

# DISCUSSION PAPERS

Discussion Paper 18

**THE SUN IN THE SKY:  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAKISTAN'S ISI  
AND AFGHAN INSURGENTS**

*(Summary in Dari appended)*

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## **The Sun in the Sky: The relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan insurgents**

Matt Waldman<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Many accounts of the Afghan conflict misapprehend the nature of the relationship between Pakistan's security services and the insurgency. The relationship, in fact, goes far beyond contact and coexistence, with some assistance provided by elements within, or linked to, Pakistan's intelligence service (ISI) or military.*

*Although the Taliban has a strong endogenous impetus, according to Taliban commanders the ISI orchestrates, sustains and strongly influences the movement. They say it gives sanctuary to both Taliban and Haqqani groups, and provides huge support in terms of training, funding, munitions, and supplies. In their words, this is 'as clear as the sun in the sky'.*

*Directly or indirectly the ISI appears to exert significant influence on the strategic decision-making and field operations of the Taliban; and has even greater sway over Haqqani insurgents. According to both Taliban and Haqqani commanders, it controls the most violent insurgent units, some of which appear to be based in Pakistan.*

*Insurgent commanders confirmed that the ISI are even represented, as participants or observers, on the Taliban supreme leadership council, known as the Quetta Shura, and the Haqqani command council. Indeed, the agency appears to have circumscribed the Taliban's strategic autonomy, precluding steps towards talks with the Afghan government through recent arrests.*

*President Zardari himself has apparently assured captive, senior Taliban leaders that they are 'our people' and have his backing. He has also apparently authorised their release from prison. The ISI even arrested and then released two Taliban leaders, Qayyum Zakir, the movement's new military commander, and Mullah Abdul Raouf Khadem, reportedly now head of the Quetta Shura, who are among the three or four highest ranking in the movement below Mullah Omar.*

*Pakistan's apparent involvement in a double-game of this scale could have major geo-political implications and could even provoke US counter-measures. However, the powerful role of the ISI, and parts of the Pakistani military, suggests that progress against the Afghan insurgency, or towards political engagement, requires their support. The only sure way to secure such cooperation is to address the fundamental causes of Pakistan's insecurity, especially its latent and enduring conflict with India.*

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## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

This paper seeks to appraise the relationship between Afghan insurgents and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI).<sup>3</sup> It is not intended to be a precise analysis of this relationship, which is inevitably dynamic and opaque, or to specify how it is manifested in any particular location. Rather, it explores its principal dimensions as expressed by insurgent commanders and those with first-hand knowledge or experience of the Afghan insurgency.

The author conducted semi-structured interviews in or near Kabul and Kandahar, from February-May 2010, with nine insurgent field commanders: three operating in the south of the country (Kandahar province), three based in the centre of the country (Wardak province), and three operating in the south-east (two in Khost and one in Ghazni); and one high level Taliban intermediary.<sup>4</sup> All interviewees were contacted and interviewed separately. Though some of the commanders operate in the same province, none is based in the same district as another, and none disclosed to comrades that they were being interviewed. Given the comparative lack of research involving active insurgents, their comments are reproduced at length. For background research and corroboration purposes an Afghan research assistant conducted a further six insurgent interviews: three in Kandahar with commanders who operate in that province; and three in Quetta: with a senior Taliban official and commanders who operate in each of Kandahar and Helmand.

The author also conducted interviews with ten former senior Taliban officials (six ministers, two ambassadors, a high-ranking civil servant and a military commander);<sup>5</sup> twenty-two Afghan elders, tribal leaders, politicians and analysts; and thirteen foreign diplomats, experts and security officials.<sup>6</sup>

As various analysts have shown, the Afghan insurgency is segmented, principally consisting of seven armed groups of different provenance (Ruttig 2009a; Giustozzi 2009). However, this research focuses on two of the most significant elements of the insurgency. First, the core Taliban movement led by Mullah Mohammad Omar,<sup>7</sup> which is relatively hierarchical and has national reach but is strongest in southern Afghanistan; and, to a lesser extent, the Haqqani network, led by Jalaluddin Haqqani, which is based in Waziristan, but operates largely in south-east Afghanistan.

After the loss of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971, Pakistan took steps to counter a perceived threat from India and growing Pashtun nationalism. Part of the response was an increasing Islamicization of society, reflected in the proliferation of *madrassas*, and greater support for militant, Islamist groups that could be used as proxies in Kashmir and Afghanistan (Cohen 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank LPB for constant support and assistance.

<sup>3</sup> Pakistan has in fact two civilian intelligence agencies and two military intelligence services, but the ISI has responsibility for foreign intelligence and is increasingly influential.

<sup>4</sup> Most of the commanders interviewed lead between 40 and 120 men (which varies seasonally); however, one of the Haqqani commanders interviewed leads around 1,000 men. Due to safety concerns each commander insisted on anonymity.

<sup>5</sup> Among others, these include: Mawlawi Arsala Rahmani; Mawlawi Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil; Mullah Abdul Salam Zaef; Wahid Muzhda; Mawlawi Abdul Hakim Mujahid; Mawlawi Abdul Hakim Monib; and Haji Mohammad Mousa Khan Hotek.

<sup>6</sup> For safety reasons most interviewees requested anonymity.

<sup>7</sup> The '*amir ul-mu'menin*', or leader of the faithful.

In the 1980s the ISI was instrumental in supporting seven Sunni Muslim mujahedeen groups in their jihad against the Soviets, and was the principal conduit of covert US and Saudi funding. It subsequently played a pivotal role in the emergence of the Taliban (Coll 2005:292) and Pakistan provided significant political, financial, military and logistical support to the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan (1996-2001)(Rashid 2001). This support was comprised not only of arms, ammunition, equipment, fuel and other supplies, but also military advisers and trainers, as well as economic support. Even in 2001, in breach of UN sanctions, 'up to thirty ISI trucks a day were still crossing into Afghanistan' (Rashid 2008:60). This research asked insurgents and informed individuals: To what extent has this relationship endured?

Separately, there are a wide range of Islamist militant groups, principally based in north-west Pakistan, a large number of which coalesced under the banner of Tehrik-e-Taleban-e-Pakistan, also known as the Pakistani Taliban (Franco 2009:269). Although the ISI previously supported many of these groups, since 2007 the militants have increasingly turned their fire on Pakistani state.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the Pakistani military has undertaken extensive operations against their strongholds in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.<sup>9</sup> While there are undoubtedly links between the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban, they appear to be sufficiently distinct for the Pakistani military and ISI to treat them very differently.

Most studies posit a relationship of co-existence between the ISI and the Afghan Taliban, and suggest that individuals or elements within, or connected to, the ISI and Pakistani military support or advise the insurgents. As a US Congressional Research Service (CRS) report summarises:

Many analysts believe that Pakistan's intelligence services know the whereabouts of ... Afghan Taliban leadership elements and likely even maintain active contacts with them at some level as part of a hedge strategy in the region. Some reports indicate that elements of Pakistan's major intelligence agency and military forces aid the Taliban. (Kronstadt 2009:12)

However, a 2010 CRS report suggests that: 'Pakistan appears to have shifted somewhat to actively assisting the U.S.-led effort in Afghanistan.'

The author Ahmed Rashid argued recently (The Washington Post, 27 April 2010) that: 'Taliban leaders and their families live in Pakistan and are in close touch with the military and its ISI. Some Taliban allies, such as the network led by Jalaluddin Haqqani, are even closer to the ISI. Although the military is finally hunting down the Pakistani Taliban in the Northwest tribal areas, the Afghan Taliban and Pakistani extremists in Punjab province are being left alone.'

This paper argues that this is a significant underestimation of the current role of the ISI in the Afghan insurgency. Given that the ISI and its operations are by their nature secret, the findings described below are based on interviews and cannot be conclusively verified.

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<sup>8</sup> One of the turning points was the Pakistani military's assault on the Red Mosque, Islamabad, in July 2007 (see Rashid 2008:381-385)

<sup>9</sup> Such as the offensives in South Waziristan, Swat and Bajaur, 2007-2009.

However, according to Taliban commanders the powerful role of the ISI is ‘as clear as the sun in the sky’.

The paper considers the ISI involvement in terms of Taliban strategy; operations; sanctuary, funding, supplies and munitions; and training and recruitment. Separately, it considers ISI involvement in the Haqqani network.

Given the intrinsic opacity of covert agencies and their operations, it is not possible to say with certainty whether interviewees are correct in attributing certain individuals or activities to the ISI specifically. Therefore, references to the ISI should be taken to mean the ISI and/or, in some cases, elements of the Pakistani military or security agencies with whom they operate.

