

Try to see it my way

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As the dust settles from the daring U.S. raid on Osama Bin Laden's lair in Abbottabad, a cantonment town just a few hours from Islamabad, serious rifts are obvious between Pakistan and America. Both countries need each other for a host of different reasons, and, at the same time, resent this mutual dependency that has locked both in a deadly embrace.



In the aftermath of the bin Laden raid, U.S. [officials](#) and citizenry alike want to abandon Pakistan, and indeed, the bin Laden affair was the most recent in a string of revelations that cast doubt on Pakistan's reliability as a partner in the war on terror. Pakistan's [government](#), [armed forces](#) and [citizens](#) are no less vexed with the United States after the raid for equally valid reasons. And it is well past time for both Americans and Pakistanis to consider each other's views and come to an accommodation.

The view from Pakistan: humiliation and frayed sovereignty

While Americans were celebrating the death of bin Laden in the wee hours of May 2, 2011, Pakistanis woke up to a morning of confusion, outrage, and embarrassment. Pakistan's government has [insisted](#) over the last decade that bin Laden was not in Pakistan. Many were astonished by his presence in Abbottabad, and [three in ten Pakistanis](#) believe that Pakistan's intelligence agency must have known he was there. Pakistanis were also whipsawed by the reality that a foreign force invaded their airspace with several helicopters, waged a firefight that spanned forty minutes in a garrison town and included blowing up a failed helicopter, and made it back to Afghanistan before Pakistan's air force could even scramble their jets. Pakistanis were left wondering whether their military was complicit in harboring the world's most wanted terrorist or simply incompetent beyond imagination. As one Pakistani commented to me in the wake of the assault, "We are either a rogue state or a failed state."

Americans should ponder how they would feel under such circumstances. The attack made Pakistanis painfully aware that their military is not capable of protecting them as it has long claimed. Could India launch such an attack? Could the United States, Israel, or India launch surprise raids on Pakistan's nuclear assets? While these questions may seem farfetched to Americans, they are real to Pakistanis who fear India, the United States, and Israel. As the Pakistani Army derives its legitimacy from the public opinion of Pakistan's citizens, Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies were also deeply humiliated by these obvious failures.

Americans should consider how the United States looks to the average Pakistani who does not read English, has a sixth grade education, has never left the country, and likely has never met an American in person. How is such a Pakistani to understand the presence of Americans in their country? The secrecy of U.S. operations in Pakistan has as much to do with the United States as it does with Pakistan's need to obscure the U.S.'s role, out of embarrassment that it needs the U.S.'s training, equipment, and yes, drones.

But the average Pakistani is largely uninformed about its country's foreign policies and defense engagements. Pakistanis are [unaware of its intelligence agencies'](#) support for militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Afghan Taliban. They reject the assertion that Pakistan harbors terrorist when it knows full well that thousands of Pakistani armed forces have died at the hands of terrorist and violence in recent years alone has claimed [some 25,000 victims](#). Pakistanis have seen large numbers of defense contractors roaming about cities such as Peshawar and Islamabad and Lahore. No one has told Pakistanis that some of these contractors are there to help train Pakistan's Frontier Corps in Warzak.

While the [Raymond Davis affair](#) appalled and angered Americans, Americans do not know that many foreign diplomats have harmed or killed Pakistani citizens in episodes or reckless or drunk driving, or that they have rammed their vehicles into Pakistani government assets while driving without regard to anything but their own destination and status. The U.S. embassy instructs staff to head straight to the embassy in the event of an accident even if a Pakistani has been harmed. Americans should recall their outrage when [one Georgian diplomat was drunk](#) and killed a young woman in 1997. In that instance, under U.S. pressure and public outrage, Georgia waived diplomatic immunity and he received a seven year sentence. Whether or not the perpetrators of crimes in Pakistan are ever tried in the United States is unknown. If a Pakistani diplomat committed a similar crime, he or she would not be ferreted out of the country as western diplomats are from Pakistan under such circumstances.

Then there is the issue of the [drone strikes](#). As I have argued [elsewhere](#), since 2008, the drones in Pakistan's tribal areas have been increasingly precise and have claimed a small number of civilian casualties. Pakistani senior leaders have shared with me and [others](#) the view that drones are both needed as they can accomplish what the Pakistan military cannot *and* they do not kill the massive numbers of innocent women and children claimed by the Pakistan Taliban and Pakistani analysts and media.

The U.S. government insists upon keeping this program "covert," even though there is nothing covert about it anymore in actuality. The U.S. should reveal who was targeted, who was killed, what attacks they are responsible for, as well as the role of the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies that facilitated the drone attack. Unfortunately, the Pakistani government fears that such acknowledgment will undermine its credibility among the populace. But Pakistanis are wary of the terrorists that have devastated their state. Some sense of *ownership* over the drone strikes and confidence that they are killing the guilty not the innocent would likely shift the debate around drones.

Yet, the U.S. and Pakistani governments lack the grit to do so. As such, the only successful program to eliminate terrorists with minimal civilian casualties is strategically undermined by

pervasive doubts, resentment and deep-seated feelings among Pakistanis (and Americans among others) that the United States is indifferent to Pakistanis' need to *feel* sovereign even while many know that their government cannot exercise sovereignty in its fullest sense.

Americans should also reflect how Pakistanis experience U.S. assistance. In recent years, Pakistanis have come to understand that the United States uses its development assistance in order to diminish anti-U.S. sentiment; dampen support for or participation in militancy; and to secularize Pakistan among other objectives that alienate and even disgust Pakistanis. In short, U.S. development assistance lamentably has become a [tool in the U.S. counterinsurgency efforts](#). Even [U.S. flood assistance](#) was framed publicly by the need to lessen antipathy towards the United States than to alleviate Pakistani suffering. Worse yet, due to corruption in how the United States distributes aid in Pakistan *and* corruption in the Pakistani system, Pakistanis simply have not seen the benefits and worry that U.S. aid has deliberately benefited the most corrupt elements in Pakistan. They are not completely wrong.

