

IN MEMOGATE CROSS-EXAMINATION, IJAZ CLAIMS TO HAVE TRANSCRIPT OF ZARDARI, KAYANI PHONE CONVERSATION

Following up on his original video deposition from late last month, Mansoor Ijaz, once again by video link from London, was subjected to cross-examination yesterday and today by the judicial commission investigating the Memogate scandal. Ijaz reiterated his primary claim he has made from the start, that his actions were prompted by a strong belief that a military coup was imminent on the heels of the US action that killed Osama bin Laden in May, 2011.

Although he did not list the countries, Ijaz claimed to have been briefed by intelligence agents from four different countries. He submitted multiple documents as his proof. The Express Tribune described the documents as including a transcript of a phone call between Pakistan's President and Army Chief:

After Haqqani approached him first, Ijaz said, he used his contacts with intelligence agencies of various countries to obtain documents, including travel records of Director-General Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lt General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, minute-by-minute Pakistan Air traffic Control flight monitoring of US helicopters which infiltrated Pakistani airspace for the May 2 raid, and a transcript of a call between President Asif Ali Zardari and Army Chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani.

Interestingly, Dawn's coverage of the cross-

examination doesn't specifically mention Zardari and Kayani by name as being in the transcripts, although it comes close:

During the cross-examination before the judicial commission investigating the case, the Pakistani-American businessman said he had been briefed by at least four intelligence networks of different countries after the killing of Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad on May 2, last year.

He said he had obtained the information about actions and reactions of Army Chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, President Asif Ali Zardari and the military secretary to the president after the incident, details of foreign visits of the Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and transcripts of conversation between air traffic control staff and the pilots of the US helicopters which raided Osama's compound.

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He also claimed to have the transcripts of conversations between the President's House and the Army House on the operation.

How is it that an American citizen of Pakistani descent would have access to intelligence agencies of so many countries? And, especially, how could Ijaz come into possession of a transcript of a call between Zardari and Kayani?

One theory for what is transpiring in Memogate is that it is a "slow-motion coup". Writing in Foreign Policy in early January (where Josh Rogin broke much of the Memogate story), Christine Fair of Georgetown University described it in this way:

Watchers of Pakistan's sordid history of military intrusion into civilian affairs

understand the rich irony of this current saga. Not one of the generals who have overthrown varied governments has ever been charged with treason. Not one of the varied Supreme Court justices who violated their oaths to protect the Constitution by providing judicial sanction to Pakistan's varied military coups has ever been punished.

So let's call the devil by his name: Memogate should be understood as a sophisticated attempt by the Army and intelligence agency to use the court to bring down this government, not just a titillating imbroglio involving Husain Haqqani.

But is there anything Washington can do about it? While the current Pakistani government is certainly abysmal, what's also true is that the only way Pakistani democracy can solidify is through consecutive constitutional changes of power through elections. If the United States and its partners genuinely support Pakistan's fragile democracy as the only means to achieve a more stable Pakistan in the long run, then they should act now to preempt the coup that, ironically, the suspect memo was supposedly written to prevent in the first place.

Fair's thesis was that Pakistan's military is using the judicial proceedings around Memogate and the parallel judicial proceedings around the failure of Pakistan's government to carry out corruption investigations required when the National Reconciliation Ordinance was overturned to oust the Zardari government. Failing that, Fair notes that the military and ISI seem to be aiding the campaign of Imran Khan, grooming him to be the next President through elections.

The process works in this way, according to Fair:

In the old days, Pakistani generals sent tanks to oust a government. Now they plant stories in the press and manipulate the legal system.

With that framing in mind, it becomes easy to speculate that Ijaz received his transcripts of the Zardari-Kayani phone call and the air traffic controllers with the US helicopters directly from Pakistan's military. He would seem to be just the tool for them to use in the process Fair describes for planting information and then manipulating the legal system around it. It is harder to assess Ijaz's claims to have been briefed by other intelligence agencies. The US military's responses to Ijaz's claims have been very dismissive after grudgingly admitting receiving the memo from him but assigning it (and Ijaz) little credibility.

Ijaz claims, however, to also have US sources while admitting that some information came from Pakistan's military:

When asked how he collected the documents containing conversation between US pilots and Pakistani air traffic control following bin Laden's killing, Ijaz replied his source were both in the US and the Pakistan Army and they were unimpeachable.

Ijaz has refused to travel back to Pakistan for his testimony, claiming that he fears for his life. He is also renewing his claims of death threats in his current testimony. From the Express Tribune article:

"Did Haqqani and his friends threaten you Mansur?" the counsel asked, to which Ijaz said that Haqqani had once directly intimidated him, while his 'friends' have done so too.

When asked to name the friend, Ijaz pointed towards Interior Minister Rehman Malik's threats of arrests if Ijaz were

to come to Pakistan.

He said he had received death threats in Urdu, Arabic and English from anonymous sources by SMS, e-mail and phone calls.

These were translated into English by contacts in the US Federal Bureau of Investigations, Ijaz said.

Pressed to name other threat sources, Ijaz revealed that former US officials including Bruce Ridel, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official, scholar Christina Fair had used slanderous language against him.

"It is my belief that these statements were purported by Husain Haqqani" Ijaz alleged.

It is interesting that Ijaz seems to put statements calling his credibility into question on the same level as what he claims are death threats. He also only identifies Haqqani and Malik as threat sources from within Pakistan, suggesting indirectly that he harbors no fear of the military or intelligence communities in Pakistan being a threat to him.