## **Strategy**

Through providing sanctuary and support to the Afghan Taliban, and arresting those who step out of line, the ISI appears to be able to exert significant influence on Taliban strategy. As a Kandahari political figure summarised: ‘The ISI have some control [over the Taliban]. They have influence in strategic decision-making. Sure, they have dominated the Taliban movement, but they [the Taliban] have some independence.’<sup>10</sup> Likewise, a political analyst in Kandahar said: ‘The Taliban is obliged to accept Pakistan’s demands – it needs their support, but is not their puppet.’<sup>11</sup>

The Taliban-ISI relationship is founded on mutual benefit. The Taliban need external sanctuary, as well as military and logistical support to sustain their insurgency; the ISI believes that it needs a significant allied force in Afghanistan to maintain regional strength and ‘strategic depth’ in their rivalry with India.<sup>12</sup> As a former Taliban minister put it: ‘The ISI are helping the Taliban a lot, but they only give for their own gain. There is a reciprocal issue: Kashmir. The root of the problem in Afghanistan is the Pakistan-India competition.’<sup>13</sup>

Pakistan’s fundamental strategic calculus does not appear to have altered significantly since the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> According to Steve Coll (The New Yorker, 24 May 2010) earlier this year Pakistan submitted a briefing to the US on its national interests in the Afghan conflict, which reportedly, ‘reflects one overriding concern: India.’ Indeed, in February 2010, the US Director of National Intelligence confirmed: ‘Islamabad’s conviction that militant groups are an important part of its strategic arsenal to counter India’s military and economic advantages’.<sup>15</sup> As Steve Coll explains (The New Yorker, 1 March 2010): ‘Pakistan’s generals have retained a bedrock belief that, however unruly and distasteful Islamist militias such as the Taliban may be, they could yet be useful proxies to ward off a perceived existential threat from India. In the Army’s view, at least, that threat has not receded.’

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<sup>10</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Most interviewees explained ISI conduct in terms of Pakistan’s rivalry with India, while some also mentioned the dispute over the Durand line. Most believed that Pakistan opposed ‘reconciliation’ in Afghanistan and that it benefitted from having a weak Afghanistan in which its Taliban proxies hold considerable influence.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>14</sup> As Bruce Reidel observes: ‘Central to Pakistan’s policy calculations throughout [recent history] have been security concerns about India.’ (Reidel 2008:40)

<sup>15</sup> Dennis C. Blair, ‘Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community’, Testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2 February 2010.

Many in the Pakistan establishment believe that India has significant, and increasing, economic and political influence in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> India enjoys close relations with the Karzai administration, has four regional consulates, and is providing substantial reconstruction assistance,<sup>17</sup> including rebuilding the Afghan parliament, and construction projects on the Pakistan border (Tellis and Mukharji 2010; Sullivan 2010). Senior Pakistani officials also believe the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, scheduled to commence from July 2011, could open up a power struggle from which India could benefit (Tellis 2010) – a major incentive for Pakistan to maintain, or even strengthen, its Afghan allies (Wilkins 2010).

Pakistan's support to the Afghan insurgency is reinforced by its aspiration for influence among the Pashtuns that are divided by the disputed 'Durand Line', which separates Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> It thus seeks to subdue the 'Pashtunistan' cause and quiescent Afghan claims to territory in north-west Pakistan, including in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA.

But how is Pakistan's strategic influence manifested in practice? As noted above, analysts dispute whether ISI support to the insurgency is officially sanctioned, and whether it is carried out by serving or former officers. Some analysts speak of the 'collaboration of elements within the ISI' with the Taliban (Johnson and Mason 2008). Antonio Giustozzi argues there is evidence of the involvement in the insurgency of 'advisors with long-standing experience of Afghanistan, such as current or former ISI operatives' (Giustozzi 2007).

Seth Jones has argued: 'There is some indication that individuals within the Pakistan government—for example, within the Frontier Corps and the ISI—were involved in assisting insurgent groups' (Jones 2008). He has also reported that by mid 2008, 'the United States collected fairly solid evidence of senior-level complicity [in ISI support to the insurgents]' (Jones 2010)

In an organisation up to ten thousand strong (Bajoria 2009), with cross-service membership (Cohen 2004:100), and extensive partitioning of operational responsibilities, there is inevitably the possibility of recalcitrant elements. However, interviews strongly suggest that support to the Afghan insurgency is official ISI policy. It appears to be carried out by both serving and former officers, who have considerable operational autonomy.

### **ISI Membership of the Quetta Shura**

The supreme council of the Afghan Taliban is properly known as the '*Rabari*' or '*Markazi Shura*' (leadership or central council). However, most of the insurgents interviewed for this research referred to it as the 'Quetta Shura'. (They distinguished it from another Quetta Shura, which is the military command council for Taliban operations in southern

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<sup>16</sup> See for example: Ahmed Rashid, 'Pakistan and the Afghanistan End Game – Part I', *YaleGlobal*, 12 March 2010.

<sup>17</sup> There are some reports that India has provided \$1.2bn in assistance since 2001. According to the Afghan Government, India committed to spend this amount between 2002-2009 but disbursed \$662m: Afghanistan Ministry of Finance, 'Donor Financial Review', November 2009, p 38.

<sup>18</sup> The 'Durand line', formalized in 1893, created a border between what was then British India with Afghanistan. It effectively divided the Pashtun nation into two parts, and is thus rejected by many Pashtuns on both sides of the border. Notably, there are some 25 million Pashtuns living in Pakistan, perhaps double the number in Afghanistan (although there are no exact Afghan population statistics). Pakistan's support for the Afghan insurgency is perhaps also reinforced by fears that India is seeking to bolster insurgents in Balochistan, a south-western province of Pakistan.

Afghanistan.) Therefore, unless otherwise stated, references to the Quetta Shura in this paper are intended to mean the leadership or central council.

It is not clear to what extent the membership and activities of the Quetta Shura are regimented or formalised. However, it is widely believed to comprise around a dozen or so members who meet several times a year; while certain members and sub-committees may meet more frequently.<sup>19</sup> Interviews strongly suggest that the ISI has representatives on the Shura, either as participants or observers, and the agency is thus involved at the highest level of the movement. Significantly, even a limited ISI presence on the Shura would allow the agency to monitor the Shura's decisions and take steps against members who are not perceived to be acting in Pakistan's interests.

One individual who was a deputy minister under the former Taliban regime and who frequently liaises with the Taliban, said that three to seven ISI officials attend the Quetta Shura as observers. He believes that the ISI has responsibility for organising the meetings and that it exerts pressure on individual participants beforehand, especially if major decisions are to be taken.<sup>20</sup> As one commander put it: 'We heard that the ISI were on the Quetta Shura, but we don't follow their orders. They are observers, not making decisions.'<sup>21</sup> An Afghan conflict analyst, with years of experience in southern Afghanistan and contacts with the Taliban, concurred, pointing out that the ISI, 'use people who have the same appearance, language, behaviour, and habits as Afghans. They wouldn't be strange to the Talibs, who seem to them to be Muslims, also fighting infidels.'<sup>22</sup> In fact, both he and other interviewees suggested that the ISI observers could be Afghans, possibly even Taliban leaders who are working closely with, or for, the ISI.

Almost all the Taliban commanders interviewed believe the ISI are represented on the Quetta Shura. One senior southern commander said: 'Every group commander knows the reality – which is obvious to all of us – that the ISI is behind the Taliban, they formed and are supporting the Taliban.' He also explained why it was not widely known: 'Every commander knows about the involvement of the ISI in the leadership but we do not discuss it because we do not trust each other, and they are much stronger than us. They are afraid that if they say anything against the Taliban or ISI it would be reported to the higher ranks – and they may be removed or assassinated ... Everyone sees the sun in the sky but cannot say it is the sun.'<sup>23</sup>

An ISI presence on the Shura is consistent with the agency's heavy involvement in the movement's inception and augmentation, as noted above. Indeed, a detailed assessment of the history and composition of the Quetta Shura indicates that the ISI, 'maintains a hand in controlling its operations' (Tribal Analysis Center 2009:6).

In addition, the ISI may be able to exert influence by exploiting tribal fractures within the Shura. It has limited representation of Zirk Durrani tribes, members of which tend to occupy

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<sup>19</sup> There are believed to be several sub-committees of the Quetta Shura dealing with issues such as finances, political affairs, and the media. Interviews, March and April 2010; see also Ruttig 2009a: 16.

<sup>20</sup> 'The ISI's job is the security of the meeting [of the Rabari Shura], selection of a location, security of the members and transportation. ... When they want to hold a shura they speak to all individuals, and give separate advice and instructions beforehand' - interview, March 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>23</sup> The same commander also said: 'We can't give examples of who is ISI [on the Shura] but for sure we can say that there are ISI people in the Quetta Shura. If they are not with them, how can they have a shura in Pakistan? The leadership of the Quetta Shura is in the hands of the ISI' - interview, May 2010.

senior positions in the Afghan government (the Karzai family, for instance, is from the Popalzai Zirk Durrani tribe). Instead, it comprises mainly Ghilzai Pashtuns (the Zirk Durrani's historic rivals) and, increasingly, members of the Panjpai branch of the Durrani tribe (that are smaller, more dispersed and tend to have less government power than Zirk Durrani tribes).

