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Gunman in Mumbai Siege a Pakistani, Official Says

By RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr. and SALMAN MASOOD Published: January 7, 2009

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's national security adviser, Mahmud Ali Durrani, confirmed Wednesday that the lone surviving gunman from the Mumbai terrorist attacks, Muhammad Ajmal Kasab, is a Pakistani citizen.

The bizarre turn of events — which came after repeated claims by Pakistani officials that they could find no proof of Mr. Kasab's nationality — showed how deeply the aftermath of the Mumbai siege has riven the country's fragile government as it struggles to come to grips with what American officials have said is clear evidence that Pakistani nationals plotted the attack.

Even as officials in Islamabad asserted that the country's premier spy agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, was trying to shed longstanding sympathies and ties to Islamist militants, evidence continued to grow that it was a militant group established by the agency two decades ago that carried out the Mumbai attacks.

Mr. Durrani's confirmation of Mr. Kasab's nationality, reported Wednesday by Pakistani and Indian news media, followed the disclosure by Pakistani officials last week that the authorities had obtained confessions from other militants involved in the November attacks, which left more than 160 people dead.

Perhaps the most enduring image from the three-day siege is a picture of Mr. Kasab, clad in a dark blue shirt and gray pants, toting an assault rifle as he strides through the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Mumbai's busiest train station.

When the gunfire ended Nov. 29, Mr. Kasab was the only member of the 10-man team of attackers captured alive. Indian officials say he confessed that the attacks were organized by Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistani militant group established and trained in the 1980s with substantial help from the ISI to fight a proxy war against Indian forces in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Pakistani officials acknowledge that the ISI played a large role in creating Lashkar-e-Taiba. But they emphatically deny that the intelligence agency or any other "state actor" was involved in the Mumbai attacks.

Later in the day, the Pakistani government hastily acknowledged that Mr. Kasab was a citizen and announced that Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani had fired Mr. Durrani for failing to take Mr. Gilani "and other stakeholders into confidence" and for a "lack of coordination on matters of national security."

In an interview, Mr. Durrani said that he was one of a handful of senior government officials authorized to publicly discuss the matter, and that other government officials were also preparing to acknowledge Mr. Kasab's nationality.

"Supposedly, he's unhappy that I made the statement without consulting him," Mr.

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Durrani said of Mr. Gilani, noting that two government spokesmen confirmed Mr. Kasab's citizenship.

Cyril Almeida, an editor at Dawn, an influential English-language newspaper, said that Mr. Durrani was considered close to the Pakistani Army and the United States, and that by firing him the prime minister was trying to demonstrate that his government was in charge.

The firing marked "another sign of an ongoing internal power struggle between the security establishment and the civilian government," Mr. Almeida said.

But he added that "such bold moves by the government have backfired before, causing immense damage to the government's reputation. It remains to be seen if the ouster of Durrani is accepted placidly by his backers in Pakistan."

A version of this article appeared in print on January 8, 2009, on page A8 of the New York edition.

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