

A peep into the working of the Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan **By Dr G Sreekumar Menon, Commissioner of Customs & Central Excise**



NO other intelligence agency has been in the news as the Inter-Services Intelligence (I.S.I.) of Pakistan. Whether it is a terrorist attack or narco-smuggling the ubiquitous hand of the I.S.I. is evident. As a law enforcement department officers of Customs & Excise would be curious to know about the working of the I.S.I. This article proposes to give a bird's eye-view of the I.S.I.

Inter-Services Intelligence is Pakistan's principal intelligence-gathering agency, founded in 1948 by a British army officer, Major-General R. Cawthorne, then deputy chief of staff in Pakistan's army. The ISI's primary mission in the country's first few tumultuous years of independence was to safeguard Pakistani national interests, monitor opposition political groups, and sustain military rule in Pakistan. The intelligence service's mandate also included the collection and dissemination of foreign and domestic intelligence, coordinating the intelligence functions of the three military services, and monitoring all foreigners in Pakistan, as well as members of the national and international media. The ISI also conducted surveillance of politically active segments of Pakistani society, and the diplomats of other countries accredited to Pakistan – especially those serving inside the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.

Over time, however, this powerful intelligence-gathering body became a creature beyond political reigns. The ISI is undoubtedly the most powerful institution inside Pakistan – many power brokers in the country believe it is more omnipotent than the military and prime minister's offices combined. Staffed by hundreds of civilian and military officers, plus thousands of other employees, the agency's headquarter is located in Islamabad. The ISI reportedly has a total of about 25,000 officers and staff members, a number that does not include informants and assets.

It is reportedly organized into between six and eight divisions, including:

++ Joint Intelligence, or JIX, secretariat coordinating administrative support to other ISI wings.

++ Joint Intelligence Bureau, or JIB, responsible for political intelligence.

++ Joint Counter Intelligence Bureau, or JCIB, responsible for field surveillance of Pakistani diplomats stationed abroad, as well as for conducting intelligence operations in the Middle East, South Asia, China, Afghanistan, and the former Soviet Union.

++ Joint Intelligence North, or JIN, responsible for covert operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

++ Joint Intelligence Miscellaneous, or JIM, tasked with espionage in foreign countries, including offensive intelligence operations.

++ Joint Signal Intelligence Bureau, or JSIB, responsible for handling all signal and technological intelligence - Gathering methods and operations.

The ISI is tasked with collection of foreign and domestic intelligence, co-ordination of intelligence functions of the three military services, surveillance over its cadres, foreigners, the media, politically active segments of Pakistani society, diplomats of other countries accredited to Pakistan and Pakistani diplomats serving outside the country. Besides, the other charter of duties of the ISI are interception and monitoring of communications and the conduct of covert offensive operations.

STRUCTURE OF ISI

The ISI functions under the Ministry of Defence. It has a strength of over 25,000 personnel and has its headquarters in Islamabad. Its responsibility, essentially, is to collect, collate and disseminate military and external intelligence and conduct offensive operations against India.

The ISI structure is as follows :

Director General

Additional Director General

Deputy Directors General (DDG) (3)

DDG (POLITICAL)

DDG (EXTERNAL)

DDG

1. Joint Int Bureau (JIB)

Joint Counter
Intelligence Bureau
(JCIB)

Jt Signal Int Burea
(JSIB)

2. Jt Int Miscellaneous (JIM)

Jt Int-X (JIX)

3. Jt Int North (JIN)

4. Jt Int Tech (JIT)

Director (Field Surveillance)

Director (External-Political)

Director (External for Asia,
Europe and Middle East)

Director (Attached to the PM's Secretariat)

SPECIAL WINGS OF ISI

1. ISI Academy

2. Military Liaison Section (MLS)

JOINT INTELLIGENCE X (JIX)

It serves as the secretariat which coordinates with and provides administrative support to the other ISI wings and field organizations. It also prepares intelligence estimates and threat assessments.

Headed by a Director, JIX looks after general administration and accounts of the ISI Directorate. The Director is assisted by five Deputy Directors, handling administration, budget, accounts, transport and miscellaneous work. It is one of the largest wings of the ISI Directorate.

JOINT INTELLIGENCE BUREAU (JIB)

It is the largest wing of the ISI Directorate with about 60 per cent of the staff of the

Directorate on its rolls. The DDG is assisted by a Director who has under him five Assistant Directors in charge of the subject of Labour, students, Political parties, Anti-terrorism and VIP security.

In addition, there are three sub-sections dealing exclusively with the political and economic developments in specified regions of the world:

- (a) Sub-section 1 — deals with India and the Far East.
- (b) Sub-section 2 — deals with communist countries.
- (c) Sub-section 3 — deals with East Asia and Africa.

