

# Wikileaks and the Truth of the Af-Pak War

Tuesday 28 September 2010, by [USMANI Adaner](#) (Date first published: 15 September 2010).

IN THE AFTERMATH of the much-discussed leak of the Afghan war documents, few aspects of the Af-Pak imbroglio have been as scrutinized as the supposed duplicity of the Pakistani security establishment. The *New York Times* editorial board, for example, promptly declared that of all of the revelations, the reports detailing the “cynical collusion between Pakistan’s military intelligence service and the Taliban” were the “most alarming.” (This, too, from a paper that had been privy to the leaked material for some time before the database went public). [1]

And even if the guardians of the American State, for the most part, struck a more diplomatic tone, [2] the political fallout called forth its fair share of finger-pointing at that most “shadowy” of spy agencies, the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Not soon after Robert Gibbs repeated Obama’s commitment to not handing Pakistan a “blank check,” British PM David Cameron ingratiated himself with Indian hosts by pleading passionately for Pakistan to put a stop to the “export of terror.”

Without, of course, begrudging these men their right to be affronted, there are several reasons why it is impossible to take any of this seriously. For one, in this specific regard, there is nothing at all revelatory about the leaks.

The links between the Pakistani State and elements of the Afghan Taliban have been common knowledge for the duration of the insurgency. Tariq Ali rightly titled a recent opinion piece in *The Guardian* to this effect. [3] Not only is the buzz unjustified, it is amusing to recall how well it repeats the similarly disingenuous hubbub generated by “unprecedented” findings in June, surrounding a report released under the aegis of the London School of Economics. [4] In it, nine Taliban field commanders spoke of the “significant influence” wielded by the ISI on the operations of the Afghan Taliban.

Indeed, everything of any seriousness that has been written on NATO’s occupation of Afghanistan has reflected on Pakistan’s “double game.”

The question invariably arises: why have the masters of this war been keen to bleat on about Pakistani cynicism? It is not because the leaked information is especially damning. While I have no soft spot for the Pakistani State, it is hard to disagree with their rejoinder that many of these specific leaks remain uncorroborated.

*The Guardian*, another of the papers with extended access to the files, concluded as much: “(F)or all their eye-popping details, the intelligence files, which are mostly collated by junior officers relying on informants and Afghan officials, fail to provide a convincing smoking gun for ISI complicity. Most of the reports are vague, filled with incongruent detail, or crudely fabricated. [F]ew of the events predicted in the reports subsequently occurred.” [5]

Instead, the reason for this myopic focus on Pakistan lies in the broader truths about the war on which the leaks also shed light: namely, the fact that the occupation of Afghanistan is criminal, failing, and unwinnable. The more than 90,000 files made public by Wikileaks detail the often hitherto unreported murders of hundreds of civilians by NATO forces — by nervous, trigger-happy

troops at checkpoints, during raids by secret CIA operatives, in botched airstrikes, etc. The data regarding the specifics of some 16,000 IED attacks further confirms the claim that the depth and scope of the insurgency is formidable — and intensifying. [6]

When appended to ex-State Department officer Matthew Hoh's verdict in his damning indictment of the war (also his resignation letter) — that “the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul” — it is easy enough to understand why the notion of an insurgency puppeteered from Pakistan becomes a convenient trope. [7]

## **Tangled Webs**

None of this is to deny that the relationship between the Pakistani Army and elements of the Afghan Taliban's leadership is very real. Its links to the Haqqani group, based in North Waziristan, are well-established. Moreover, the ease with which Pakistan moved to arrest seven of the 15 members of the Quetta Shura, earlier this year, and the lack of transparency surrounding their fate only adds to the suspicions. For a government that has deployed all the idioms of the war on terror to wage murderous counterinsurgency campaigns against “barbarians” within its borders, the fact of this collaboration is of course telling.

Yet not only are high-level links perfectly compatible with claims about the indigenous roots of the insurgency, they follow naturally from the rationale of realpolitik.

Pakistan's planners are uncertain about how the endgame of the Afghan war will unfold. The possibility of India consolidating influence in a post-occupation regime is their worst nightmare. In that sense, the Pakistan government's double game is only as rational or irrational as are any States' dealings in the unfolding Great Game.

We should hardly need reminding that those leveling the charge of Pakistani “cynicism” are themselves presiding over an iniquitous occupation of a country thousands of miles from their borders.

Obama's surge into Af-Pak has only succeeded in clarifying the scale of the challenge that confronts the United States and its increasingly wary NATO allies. The much-vaunted Kandahar offensive — which was to be the turning-point of the war effort — has been deferred and scaled down, as U.S. planners reckon with the impossibility of transforming military might into political credibility.

The likely scenario remains a slow march towards reconciliation with elements of the insurgency, in which case the ISI-Taliban ties so roundly denounced today may well prove indispensable to the path out of the Afghan quagmire. We should hardly be surprised. For all his earnest, righteous grandstanding, in the sordid world of international relations the bourgeois statesman has yet to find a place for principles.

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**P.S.**

\* From *Against the Current*, ATC 148, September-October 2010.

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## Footnotes

- [1] "Pakistan's Double Game," *New York Times*, July 27, 2010  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/27/opinion/27tue1.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/27/opinion/27tue1.html?_r=1).
- [2] "Sacrifices made by Pakistan not fully realized: Pentagon," *DAWN*, July 26, 2010  
<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/16-sacrifices-made-by-pakistan-not-fully-realised-pentagon-670-hs-06>.
- [3] See on ESSF: [It's no secret what Pakistan's been doing with the Taliban](#)
- [4] "ISI assisting Afghan Taliban: Study," *The Express Tribune*, June 14, 2010  
<http://tribune.com.pk/story/21066/isi-assisting-afghan-taliban-study/>.
- [5] "Afghanistan war logs: Clandestine aid for Taliban bears Pakistan's fingerprints," *The Guardian*, July 25, 2010  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/25/pakistan-isi-accused-taliban-afghanistan>.
- [6] For a sense of this, see this remarkable representation of the Wikileaks' IED data in visual form: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlfQQnH6\\_Cc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlfQQnH6_Cc).
- [7] Hoh's letter, dated September 10, 2009, is available online at:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/hp/ssi/wpc/ResignationLetter.pdf?sid=ST2009102603447>.