



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on May 4, 2011

Pakistan, Aid Scrutinized After bin Laden Killing

A [leaked diplomatic cable](#) recently revealed that one of the reasons bin Laden might have remained so elusive was because of assistance from Pakistan's security services, or at least some elements within them. And American lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have expressed suspicions, too. The question of whether or not Pakistani officials may have sheltered bin Laden is a hot topic. And it's garnering headlines across the globe.



A [U.S. embassy cable](#) released by WikiLeaks [cited](#) in news reports worldwide seems to add weight to the possibility that bin Laden was sheltered by officials. "In Pakistan, Osama Bin Laden wasn't an invisible man, and many knew his whereabouts in North Waziristan, but whenever security forces attempted a raid on his hideouts, the enemy received warning of their approach from sources in the security forces," the 2009 document states.

But did government authorities really help hide the man reputed to be al-Qaeda boss bin Laden? A lot of people seem to think so, including U.S. lawmakers, administration officials, analysts, military officers, and others. The suspicions have been splashed publicly and loudly in the world press almost since Obama's late night announcement on May 1.

Many experts had speculated that bin Laden might have been hiding in Pakistan — possibly somewhere in the mountainous tribal region along the border with Afghanistan famous for hosting Islamic militants of various stripes. But according to President Obama, bin Laden was finally discovered in a compound just a few dozen miles from Islamabad, the capital — right under the Pakistani government's nose.

The area where bin Laden's reported compound was located — in a town called Abbottabad — sits right in the heart of an area known as a haven for retired military brass. A few hundred yards from the compound is the nation's top military academy, described in the international press as the Pakistani equivalent of West Point. The town is bustling with current and former military officers and government facilities.

And bin Laden was supposedly living there for years undisturbed and unnoticed. "I think the latest information is that he was in this compound for the past five or six years," White House terror czar John Brennan [told](#) CBS in an interview, noting that bin Laden "seemed to be very active inside the compound."

Brennan also said it was "inconceivable" that the alleged terrorist did not have some sort of support network in the country. And numerous analysts and even top U.S. lawmakers believe that network may



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have included Pakistani officials. For example, Retired U.S. Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, also a former assistant Secretary of State, [sounded](#) very suspicious in an interview with CNN.

“That’s going to be the major question that’s asked in the days and weeks to come — was the Pakistani government complicit? Were some local officials complicit?” he wondered. “It would seem very, very hard to believe that somebody could be in that area for an extended period of time without some local official being aware of it.”

And on both sides of the aisle, legislators are sounding the alarm, too. Republican U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham, who also complained about the rapid disposal of what the administration said was bin Laden’s body, also seemed incredulous. “Well let’s put it this way — it’s pretty hard to believe that he stayed there that long and somebody didn’t know about it,” he [told](#) Fox News in an interview. “That’s what we need to look at, we need to push the Pakistanis.”

Democrats were skeptical as well. “It’s very hard for me to understand how Pakistan, particularly [its intelligence service], would not have known that something was going on in that compound,” noted Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. “I have had a growing concern that the Pakistani government, the Pakistani military and the Pakistani intelligence community is really walking both sides of the street, and the question comes what to do about it.”

At least one Senator with the power to help make it happen brought up the possibility of cutting off American handouts. “The United States provides billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan,” said Sen. Frank Lautenberg, who sits on the appropriations committee. “Before we send another dime, we need to know whether Pakistan truly stands with us in the fight against terrorism.”

Just about every American lawmaker who was given the opportunity [wondered](#) out loud about Pakistan’s loyalties. And the topic of foreign aid came up repeatedly. The U.S. government does indeed provide billions of dollars in aid to the Pakistani regime. Obama is seeking almost \$3 billion of it in the 2012 budget, with more than half of that dedicated to “security” programs.

A substantial portion of the handouts has gone to the Pakistani spy agency, known as the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). And the ISI, though closely allied with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for decades, is attracting even more scrutiny than the rest of the Pakistani government.

The CIA is [known](#) to have used the ISI to help fund, arm, and train the Mujahideen in Afghanistan during its battle against the Soviets. The Islamic-warrior organization eventually [morphed](#) into what is today known as al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and a variety of other militant Muslim groups.

But while the ISI continues to be close to the CIA, the Pakistani agency has also been implicated in a wide range of terror attacks. Among them: the [2008 killing spree in Mumbai, India, which also involved a “former” U.S. asset](#); and a string of attacks in recent years in Afghanistan believed to be [part of a “proxy war” against India](#).

[Claims reported](#) by the *Wall Street Journal*, AFP and numerous other sources — usually attributed to high-level “officials” — even link a former ISI chief to the September 11 attacks. According to the “officials,” ex-ISI boss Mahmoud Ahmad ordered \$100,000 wired to alleged 9/11 ringleader Mohammed Atta before the attacks.

And according to top American military officials, the ISI’s support for Islamic terror continues to this day. “It’s fairly well known that the ISI has a longstanding relationship with the [al Qaeda-linked] Haqqani network,” [said](#) U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen a few weeks



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ago. “Haqqani is supporting, funding, training fighters that are killing Americans and killing coalition partners.”

But another former chief of the ISI, Gen. Hamid Gul, [suggested](#) that not everything was as it seemed with the reported killing of bin Laden. During an interview on the nationally syndicated Alex Jones Show, Gul claimed the whole episode was likely “make-believe drama” to boost Obama’s 2012 presidential campaign. He essentially described bin Laden as irrelevant and agreed that it “appeared” as though the whole event was “staged.”

In an [official press release](#), the government of Pakistan defended its spy agency, saying, “ISI’s own achievements against Al Qaeda and in War on Terror are more than any other intelligence agency in the World.” It also expressed “deep concern and reservations” about the manner in which the alleged “unauthorized unilateral action” by U.S. forces was carried out, saying the raid should not be used as a precedent. Finally, it strongly suggested that Pakistani officials had no prior knowledge of bin Laden’s whereabouts.

A spokesman for the ISI [said](#) it was “embarrassed” by the failure. But Pakistan’s Ambassador to the United States said that, while an inquiry was planned, “it’s really important not to turn [a mistake] into any allegation of complicity.”

Pakistan’s former High Commissioner to Britain, however, said it was likely that his government did actually know bin Laden was there. “A building of that size so near the Pakistan Military Academy would have [been] bound to raise all kinds of suspicions, especially the kinds of characters coming and going from the building,” Dr Akbar Ahmed [told](#) the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. “So it is highly unlikely that the authorities did not know who was in that building.”

The current and former presidents of Pakistan have both [denied](#) that officials knew anything about bin Laden allegedly living at the compound. Current President Asif Ali Zardari even rebuked the U.S. media for suggesting that his country might not be fighting the “War on Terror” with sufficient vigor.

But while suspicions run high among some in the West, the communist regime in China — another ally of Pakistan — is standing firmly behind the Pakistani regime. “We have to admit that the Pakistan government is firm in resolve and strong in action in its fight against terrorism, and the Pakistan government has made important contributions to the international fight against terrorism, to which we should have no doubt,” a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry [told](#) reporters, saying that the communist government believed Pakistani officials were simply unaware of bin Laden’s presence.

So far no specific Pakistani officials have been formally named as suspects in allegedly helping to hide bin Laden. And [countless questions still remain](#) about the reported assassination and related issues. But one thing is certain: The truth remains elusive in the bin Laden saga.

Photo of Osama bin Laden: AP Images



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