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U.S. officials link Taliban surge to Pakistani agents

By Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON: The Taliban's widening military campaign in southern Afghanistan is made possible in part by direct support from operatives in Pakistan's military intelligence agency, despite Pakistani government promises to sever ties to militant groups fighting in Afghanistan, according to American government officials.

The support, officials say, consists of money, military supplies and strategic planning guidance to Taliban commanders who are gearing up to confront the international force in Afghanistan that will soon include about 17,000 American reinforcements.

Support for the Taliban, as well as other militant groups, is coordinated by operatives inside the shadowy S Wing of Pakistan's spy service, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, the officials said. There is even evidence that DSI operatives meet regularly with

agents aiding a broader array of militant networks with more diverse types of support than was previously known — even months after Pakistani officials said that the days of the ISI playing "double game" were over.

Pakistan's military and civilian leaders publicly deny any government ties to militant groups, and American officials said it was unlikely that top officials in Islamabad are directly coordinating the clandestine efforts. American officials also said that mid-level ISI operatives occasionally cultivate relationships that are not approved by their bosses.

In a sign of just how resigned Western officials are to the ties, the British government has sent several dispatches to Islamabad in recent months asking the ISI to use its pre-election strategy meetings with the Taliban to persuade its commanders to scale back violence in Afghanistan before the elections.

But the inability, or unwillingness, of the embattled civilian government led



left, clockwise: the Ministry automatic chronograph, in rose gold, with an ivory dial; a Great Wheel clock; and a Three-Times clock. The company makes its clocks in Britain, but its two watch lines are certified Swiss-made chronometers.

To expand the brand into the wristwatch market, the partners turned to Swiss skills and technology. The collection introduced this year draws inspiration from the company's British past; but the pieces are officially certified Swiss chronometers.

Two lines of luxury watches are being presented, under the names "Ministry" and "Parliament." The Ministry design features a round dial marked with Roman numerals, set in a circular case. The Parliament line features a similar dial, set in a square case, unmistakably echoing Big Ben's iconic silhouette. "The case was the hardest part," Mr. Hutchinson said. "We threw away thousands before getting a prototype we were happy with."

The cases are mostly in 18-karat white or rose gold, except for the top-of-the-line Ministry Chronograph, in platinum. Each model is offered in a limited edition of 250 pieces, at prices ranging from \$8,500, or \$12,300, to \$25,000.

Sales outlets are limited to fewer than a dozen selected locations in the United States, Britain and Abu Dhabi.

We have no human resource department, no press office."

As heir to a grand imperial tradition, Dent was particularly pleased when it won the commission, in 2006, to remake the St. Pancras station clock. "We were lucky; we just happened to be the original gothic Victorian clock makers," Ms. Hutchinson said. Big Ben and the station clock bear many similarities: same dial, same use of 24-karat gold leaf — but the station clock, while modestly smaller, bears the once-again proud name of the brand. In Victoria's day, such self-advertisement might not have amused the queen.

In a fitting tribute to the resurrection of the company, Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman recently commissioned a magnum horological opus to ring in the jubilee celebrations for his 40-year reign in 2000. Taking its inspiration from the sultan's Great Mosque, a giant architectural monument inaugurated in 2000, it will feature the domes and arcade of the mosque, with the Oman coat of arms. Britannia herself would surely have approved.

Offering off-beat precision

By Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop

SINGAPORE When Christopher Long, a brand manager working for a watch distributor, met Alvin Lye, a former executive who had quit a job with Sony to open a vintage watch store, the encounter blossomed into a shared adventure. In 2003, the two Singaporeans combined their engineering and business knowledge to found Azimuth, a maker of innovative design watches.

Mr. Long, now 32, began collecting watches 15 years ago. It was that passion that led him to Mr. Lye's shop.

When the pair set up Azimuth, they started by buying 200 vintage movements from a Swiss supplier selling stock from closed factories. With these they built their first model, the Bombarier I, a design inspired by a generic German Air Force watch dating from the 1940s, the B-Uhr, with a large onion crown, an oversized dial with bold Arabic numerals and riveted calf-leather strap.

But their ambition was to make something different: funky, avant-garde designs providing alternative ways of telling time.

"The designs are more machine-inspired — with portholes where different apertures tell you different times," Mr. Long said. "We're trying to emulate this kind of field in the world of watch making, so you're wearing more than just a watch, it also has a gadget feel."

Azimuth now works with a mix of modern ébauches, or half-finished blank movements, and assembled movements from Swiss watch makers which it modifies to its own designs. Made in Biel-Bienne in Switzerland, the watches, which incorporate such complications as split-second chronographs, retrograde counters, calendar functions and jumping hours, are distributed internationally and have attracted some attention from collectors. The company manufactures about 1,500 pieces a year.

Last year, it unveiled "Mr. Robot," a watch inspired by a 1990s tin toy, the Eastern Robo. On the watch face, the left eye shows the

hour; the right eye is set to Greenwich Mean Time; the nose shows seconds and the mouth area a retrograde minute display.

This year, it is showing its new Twin Barrel Tourbillon at BaselWorld, a model which Mr. Long hopes will become emblematic of Azimuth's ambition to "create complicated watches in avant-garde design."

"I was looking at a car magazine with a supercar on the front cover, and at that moment I could almost imagine a watch coming out," he said. "The T.B.T. is the very first watch designed to replicate the curves of the supercar faithfully. It's almost like strapping a car on your wrist."

The ultra-lightweight, aerodynamic case, is adorned with plates of carbon fiber fitted into recesses on its sides and back. Under a sapphire crystal domed "cockpit" a massive tourbillon mechanism, with a high beat 28,800 vibrations per hour, five-day power reserve, is revealed at the 6 o'clock position. The time is told by reading twin rotary discs suspended by a massive central titanium arm. Even and odd hours are divided on hexagonal discs, while the minutes are displayed in an arc at the edge of the dial from the traditional 3 o'clock position to the 9 o'clock position.

Azimuth is planning a limited edition of only 25 pieces, to retail for 120,000 Singapore dollars, or \$77,500, taking the brand sharply up market from its typical \$5,000 dollar price point.

Mr. Long said: "Azimuth designs will continue to be headed in this direction."

"Avant-garde designs, unconventional ways of telling time, are definitely not for every man, but customers looking for interesting timepieces, or I should say weird-looking watches, come to us, and certainly we believe we have built a reputation around that."



Azimuth



Azimuth's penchant for weird-looking watches has earned the Singapore brand some attention from collectors. Its "Mr. Robot" model, left, was inspired by a tin robot toy from the 1990s. Its most recent offering, the Twin Barrel Tourbillon, below, aims for the supercar look.

AT AZIMUTH, 2 SINGAPOREANS FORGE A PARTNERSHIP THAT PRODUCES INTRICATE, AVANT-GARDE MECHANISMS