Reportedly, two members of the Quetta Shura (Mohammad Hassan Rahmani and Abdul Razaq) are from the Achakzai tribe, a Zirk Durrani sub-tribe, which has been internally divided, manipulated by other groups or tribes, and, unlike other Zirk Durrani sub-tribes, excluded from political power.<sup>24</sup> It is also principally located in Pakistan. Thus, as the Tribal Analysis Center argue: 'It is entirely possible that ISI has some positive influence, if not actual control, over one or both of the Achakzai members of the Quetta Shura' (Tribal Analysis Center 2009).

The ISI may also be able to exert influence through exploiting other fissures, and significant levels of mistrust, in the Taliban leadership. Indeed, interviews suggest that there is currently a rivalry or latent power-struggle between, on the one hand, the newly-empowered Qayyum Zakir, military commander of the movement, his deputy, Mullah Akhtar Mohammed Mansour, and his close associate, now believed to be head of the Quetta Shura, Mullah Abdul Raouf Khadem, and, on the other hand, the old guard figures of Amir Khan Muttaqi, Mullah Mohammad Hassan and Mullah Gul Agha.<sup>25</sup> Although the extent of this dissension is not clear, it may well have generated opportunities for manipulation.

### **ISI pressure and Taliban leadership arrests**

The ISI has apparently established parameters of Taliban conduct and strategy, reinforced by the threat of arrest. Independent contacts between the Taliban's former military commander, Mullah Baradar,<sup>26</sup> and the Afghan government, possibly with a view to negotiations, apparently breached these boundaries, and so he and at least seven other Taliban leaders were arrested by the ISI in early February 2010. It appears that the arrests were intended to send a message to both the Taliban and the United States that negotiations could only take place if the ISI had a major role in, if not control over, the negotiating process.<sup>27</sup>

This view was echoed by Taliban commanders, most of whom doubted Pakistan's support for negotiations. As a commander from a central province said: 'The ISI arrests [of Taliban leaders] were done for their own interests; they don't want peace in Afghanistan, and they don't want them to talk to the Afghan government. If there is peace, it is not to Pakistan's benefit.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 'The divided status of the Achakzai's subtribes, combined with the potential estrangement from the Barakzai and the rest of the Zirk Durrani, the Achakzai within the Taliban senior leadership may be easily manipulated by ISI.' (Tribal Analysis Center 2009:11). See also: Tribal Analysis Center, 'The Achakzai Tribe,' October 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Interviews, May 2010.

<sup>26</sup> 'Mullah Baradar' is the nom-de-guerre of Abdul Ghani.

<sup>27</sup> As Carlotta Gall and Souad Mekhennet write, 'Pakistan's arrest of the top Taliban military commander may be a tactical victory for the United States, but it is also potentially a strategic coup for Pakistan, officials and analysts here and in Afghanistan said. Pakistan has removed a key Taliban commander, enhanced cooperation with the United States and ensured a place for itself when parties explore a negotiated end to the Afghan war.' ('Taliban Arrest May Be Crucial for Pakistanis', *The New York Times*, February 16, 2010). See also Tellis 2010a.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, March 2010.



According to the conflict analyst: ‘There is not an equal relationship between the ISI and Taliban – the ISI are far more powerful. The Taliban don’t have any choice except to live in Pakistan; where else can they go?’<sup>29</sup> One former Taliban deputy minister said he thought Taliban leaders in Pakistan were ‘living under pressure ... they fear the Pakistan government, that their families will be taken to prison.’<sup>30</sup> This is confirmed by a joint US, NATO and Afghan intelligence assessment from June 2006, which concludes: ‘A large number of those fighting are doing so under duress as a result of pressure from the ISI.’<sup>31</sup>

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has a deliberate decapitation strategy that uses special forces to target Taliban commanders, which has been remarkably effective (as confirmed by ISAF officials and a majority of commanders interviewed).<sup>32</sup> Thus, to some extent, Taliban leaders are caught between pressure and the threat of imprisonment from the ISI, and Afghan and international forces north of the border. Interviews suggest that Talibs deeply resent the ISI pressure.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, one interviewee who has frequent contact with Taliban leaders and commanders said the only people they hate more than the Americans are the ISI.<sup>34</sup>

### **Government collusion**

Analysts are divided on the extent to which ISI policy towards Afghan insurgents is determined independently of civilian officials, especially after Pakistan’s newly elected government attempted, and failed, to bring the ISI under the control of the Interior Ministry in July 2008. Seth Jones has written: ‘there were some reports that senior officials of the ISI and the Pakistan government were aware of the ISI’s role [in supporting the Taliban] and were actively encouraging it.’ (Jones 2010:267). An incident in late March or early April suggests that the policy is approved at the highest level of Pakistan’s civilian government.

According to a Talib who has regular contact with members of the Quetta Shura, in late March or early April this year President Zadari and a senior ISI official visited some 50 high-ranking Talibs who were held in a prison in a secret location in Pakistan. Some 30-35 had been arrested in recent months, and 10-15 were longer-term prisoners. Reportedly, he told them they were arrested because he was under a lot of pressure from the Americans and that, ‘you are our people, we are friends, and after your release we will of course support you to do your operations.’ (Disturbingly, Zadari’s words echo what the ISI’s commanding general, Mahmud Ahmad, said to the Taliban’s Pakistan Ambassador, Abdul Salam Zaeef, in late in 2001, “We want to assure you that you will not be alone in this jihad against America. We will be with you”, as quoted by Steve Coll in his article (The New Yorker, 1 March 2010).

President Zadari told the prisoners he would release them in two categories: first, those who are not well known to the media, who would be released shortly, and, second, those who are

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<sup>29</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, February 2010.

<sup>31</sup> From: ‘Insurgency and Terrorism in Afghanistan: Who is Fighting and Why?’, Special Security Initiative of the Policy Action Group, June 2006; quoted in Rashid 2008:368

<sup>32</sup> Interviews with military officials, March 2010. See, for example, Eric Schmitt, ‘U.S. plans to expand secret Afghan operations; Elite commando units are said to be weakening Taliban leadership ranks’, *The International Herald Tribune*, 28 December 2009.

<sup>33</sup> As a former Taliban minister put it, ‘the new Taliban don’t want to be controlled by the ISI. Baradar did not want to be controlled by Pakistan’ – interview, March 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, March 2010.

better known, who would be released later in prisoner exchanges. He strongly urged them not to report the meeting to the media. Consistent with Zadari's promise, just three days after the visit, around a dozen Taliban figures were released (including an individual who is the indirect source for this account).<sup>35</sup>

This report is consistent with Pakistan's political history, in which civilian leaders have actively backed jihadi groups that operate in Afghanistan and Kashmir. As Christine Fair concludes: 'The army does not operate alone... Previous civilian governments tolerated and even supported some militant enterprises.' (Fair 2009:161-163)

Indeed, the report gives credence to the claim of two American analysts, Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, that 'Pakistan is in fact following its own perceived strategic interests, which do not coincide with those of the United States.' They even argue that the arrests constitute, 'not cooperation against the Taliban by an allied state; it is collusion with the Taliban by an enemy state [Pakistan]' (Johnson and Mason 2008).

### **Arrest and release of Zakir and Raouf**

As noted above, in early February 2010 the ISI arrested seven or more Taliban leaders, including Qayyum Zakir<sup>36</sup> and Mullah Abdul Raouf Khadem, two of the most powerful individuals in the movement.<sup>37</sup> Yet, only days after their detention they were released.<sup>38</sup> To say the least, this is a strong indication of significant ISI influence over the movement and it is highly likely that the release was on ISI terms or at least on the basis of a mutual understanding.<sup>39</sup>

The Pakistan government is said to have a long-term bias against the Durrani tribes due to their record of support for the idea of 'Pashtunistan' and claims to Pakistan territory. The appointments of Zakir and Raouf, who are reportedly Alizai, a sub-tribe of the Panjpai Durrani tribe, confirm the trend of increasing Panjpai Durrani representation on the Shura. As noted above, this could indicate diminishing ISI influence over the Taliban leadership. However, it is more likely to be an attempt by the ISI to increase its control over the movement and empower leaders more to their suiting: Mullah Baradar, who was arrested, is a Popalzai Zirk Durrani, which may have helped to facilitate links to President Karzai and his influential brothers. Increasing Panjpai Durrani representation on the Shura helps to strengthen the authority of the movement, given Afghanistan's long tradition of Durrani rulers (Tribal Analysis Center 2009:6,7,10), and gives Pakistan more leverage in any possible negotiations.

