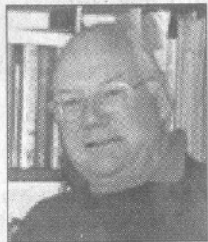


Mass Media

Media and India-Pakistan



By Brian Cloughley

How can we believe mysterious unidentified 'officials' who allege without evidence that Pakistan's intelligence agency was responsible for the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul?

SO attacks in Afghanistan must be the work of Pakistan's dastardly Directorate of Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), yet again, because the New York Times told us the other day that "American intelligence agencies have concluded that members of Pakistan's powerful spy service helped plan the deadly July 7 bombing of India's embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, according to United States government officials." The New York Times went on to claim that "The conclusion was based on intercepted communications between Pakistani intelligence officers and militants who carried out the attack, the officials said, providing the clearest evidence to date that Pakistani intelligence officers are actively undermining American efforts to combat militants in the region. The American officials also said there was new information showing that members of the Pakistani intelligence service were increasingly providing militants with details about the American campaign against them, in some cases allowing militants to avoid American missile strikes in Pakistan's

tribal areas."

There are plenty of clichés ("powerful spy service" and "actively undermining" are splendid examples), but not a shred of hard evidence in this important story. There is not one bit of material that can be verified or even checked for accuracy. No names are named. There are declarations by anonymous "American officials" concerning supposed electronic intercepts of which no details are provided. But the New York Times and other US newspapers chose to blare to the world the unsupported conclusion that Pakistan is guilty of treason against itself.

It might be thought that the New York Times would have learned a lesson

days, filled with unproven assertions and factual inaccuracies."

To believe the sort of drivel that comes from "officials" of any nationality who refuse to be identified takes particular energy and dedication. But even those who are required to speak on the record are liars when it suits official purposes and policies. Take the VOA report in early July that "The Pentagon says no civilians were killed in an air strike Sunday in a remote area of eastern Afghanistan, which local officials say killed 27 people who were walking to a wedding. US military officials in Kabul say they believe the air strike hit its intended target, a group of militants. Pentagon Spokesman Bryan Whitman confirmed

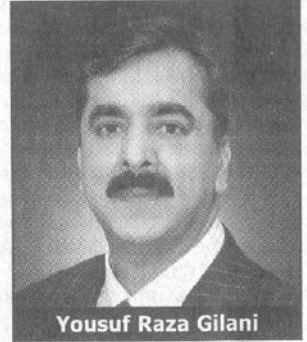
where so many civilians were killed? Of course not: he spoke with "Afghanistan" as represented by a bunch of unnamed US officials in Kabul. He then retailed the same rubbish, that "there were not [sic] innocent civilians involved," which was a lie, because the province governor stated with hard evidence - like bodies of children - that there had indeed been many civilian deaths.

Then the president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, left his fortress in Kabul and flew to the stricken village to speak with the tribes, saying he had "come to share your grief". Now: is it likely that Karzai, beholden to Bush as he is, would have taken the trouble to do that if the

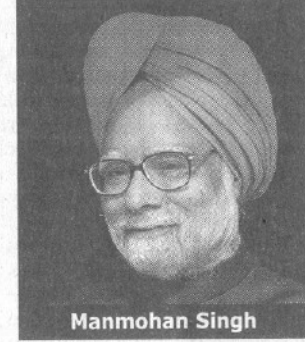
when they kill so many scores of civilians by reason of technical or human ineptitude and then lie about the crimes, how can we believe mysterious unidentified "officials" who allege without evidence that Pakistan's intelligence agency was responsible for the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul?

Stories change; usually when the lie has become too obvious for all the "officials" and other sources to continue spreading it. As happened with the killing of a bank manager and two of his staff by American troops on Baghdad's Airport Road on 25 June, for example. It was stated officially that "The attack left bullet holes in two of the convoy vehicles, and a

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after being manipulated by the infamously incompetent and gullible reporter Judith Miller who made such a fool of the paper at the time of the US invasion of Iraq. She swallowed nonsense purveyed to her by un-named "government officials" and other anonymous and indeed malevolent sources, but the newspaper's editors just followed along and published the rubbish. Garbage in; Garbage out. As one of her colleagues said of her in the context of a combined story: "She has turned in a draft of a story of a collective enterprise that is little more than dictation from government sources over several

that view. I can only tell you I talked to Afghanistan this morning, and they are very clear with that particular strike that they believe they struck the intended target and that there were not innocent civilians involved in that particular strike."

