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Pakistan must come to party on fighting terror or pay the price



The funeral ceremony of an army captain who was killed in Tuesday's attack in Balochistan.

CLAUDE RAKISITS THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM October 27, 2016

Less than three months after a horrendous terrorist attack, Balochistan was yet again the target of extremism on Tuesday when at least 61 people died at a police training college. It was the deadliest attack on a security installation in Pakistan's history.

A number of indirect and inconclusive claims of responsibility emerged after the attack. According to the authorities in Balochistan, the attackers were from Lashkhar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami (LeJ), a terrorist group affiliated with al-Qa'ida and the Pakistani Taliban. An intercepted email purportedly links the LeJ to the attack. But being an extremist Sunni organisation, its preferred target is the minority Shia community. So, while not impossible, it would be unusual that the LeJ would be behind this attack. Islamic State has also made a claim via Amaq, its affiliated news agency, releasing a picture of the three assailants.

Regardless as to who was responsible, the attack is a disaster for Pakistani authorities. The vast resource-rich western province bordering Iran and Afghanistan is critical in the completion of China's massive \$US46 billion (\$60bn) investment in the multifaceted infrastructure venture known as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which will link the port of Gwadar on the Indian Ocean to western China via roads, railways and gas pipelines.

Despite the Pakistan government making this a top priority and promising to raise a security force of 15,000, CPEC has already run into problems due to slow starts and lack of security. Already five projects worth billions have had to be cancelled. So this latest terrorist act will make the Chinese even more nervous than they already are about this expensive enterprise.

Of course, one needs to look at the wider context of Pakistan's terror problem. Since June last year, following a terrorist act on Karachi airport, the Pakistani military has been engaged in widespread military operations in tribal areas of the northwest along the border with Afghanistan.

The military promised that all terrorist groups would be hunted down, including the groups with which the Pakistan military and government had negotiated deals, the so-called "good" Taliban.

And while many terrorists have been killed, their capability degraded and their network disrupted, the "bad" Taliban are still able to strike against civilian and military targets throughout Pakistan.

Many of these groups flee the tribal area across the border to Afghanistan, particularly the Haqqani Network. Escaping across the border would be impossible without the help of elements of the Pakistan military intelligence. This has strengthened the Afghan Taliban's ability to sustain its fight the Afghan security forces.

The US congress is fast losing patience with Pakistan and what legislators consider its duplicitous approach to dealing with terrorism. A bill to designate Pakistan a terror state, sponsored by Republicans and Democrats, is working its way through congress. Of course, it has a long way to go before it reaches the White House for the president's signature. But if it does, the next US commander-in-chief may not be as tolerant towards Islamabad as the Obama administration has been.

The terror attack in Indian-held Kashmir by Pakistan-based terrorists last month was a turning point for the international community. And Pakistan knows it.

While the Indian government's heavy-handed approach towards the habitants of Indian-held Kashmir in recent months has been unacceptable, allies and friends of Pakistan have turned on Islamabad, demanding that it rein in the "good" terrorists, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, which was responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attack.

If Pakistan is to avoid international isolation, it will need to demonstrate a commitment to fight terrorism, including arresting the leader of the LeT, who now roams freely in Lahore. Anything short of that will make it difficult for Pakistan's friends to stand by Islamabad. Even China would begin to question the wisdom of CPEC.

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