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PAKISTAN MEDIA ANALYSIS

May 10, 2011

- Military shifts bin Laden blame to civilian government and U.S.
- Munter interviews: “up to Pakistan to decide whether we can take joint action”
- Same old: Editorials and TV talk shows back to attacking America

Media focus has shifted away from criticism of the military-intelligence establishment over their incompetence or complicity in Abbottabad toward the U.S. for violating Pakistani sovereignty and impugning Pakistan’s honor. Prime Minister Gilani’s statement to Parliament yesterday defending the armed forces and Army Chief General Kayani’s statement blaming initial criticism on insufficient media handling on the part of the GOP were the two top stories. Although Gilani admitted a failure of intelligence, all Urdu and most English papers emphasized that the speech gave a “clean chit” to the ISI. English media speculated that his speech was written by the military establishment in English for an international audience.

The top TV stories this morning were reports that U.S. forces were prepared to fight any resistance from Pakistan during the Abbottabad operation, and that the GOP had given the U.S. permission to interrogate bin Laden’s widows in Pakistan. Ambassador Munter’s exclusive interview with Geo TV’s Kamran Khan (which aired Monday evening) received extensive coverage, including the front pages of both mass-circulation Urdu daily “Jang” and its sister English publication, “The News.” The papers highlighted the Ambassador’s remarks that it is up to Pakistan to decide whether we can take joint action against terrorist leaders remaining at large, including Zawahiri and Mullah Omar. Other headlines included White House spokesman Carney’s refusal to apologize over the American raid and Indian war games taking place on the Pakistani border.

Over the last two days, the tone of Urdu editorials and TV talk shows has turned decidedly away from criticism of Pakistan’s establishment and toward attacking the U.S. We assess this reflects that fact that after a week, the shock of Abbottabad has worn off, and the establishment has settled on a narrative and kicked their media control machine into high gear. The striking and uncharacteristic freedom of debate we saw in Urdu last week has all but disappeared. There’s a bad guy in the story, and it’s the U.S., for its violation of Pakistani sovereignty and honor.

Today, leading Urdu daily “Jang” said “some analysts are describing the Abbottabad episode as a drama that was staged to exert more pressure on Pakistan. instead of making lame excuses, to think wisely, and revisit ties with the U.S. and Pakistan’s role in the U.S.-led war on terror.” Rightist “Nawa-i-Waqt” warned that the “U.S. should not be given more opportunities to press Pakistan; even if it (U.S.) stops aid and even if President Obama does not visit Pakistan.” Even relatively liberal Urdu daily “Express” cautioned that “Our rulers should beware of American plots in order to maintain the country’s dignity and sovereignty.”

With an exception of Geo TV’s Najam Sethi, most Monday night TV talk shows also unloaded on the U.S. Sethi noted that “The future policy of the U.S. will be the same. If we fail to find wanted terrorists and hand them over to the Americans, Washington itself will do the job. Now, we must decide what we want to do.” In his Geo TV program, Hamid Mir floated a new conspiracy theory that the Pashto-speaking Afghans also took part in the Abbottabad operation. A PML-N representative on the Express TV program “Kal Tak,” accused that the Prime Minister of giving the Americans a “license to kill” in Pakistan in his speech. Former President Musharraf asserted in a televised interview that the military was not complicit in sheltering bin Laden, Pakistani officials need not resign, and OBL was a symbol of terrorism but did not have any direct link with the terrorist activities in Pakistan.

Urdu Editorials/Opinions:

“Growing U.S. Pressure – What To Do?” An editorial in the leading mass circulation populist, often sensational Urdu daily “Jang” (cir. 300,000) (05/10)

“The U.S. has launched a drive of atrocities against independent countries in the name of controlling terrorism, and it will not stop this campaign so easily and quickly. The U.S. says that no doubt the death of bin Laden is a major blow to Al

Qaeda, but we cannot declare it as total defeat of this network. Our war against terrorism isn't over, and Aiman Al Zawahiri is our next target. The entire world knows that it the U.S. that began this war on terror on our border, and forced us to participate in this war. We unwillingly have become the major non NATO ally, and have paid a heavy price, and are paying even today. The U.S. has claimed that it has killed bin Laden in Abbottabad, but it did not furnish any proof of it, so several independent analysts are seeing this claim with suspicions. And some analysts are describing the Abbottabad episode as a drama that was staged to exert more pressure on Pakistan. In this state of affairs, the nation is concerned about its future; we can stay hungry, but will not compromise on our honor and dignity. The time has come that our rulers instead of making lame excuses, think wisely, and revisit our ties with U.S. and Pakistan's role in the U.S. led war on terror."