### **Views of commanders and informed individuals**

All eight Talibs interviewed (seven field commanders and one senior intermediary) believe that the ISI has heavy influence on their leadership, four of whom believe that this amounts to

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<sup>35</sup> See: Greg Miller, 'U.S. officials say Pakistani spy agency released Afghan Taliban insurgents', *The Washington Post*, 10 April 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Also known as Abdullah Ghulam Rasoul.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, April 2010. Anand Gopal, 'Half of Afghanistan Taliban leadership arrested in Pakistan', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 February 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, April 2010 and Anand Gopal, 'Qayyum Zakir: the Afghanistan Taliban's rising mastermind', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 30 April 2010.

<sup>39</sup> It is possible that there was a pre-existing understanding between the ISI and these individuals, who may even have been arrested by mistake.

control. One of the southern commanders claimed: 'If any one rejects that the ISI backs or controls the Taliban, he has a mental problem ... all our plans and strategy are made in Pakistan and step by step it is brought to us, for military operations or other activities. Pakistan [the ISI] does not have only one representative on the Quetta Shura, they have representatives everywhere. As for Mullah Baradar's arrest, do you think they didn't know where he and others were before that? ... the ISI have more than two, three or four [representatives] on the [Quetta] Shura. ... Some [other members of the Quetta Shura] know they work for the ISI, but it's not discussed. ... The reality is that the ISI controls the leadership. Mullar Omar has strong support of Pakistan; he has to listen to them and do what they say.'<sup>40</sup>

This view is echoed by leading community, tribal, civil society and political figures in Kandahar. Fourteen interviewees live in Kandahar, all of whom have first-hand knowledge of, or connections to, the insurgency; 10 of them believe that the ISI is represented on the Quetta Shura and has either control of the movement, or something that approximates to control. (The other four believe that the ISI has control or significant influence over the movement, but are not sure if it has representation on the Shura.)

A political figure said: 'Everything is controlled by the ISI. Without the agreement of the ISI, then the insurgency would be impossible... The big problem is that Pakistan created the fundamentalists; the government, military and ISI supported them; yet while the first two have stopped supporting them, the ISI continues to ... of course ISI are on the Quetta Shura.'<sup>41</sup> (Obviously, this claim is not consistent with President Zadari's approbation of the Taliban, but that is not surprising given its apparent secrecy.)

Although many informed Afghans interviewed argue that the ISI is *controlling* the Taliban leadership, this is probably an exaggeration, given the powerful internal force and dynamics of the movement. The Taliban leadership also has a record of resisting Pakistani pressure (for instance, the refusal of the Taliban regime to recognise the Durand Line or to hand over Osama bin Laden to the US). Nevertheless, indications of significant ISI involvement at a strategic level are compelling, and are consistent with reports of their influence in the field.

## Operations

Insurgents believe the ISI shapes their operations in a powerful, surreptitious and coercive way. They even believe that the ISI is represented on their operational command councils. One, from a central province, said: 'We heard the ISI are on the Quetta,<sup>42</sup> Miramshah and Peshawar shuras, [the operational command councils for the south, south-east and eastern Afghanistan] and we're not happy about this.'<sup>43</sup> Certainly, insurgent skills and capabilities at the operational and tactical level suggest the involvement of trained military personnel (Giustozzi 2007:25). As a former senior security official said: 'They give them the plans, the strategy and new techniques. The chain goes back to the ISI.'<sup>44</sup> This is also consistent with

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<sup>40</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Interview, March 2010. A religious leader concurred: 'Just as Karzai is a puppet of America; the Quetta Shura is also a puppet of Pakistan and other nations' – interview, March 2010.

<sup>42</sup> This reference to the Quetta Shura is probably to the council responsible for Taliban operations in southern Afghanistan, and not the leadership shura.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Interview, May 2010.

reports that the ISI has provided tactical, operational and strategic intelligence to the Taliban (Jones 2010:266).

It should be borne in mind that insurgents may seek to shift the blame for some of their most egregious activities, such as the execution of elders or attacks on schools; they may misapprehend and overstate ISI power; or they may in fact be in a state of denial.

However, it is hard to discount the consistency, cogency and force of commanders' views. These comments of one southern commander echo those of many others: 'There are a lot of ISI Taliban and they are very strong. It is very hard to recognise them ... Both foreign [meaning non-Pashtun] and Afghan Talibs are working for the ISI.'<sup>45</sup> He described how if an Afghan Talib is working for the ISI, and 'if he is above us [in rank], then there is nothing we can do against him. The ISI make plots for killing commanders who do not obey their orders ... They have their groups and commanders, to whom they pay a lot, very secretly. They reach their interests through these commanders.'<sup>46</sup>

Likewise, the Afghan conflict analyst described how: 'I have spoken to foot-soldiers and low-level commanders, who all say, "we have no independence, if we do not obey [the ISI] we are fired, replaced or transferred." ISI control doesn't extend to all levels, but there is a hierarchy that is disciplined.'<sup>47</sup> Arguably, such influence is facilitated by the movement's fragmentation. As one commander put it: 'I can't say the Taliban are all united, there are different groups, and different ideas ... different leaders, which makes it very complex.'<sup>48</sup>

Southern Taliban commanders all complained of heavy ISI involvement, which they say is often responsible for attacks on civilians - accusations which have also been reported by Antonio Giustozzi (Giustozzi 2007:27). A south-eastern Taliban commander said: 'They [the ISI] have specific groups under their control, for burning schools and such like. The ISI [also] has people working for it within the Taliban movement - it is clearer than the sun in the sky.'<sup>49</sup>

One southern commander described their predicament as follows: 'Another group of Taliban is directly supported by the ISI. They will never stop fighting in the country; they want to destroy the government and bring chaos. Behind all the attacks on ... NGOs, schools, teachers, doctors, this is Pakistan. We cannot deny that it is Taliban; but there are Pakistan-controlled groups among us. They want destabilisation. They are the enemies of our nation and our country. The people in charge of these factions are members of the Pakistani intelligence. The fighters are Afghans, but they are not true Afghans. We have spoken to them, and they feel that only the Taliban are Muslims, but those who are just normal, working Afghans - who die in the suicide attacks - they think they are all infidels. The ISI Taliban are stronger than us, they have more money, and are supporting us. We have few resources, so we have to follow them. We have no backers in order to resist them. I was never given an order

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<sup>45</sup> Interview, March 2010. The commander also said 'maybe my commander could be ISI Taliban... it takes a long time to recognise them.'

<sup>46</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Interview, March 2010. The analyst believes that the ISI expects commanders to conduct certain activities, such as the laying of IEDs [improvised explosive devices], and even requires them to file reports on their activities. This was not corroborated by other interviews. However, a southern commander said that their leaders had to file progress reports to the ISI - interview, March 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Interview, March 2010. The commander added that '[non-Pashtun] Pakistanis only come in summer and help plan operations, so that [in our province in summer] there are around 80-100 fighters.'

to blow up a bridge or burn a school, because they know who is suitable. Even if they tell me I would not tell my fighters to do it. The Pakistan Taliban is perhaps about 30 per cent of the Taliban in our district [in Kandahar], but they are much stronger than the others, who have to follow them.’<sup>50</sup>

Two other southern commanders echoed these claims: ‘The assassination of tribal leaders, of *‘mawlawis’* [religious leaders] has ruined the foundation of our country. The ISI stand behind all this, the burning of schools, keeping children out of education, the beheadings, all are related to the ISI Taliban. The Emirate and Islam never order these innocent people to be killed. When we are ordered to do these things, we cannot say no, but try to persuade our commanders that we shouldn’t do it. If I don’t do it, they will make me powerless or a foot-soldier. ... Many [Taliban commanders] have been assassinated by the ISI.’<sup>51</sup>

The other southern commander said: ‘The ISI gives orders to the Taliban to attack road contractors, schools or aid workers. They tell our commander and he orders us. They say it is the Taliban’s plan, we know it is their [the ISI’s] plan. We know the projects are for the welfare of communities, we know that burning schools is not against the [Afghan] government; they benefit the community, so we know they are ISI activities. If he doesn’t accept he will be dismissed or killed. .... On the Kabul-Kandahar highway all the bridges are destroyed, this is on the orders of the ISI. Our country is like our house, nobody from the family wants to destroy his own home. If you see such destruction, you should know your neighbour [Pakistan] has done this.’<sup>52</sup>

There have been reports of Pakistani commanders operating in Afghanistan, such as a Taliban commander killed by British special forces in late 2008 who was identified as a Pakistani military official (see Christina Lamb’s article for the UK Sunday Times, 12 October 2008). However, most commanders contend that Afghans are working for the ISI, and therefore the truth of the above assertions is difficult to verify.<sup>53</sup> It could be an attempt to evade responsibility for acts that are deeply unpopular with ordinary Afghans or an overestimation of ISI involvement. Nevertheless, it reinforces claims of ISI participation in Taliban operations and raises the possibility that the ISI may be supporting the most violent commanders or units within the movement. Arguably, it is consistent with the arrest of Taliban leaders that showed an interest in talks with the Afghan government, and with the ISI sanctioning, perhaps even orchestrating, the replacement of Mullah Baradar with the more hard-line Qayyum Zakir.

