

## **The sun in the sky**

*Matt Waldman scrutinises Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.*

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 geopolitical 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.

*Source: The sun in the sky: The relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan insurgents by Matt Waldman, Crisis States Discussion Papers 18, Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics, published June 2010.*