

Pakistan: Balancing Act

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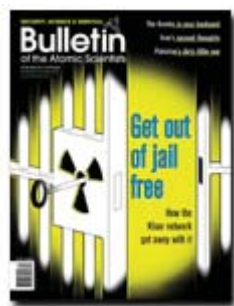
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Current Issue

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Special report: The Khan network

Where is the justice?

In 2004, the Bush administration declared that members of the A. Q. Khan nuclear smuggling network were being "brought to justice." Yet, as of today, only three have been convicted and served time. *By Kenley Butler, Sammy Salama and Leonard S. Spector*

The unmaking of a nuclear smuggler

For decades, Dutch businessman Henk Slebos was a key operative in the Khan network. Last year he was finally convicted--but the damage was already done. *By Mark Hibbs*

Opinions

Paul Kerr reveals why Iran's nuclear intentions are so difficult to decipher; Gerald E. Marsh and George S. Stanford offer advice on how to promote nuclear energy without spreading nuclear know-how.

On topic

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- **Pakistan: Balancing act** *By Scott Atran*

By Scott Atran

The 7.6 magnitude earthquake that struck Pakistan last October killed 75,000 people and left 3 million homeless. But the deaths would not end there. In May, the Pakistani army **managed to force out** most remaining foreign relief workers from the still-devastated region of Azad Kashmir, the Pakistan-controlled part of the disputed province. Just days later, 38 people in villages of southern Azad Kashmir had their throats cut or were beheaded. The youngest victim was four months old.

The army blamed infiltrators from India. But on the morning of May 17, two men said to be armed with Sten submachine guns and daggers accosted girls on their way to school in the village of Sanghola. Alerted by the girls' screaming, villagers surrounded the school and captured the men. The assailants claimed to be road workers, but a body search revealed ID cards of the kind carried by the Pakistan Army's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Around noon, villagers escorted the two men, on foot, to local police at Rawalakot. At 11:30 pm, six army officers, including a colonel and a brigadier, took the captured men from the police at gunpoint.

The last killing I heard of occurred on June 10 in Gulpur. I had gone up to Azad Kashmir to survey relief efforts but was immediately confronted by these reports from terrified Kashmiris. I had to cut short my investigation when ISI agents began following me and interrogated my hosts, asking about my interest in the *chura* (“daggers,” meaning the recent killings) and “camps” (meaning jihadi activities). While no direct evidence links ISI to the killings, many native Kashmiris I talked to and most nationalists--banned from elections, since they advocate a Kashmir independent from Pakistan and India--believe it to be so. Two troubling facts credit this argument: First, there have been no reports of the incidents in the mainstream Pakistani press. If it had been Indians, or even the possibility of Indians, it would have made the national news. Second, while the army initially promised the police and people of Rawalakot an investigation, they’ve done nothing.

Kashmiris suspect that the violence was a way to divert people’s attention from the fact that very little of the earthquake relief money had made its way to the people. Most of it remains in the hands of the army, which dominates economic as well as political life in Azad Kashmir. Indeed, from what I saw, little relief money had made it to the villages. Basic services were still lacking, and schools and hospitals that were completely destroyed were still rubble. The Pakistani government had promised 175,000 rupees to every victim of the earthquake; at that time, only 25,000 had been paid to some, though a bit more is now in the pipeline.

Another suspected goal of the killings was to incite public turmoil and stop the peace process with India--a goal shared by jihadi groups and their sympathizers within the army and ISI. To be sure, Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf now appears committed to a rapprochement with India, and is trying to rein in the jihadi groups after their repeated attempts on his life. Yet, he is the same man who instigated the Kargil attacks across the International Line of Control in 1999 that brought India and Pakistan to the brink of nuclear war. Senior army commanders told me that the peace process with India is a non-starter, because India will only come to the negotiating table and give up Kashmir if forced to do so.

The army's dangerous split, or double-game, was apparent in repeated public announcements from the presidential level on down that jihadi groups had been banned from Azad Kashmir when in fact all of the main jihadi groups had been they were operating freely in, in the area, brandishing guns from army vehicles, promising relief only to people who understood--as Hafiz Saeed, leader of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (“Army of the Pure”) put it—that “the earthquake is the result of the rulers’ sinful policies” and God’s punishment for neglecting a particular, radical view of Islam.

But after international relief workers, including members of American NGOs and the armed forces, objected to the prominence of jihadi groups in the early stages of the relief effort, Musharraf began to seriously curtail freedom of operation for jihadi groups. Today, for example, the jihadi banners are largely gone from Azad Kashmir capital, Muzaffarabad, and the Lashkar-e-Taiba mosque just outside of Rawalakot stands empty. According to Kashmiri sources, the principal jihadi camps have relocated away from the main roads and into more remote areas (for example, Lashkar-e-Taiba in Kotli) or outside Azad Kashmir (for example, Hizb ul-Mujahedin in Hisari in the nearby region of Hazara). And the army is telling the jihadis that they can no longer cross the border at will into Indian held Jammu and Kashmir, with or without weapons.

Larger jihadi groups with outside financing and manpower, such as Jaish-e-Muhammed (linked through the Crescent Relief Society to those arrested for the August 2006 London plane bombing plots), maintain an active propaganda and recruiting campaign in Azad Kashmir's main cities, sometimes under the umbrella of a "charitable organization," such as the Jamaat-ul-Dawa led by Hafiz Saeed (linked with those arrested to the July 2006 Mumbai rain bombings). But other groups which are smaller (Al-Badr Mujahedin) or locally composed (Harkat-ul-Mujahedin) are being squeezed by dwindling financial and logistical support. Army hardliners, particularly in the ISI, are unhappy about this partial demobilization of jihadi forces in Azad Kashmir and nod to former ISI chief Hamud Gul's contention that: "the decisions of general Musharraaf do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the entire army."

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