### **Sanctuary, funding, munitions and supplies**

The Taliban have a number of sources of external support, and there is little doubt that elements within Iran are increasing the arms, funding and training they provide to Afghan insurgents. This paper, however, focuses on support provided from within Pakistan.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview, May 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>53</sup> To substantiate his claim of Pakistan’s malign intent towards Afghanistan, one commander, from the centre of Afghanistan, recalled an exchange with his madrassa superiors. ‘In Karachi I had seen many American military vehicles and tanks being offloaded from ships and transported to Afghanistan. “When I asked why do we not attack them here?” I was told, “No – attack them in Afghanistan” – I was not given a reason. I told them it was easy to get rockets and ammunition in Pakistan, and hard in Afghanistan, but they said, “no, attack in Afghanistan” – interview, March 2010.

ISI involvement in the early stages of the insurgency has been widely acknowledged. From 2003-2004 the ISI were operating training camps for Taliban recruits, and facilitating the supply of funds, equipment and arms from Gulf countries.<sup>54</sup> The Pakistani army established medical facilities for Taliban fighters, and were even providing covering fire at border crossings. Communications intercepts showed that Taliban commanders were liaising with Pakistani military officers to ensure safe passage across the border (Rashid 2008:223).

The scale of ISI support was evident from the major Taliban offensives launched in southern Afghanistan in 2006. In June that year a joint US, NATO and Afghan intelligence assessment (noted above) concluded that the ISI not only provided a vital sanctuary for the Taliban, but also paid and pressured them to fight.<sup>55</sup> As Ahmed Rashid puts it, 'over time evidence slowly collected by U.S. and NATO intelligence officers on the ground showed a systematic and pervasive system of ISI collusion.' (Rashid 2008:222)

A number of analysts suggest that due to American and international pressure in 2006, 2007 or later, Pakistan has curtailed its support for the insurgents, but there is little evidence to support this.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, in February this year the US Director of National Intelligence admitted that the 'Pakistan safe-haven is an important Taliban strength', and made no mention of any change in their behaviour vis-à-vis the Afghan insurgents.<sup>57</sup>

A former Taliban minister said there continued to be close cooperation on cross-border movement between the Taliban and ISI or military, of which he had seen written evidence: 'I have seen a letter from the Taliban governor in Helmand to Pakistani officials, one year ago, which asks for them to let some vehicles go through the border, giving their type and number plate'.<sup>58</sup> ISAF officials readily accept that insurgents continue to cross the border in significant numbers.<sup>59</sup> And as one southern commander confirmed: 'When we need ammunition we go to Miramshah [in North Waziristan]; our base is there and we get ammunition and expenses. If I go across the border, even if the Pakistani authorities know I am a commander they open the way for me, all the way to the base.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> 'By 2004 they [the US and NATO] had confirmed reports of the ISI running training camps for Taliban recruits north of Quetta, funds and arms shipments arriving from the Gulf countries, and shopping sprees in Quetta and Karachi in which the Taliban bought hundreds of motorbikes, pickup trucks and satellite phones. American soldiers at firebases along the border in eastern Afghanistan and US drones in the skies watched as army trucks delivered fighters to the border at night to infiltrate Afghanistan and then recovered them on their return a few days later. Pakistani artillery gave covering fire to Taliban infiltrators crossing into Afghanistan, and medical facilities were set up close to the border by the army for wounded Taliban.' (Rashid 2008:222)

<sup>55</sup> 'ISI operatives reportedly pay a significant number of Taliban living/operating in both Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight... A large number of those fighting are doing so under duress as a result of pressure from the ISI. The insurgency cannot survive without its sanctuary in Pakistan, which provided freedom of movement, safe havens, logistics and training facilities, a base for recruitment, communications for command and control, and a secure environment for collaboration with foreign extremist groups. The sanctuary of Pakistan provides a seemingly endless supply of potential recruits for the insurgency.' From: 'Insurgency and Terrorism in Afghanistan: Who is Fighting and Why?', Special Security Initiative of the Policy Action Group, June 2006; quoted in Rashid 2008:368)

<sup>56</sup> Pakistan reportedly arrested Taliban leaders in 2007, but with little effect.

<sup>57</sup> Dennis C. Blair, 'Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community', Testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2 February 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Interviews, June 2009. See also Jones 2008:58. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border is 1,640 miles long with over 300 informal crossings.

<sup>60</sup> Interview, May 2010.

Taliban financing is diverse. As confirmed by senior American officials, and reported by Craig Whitlock in his article (The Washington Post, 27 Sept 2009), the movement receives significant funding from sources in Gulf countries. The insurgents also derive income from: '*ushr*' an Islamic tithe or '*zakat*', charitable donations, applied to businessmen or farmers, especially opium cultivators and traffickers; ransom from kidnappings; protection money from contractors or officials; or from selling goods from ambushed supply vehicles (Giustozzi 2009:8,51,187,202).

However, interviews suggest that Pakistan continues to give extensive support to the insurgency in terms of funding, munitions and supplies. As a south-eastern commander put it: 'We receive a lot of training, weapons, ammunition and expenses from the Pakistan government. ... Everyone knows Pakistan gives money, it goes centrally, then flow down.'<sup>61</sup> Another commander from a central province said: 'Of course, it's a huge project [the insurgency], it needs huge funding, IEDs [improvised explosive devices], ammunition, training, needs everything, all of this has been given by Pakistan. We do not have facilities to produce any of this. ... We get 10,000 Pakistani rupees (\$120) per month for each Talib. This money comes from Pakistan, first to the [shadow] provincial governor, then to the district commander, then to the group commander. It is from the Pakistan government – but maybe other countries too, are paying from behind the curtain.'<sup>62</sup> One southern commander reported that groups were paid bonuses for successful attacks against coalition forces, usually of \$2,000-3,000, which he believed were derived from ISI sources.<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, a commander from a central province said: 'The ISI help our commanders, they come occasionally, and meet secretly. They give money and advice. I don't like them – they are not honest people, they are fighting for their own purposes. Most Taliban think this. But we have to work with them – we don't have any other choice. If we get injured or sick we have to go to Pakistan for treatment, or for training.'<sup>64</sup>

These accounts were corroborated by former Taliban ministers,<sup>65</sup> a western security analyst,<sup>66</sup> and a senior UN official based in Kabul, who said the Taliban largely depend on funding from the ISI and groups in Gulf countries.<sup>67</sup>

The ISI also appears to be funding groups of Taliban fighters who are based in and operate from Pakistan. One southern commander said that when he and comrades were living in Pakistan they used to solicit donations for fighting in Afghanistan, but: 'The ISI and Pakistan government [also] paid. Charity was small money; it didn't even pay the rent. Groups going to Afghanistan [from Pakistan] have a lot of expenses. For sure the ISI were paying a lot of money: groups of 20-30 people got 2-3 million Pakistani rupees [\$24,000-\$36,000] each year.'<sup>68</sup> Some Afghan and western security officials believe that the ISI is also covering the living costs of the families of Taliban fighters who live in Pakistan.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Interview, April 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Interview, May 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Interview, February 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>69</sup> 'The ISI indirectly pay the families of Afghan Taliban. We have known this for a while'; interview, May 2010.

The sheer scale of the insurgency appears to have convinced Afghan officials that it is supported by Pakistan. An Afghan minister interviewed for this research argued: ‘The ISI control the Taliban – otherwise there couldn’t be this level of insurgency, with huge logistical and military needs. How can we ... take this out of Pakistani hands?’<sup>70</sup> Likewise, a former senior Afghan security official observed: ‘For fighters, when they move to fight it’s essential that they have logistical support. They need vehicles, fuel and food. They need ammunition. They need money and guns. ... They need a hospital to take their casualties to for treatment. So who is providing these things to the Taliban if it’s not Pakistan?’<sup>71</sup> This argument is reinforced by the fact that the Afghan insurgency may be over 35,000 strong, as reported by Jerome Starkey (The Times [London], 3 March 2010) and last year launched an average of 620 attacks a month.<sup>72</sup> Assuming costs associated with each Talib average \$150 per month,<sup>73</sup> manning costs alone would exceed \$60 million a year.<sup>74</sup>

### **Training and recruitment**

The interviews suggest that the ISI continues to sanction and support military training centres for insurgents and a large number of madrassas that actively encourage their students to fight in Afghanistan. All commanders reported that significant numbers of their fighters attend training camps in Pakistan that are run or backed by the ISI. One southern commander described how in his district, where there are some 600 fighters, around 70-80 fighters had gone to Pakistan for training this winter [2009-2010].<sup>75</sup> Emphasising the continuing importance of such training, a south-eastern commander said that, ‘of the 280 fighters in our district, some 80 per cent were trained in Pakistan.’<sup>76</sup>

Commanders described their own experiences in Pakistani madrassas and training camps, highlighted below, which suggest a large-scale, well-organised system. One southern commander attended a madrassa in Quetta for four years to 2008. There were 500-600 students, most of whom were Afghan, and some 60-70 graduated every year. He said: ‘Everyone was saying jihad [in Afghanistan] is good. All our teachers were saying this as well. Everyday jihad was discussed.’ Apparently, jihad in Afghanistan was raised and endorsed not only in political classes but also in both religious, and religious law classes. At certain times, groups of students from the madrassa would attend military training camps in Pakistan (to learn how to make and lay IEDs, for example) or spend a period fighting in Afghanistan, which could range from 10-20 days to several months.

