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Pakistan Must End Its Dangerous Dance With the Taliban



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The Pakistani Taliban outraged the world with its attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in which they sprayed bullets frenetically, [killing 145 people, 132 of them children](#). As the country mourned the loss of these young lives, Pakistan's prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, [declared](#) that Pakistan would "continue the war against terrorism till the last terrorist is eliminated" and assured the world that it would not differentiate between "good and bad Taliban." The spokesman for Pakistan's powerful military, [Maj. Gen. Bajwa](#), bellowed, "for the military, there'll be no discrimination among Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, Haqqani network or any other militant group." Pakistan's army chief vowed, along with Afghanistan's new president, Ashraf Gani, that the two countries would [fight terrorism together](#).

Thousands in Pakistan will die before its army gives up its jihad habit. No amount of American aid or inducements will change that.

Even ostensibly seasoned analysts, such as [Peter Bergen](#), embraced the rhetoric as fact and argued that this heinous crime "may prove as pivotal to Pakistan's national security policy as the 9/11 attacks were for the United States." Alas, the attack — no matter how heinous — will not motivate Pakistan to abandon its long-held reliance upon Islamist militant groups, who operate with impunity in Afghanistan and India, thanks to Pakistan's ever expanding nuclear umbrella.

Even as the young victims of the Peshawar massacre wait to be laid to rest, Pakistan has released on bail Lashkar-e-Taiba's notorious [Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi](#). Lakhvi was the mastermind behind the multiday siege on Mumbai in November of 2008. In that assault, 10 Lashkar gunmen killed 165 people before Indian forces finally put an end to the attacks. Lakhvi's tenure in jail was really more of a protective detention as he continued to plan and execute operations with the logical support of his jailers. He even fathered a child during his tenure, as he enjoyed extensive conjugal visits. The group's leader, [Hafiz Saeed](#), speaking to crowds in Urdu assembled in Lahore, denied that the Taliban were behind the murders in Peshawar; rather, he claimed that India was behind the conspiracy (sazish).

The release of Lakhvi is important. In September and October of this year, Pakistan's army [began weeks of artillery fire](#) across the line of control in the part of Kashmir controlled by India. Pakistan's army uses artillery cover to facilitate the movement of Pakistani militants who are tasked by the

military with conducting terrorist attacks in and beyond Kashmir. This fall, Pakistan's military inserted record numbers of terrorists associated with Lashkar-e-Taiba and another group, the Jaish-e-Mohammad. While out on bail, Lakhvi will be even more effective in masterminding terrorist attacks in India.

Does this sound like Pakistan's military is discontinuing a long-held policy of distinguishing between those "good militants" who operate on its behalf in Afghanistan and India, and those "bad militants" who kill Pakistanis? Of course not. Unfortunately, many tens of thousands of Pakistanis will die long before the army gives up its jihad habit. And there is *absolutely* no amount of American, British or other aid or forms of inducements that can change this basic truth.

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