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EXCLUSIVE REPORT

Terror in the mountains

A series of brutal killings in Kashmir has not been reported in the Pakistani press. Why? SCOTT ATRAN tells the story ▶

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Islamist spies with a licence to kill

In early May, seven months after an earthquake killed more than 70,000 people and left 3 million homeless, the Pakistani army pushed out almost all remaining foreign relief workers from the still-devastated region of Azad Kashmir, the Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir.

Then, between May 13 and 16, a series of 38 throat slittings and beheadings occurred in villages of southern Azad Kashmir. The youngest victim was four months old.

The army immediately blamed infiltrators from India.

But on the morning of May 17, two men said to be armed with Sten guns and daggers accosted girls on their way to school in the village of Sanghola. Alerted by the girls' screams, villagers armed themselves with whatever weapons were at hand and surrounded the school.

The two men ran to the nearby forest where they were captured by



Pakistan's intelligence service is implicated in a series of brutal murders in Kashmir, writes SCOTT ATRAN

villagers. The men 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). Villagers identified both as Punjabi by their accents.

Around noon, an estimated 100 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.

Whereas most local police are Kashmiri, most army personnel at the ISI headquarters, down the road from Rawalakot, are Punjabi.

The next day, the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, Sardar Sikandar Hayat, declared that his government was "unable to protect you [the people of Kashmir]".

On May 19 thousands of people demonstrated in Rawalakot, and protests also occurred in Kotli, ►

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◀Mirpur and Bhimbar. On May 24, protests were apparently lodged by Kashmiris at the Pakistani consulate in New York City and at the embassies in London and Brussels. On June 9, thousands demonstrated in Khaigala as the killings continued.

The last killing I am aware of occurred on June 10 in Gulpur. I was compelled to cut short my investigation when ISI agents began following me and interrogated my hosts about any interest I might have 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 as they advocate a Kashmir independent from Pakistan *and* India) believe ISI is behind the killings.

Two troubling facts lend credence to this argument: first, there have



Very little of the quake relief money has made its way to the people who need it

been no reports of the incidents in the mainstream Pakistani press; second, while the army initially promised the police and people of Rawalakot an investigation, they've done nothing. If there had been evidence to support the army's line that Indians were to blame, it would have made headlines in Pakistan.

Kashmiris I have interviewed believe the killings were intended to incite public turmoil. They cite three motives, which they believe are shared by ISI and the jihadi groups that the army supports:

1. To divert people's attention from the fact that very little of the earthquake relief money has made its way to the people who need it, and that most rests in the hands of the army, which dominates economic as well as political life in Azad Kashmir. I can testify that many basic services still await funds: for example, the Degree Boys ▶

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◀School and the CMH hospital in Rawalakot remain rubble.

2. To subvert the July 11 elections in Azad Kashmir and create insecurity so the army can tighten its grip after loosening it during the relief effort. The head of the ruling party in Azad Kashmir and its former PM, Sardar Abdul Qayyum, said: "Elections are meaningless, the actual government will be formed by ISI."

3. To stop the peace process with India. Although Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf now appears to be committed to a rapprochement with India, and is trying to rein in the jihadi groups after their repeated attempts on his life, the same man was the instigator of 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

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Musharraf almost brought India and Pakistan to the brink of nuclear war in 1999

only come to the negotiating table and give up Kashmir if forced to".

Although banned, jihadists were omnipresent at the start of the relief effort, riding in vehicles supplied by the army, brandishing guns and promising relief to those people who understood the earthquake was God's punishment for neglecting a very particular, radical view of Islam.

American security forces at present teamed with ISI in the hunt for Osama bin Laden have been shocked by the Islamist sentiments of some officers. The former head of ISI, Hamid Gul, has become openly Islamist and anti-American, and continues to enjoy influence in ISI.

Given this Islamist tendency, there is perhaps cause to worry more about America's "great ally" in the war on terror than, say, Iraq. ■

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▶Robert Fox in Helmand province

▶Scott Atran on Abu Bakar Bashir

