

The report on ISI by the London School of Economics

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Another bombshell for Pakistan fell last weekend when the prestigious LSE released a report by Matt Waldman, a fellow at the Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy, that Pakistan's premier intelligence agency, the ISI, does not only continue to have links with the Afghan Taliban but that it is, to date, funding them, training them, providing them sanctuary, all at an unprecedented scale, and even assisting them to plan operations. The report is based on interviews with nine Taliban 'Field Commanders'. The report, obviously, concludes that the ISI is actively supporting the Afghan Taliban to 'counter Indian influence'.

It is surprising that if these are Taliban who are beneficiaries of the ISI funding, training, succor, etc, why should they disclose this to embarrass their benefactor, and risk the possibility of losing all that the ISI is giving them?

One would have thought that these Taliban 'Field Commanders' would be more likely to name an agency that had denied them what they asked for, to malign the agency internationally, thus repaying them for refusing assistance.

Let us examine the report from another angle. Where did author find nine 'Field Commanders' and which chapter of the Taliban did they belong to? Regrettably, the report fails to state names, or their affiliation. Based on most journalists reporting on his article, it would be fair to assume that Waldman did not venture out of the safe premises of Kabul.

So, if Waldman found nine Taliban Field Commanders in Kabul, because he could not afford to go see Mulla Omer's commanders or Hakimullah's commanders or those of the Haqqani group, or Zabihullah Mujahid; or any other group resisting 'American occupation', it would also be safe to assume that none of the above would venture into Kabul, merely to grant him an interview!.

If my conclusion is correct, the only Taliban located in Kabul are those belonging to Gulbedeen Hikmatyar's chapter called the Hizb-e-Islami. This was the group that the ISI and the CIA gave maximum support to, in the 1980s and early 1990s but Hikmatyar could not deliver in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal. He and his followers have slowly been marginalized, isolated, and the faction is crumbling. A couple of months ago, Hikmatyar and his followers fell out with the Haqqani group and were about to be slaughtered when Afghan government forces helped some of them escape. These are the Taliban to be found in Kabul, starving, hopeless, and isolated; almost as discredited amongst the Afghan as the Karzai government's security forces; they would certainly have an axe to grind by maligning the ISI, which gave up on them in 1994.

Afghans residing in Peshawar are of the view that the report has been engineered by Amrullah Saleh; who they say is on the payroll of RAW. Saleh is a Tajik who worked

under Ahmed Shah Masood and believes that the ISI was responsible for Masood's murder. He has been heading the National Directorate of Security under Karzai for almost six years and resigned recently on June 6th 2010, after a Taliban attack on the Loya Jirga organized by Karzai. The Afghan Pashtun, are of the view that Saleh also engineered the 'Taliban' attack on the Loya Jirga, in order to scuttle the effort; but then these are Pashtun and he is Tajik; they might even have suffered at his hands.

He is, however, strongly opposed to any effort at reconciliation with the Taliban and, even without any encouragement from RAW would do anything to scuttle such an effort and to malign Pakistan and the ISI. He thinks he still has a score to settle with both but Karzai's sudden efforts at reconciliation with the Taliban and Pakistan could have forced him to act precipitately. After his resignation, he issued a statement that Karzai had lost faith in the US and NATO forces.

That the ISI retains links with chapters of the Afghan Taliban is an open secret and should be no surprise. After all, the Pakistan army had its rear unprotected from the Wazir tribe and the Haqqani group that is also based in North Waziristan, when it undertook operations in South Waziristan. What is more, we are now witnessing the beginning of the 'Endgame' in Afghanistan; with all parties jockeying for their own ends. Why shouldn't Pakistan?

If the US is pulling out beginning 2011 and Karzai is negotiating with relatively insignificant Taliban, why should Pakistan not retain links with those Taliban who are likely to be of some significance? That Pakistan looks the other way when they are provided succor by friendly tribals, is also an accepted fact; as also is the fact that monetary contributions from Pakistanis and the Gulf continue to fund them. I would even be prepared to accept that the ISI also helps fund them; but training them, or helping them plan their operations? I find difficult that a little far fetched. **What is more, the days that Taliban needed ISI expertise in training or planning operations, is long past; today, they could probably teach the ISI personnel a thing or two!**

However, the most ludicrous part of the report, which casts serious doubts on even the believable portion of the report, is the allegation against Zardari. To imagine that Zardari, whose concept of personal security is legendary and keeps him a virtual prisoner in the President's house, could expose himself to meet with captured Taliban in a prison defies imagination! What is more, the view in Pakistan is that if a Deputy Undersecretary of the US asked Zardari to jump, he would ask 'how high?' If someone can assert Pakistan's interests when they conflict with the it is GHQ, and Kyani, the COAS, who has never failed to voice his conflicting views; never anyone in the political setup.

Believe the report in full, in part, or rubbish it. I leave that to the reader.