There is also a separate Special Wing dealing exclusively with Afghanistan, headed by a Director. The Section has three sub-sections, each looked after by a Deputy Director, dealing with:

- (i) Training and operations.
- (ii) Arms distribution and logistic support.
- (iii) Training of Afghan refugees and psychological warfare.

JIB also controls the positioning and functioning of the Pakistani MilitaryAttaches/Advisors in missions abroad.

JOINT COUNTER INTELLIGENCE BUREAU (JCIB)

It is responsible for field surveillance of Pakistani diplomats stationed abroad, as well as for conducting intelligence operations in the Middle East, South Asia, China, Afghanistan and the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union.

DDG (External) controls the JCIB for surveillance of foreign diplomats and nationals, political leaders and ISI personnel. DDG(External) is assisted by four Directors, as follows:

- (a) Director — field surveillance and foreign diplomats and foreigners.
- (b) Director — External (Political)
- (c) Director — External for Asia, Europe and Middle East
- (d) Director — attached to the Prime Minister's Secretariat

The Wing also has a unit called Inter Services Security Section (ISSS) which maintains surveillance on ISI personnel. Detachments of JCIB are stationed at Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Kohat, Rawalpindi, Mardan, Nowshera, Attock, Muree, Jhelum, Kharjan, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Sahiwal. Multan, Sargodha, Hyderabad, Muzaffarabad, Tulbul and Gilgit. These detachments carry out counter intelligence tasks, apart from collecting internal political intelligence.

JOINT INTELLIGENCE NORTH (JIN)

It is responsible for carrying out special operations in Jammu and Kashmir, including infiltration, propaganda and other covert operations. It is also tasked with collection of intelligence on Jammu and Kashmir. It provides training and supply of arms and ammunition and funds to Kashmiri militants to carry out sabotage and subversion.

JOINT INTELLIGENCE MISCELLANEOUS (JIM)

It conducts espionage in Europe, America, Asia and Middle East – directly from the ISI Headquarters, through agents and indirectly through its officers posted abroad under cover assignments. It also operates trained spies in India and Afghanistan to carry out offensive intelligence operations.

JIM is headed by Director (Operations) who has under him two Deputy Directors for operations in Europe/America and in Asia/Middle East. There are eight Assistant Directors of the rank of Majors in the wing.

JOINT SIGNAL INTELLIGENCE BUREAU (JSIB)

Its main function is to provide communication network for the ISI and to collect intelligence through monitoring of communication links of neighbouring countries, particularly India and Afghanistan.

This wing also produces signal codes for the use of Services. A sizable number of officers and men from the Army Signal Corps have been taken here. JSIB has detachments at Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar, each headed by a Deputy Director.

It is headed by Director (Technical), who is of the rank of a Colonel and is assisted by three Deputy Directors for Wireless, Monitoring and Photos. It operates a chain of signals intelligence collection stations along the border with India and provides communication support to militants operating in Kashmir.

JOINT INTELLIGENCE TECHNICAL (JIT)

It deals with technical aids for intelligence operations. It handles all the electronic gadgets required for ISI's intelligence operations.

SPECIAL WINGS OF THE ISI

ISI ACADEMY: It was renamed in April 1989 as "Defence Services Intelligence Academy". It is headed by a Deputy Director(Training) who is assisted by Officer Commanding (Language) and Officer Commanding (Technical training).

CURRICULUM IN THE TRAINING CAMPS

Elementary training – 7 to 10 days

++ Introduction to AK-47 rifles, Chinese pistols, rocket launchers

++ Art of ambushing with minimum firing practice on AK-47 rifles and pistols plus live demonstration

++ Lectures and practical demonstrations in concealments, camouflage, reconnaissance and intelligence gathering

++ Training in sabotage and subversive operations

++ Indoctrination for armed struggle through lectures and video films

Advanced training courses from 2-12 weeks

++ Rigorous physical training and border crossing

++ Handling of sophisticated weapons including rocket launchers, medium and light machine guns, MI/sniper rifles, anti-aircraft guns, mortars, remote control devices antipersonel/tank mines and explosives, including IEDs

++ Finer aspects of ambushes/raids, operation of walkie-talkies

++ First aid/para-medical training

++ Audio-visual education

Training for tech-savvy recruits

++ Wireless communication training (morse and computer based data mode)

++ Specialised training in new weapons including Sniper Rifle Dragunov (SVD), 12.7 MM Heavy Machine Guns (HMG) and 82 mm mortars;

++ Battle induction in Afghan Mujahideen War

Revised Curriculum

In selected cases, the training programmes have been extended from six months to one year. Educated youth, preferably with a technical or science background and affiliated to pro-Pak groups are being selected for specialised training.

