

## Kayani's gambit

*America is furious about WikiLeaks' revelations on the war in Afghanistan. But Pakistan also has much to worry about.*



GENERAL ASHFAQ KAYANI'S moment of pleasure was fleeting. Last week the Pakistani government granted him a second three-year term as army chief—something that no elected government in Pakistan had done before. But within days, thanks to a treasure-trove of 75,000 leaked American military reports, the Pakistani army was once again in the international spotlight for its suspected role in helping the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The files released by WikiLeaks, a whistle-blowing website, are mostly sparse field reports and intelligence assessments from 2004 to 2009. They detail the grim reality of the war: the hunt to kill insurgent leaders, the death of Afghan civilians by error or callousness, bomb and shooting attacks by insurgents, the unreliability of Afghan forces, the corruption of political leaders and much more.

At least 180 of the files contain accusations that Pakistan's military intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), had given arms, supplies and training to the insurgents. One reports that the ISI handed 1,000 motorcycles to the Haqqani network, thought responsible for most suicide bombings and spectacular attacks in Kabul. Another claims that insurgents were plotting to poison beer supplies for American forces.

Many of these reports may be unsubstantiated, originating from dubious Afghan informants. But the trouble for General Kayani, these days America's favourite Pakistani general, is that he led the ISI from 2004 to 2007, before becoming army chief. America has denounced the leak as endangering soldiers' lives, but played down the revelations. The White House said "there is no blank cheque" for Pakistan. But the cheque is nonetheless large. Washington has announced \$500m of civilian-aid projects for Pakistan, part of a \$7.5 billion, five-year package. Pakistan will also get about \$2 billion a year in American military aid.

America is in a bind. It relies on Pakistan to help in the hunt for al-Qaeda figures in its tribal areas, and it in turn helps Pakistan fight its version of the Taliban. Yet America can do little to convince Pakistan to act against the Afghan Taliban. America's policy is to embrace Pakistan, in

the hope that the alliance will assuage its fears about India's Afghan ambitions and convince it to "let go of the proxies", as one senior American source says.

The chairman of America's joint chiefs of staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, has invested heavily in his friendship with General Kayani, and accepts that the Pakistani army is stretched after operations against the Pakistani Taliban in the Swat valley and South Waziristan. The American source says: "Kayani has done everything he has promised to do, and he has not missed the deadlines by much."

The Pentagon is thought to have lobbied Islamabad to renew General Kayani's tenure. In most countries the extension would not be big news. In Pakistan, however, the prime minister made a sudden late-night address to announce that General Kayani would stay on because "military operations are at a critical stage" which required "continuation in military high command".

Pakistan has spent most of its 63-year history under military rule—General Pervez Musharraf quit only in 2008. The army remains the country's dominant force, and many believe General Kayani's extension is a blow to a fragile democracy. "This strengthens the institution that should be subservient to civilian authority," says Imtiaz Gul, an analyst and author of "The Most Dangerous Place", a book about Pakistan's tribal areas.

The laconic General Kayani has mostly kept out of domestic politics, but he has left no doubt who is in charge. The armed forces have kept a tight grip on two crucial areas: security policy and the sensitive bits of foreign policy, which means relations with Afghanistan, America and India. Extending the general's term will entrench his position.

Despite its robust action against the Pakistani Taliban, there is scant evidence that the Pakistani army has fundamentally changed its policy towards Afghan insurgents. Most believe that it has little reason now to turn on the Taliban and the Haqqani networks, given that the Afghan war seems to be reaching an end-game which could give the insurgents some measure of power. And many ordinary Pakistanis much prefer the Taliban to Westerners. A survey by the Pew Global Attitudes Project this week suggested that 65% of Pakistanis want American and NATO soldiers out of Afghanistan, and just 25% think it would be bad if the Taliban took over in Kabul.

President Hamid Karzai has moved closer to the idea of accommodating the Taliban. Some Pakistanis believe Washington will be willing to concede at least some of Pakistan's aim to give the Taliban political representation within a broad-based government, in return for an end to the fighting. The senior American source, however, says: "Pakistan is not going to broker this deal. It has a view. It will have to be included. But we are not going to let Kayani drive this outcome."

Pakistan contends that it can get the Taliban and the Haqqani network to join talks. It aims to promote groups that will ensure Afghanistan is friendly to Pakistan, and that Indian influence is kept at bay. Might General Kayani thus become a power behind the throne in Afghanistan too? The WikiLeaks disclosures, alleging Pakistani double-dealing, will not serve such dreams. This week David Cameron, the British prime minister, who was visiting India in an effort to improve relations, warned Pakistan that it could not look "both ways", being a friend of the West yet "exporting terrorism".

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