"Cancellation of Obama's proposed trip to Pakistan and the increasing U.S. pressure" an editorial in the second largest Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (circ. 150,000) (05/10)

"By cancelling President Obama's scheduled November visit to Pakistan the U.S. administration has apparently given a message that it considers Pakistan complicit vis-à-vis Osama and al-Qaeda's alleged activities.... If Osama was really killed in the U.S. operation then why wasn't a picture of the body released? Questions about the operation and Osama's alleged burial at sea give rise to suspicion that Osama was neither present at Abbottabad compound, nor was he killed in the operation. This American drama was staged only to pressurize Pakistan.... America should not be given more opportunities to press Pakistan; even if America stops our aid and even if the American President does not visit Pakistan. We should give priority to our state and national interests."

"The need to review the situation carefully" an editorial in the liberal Urdu daily "Express" (circ. 25,000) (05/10)

"The fact is that the rulers must dispassionately consider the impact of the hot pursuit policy America has adopted after Osama's killing... Our rulers should beware of American plots in order to maintain the country's dignity and sovereignty. No power should be allowed to indict Pakistan. [President Obama's] order to locate the Osama support network is actually the preamble to further orders; hence there is a need to carefully observe each page of the Osama tale."

"Osama's Killing: Some Questions," an op-ed by Saleem Safi in the leading mass circulation populist, often sensational Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (05/10)

"I still believe that neither our security system is weak, nor the U.S. helicopters could sneak into Pakistan's airspace without our own consent... Neither the Pakistani intelligence agencies had provided Osama a safe haven in Abbottabad, nor did he himself trust them. In fact, it was the tip provided by Pakistan's intelligence service which helped Americans to take out al-Qaeda chief. It may also be possible that the U.S. commandos had arrested Osama alive and killed him later. Even he may still be alive in American custody, because the U.S. authorities appear unable to provide satisfactory answers to several questions."

"Trap," an op-ed by Nazir Naji in the leading mass circulation populist, often sensational Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (05/10)

"To dismantle Al-Qaeda's terrorist network is not an issue for the U.S. and Pakistani governments, rather it has become a matter of serious concern for the entire world. Moreover, Osama and his companions have been nominated as terrorists by the UN. For the time being, the U.S. alone is chasing these terrorists, but we should not forget that Washington enjoys the support of entire international community in this campaign. Hence, Pakistan too is bound hunt Osama's network."

"Beginning of New Pressure on Pakistan," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (05/10)

"It was the U.S. that always backed and supported the dictatorial regime in Pakistan while adopted an arm-twisting policy towards the democratic governments in the country. Resultantly, the latter could neither deliver anything to the masses, nor they could resolve the problems, which were essentially the product of dictatorships, facing the common man... Both President Zardari and PM Gilani had played no role in creating Osama's monster, but the U.S. is putting the onus on them and they are in a quandary as to what to do."

"Obama Issues 'Show Cause Notice' To Pakistan," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily

“Islam” (cir. 15,000) (05/10)

“It has now become almost crystal clear that the real target of the U.S. and its allies, particularly India and Israel, is to deprive Pakistan of its nuclear assets. Abbottabad operation was, in fact, the rehearsal to achieve this goal. For this purpose, the Americans can use the pretext of chasing Aiman al-Zawahiri or some other high-value target.”

“New U.S. Strategy,” an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily “Mashriq” (cir. 55,000) (05/10)

“At a time when Osama’s killing in Abbottabad operation is yet to be confirmed through irrefutable evidence, even many U.S. politicians and intellectuals have expressed reservations regarding the authenticity of this story, the Obama administration insists that valuable information was recovered from the compound where the al-Qaeda chief was allegedly hiding... We think that instead of expressing their own suspicions, Americans themselves bear responsibility to provide concrete evidence about Osama’s killing in Abbottabad operation.”