Finally, Americans should not blithely assume that Pakistan's military or intelligence agency knowingly aided and abetted bin Laden. The U.S. government has provided no evidence to support this speculation. In fact, [U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates](#) said in mid-May, "I have seen no evidence at all that the senior leadership knew. In fact, I've seen some evidence to the contrary." Even [former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld](#) has urged not rushing to judgment on Pakistan and how to respond and argued that it is perfectly possible that bin Laden hid in plain sight.

The view from the United States: outrage and disappointment

It is equally important that Pakistanis try to understand the American point of view. The United States has allocated \$20 billion in economic assistance, development aid, military reimbursements, and military assistance in exchange for Pakistan's ongoing cooperation in the war on terror. But over the years, Americans have come to learn that it is the Afghan Taliban (and allied groups such as the Haqqani and Hekmatyar networks) that are responsible for the majority of the nearly [1,600 military deaths in Afghanistan](#) and many more injured.

Additionally, virtually every terrorist attack that has been executed or disrupted in the United States or Europe by Islamist extremists [has had ties back to Pakistan](#). While Pakistan is right to note that these often -- but not always -- involve homegrown extremists, the simple fact remains that these individuals received training in Pakistan even if they radicalized "at home." The ongoing revelations that an American citizen by the name of [David Coleman Headley facilitated the Lashkar-e-Taiba attack on Mumbai in 2008](#) have left Americans wondering whether or not Pakistani groups will expand their operations into the United States itself. Worse, Headley's claims that he acted [with direct involvement of Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate \(ISI\)](#) have again left Americans in disbelief that Pakistan's agencies are supporting groups that harm American interests while benefiting from American resources.

Nor has [Pakistan's deeply hostile opinion towards the American government](#) and American aid helped proponents of the relationship make their case to continue supporting Pakistan and Pakistanis. Moreover, Pakistanis have dismissed the resources to civilian institutions offered by

Kerry-Lugar-Bergman ([\\$7.5 billion to Pakistan over five years](#)) as chump change. To an increasingly broke America seeking to cut its budget where it can, this is a large sum. Moreover, Pakistan's anti-Americanism and even [complaints about the legislation](#) further soured any desire to continue helping Pakistan.

Time to get real

Both publics and governments need to make a serious attempt to understand the other and to increase transparency in their ties. For example, Pakistanis need to abandon the convenient trope of framing international relations in the lexicon of friends. (Countries form ties out of national interests, not an inchoate sense of fraternity.) And Americans need to get real about the national security interests of Pakistan and how they limit what Pakistan is willing to do: no state acts to undermine their national interests.

The U.S.'s policy of trying to [de-hyphenate its relations with India and Pakistan](#), which it has pursued since 2000, has floundered on the shoals of reality. The U.S.-Indian nuclear deal has exacerbated Pakistan's concerns about India and angers Pakistanis who feel that U.S. alignment with its existential nemesis while Pakistan is at war with militants is an extreme insult. Pakistanis dismiss the obvious criticisms about the different proliferation histories of the two states.

Similarly, India's role in Afghanistan may be welcomed by some actors in that country, albeit with varying degrees ambivalence. However, it is a major source of anxiety in Pakistan, which fears that India will exploit the space to foment insurgency in Pakistan along the Afghan border as just desserts for Pakistan's far more extensive support of insurgencies and terrorism in India.

If the United States is committed to supporting India's vision of itself as a regional hegemon, Pakistan will work ever more vigorously -- and dangerously -- to undermine India's ability to do so. It will do so even if Pakistan's activities harm Pakistan more than India. Engaging Pakistan could become impossible if the United States accepts India's goals of regional domination. Worryingly, many Pakistani security elites *already* believe that Washington has acquiesced to this Indian desire to project power. Washington needs to decide whether or not supports a hegemonic India and adjust its regional plans accordingly.

Similarly, Pakistan must realize that its reliance upon terrorism as a tool of foreign policy is dangerous, primarily, to Pakistan itself. Pakistan's militant proxies can harass -- not wear down - India. Pakistanis are surprisingly ignorant of how negatively these so-called *mujahideen* are seen in Kashmir and the rest of India. They spread a Deobandi religious tradition that is anathema to Kashmiris' Sufi traditions. Worse, their savagery has undermined indigenous Kashmiris' complaints about their status in India, and many around the world have conflated victimized Kashmiris with terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba. Similarly, Pakistan's insistent reliance upon violent Islamist groups in Afghanistan has soured Afghans' view of Pakistan, many of whom blame Pakistan for their wrecked country. They ask why Pakistan cannot do what India does: export food, hydroelectric technology, roads, schools, buses, and aircraft. Instead, Afghans see only the terrorist lunatics that Pakistan exports to Afghanistan. This strategy is not working for Pakistan or Pakistanis and it undermines the legitimacy of the very causes the Pakistani government claims to espouse.

In this mélange of distrust and loathing resides the basic challenge for the United States and Pakistan that can no longer be denied or deferred: Pakistan's existential threat (India) is a key U.S. strategic partner, while American existential threats (Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Afghan Taliban, and other militant groups) are Pakistan's partners. Both need to find a way of sustaining a relationship on the areas of convergence while managing and, over time, mitigating the gross areas of dangerous divergence.

The challenge before both states, now, is to figure out a way of sustaining a relationship that is vital to both states while acknowledging -- rather than ignoring -- the real differences in priorities and interests in the region and beyond. It is a hard road. But there are no alternatives.

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