MILITARY LIAISON SECTION (MLS): Though the MLS is a part of Pakistan's Ministry of Interior, it functions directly under the control and command of the ISI Directorate. MLS is represented by all the civilian security agencies, para-military organizations, Federal Investigation Agency and Passport and Immigration Directorate.

In addition to these main elements, ISI also includes a separate explosive section and a chemical warfare section.

Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the President of Pakistan in 1950s , expanded the role of ISI in safeguarding Pakistan's interests, monitoring opposition politicians, and sustaining military rule in Pakistan. The ISI was reorganized in 1966 and expanded in 1969. The ISI lost its importance during the regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was very critical of its role during the 1970 general elections, which triggered off the events leading to the partition of Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh.

The ISI regained its lost glory after Gen Zia ul-Haq seized power in July 1977. In late 1979, when the Soviet Union intruded into Afghanistan, Pakistan became a frontline state for the US and the ISI got a never-before boost. The ISI played a pivotal role in channelising assistance for the Afghan Mujahideen. The ISI trained about 83000 Afghan Mujahideen between 1983 and 1997 and dispatched them to Afghanistan.

During the Afghan war, the ISI officers got access to denied intelligence and technology, large quantities of surplus terrorist hardware and trained manpower adept in covert warfare. This was the time when the ISI developed strategic operational linkages at two different planes: with fundamentalist Islamic groups the worldover, from where recruits and material help was drawn for the Afghan war; and with drug cartels, gun runners, underworld and smugglers in several parts of the world to finance covert activities.

The ISI's role in the Afghan war offered numerous geopolitical opportunities for its savvy technocrats to play regional chess with pious pawns of Afghanistan. Between 1983 and 1997, the ISI trained nearly 100,000 mujahadeen in intelligence gathering, special operations, commando techniques, sabotage, and cold killing. Many volunteers inside the ISI training camps were Osama bin Laden's Afghan Arabs. Others belonged to Hamas, Hezbollah, and a dozen more terrorist groups. The ISI were the ones who created the Taliban and, covertly, supported Al-Qaeda.

In the waning years of the Afghan war, Pakistan intended to become a major player in the postwar political landscape of that country. Pakistan's volatile and porous mountain

frontier with Afghanistan demanded that Islamabad have a strong voice in Kabul. The ISI wanted the dominant Islamic militia in Afghanistan to be one totally subservient to Islamabad's whims. When that group, a mujahadeen formation led by warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, failed to consolidate power inside Afghanistan, or secure Pakistan's North-West Frontier and the land routes to and from the oil-rich former Soviet republics in Central Asia, the ISI created the Taliban.

The Taliban was a Pakistani-produced proxy designed to create a land block of Muslim resistance to Indian dominance of the subcontinent. The ISI of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government provided the Taliban with money, fuel, food, transportation, and weapons. It allowed Islamic students from the madrassas to join the Taliban's fight in Afghanistan, and it connected Afghanistan to Pakistan's American-and British-built telephone grid. But the Taliban became a creature beyond the scope of Islamabad's wildest imagination. They became the champions of Islamic terrorist groups emerging in the Horn of Africa, in the Persian Gulf, in South-east Asia, and inside Pakistan itself.

Qurban Ali Doctrine : This doctrine propounds the ultimate balkanization of India. The strategy is to identify the fault lines and inflict "a thousand cuts" so as to weaken India on various fronts and thereby cause its disintegration. The ISI has evolved a broad policy of four objectives which are:

1. Sustain Kashmir movement at minimal cost and force its settlement on terms acceptable to Pakistan.
2. To weaken India's potential strength and national will by hitting at its perceived "Fault lines" and to pursue the policy of thousand cuts.
3. To prevent India from emerging as a strategically dominant power in the region.
4. To render Indian borders porous and bordering states vulnerable.

In pursuance of the above policy it has been vigorously pursuing patronizing of border smugglers and criminals and cultivating them for intelligence activity, arms smuggling and narcotics trade. Pumping counterfeit currency into India through fundamentalist groups, hawala operators and infiltrators to destabilize the economy has been going on relentlessly.

The tentacles of the ISI has spread deep and wide within India. It is a strange kind of war, one without front lines or massed troops, fought in the shadows against an elusive enemy, without a clear sense of where it would lead or how it would end. Our approach has been one of complacency and hysteria coupled with our inability to strengthen a porous domestic security system. Vulnerabilities of an open and ill prepared society are being exploited by a determined band of fanatics. Intelligence services and enforcement agencies cannot foil all terrorist plots. We have to accept that the struggle will be lengthy, will involve casualties and may have no clear cut finality. The challenges that now loom large are how to fight back against the ISI machinery, and how to reduce our vulnerability to future covert attacks.

(The views expressed are personal of the author who is working with the Department)