The claim, the flat statement, that there were no civilian casualties was first made by unidentified "US military officials", then by a spokesman who had "talked to Afghanistan." To whom did he talk? To any Afghans? To anyone in the Afghan government? To an Afghan who had lost a wife or husband or children in the blitzed village of Deh Bala

US claim of no civilian deaths had been even remotely believable?

One has to give Karzai recognition for venturing into the region where the US bombing took place, because there is no doubt that by doing so his life was in extreme danger (possibly from a US airstrike like the one for which he went to offer condolences). We must give credit where it's due. But there is no credit, or credibility for that matter, due to the liars who try, with increasing success, to mislead the media and thereby the outside world, about the slaughter of civilians through incompetence. And

weapon was found in the car," but these were lies. Deliberate, unvarnished, straightforward, downright lies. Iraqi outrage was such that there had to be an investigation, and eventually a US spokesman had to say that the official description of the incident was poppycock from beginning to end. (Nobody was punished for telling lies or slaughtering civilians, of course: that would be too much to expect.)

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pers. The words of US "officials" go straight into print without question and are presented as incontrovertible fact.

The evidence that US "officials" have lied to the depth of their bootstraps is, however, irrefutable. So why believe the unsupported word of nameless US officials that Pakistan plotted the Kabul bombing?

As a result of worldwide parade of a media report based on unverifiable declarations by anonymous "US government officials", there has been a dramatic dive, a terrible crash in relations between Pakistan and India. At the exact time when, for the first time in almost five years, there were exchanges of fire between soldiers of India and Pakistan

next year and trying to be all things to all people; it is under enormous strain. In Islamabad there is a barely-functioning coalition of mutual distrust, and the country is desperately in need of external support that could promote domestic calm. Domestic and bilateral stability in the region, one would think, should be encouraged by foreign powers.

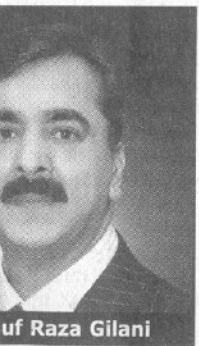
Yet "American intelligence agencies" and "United States government officials" tell newspaper reporters that Pakistan was involved in attacking the Indian embassy in Kabul, thus immeasurably increasing tension between Islamabad and Delhi (and Islamabad and Kabul, of course) and almost destroying their faltering but sincere approaches to rapprochement.

The extremely serious implications of such statements to reporters of a large US newspaper, and consequent international results, must have been understood by whoever made them. So why did they make them? What was the purpose? It certainly wasn't to encourage dialogue between two neighbours who distrust each other.

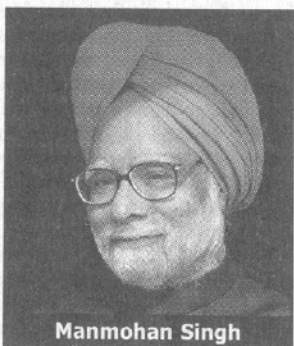
We will never know the motive, of course, because there is no means of finding out; just as there is no means of verifying the story. So once again some unaccountable US officials have sown even more distrust and created much more resentment in a region in which there is singular lack of trust and a marked inclination to believe the worst of neighbours. Whoever had the bright idea of spreading this malevolent tale must now have the satisfaction that it had the result of stirring up hatred and suspicion. Give credit where it's due. But credibility is quite another matter.

COURTESY COUNTERPUNCH

The writer is a commentator on South Asian political and military affairs



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along the Line of Control in Kashmir, the sadly disputed territory between the two countries, there suddenly appeared a US-sourced report that gravely endangers ongoing but fragile India-Pakistan confidence-building discussions.

Why?

The tale from unidentified US "officials" that Pakistan was involved in an attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul was published in a period when the governments of India and Pakistan are extremely vulnerable to religious and nationalist pressures. In Delhi the shaky coalition is apprehensive about elections