.” The hidden hand refers to elements within the Pakistani state that support terrorism due to vested political or commercial interests. Sometimes, the intended beneficiary may even be unaware that his fortunes are being boosted by a few deliberately timed massacres. One example of this dynamic is the spate of mysterious bombings that accompanied Imran Khan’s career shift from cricket to politics in 1996. At the time, Khan enjoyed the patronage of former ISI chief Hamid Gul, who in turn advocated a “soft Islamic revolution” for Pakistan and was known

to be close to jihadist groups. After a cancer hospital run by Khan was bombed, killing seven people, public sympathy for his party rose even as the cricketer himself was alienated from the PPP government that was in power in Islamabad at the time. The bombing, like other unsolved cases, was blamed on RAW agents by local law enforcement, but both Khan and Nawaz Sharif stated that they held domestic actors responsible. A similar case of hidden hand intervention may have occurred in autumn 1999, when Sharif (as prime minister) and his army chief, Pervez Musharraf, prepared for a political confrontation. Several fatal sectarian attacks took place in the weeks leading up to Musharraf's October 12 coup, giving him grounds to justify seizing power for the sake of public safety and the national interest. After the coup, the attacks mysteriously stopped, as journalist Syed Ali Dayan Hasan observed in 2000.

Over the last decade, there has been speculation among inhabitants of the northern areas of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir that the government is protecting Sunni sectarian militants. Allegedly, the ISI sees value in maintaining tensions between Shia and Sunnis in the region, in order to prevent them from rallying on the basis of shared ethnicity against Punjabi and Pashtun settlers. Such a modus operandi would fit well with the policies simultaneously being adopted in Sindh and Balochistan, of promoting Sunni Islamization to forestall ethno-nationalist mobilization. Where Islamists fail to win support, state-sponsored death squads operate to ensure "patriotism." Balochistan has long been the site of a so-called "kill and dump" policy that has been criticized by the English press in Pakistan. Activists for Sindhi nationhood have been abducted by the ISI and tortured with the aim of extracting false denunciations of political parties like the Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz as being RAW fronts. In one 2005 case, a senior JSMM activist held in secret police custody for several weeks managed to escape and told the Karachi press how he had been brutally tortured in order to incriminate his colleagues as foreign agents. He died shortly thereafter from his injuries.

Separating Fact From Conspiracy

All the incidents discussed above are not meant to deny that the RAW is operating in Pakistan. Indeed, given the sheer number of international terrorist plots emanating from Pakistan, as well as the India-obsession of its military leadership, one would expect the Indian external spy agency to prioritize collecting information from Pakistan. But there is a huge gap between spying on the one hand, and sabotage and terrorism on the other. The ISI has been merrily mixing the two activities together ever since it was subcontracted by the U.S. intelligence community to run the Afghan resistance against the Soviets in the 1980s. RAW meanwhile, with its painful memories of Indian intervention in Sri Lanka, has largely abstained from paramilitary covert action. During the 1980s, the agency had assisted Tamil rebels in fighting the Sri Lankan government, only to discover that the latter had developed an independent agenda and could no longer be controlled. Nowadays, when asked why India does not carry out retaliatory proxy warfare against Pakistan, by massively providing arms and explosives to separatists in Sindh and Balochistan, RAW officials point to the bitter lessons of the Sri Lankan experience, as well as the ISI's own difficulties with controlling recalcitrant Taliban factions.

As recently as September 2016, Pakistani officials have leaked statements that allege that RAW has set up a special cell to disrupt the establishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This is a claim worth assessing, because it carries at least a shred of plausibility. Certainly, New Delhi has reason to be upset by Chinese willingness to build infrastructure in Kashmiri territory that India has claimed since 1947, which is currently under Pakistani occupation. One would therefore expect India to vigorously protest Chinese military and economic activities in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. But there may be no compelling reason for India to be displeased by the emergence of CPEC in a larger, strategic sense. China might only be doing what India has long been accused of: Undermining Pakistan's sovereignty by hollowing out its economy.

