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The Nation

The WikiLeaks Papers and the Pakistani Intelligence–Taliban Connection

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The WikiLeaks release [1] of nearly 100,000 Afghanistan war documents has created its own firestorm. It's a massive database, and on line WikiLeaks has created a handy guide to its compilation, suitable for browsing. It also links to reports on the documents that were published by the New York Times [2], the Guardian [3] and Der Spiegel [4], each of which had access to the trove of classified data weeks ago, on condition that they not release them until Sunday.

It is, as the founder of WikiLeaks asserted with only a little exaggeration, the "Pentagon Papers" of 2010. (One major difference, of course, is that the Vietnam-era Pentagon Papers involved a detailed analytical study of that misguided war, while the WikiLeaks papers are for the most part raw data and intelligence reports, not yet vetted.)

As WikiLeaks notes:

> Most entries have been written by soldiers and intelligence officers listening to reports radioed in from front line deployments. However the reports also contain related information from Marines intelligence, US Embassies, and reports about corruption and development activity across Afghanistan.

It's interesting that in its report, the *Times* emphasizes the involvement of Pakistan, its army and its intelligence service, the ISI, in support of the Taliban. Not that ISI's support of the Taliban has been much of a secret, of course, since it's been widely known and reported for years, and since it was the ISI that created, armed, and trained the Taliban in the early 1990s. But the *Times* and WikiLeaks database helpfully reinforce that concept. Reports the *Times*:

Taken together, the reports indicate that American soldiers on the ground are inundated with accounts of a network of Pakistani assets and collaborators that runs from the Pakistani tribal belt along the Afghan border, through southern Afghanistan, and all the way to the capital, Kabul.…

The reports suggest, however, that the Pakistani military has acted as both ally and enemy, as its spy agency runs what American officials have long suspected is a double game—appeasing certain American demands for cooperation while angling to exert influence in Afghanistan through many of the same insurgent networks that the Americans are fighting to eliminate.

The *Washington Post*, grumpy no doubt that WikiLeaks didn't give it preferred access to the data, has its own report [5] that quotes an Obama administration official thusly:

The key thing to bear in mind is that the administration is not naive about Pakistan. The problem with the Pakistanis is that the more you threaten them, the more they become entrenched and don't see a path forward with you.

That's a good point. The administration has no choice but to deal realistically with Pakistan, the real one—the one that exists—and not with the happy, sunny Pakistan that they wished existed. President Hamid Karzai has already figured that out, to the consternation of his former chief of intelligence, Amarullah Saleh, who's running a political pressure operation [6] against Karzai's efforts to strike a deal with the Taliban and with Pakistan.

The Pakistanis are angry and upset [7] about the Wikileaks report, and of course they deny everything, declaring that they are shocked, shocked to hear allegations of a Pakistan-Taliban connection. Amid all the huffing and puffing, however, the *Post* quotes one Pakistan official as follows:

"It is our war that we are fighting. If the Americans don't think they can support us, sorry. Tough luck. We will continue to do what we are doing."

And so they will. Pakistan is not going to change its Afghanistan policy, not its Kashmir policy, because the United States provides economic aid for development in the tribal areas.