The commander described one round of training that took place at a house in Wana in South Waziristan agency, FATA, in 2005. There were between 20 to 50 people (at different times), who were being instructed in how to make suicide vests and car bombs. ‘The trainers were ISI. One of the trainers had two jobs: he worked with us and in the Pakistan military. There are very good relations between the Pakistan military and Taliban, a good friendship; we’d often sit together and exchange ideas on how best to attack. ... The man was definitely ISI, he

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<sup>70</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Interview, May 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, ‘Fourth Quarter Data Report’, January 2010, p 10.

<sup>73</sup> Estimate drawn from commander interviews. See also Dresseler and Forsberg 2009:4

<sup>74</sup> Allowing for expansion of the movement, this squares roughly with Antonio Giustozzi’s 2009 estimation that the Taliban were spending some \$70-80m a year (Giustozzi 2009:296)

<sup>75</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Interview, March 2010.



told some of us. When some of our friends were arrested by the Pakistani authorities, he went and got them freed.’<sup>77</sup>

One of the commanders from a central province described how he spent a year in a Pakistani madrassa in 2008, describing it as ‘a big camp, really big, like a university with 2,000-4,000 people’ (although he believes it is now much smaller).<sup>78</sup> It included a military training camp, where they were taught combat techniques, such as how to lay IEDs, attack or ambush. He said two-thirds of the students were Afghans, and that their Afghan and Pakistani teachers were continually telling them, ‘it was our duty to fight in Afghanistan.’<sup>79</sup>

The other commander from the centre of Afghanistan described how he spent four years in a Pakistani madrassa in Karachi with 600-800 others, one third of whom were Afghans. He said that every day, either in formal classes or informal discussions, ‘jihad against the infidel American invaders’ would be condoned and encouraged. Often students would go for two or three months military training, and then some months fighting in Afghanistan, after which they would return to the madrassa. He said that the camps were ‘huge, with thousands of people’. Indeed, in 2007 he attended a camp in the mountains near Mansehra, in Kyber Pakhtunwha, which was up to 2,500 strong. The training was comprehensive: in attacks, ambushes, escapes, and in using rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and the PKM heavy machine gun (although IED training was conducted elsewhere). He said that all those attending the camp were being trained for fighting in Afghanistan. He also believed that most of the Pakistani military trainers were ISI: ‘The ISI is hard to recognise; we could tell, but we kept it secret.’<sup>80</sup>

Given that the commanders’ experiences are from some years ago, it is impossible to verify the continuance of this form of insurgent recruitment and training in Pakistan. However, most of the commanders believed that the only significant change is that the military training camps are now smaller, more dispersed and better concealed – a point which also emerged from research on the Haqqani network.

### **The Haqqani network**

This section considers the Haqqani insurgent group, which is based in North Waziristan but operates mainly in south-eastern Afghanistan or ‘Loya Paktia’ and provinces further north towards Kabul. Although the group has links to the Taliban, it is considered separately given that it has a separate leadership, membership and operations. It is not intended as a detailed analysis of the group – such as impressively accomplished by Thomas Ruttig (Ruttig 2009b:57-88) – but focuses on its links to Pakistani officials, as described by Haqqani commanders.

Two such commanders were interviewed: one was jointly responsible for operations in three districts (referred to below as the ‘district commander’); the other was one of the two or three most senior Haqqani commanders. He leads eight other commanders with about a total of a thousand fighters (referred to below as the ‘senior commander’).<sup>81</sup> The analysis is divided

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<sup>77</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>78</sup> The interviewee would not disclose the camp’s location.

<sup>79</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>81</sup> The senior commander was interviewed in April 2010; the field commander was interviewed in May 2010.

into the same sub-sections applied to the Taliban, above: strategy; operations; sanctuary, funding, supplies and munitions; and training and recruitment.

### *Strategy*

Western analysts and intelligence agencies have long been aware of ISI support to the Haqqani network, which is founded on historic ties and ‘symbiotic relations’.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, US intelligence agencies believe: ‘Islamabad has maintained relationships with ... Taliban-associated groups that support and conduct operations against US and ISAF forces in Afghanistan. It has continued to provide support to its militant proxies, such as Haqqani Taliban’.<sup>83</sup> Both Haqqani commanders confirmed this relationship, which substantiates the ISI designation of Jalaluddin Haqqani as a ‘strategic asset’, as discussed by Catherine Philip in her article (The Times [London], 17 Feb 2009). Notably, Western intelligence officials attribute the July 2008 attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul to the Haqqani network (Kronstadt 2009)

The senior commander described how the network was led and resourced by a command shura comprising Maulawi Jalaluddin Haqqani, his son Sirajuddin Haqqani and a small group of former senior ISI officials (at least one other of whom is Afghan), who are, in his words, ‘contracted by and working for the ISI.’ The other district commander remarked: ‘If the Pakistani ISI were not with him [Jalaluddin Haqqani], then he can’t do anything’.<sup>84</sup>

These views are consistent with the clandestine network, described by Ahmed Rashid, comprised of former ISI operatives or army officers who were hired by the ISI ‘on contract’ after 2001 to support Afghan insurgents (Rashid 2008:221). In March this year the New York Times reported that western officials believe ‘Colonel Imam’, a senior former ISI official, ‘has continued to train, recruit and finance the insurgents. Along with a number of other retired Pakistani intelligence officials, they say, he has helped the Taliban stage a remarkable comeback.’<sup>85</sup>

Indeed, it appears the ISI reportedly had a central role in the genesis (in some ways, re-emergence) of the Haqqani group after the intervention in 2001. The district commander described how he and many former Talibs and jihadi fighters were living in Pakistan, doing ordinary jobs. But in 2003-2004 the ‘Pakistani military and ISI’ were actively ‘trying to reconnect us, encouraging us to join back together, and urging us to fight. They said if you go back we will give you money, weapons, support.’

With regard to relations with the Taliban, the senior commander said that neither Sirajuddin or Jalaluddin Haqqani was any longer a member of the Quetta Shura: ‘Before we got all [strategic] decisions from the Quetta Shura, but recently because they started talking to the [Afghan] government, we stopped being involved with them.’ The district commander believed that the Haqqani group was still represented on the Quetta Shura but suggested that

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<sup>82</sup> Jalaluddin Haqqani was a group commander in Hezb-e Islami (Khalis) during the jihad against the Soviets, and received extensive support from the ISI. See Ruttig, 2009b:57-88 and Jane Perlez, ‘Rebuffing U.S., Pakistan Balks at Crackdown’, *The New York Times*, 14 December 2009.

<sup>83</sup> Dennis C. Blair, ‘Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community’, Testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2 February 2010.

<sup>84</sup> He also thought that Waziri tribesmen were on the council; and that due to the threat from US drones it was forced to move from place to place.

<sup>85</sup> Carlotta Gall, ‘Former Pakistani Officer Embodies a Policy Puzzle’, *The New York Times*, 3 March 2010. Colonel Imam was recently kidnapped by Islamic militants in FATA, and subsequently released.

there were not strong links with the Taliban. (He also said that in his area Haqqani fighters sometimes had ‘problems’ with Taliban and Hizb-e Islami fighters, which led to fighting. He was critical of both groups, who he accused of co-opting criminals.) He also said that there were a number of Arabs working for the Haqqani group, sometimes as commanders. Although he did not believe these were Al Qaeda operatives, there are reported to be close links between the Haqqani and the Al Qaeda networks (Ruttig 2009b:75).

### *Operations*

The senior commander described how the ISI had significant influence within the ranks of the network, claiming: ‘Yes – there are ISI people inside the Taliban, even in the Afghan government. Three of my [eight] commanders have close relations with the ISI.’