Well before CPEC was announced during Chinese President Xi Jinping's April 2015 visit to Pakistan, the damaging effect of low-

cost Chinese goods upon Pakistani industries had been observed but not commented on, for fear of weakening the bilateral relationship. For instance, one Pakistani journalist, Shimaila Matri, had noted in 2003 that “the influx of Chinese products has dealt a powerful blow to domestic producers of the same products, already burdened due to bureaucratic red-tape and a host of uncondusive business conditions, including exorbitant electricity rates and frequent power shortages.” The fact that Pakistani consumers can spend their scarce rupees on cheap Chinese imitations of Western brands does not take away from the fact that Islamabad’s annual trade deficit with Beijing is widening, reaching \$6.2 billion in August 2016.

Islamabad hopes that Chinese investment will follow the construction of transportation infrastructure across the Karakoram range, but this is far from assured. As long as international terrorist groups continue to find safe haven on Pakistani soil, Chinese entrepreneurs will be reluctant to risk their own lives and capital in an unstable political environment. It is one thing to undertake a road project under the protective umbrella of a client state’s security forces and another entirely to trust that state’s business culture and legal systems enough to park one’s money there. To provide reassurance to Beijing, the Pakistani army is raising two divisions specifically for the security of CPEC. Ironically, in the late 1980s ISI chief Hamid Gul had reportedly justified the sponsorship of Sikh separatists in India as the equivalent of having two extra divisions at no cost; now Pakistan finds itself needing to bear the same burden out of deference to its “all-weather friend.” And yet, some Pakistanis still choose to think that it is India and not China that is bleeding their economy.

Elements of the Baloch population seem alert to the discrepancy. Many are fed up with the humiliating security checks they have to undergo at the hands of federal (mostly Punjabi) security forces, just so Chinese expatriates can feel safe. An economic advisor to the Balochistan chief minister described this resentment in early 2016: “The suspicion is that all the Baloch will get from CPEC is the right to repair punctures on Chinese tires.”

Finally, in the long run, continued Pakistani patronage of jihadist groups will damage CPEC far more effectively than Indian agents can ever hope to. Islamabad's spin doctors would have their reading and TV-watching public believe that RAW is responsible for mysterious attacks on Chinese engineers, either directly or through Baloch proxies fighting for their right of self-determination. Meanwhile, reasonable and objective Pakistani reports note that terrorist attacks on Chinese expatriates are not the work of Baloch rebels, but a group of roughly 1,000 Uyghur militants who have lived in Pakistan for several years. The latter were angered by Islamabad's decision in 2004 to sell out their leaders to Beijing. Attacks on Chinese interests rose after Pakistani officials had arrested and deported several dozen leaders of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, most of whom were summarily executed by Chinese authorities.

Ultimately, it is unnecessary for a "foreign hand" to weaken Pakistan. The ISI does that well enough all by itself due to the Pakistani army's ingrained paranoia and the general public's need to believe in an alternative reality, which permits a momentary escape from their daily circumstances. Academic research has long suggested that populations in closed and authoritarian political systems exhibit a need to "escape from reality into fiction, from coincidence into consistency." Such collective fantasies are the stuff of adventure novels and cannot form the basis of serious policymaking. While the ISI focuses on stoking rebellions domestically and abroad, the RAW can go about collecting secret data to serve the Indian national interest.

Those who hope for reconciliation between India and Pakistan might do well to consider the proposition that Pakistan's only enemy is its own Deep State, as articulated by Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid back in 1992:

A clean-up of the intelligence agencies is long overdue but so is the need to coordinate their activities, bring their budgets under control and avoid duplicating work and creating rivalries between them. In the past three years, Pakistan's own intelligence agencies, rather than Indian or Israeli plots, have

been responsible for ruining the country's foreign policy, creating enemies abroad and allowing the Americans to stick a terrorist label on Islamabad.

Words written 24 years ago that still hold true today – some things never seem to change.

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