“Osama network: the need for a thorough inquiry” an editorial in the centre-right Urdu daily “Pakistan” (circ. 10,000) (05/10)

“U.S. President Obama has said that Osama bin Laden’s support network was present in Pakistan. In his first interview following Osama bin Laden’s death, the U.S. President said that he wants the Pakistan government to look into this network... The Pakistan government should act according to its national interests on the issues raised by the U.S. President... The government should decide to take action if the investigation reveals the involvement of individuals, groups or institutions with this network.”

“From Raymond Davis to Usama” an op-ed by Ayaz Khan in the liberal Urdu daily “Express” (circ. 25,000) (05/10)

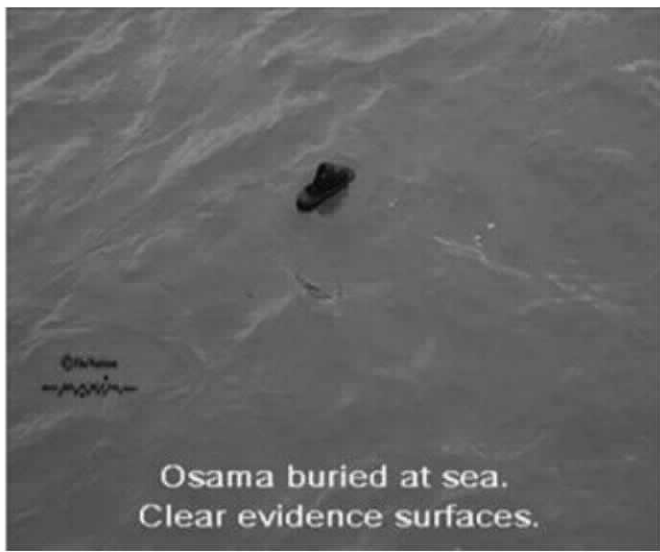
“Now that we are talking of Raymond Davis, you might recall that he was so important that even the U.S. President had to demand his release. Since I do not have proof, I cannot say with any certainty that he [Davis] was linked to the operation against Osama. However, his extraordinary importance makes me suspect that one way or the other [Davis] was linked to the operation.”

“Pakistan will be the target now” an op-ed by Javed Chaudhry in the liberal Urdu daily “Express” (circ. 25,000) (05/10)

“On May 5, the military leadership admitted to us that in one year, 7000 people from the U.S. came into this country and disappeared here. Gen Pasha and Gen Kayani are against these activities of the Americans and continue to protest on the matter. It is because of this protest that relations between the U.S and the Pakistan Army turned sour.... The ISI gave America a list of 438 CIA operatives whose activities were suspect. To cut a long story short, Raymond Davis was released, but the very next day, the U.S. carried out a drone strike on a tribal Jirga in Datta Khel, thus breaking its promise. The U.S. also refused to recall its spies. On this breach of promise, the ISI Chief and the Army Chief made it clear to the U.S. that we would review our strategy. This threat annoyed the U.S. and it sought its revenge from us on May 1 and 2... May Allah have mercy on us, because we are now America’s direct target and anything can happen anytime?”

Editorial Cartoons

“The Nation” (05/10)



“The News” (05/10)



“Daily Times” (05/10)



“The Express Tribune” (05/10)



TV Talk Shows:

Program: “Aapas Ki Baat” Geo News (05/09)

Host: Muneeb Farooq

Guest: Najam Sethi

Topic: Post-Osama bin Laden Killing

Excerpts:

Host: Imran Khan said that the Abbottabad operation is an intelligence failure for both the Pakistani Army and intelligence agencies. Additionally, Prime Minister Gilani is also terming it an intelligence failure, but he also said that it was a failure for all intelligence agencies around the world. What do you say?

Najam Sethi: Initially, Imran Khan said that it was a government’s failure. But then he added the military to his comment. Prime Minister has tried to put the blame on other agencies, rather than accepting it as the sole failure of Pakistani intelligence. He tried to calm down the masses, but failed. He should have taken full responsibility.

Host: Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S. said that there was some involvement from the Pakistani side in supporting al-Qaeda. However, the Prime Minister said that no Pakistani institution was involved. What is your opinion?

