

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
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See Reuters report below on Mullen's prepared testimony for hearing today:

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U.S. - Pakistan's ISI supported Kabul embassy attack

Thu, Sep 22 10:46 AM EDT

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Haqqani militant network is a "veritable arm" of Pakistan's powerful ISI intelligence service, which supported the group as it launched a startling attack last week on the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, the top U.S. military officer said on Thursday.

"The Haqqani network ... acts as a veritable arm of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency," Admiral Mike Mullen, who steps down this month as chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in prepared remarks to a U.S. Senate panel.

The Haqqani network is one of three -- and perhaps the most feared -- allied insurgent factions fighting U.S.-led NATO and Afghan troops under the Taliban banner in Afghanistan.

"With ISI support, Haqqani operatives planned and conducted (a September 11) truck bomb attack, as well as the assault on our embassy," Mullen said. "We also have credible intelligence that they were behind the June 28 attack against the Inter-Continental Hotel in Kabul and a host of other smaller but effective operations."

Such high-profile attacks have been a blow to Washington's hopes to weaken a stubborn militancy and seal a peace deal with the Taliban as it plans to gradually draw down the U.S. force 10 years after the Afghan war began.

Some U.S. intelligence reporting alleges that the ISI specifically directed or urged the Haqqani network to carry out the attack last week on the U.S. Embassy and a NATO headquarters in Kabul, two U.S. officials and a source familiar with recent U.S.-Pakistan official contacts told Reuters on Wednesday.

Mullen said the embassy attack and Tuesday's bombing that killed the former Afghan president, who personified hopes for brokering peace negotiations with the Taliban, were examples of the Taliban's shift towards high-profile violence.

"These acts of violence are as much about headlines and playing on the fears of a traumatized people, as they are about inflicting casualties -- maybe even more so," Mullen told the Senate panel.

"We must not misconstrue them. They are serious and significant in shaping perceptions but they do not represent a sea change in the odds of military success."

(Reporting by Missy Ryan and Susan Cornwell; Editing by Bill Trott)