He described command and control arrangements, and his reluctance to carry out attacks which targeted Afghan civilians. ‘Our fighters get orders from the command group [of former ISI officials and Sirajuddin Haqqani], it goes step by step down the hierarchy. The top command gives the orders. We get orders to attack American, ANA (Afghan National Army), ANP (Afghan National Police) bases, whoever works with the Afghan Government and the Americans – even aid workers – all of them. This is an order I’ve been given. Construction workers and logistics workers. If they give money to Serrajudin then they don’t get attacked; if not, then they’re attacked. Taliban are not all the same. Some groups never attack Afghans; some others, run by the ISI, even attack schools, everybody. I support the ANA and ANP; so many times I sheltered them in the fighting. My view is that we should fight Americans; the ISI are telling us to kill Afghans. In Afghanistan, a lot of commanders were trained by the ISI so when they get orders from the ISI, they always listen to them. I hate the big suicide attacks that kill Afghan civilian; I hate the killing of NGO workers.’

Whether these assertions are true is debatable (the caveats mentioned with respect to the Taliban also apply here). However, it is certainly consistent with a view among analysts that the Haqqani network is one of the most ruthless, aggressive and powerful insurgent groups (Ruttig 2009b:62,74).

Echoing comments of the senior commander, the district commander described how certain groups, comprised of mainly Pakistani fighters, are based in and operate from north-west Pakistan. ‘There are secret places in Miramshah and Quetta ... before the bases were open but now they are secret. Apart from the Pakistani authorities no one knows they are there. ... Police or military vehicles transport fighters to the border at night. ... Other trucks loaded with guns and ammunition arrive separately, which are distributed at the border. The Pakistani army, police, intelligence all cooperate. ... Only the group commander knows where they will fight.’

He described how he is involved in such operations around once a month: in 2010 he had undertaken four such missions by May, and one just a fortnight before. He said that around 40 per cent of all the attacks in his area were undertaken by these groups, and that ‘there are many [of these] groups and their number is increasing.’

He described how many are led by ‘Pakistani ISI or military officers’, apparently often Punjabis, who comprise the majority of the officer corps of the Pakistani army. He said that although they don’t wear uniforms, they (the Haqqani fighters) knew who they were because of their particular appearance and manner. They are, ‘well educated, well trained, give strong

orders ... use advanced techniques ... and develop good plans'. He said they participate in almost all important operations, but if it is a major operation, then there might be up to three such commanders involved. He confirmed that from his district he would regularly communicate by radio with people in Pakistan whom he believed to be military.

### *Sanctuary, funding, munitions and supplies*

Directly or indirectly, the ISI appear to have a major role in sustaining the Haqqani group. The senior commander said that in every three weeks he would usually spend two in Pakistan and one in Afghanistan. Every month he would receive 60-80 boxes of AK47 rounds and two or three large boxes of grenades and IEDs. If he required further supplies or munitions, he would go to the command group (the Haqqanis and former ISI officials) who would issue him with a letter of credit, which he could present to arms dealers in Khost (in south-east Afghanistan) or Miramshah. For operating expenses, he receives a monthly cheque of between 0.5-1 million Pakistani rupees \$6-12,000. He believes the money comes from two sources: Gulf Countries, especially Saudi Arabia, that is accessed through the Saudi Bank; and from the ISI, which is accessed from the Islamic Bank of Pakistan, in which the Haqqani network apparently has a representative. Indeed, the former claim is corroborated by a recent report that over \$920 million has flowed from Saudi Arabian donors to Afghan insurgents, mainly via Waziristan, over the last four years.<sup>86</sup>

The district commander described how arms and ammunition would sometimes arrive in his area by trucks, and sometimes by horses, donkeys or camels, which was 'from the Pakistani military'. He said that they were paid salaries: fighters receive around 9-10,000 Pakistani rupees (\$110-120) a month and he, as a commander, receives 15-20,000 Pakistani rupees (\$170-220) a month. It is apparently provided through 'hawala' (the informal money transfer system). When asked who it came from he replied: 'The Americans. From them to the Pakistani military, and then to us.' He was baffled as to why, in his eyes, the Americans were supporting their activities. (In fact, many Afghans believe that the United States is deliberately funding the insurgency. Although this is not credible, it is hardly surprising given America's massive and sustained support to the Pakistani military.) Separately, the commander confirmed that groups receive a reward for killing foreign soldiers, usually \$4-5,000 for each soldier killed.

### *Training and recruitment*

There are apparently a number of small, covert Haqqani bases in North Waziristan and Korram Agencies, and Quetta, staffed by serving or former Pakistani military officials. They are often combined with a madrassa, provide a broad-based military training, and include suicide bomber cells.

The senior commander described how until recently there were insurgent training camps in Pakistan for two to three thousand fighters, but due to drone strikes they are now far smaller, capable of training 120 Taliban each, usually for 20 days at a time. He said there are now three major camps, two in Korram Agency and one near Miramshah. He related how: 'The trainers are all Pakistan ISI – they are well trained, well educated. The Taliban have strong support of the ISI. Training is in all military tactics: attacks, ambushes, IEDs – but not suicide bombers. This training is separate, very specialist ... they have 200 standby suicide bombers;

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<sup>86</sup> Anthony Loyd, 'Terror link alleged as Saudi millions flow into Afghanistan war zone', *The Times* (UK), 31 May 2010.

it's run by Pakistanis, Arabs, Chechens, Saudi Arabia, people who use foolish, uneducated boys 13-15 years, and most of these come from madrassas.<sup>87</sup>

This account is consistent with events on the ground in Afghanistan. For example, a suicide attack in Kabul on 18 May this year, which killed eighteen people including twelve civilians, has been widely attributed to the Haqqani network. A spokesman for the Afghan intelligence directorate said: 'The intelligence service of our neighbouring country has definitely had its role in equipping and training of this group.'<sup>88</sup>

The district commander also described Haqqani bases in Quetta and Miramshah: 'The base I use [in Miramshah] is in a house, with a huge basement, for around 50 people. Outside is a big board saying it is an office. The basement is divided into sections, for example some groups are being trained in IEDs; they sleep and eat in these rooms. People being trained for suicide attacks are kept separate. There's also a big madrassa hall. Groups are taken off to other places to practice shooting or whatever. People stay for around a month.' He described the people there as, 'young boys, who cannot discern good from bad, who don't know history but are very good fighters. They want to die for Islam'.

### *The Taliban*

Both Haqqani commanders echoed the comments of Taliban commanders about the presence of ISI on the Quetta Shura. According to the senior commander: 'Yes the ISI control the Quetta Shura. When Mullah Baradar and Mullah Omar talked directly to the Afghan government – peace talks – the ISI arrested Baradar ... because they want peace talks to fail. I don't know how many ISI are on the Quetta Shura ... Honest Afghans who want jihad and are honest to their country, were disarmed, detained and became powerless ... I know many good high-ranking [former] Taliban who are not supporting the fight in Afghanistan ... the rest are listening to the ISI, [and] still have the control. I don't like this. Without the support of the ISI, Afghans cannot do anything, can't even have meetings. Both former and current ISI are on the Quetta Shura. New ISI members are not so reliable and do not have such a strong role in it; the former ISI have more credibility and influence. All the Taliban interested in the peace process are detained.'

Perhaps surprisingly, he argued: 'Peace talks with the Afghan government are a good idea. The most important condition for the Afghan Taliban is the withdrawal of foreign forces. They should say how long they will be here, and when they will withdraw, and keep to the date exactly. The ISI Taliban will never come to peace – they always want instability and weak government here.'

Similarly, the district commander said: 'The Taliban get all their plans and strategy from the ISI, if they don't cooperate, they can't live for a day there.' He doubted that negotiations with the Afghan government would succeed because in his view: 'The Taliban is in the hands of Pakistan. They have to do what Pakistan tells them to do; they do not have autonomy. Pakistani wants a weak, puppet government in Afghanistan.'

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<sup>87</sup> The allegation that recruits for suicide bombings are mentally unstable or otherwise vulnerable is corroborated by UN analysis; see: United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), *Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan (2001-2007)*, (Kabul: UNAMA, September 2007).

<sup>88</sup> Bill Roggio, 'Haqqani Network executed Kabul suicide attack', *The Long War Journal*, 24 May 2010.

## Conclusion

The Taliban movement has a strong internal impetus and dynamic. Numerous studies have shown that there are endogenous drivers of the insurgency, and this is confirmed by the interviews.<sup>89</sup> Taliban and Haqqani fighters are motivated by a range of factors, many of which relate to government predation, corruption or injustice, and the perceived aggression of foreign military forces (see for example Giustozzi 2009 and Waldman 2010).

Thus, despite the claims of many interviewees, the ISI (and elements of the Pakistani military) may not actually *control* the Afghan insurgency, which implies power over all major dimensions of the movement and its campaign, and the ability to bring it to an end. However, as the provider of sanctuary, and very substantial financial, military and logistical support to the insurgency, the ISI appears to have strong strategic and operational influence – reinforced by coercion. There is thus a strong case that the ISI and elements of the military are deeply involved in the insurgent campaign, and have powerful influence over the Haqqani network.

This relationship appears to be of a different nature, or at least order of magnitude, than suggested by most studies. However, this assessment has been shared with three experienced Afghan analysts and two senior western security officials, who concur with the principal findings.