[Footage: Video clips of both remarks were shown]

Najam Sethi: No, Ambassador Haqqani did not say that any state agent was involved. He said there are non-state agents who might have helped al-Qaeda or Osama bin Laden, and that the entire Pakistani state should not be blamed for this. Prime Minister Gilani is just saying that we were not involved. Ambassador Haqqani took it a step further by saying that non-state actors were involved. The world is now asking us why we are not taking any action against these organizations. They are blaming us for nurturing these terrorist outfits and not fighting against them. In the coming days, the U.S. and the international community will focus on these non-state actors hiding in our urban areas.

[Footage: Video clips of Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Imran Khan and Former foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi demanding resignations from Prime Minister and President, were shown]

Host: Everyone is asking for resignations. Why?

Najam Sethi: Interestingly, the general public is against everyone. They want all of the politicians and the top military personnel to go. Public says that everyone is involved in the Abbottabad episode. Prime Minister Gilani has said there will be an inquiry into the incident. The Foreign Office said earlier that no investigation would be conducted. It is ironic that the very people, who are being accused of being involved, will conduct the inquiry. The U.S. is going to provide more evidence soon against Pakistani military personnel. The public is kept in the dark, and nobody is saying anything.

Host: There had been discussions about the national sovereignty, and everybody is saying our sovereignty has been violated. What do you say?

[Footage: video clips of various top leaders about sovereignty being violated were shown]

Najam Sethi: They're all lying. Our sovereignty has been violated for the past 60 years. It started when we first handed over our people to the U.S. bypassing the due process. It was done before 9/11. Former President Musharraf gave air bases to the U.S. and allowed them to fly drones in Pakistan. How can he now talk about sovereignty? Pakistan is now in a situation where it is confused what to do if anything of this sort happens again.

Host: There will be an in-camera session for the Parliament on Friday. Would it be of any use?

Najam Sethi: No it will not be of any use. Everything is out in media. It will be done to please the Parliament only. You might remember that the Parliament had initially rejected the idea of military operation in Swat. But afterwards, when it became inevitable, they gave their nod. The military then took the confidence of the public and the Parliament and started operation in Swat. Now they are trying to use the same strategy to develop a policy. We don't know if this policy would be anti-American or not. We have just seen the interview of the U.S. Ambassador Cameron Munter on Geo TV. He has said that the U.S. wants to collaborate and resolve all these issues. The U.S. has given us an option. The host, Kamran Khan asked Ambassador Cameron Munter several times about the possibility of an operation against Mullah Omar or Aiman Al-Zawahiri, but the Ambassador didn't give any clear answer. To questions, he repeatedly emphasized the only option is that the U.S. and Pakistan continue work together, but Pakistan must decide. In other words, if we would not help them, they might unilaterally launch similar operations. The U.S. had the policy of hunting down Osama bin Laden and killing him since 2008, and our Foreign Office mentioned this in their first statement after the Abbottabad operation. The future policy of the U.S. would be the same. If we fail to find the wanted terrorists and hand them over to the Americans, Washington would do the job. Now, we should decide what we want to do now. Pakistani public should be taken on board and it should know what would be the repercussions of an anti-American policy.

Program: "Capital Talk" Geo TV (05/09)

Host: Hamid Mir

Topic: Will Pakistan be the next battlefield between America and Al-Qaida?

Summary: Hamid Mir noted soon the Pakistani military and the ISI will not have to face only the wrath of the Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists, but would also be subjected to hostile criticism and propaganda by the American media and the CIA. Hamid Mir added that the U.S media is asking the Obama administration "Can we trust them (Pakistanis)?" Our own people are also asking their government and the military establishment the very same question, "Can we trust the Americans?" Osama bin Laden's neighbors in Abbottabad revealed that Afghan intelligence officials also accompanied the American Special Forces in the operation against the al-Qaeda leader. One of Osama's neighbor said that he saw armed Afghans, who were speaking Pushto, assisting the American forces in the operation. Hamid Mir said that the videos released immediately after the Abbottabad operation had given rise to several questions and doubts. He continued to say that the U.S. is now releasing new videos to convince the world that Osama has been killed. But these tactics are not working because even the former chief of CIA's bin Laden unit, Michael Shavers rejected the new videos terming them fake.

Program: "News Night With Talat" Dawn News (05/09)

Host: Syed Talat Hussain

Guests: Sheikh Rohail Asghar (PML-N); Prof. Ibrahim Khan (JI); Shah Mehmood Qureshi (Former Foreign Minister); Ghulam Fareed Kathia (PPP)

Topic: The PM's Speech and Abbottabad Operation

Excerpts:

Host: Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has, at last, delivered his much-anticipated speech. It was in English and the reason was to convey to the world Pakistan's views on the Osama bin Laden operation. The speech highlighted the role of spin doctors and media about this operation. What are your comments?

Shah Mehmood Qureshi: PM's address to the National Assembly disappointed the already dejected Pakistani nation. Moreover, it was also too late to soothe the humiliation inflicted to our national dignity. Although the speech reiterated Pakistan's resolve to continue the war on terror, it failed to address fundamental issues. The real issue was to answer questions over Pakistan's security failure. The PM failed to raise this issue. I think Pakistan should have called upon the international community and should have talked about our mutual understanding regarding the ongoing war against terrorism. Our relationship with the U.S. is based on mutual trust and respect, but they violated our trust. Our sovereignty was violated. There is trust-deficit between the two countries. Now the question arises, what kind of relationship do we have? We were clear about unilateral action. There was an understanding between us that there would be no foreign boots on Pakistani land. But now that agreement has been breached. PM Gilani should have clearly conveyed this message to the Americans.

Sheikh Rohail Asghar: The PM gave a statement on May 2, when he congratulated the Americans on this "shared victory". Now he has given another statement condemning the violation of Pakistan's sovereignty. Which one of these two is his policy statement? On the whole, the PM has failed to "soothe the wounds" inflicted on the collective psyche of the Pakistani people.

Ghulam Fareed Kathia: The U.S. has told the Pakistani authorities that it would chase high-value targets wherever in the world they might be. So the Pakistani government did not keep the nation in dark, everything was clear.

Prof. Ibrahim Khan: Mr. Kathia is right in saying that it is the policy of the U.S. to chase high-value target deep inside Pakistan. But the question is, why did our government submissively accept that policy without any resistance? Now our nuclear assets are also insecure. The government and the military need to take concrete steps to regain the trust of the nation.

Program: "Kal Tak" Express TV (05/09)

Host: Javed Chaudhry

Participants: Ahsan Iqbal (PML-N); Mehreen Anwar Raja (PPP); Kashmala Tariq (PML-Q)

Topic: Abbottabad Operation And PM Yusuf Raza Gilani's Speech

Summary: Ahsan Iqbal expressed anger towards the PM saying that his speech was giving Americans a "license to kill" in Pakistan. He said that U.S. forces could enter the country at their own free will on the pretext of chasing anyone. Ahsan Iqbal also criticized the security agencies and the Foreign Office for their mutual lack of coordination. He said that by issuing conflicting statements on the Abbottabad operation, these institutions created even more confusion about this incident which had humiliated the whole Pakistani nation. Mehreen Anwar Raja said that we should avoid politicking on the Abbottabad operation because it was a very sensitive issue, and Prime Minister Gilani has said that an inquiry would be initiated. Kashmala Tariq said that there is still confusion whether Osama has been killed. Why are his family members arrested during the operation are not being presented before the media? I think we should redefine our defense, foreign and economic policies.

Program: "Baat Say Baat" Express TV (05/09)

Host: Maria Zulfiqar

Guest: Pervez Musharraf (Former President of Pakistan)

Topic: Abbottabad Operation

Summary: Former President Pervez Musharraf said that unlike many in Pakistan, he believes that the al-Qaeda leader has been killed in the operation. However, he demanded the U.S. to tell the world about all the facts related to this operation. Otherwise nobody will believe Osama was killed. Musharraf said that the presence of al-Qaeda chief in Abbottabad does expose the incapability of Pakistan's security agencies, but it is wrong to say that they were complicit in it. He said that demand for the resignation of the Prime Minister, Army Chief, and DG ISI are completely devoid of any justification. The former President said that Osama did not have any direct links with the terrorist activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but rather he was merely a symbol of terrorism across the globe.