It means that without a change in Pakistani behaviour it will be difficult if not impossible for international forces and the Afghan government to make progress against the insurgency.<sup>90</sup> It also means that, as one southern commander put it, ‘if the ISI doesn’t support negotiations [with the Afghan government], then they won’t succeed.’<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps more significantly, it is hard to see how the international coalition can continue to treat Pakistan as an ally and ‘effective partner’ (US Department of Defense 2010:5). Only last December President Obama affirmed that ‘we are committed to a partnership that is built on a foundation of mutual interest, mutual respect and mutual trust.’<sup>92</sup> Since 2001 America has provided Pakistan with \$11.6 billion in security-related assistance and \$6 billion in economic aid.<sup>93</sup> It is due to provide at least \$7.5 billion dollars of aid over the next five years.<sup>94</sup> Pakistani officers are even represented on the Tripartite Joint Intelligence Operation Center situated in ISAF Headquarters in Kabul (US Department of Defense 2010:7 and 32).

American and other western intelligence agencies must be aware of Pakistan’s conduct.<sup>95</sup> The

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<sup>89</sup> See, for instance: Sarah Ludbury and Cooperation For Peace and Unity, *Testing Hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan*, August 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Similarly, the US national Intelligence Director said that ‘disruption of the insurgent presence in Pakistan is a necessary condition of making substantial counterinsurgency progress [in Afghanistan]’ – Dennis C. Blair, ‘Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community’, Testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2 February 2010. See also: Gilles Dorransoro, ‘Afghanistan – Searching for Political Agreement’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Interview, March 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Address by President Obama, United States Military Academy at West Point, 1 December 2009.

<sup>93</sup> These figures included funding allocated for 2010. See Kronstadt 2010a and Kronstadt 2010b.

<sup>94</sup> See the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act 2009.

<sup>95</sup> Indeed, they have elliptically acknowledged that Pakistan, ‘maintains historic support to the Taliban’ – Dennis C. Blair, ‘Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community’, Testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2 February 2010. Steve Coll reported recently: ‘American officials believe that ISI has considerably more leverage with the Afghan Taliban than it is willing to admit’ (‘Letter from Afghanistan: War by Other Means,’ *The New Yorker*, 24 May 2010)

apparent contradiction – backing the enemy’s backer – is perhaps a reflection of America’s preoccupation with the threat it faces from Al Qaeda and associated groups, rather than the Afghan Taliban. It may reflect a reluctance to confront an unstable, nuclear-armed country that faces a serious internal threat from Pakistani Taliban groups. It may also reflect a concern not to jeopardise Pakistani cooperation in preventing terrorist attacks against western targets; or a fear of galvanising extremism among Pakistani immigrant communities.

Nevertheless, Pakistan appears to be playing a double-game of astonishing magnitude. The conflict has led to the deaths of over 1,000 American and 700 other foreign military personnel; thousands of Afghan soldiers, police, officials and civilians; and an unknown number of Afghan, Pakistani and other foreign insurgents. It has already cost America nearly \$300 billion, and now costs over \$70 billion a year (Belasco 2009). As a Haqqani commander put it: ‘Of course Pakistan is the main cause of the problems [in Afghanistan] but America is behind Pakistan.’<sup>96</sup>

The Pakistan government’s apparent duplicity – and awareness of it among the American public and political establishment – could have enormous geo-political implications. It could jeopardise American financial support: security-related assistance is conditional on Pakistan’s cooperation on Afghanistan.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, it could trigger punitive counter-measures by the US and its allies, or direct military action against the Afghan Taliban in Pakistani territory.

However, an aggressive American response to Pakistan’s conduct is only likely to generate further instability, especially given the army’s on-going battle against Pakistani militant groups and widespread anti-American sentiment among the population. The priority must be to address the fundamental causes of Pakistan’s insecurity, in particular its latent and enduring conflict with India. This requires a regional peace process and, as Bruce Riedel has argued, American backing for moves towards a resolution of the Kashmir dispute (Reidel 2008). It should be accompanied by support for military and political reform, and a combination of incentives and disincentives to persuade Pakistan’s elite that support for Islamic militants is no longer in Pakistan’s national interests (see Fair 2009 and Fischer 2010).

Even this is no panacea for the Afghan conflict; it merely makes treatment possible. So long as the root causes remain – especially a corrupt, exclusionary, unjust government, and the perception among some Afghans of an aggressive, self-serving foreign military presence – then the violence will continue.

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<sup>96</sup> Interview, May 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Security assistance is conditional on Pakistan, *inter alia*: ‘ceasing support, including by any elements within the Pakistan military or its intelligence agency, to extremist and terrorist groups, particularly to any group that has conducted attacks against United States or coalition forces in Afghanistan’ – Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act 2009, Title II, Section 203(c)(2)(A).

## روشن مثل آفتاب در آسمان

ارتباط بین آی اس آی (شبکه استخباراتی) پاکستان و شورشیان افغان

مت والد من<sup>1</sup>

ماه می 2010

محتوای گزارش:

### خلاصه

۱. معرفی

۲. استراتژی

۳. عملیات ها

۴. پناهگاه، تمویل، اصلحه و امکانات

۵. آموزش و استخدام

۶. شبکه حقانی

۷. خاتمه

ضمیمه: عناوین و خلاصه به لسان دری

### خلاصه

اکثر محاسبات بر منازعه فعلی در افغانستان باعث می‌گردد تا از ارتباط طبیعی بین خدمات امنیتی پاکستان و شورشگری درک درست و عمیق صورت نگیرد. این ارتباط در حقیقت بسیار فرا تر از تنها تماس و ارتباط آنها است، در این ارتباط کمک های مشخص از سوی عناصر در داخل شبکه استخباراتی (آی اس آی) و نظامیان پاکستان و یا حلقه های که با آنها کار می کنند ارائه می‌گردد.

با وجودیکه طالبان در باطن قدرتمند هستند، اما به گفته قوماندانان طالبان، تحریک آنها به شکل گسترده و با نفوذ وسیع از سوی آی اس آی حمایت شده و تاثیرپذیر است. به گفته طالبان، آی اس آی برای هر دو بخش؛ افراد طالبان و گروه حقانی پناه داده و حمایت های بسیار مهم چون آموزش، کمک مالی، اصلحه و مهمات و امکانات ضروری فراهم می سازد. به گفته طالبان این موضوع "مثل آفتاب در آسمان روشن است".

بطور مستقیم و یا غیر مستقیم، از قراین معلوم میشود که آی اس آی نفوذ گسترده شانرا بالای تصامیم استراتژیک و عملیات مهم طالبان اعمال می نماید، و در مورد گروه حقانی این نفوذ بیشتر است. به گفته قوماندانان طالبان و گروه حقانی، پر خشونت ترین بخش های شورشیان را که مرکز بعضی شان در پاکستان وجود دارد از سوی آی اس آی پاکستان اداره می‌گردد.

قوماندانان شورشیان این موضوع را تصدیق کردند که حتی آی اس آی در شورای عالی رهبری طالبان (شورای کوپته) و شورای فرماندهی حقانی به شکل شرکت کننده و یا ناظر نمایندگی می کنند. در حقیقت، طوری وانمود میشود که آی اس آی استقلالیت استراتژیک طالبان را محدود کرده است، بخصوص دستگیری های اخیر در پاکستان گامهای است که بخاطر جلوگیری آنها از مذاکره با دولت افغانستان برداشته شده است.

رئیس جمهور زرداری قسماً مقام های عالی رتبه دستگیر شده طالبان را مطمئن ساخت و بیان داشت که آنها "مردم خود شان هستند" و از پشتیبانی وی برخوردار اند. و همچنان بطور آشکار رهایی آنها را از زندان منظور نمود.

همکار، مرکز پالیسی حقوق بشر، دانشگاه هارا وارد 1



آی اس آی حتی دو رهبر طالبان را دستگیر و رها نمودند، قیوم ذاکر، قوماندان جدید نظامی طالبان و ملا عبدالروف خادم، به اساس گزارش ها رئیس فعلی شورای کویته، هر دوی این افراد دو رهبر در بین سه یا چهار نفر از عالیتزین رهبران اند.

حضور آشکار پاکستان تا به این حد در یک بازی دو رویه می تواند تاثیرات جیو پالیتک را به بار آورد و می تواند باعث واکنش ایالات متحده گردد. اگرچه نقش قدرتمند آی اس آی و حضور نظامی پاکستان این را پیشنهاد می نماید تا برای پیشرفت مبارزه علیه شورشی در افغانستان، و یا در سطح حل سیاسی ضرورت است تا از حمایت آنها برخوردار باشد. تنها راه مطمئن برای ایجاد همچو همکاری، رسیدگی به عوامل اساسی نا امنی در پاکستان است، بخصوص بحران نا مریی و دوامدار پاکستان با هند.

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