

Ten Fictions that Pakistani Defense Officials Love to Peddle

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The U.S.-Pakistan “[strategic dialogue](#)” has restarted yet again. I would be remiss if I did not point that it has never been strategic and it has certainly not been a dialogue. No doubt the Pakistanis are worried that wary American taxpayers and their congressional representatives may close the checkbook for good when the last U.S. soldier departs from Afghanistan. In the spirit of perpetual rent-seeking, Pakistani defense officials have recently alighted upon Washington to offer the same tired and hackneyed narratives that are [tailored to guilt](#) the Americans into keeping the gravy train chugging along.

Here are the top ten ossified fictions that Pakistani defense officials are pedaling and what you need to know to call the “[Bakvas Flag](#)” on each of them.

1. “Our relationship should be strategic rather than transactional.”

Nonsense and here’s why. For the U.S.-Pakistan relationship to be “strategic,” there should be a modicum of convergence of interests in the region if not beyond. Yet, there is no evidence that this is the case. In fact, Pakistan seems most vested in undermining U.S. interests in the region. In the name of the conflict formerly known as the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the United States has given Pakistan some [\\$27 billion](#) in military and financial aid as well as lucrative reimbursements. However, during these same years, Pakistan has continued to aid and abet the [Afghan Taliban and allied militant groups such as the Haqqani Network](#). These organizations are the very organizations that have [killed American military and civilian personnel in Afghanistan](#) along with those of our allies in the [International Security Assistance Force](#) (ISAF) and countless more [Afghans](#), in and out of uniform. This is in addition to the flotilla of Islamist militant groups that Pakistan uses as tools of foreign policy in India. Foremost among them is the [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#), which is proscribed by the United States and which is responsible for the most lethal terror operations in India and, since 2006, has openly operated against Americans in Afghanistan.

2. “The United States has been an unreliable ally.”

[Rubbish](#). Pakistani officials enjoy invoking the two treaties, the Central Treaty Organization ([CENTO](#)) and the Southeast Treaty Organization ([SEATO](#)) through which the United States and Pakistan ostensibly were allies. They lament that despite these partnerships and commitments, the United States did not help Pakistan in its wars with India (1965 and 1971) and even aided non-aligned India in its 1962 war with Communist China. It should be noted that Americans were never party to CENTO; rather, they maintained an observer status, and Americans were leery of letting the Pakistanis join SEATO, fearing that it was a ruse to suck the alliance into the intractable Indo-Pakistan dispute. In point of fact, Pakistani officials beginning with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, and General Ayub Khan [repeatedly sought to join](#) American military alliances in exchange for money and war materiel.

While Pakistan professed a commitment to America’s anti-Communist agenda, it sought these partnerships to build its military capabilities to continue challenging India. Until the 1950s, the [United States had no such interest](#) in Pakistan.

When the United States finally embraced such partnerships, the treaties were specifically [designed to combat Communist aggression](#) ensuring that the United States had no obligation to support Pakistan in its wars with India. The United States certainly had no obligation to support Pakistan in the 1965 war with India, which it started. Pakistan’s grouches about the American position during the 1971 war is particularly disingenuous. As [Gary Bass](#) has detailed, President Nixon violated numerous American laws to continue providing military support to the abusive West Pakistani regime as it prosecuted a genocidal campaign against the Bengalis in East Pakistan.

3. “The United States used Pakistan for its anti-Soviet jihad.”

More fiction. Pakistan and Afghanistan came into conflict immediately after Pakistan’s independence because Afghanistan rejected Pakistan’s membership in the United Nations and laid claim to large swaths of Pakistani territory in Balochistan, the tribal areas, and in the then-Northwest Frontier Province. As such, Pakistan began instrumentalizing Islamists in Afghanistan as [early as the 1950s](#). Following the ouster of King Zahir Shah by Mohammed Daoud Khan in 1973, Daoud began prosecuting Afghanistan’s Islamists who opposed his modernizing policies. Shia Islamists fled to Iran and Sunni Islamists generally fled to Pakistan. In 1974, then-civilian Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto established a cell within Pakistan’s Inter-services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) to mobilize these exiled dissidents for anti-regime operations in Afghanistan. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq continued the nascent “Afghan jihad” after seizing power from Bhutto in 1977.

Despite Zia’s numerous pleas for support, the Carter administration had no interest in supporting Pakistan’s jihad in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion. In fact, in [April of 1979](#), the administration sanctioned Pakistan for violating U.S. law with respect to progress on its nuclear weapons program. The United States did not begin overtly funding Zia’s “Afghan jihad” until 1982, only after the pro-Zia Reagan government was able to secure waivers for such aid due to the 1979 sanctions. Needless to say, the Reagan administration fully supported the “jihad” in Afghanistan.

However, it is important to note that Pakistan funded its own Afghan policy out of its own resources well before the first American dollar entered the fray.

4. “The United States is responsible for the development of al Qaeda and Islamist militancy.”

Not entirely a pack of lies. It was not the United States that conceived of the struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan as a “jihad.” That was Pakistan’s own invention. Pakistan was very distrustful of Pashtun nationalism and feared that an ethnic mobilization in Afghanistan would give a fillip to Pakistan’s own restless Pashtuns. Pakistan insisted upon a jihad and the Reagan Administration vigorously supported the operation, with Saudi assistance. The ISI insisted that it receive the funds from the CIA and run the jihadi groups. The ISI sought to limit the CIA’s access to the jihadi organizations and to the ISI. These fire walls remained intact, despite the CIA’s efforts to subvert them.

Owing to the ISI cell established by Z.A. Bhutto and subsequently maintained by Zia, the main militant groups were established and in place [before the Soviets crossed](#) the Amu Darya on Christmas Day 1979. That anti-Soviet jihad surely was the [crucible](#) that gave birth to the global Islamist militancy that mobilized under the banner of al-Qaeda. It is difficult to imagine the existence of al-Qaeda had the United States supported the insurgency in Afghanistan on ethnic rather than jihadist terms.

5. “The United States created the Taliban.”

Nonsense. This assertion deliberately conflates the so-called Afghan jihadi organizations from the 1970s and 1980s with the Taliban movement that emerged after 1994. Curiously, the former tended to be associated with the Jamaat-e-Islami variety of South Asian Islam while the latter are nearly exclusively Deobandi in orientation.

While the United States, along with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, heavily funded the Islamist militants fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, the United States left the region in 1989. Pakistan remained engaged. General Zia was nonplussed that the [Geneva Accords](#) were signed to end the conflict in Afghanistan without an explicit statement that an Islamist government would be ensconced in Kabul. [Pakistan continued to support the various Islamist militants](#), hoping that one would be able to stabilize Afghanistan and would act on Pakistan’s interests. First, the Pakistanis supported the Pashtun Islamist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. When he failed to bring a pro-Pakistan, stable government, Pakistan switched support to the [Taliban](#) under the watch of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. The Taliban emerged from an archipelago of [Deobandi madrassahs](#) in Pakistan who coalesced to challenge the predations of the jihad-era warlords who were ravaging Afghanistan. While the ISI did not create the Taliban, it did provide all the necessary support that enabled the organization to control most of Afghanistan by 1998. The United States at times flirted with recognizing the Taliban, but it did not create—much less facilitate—its rise.

6. “Pakistan has lost more due to its participation in the Global War on Terrorism than it has gained in U.S. assistance.”

Depends upon who is counting and what is counted. This claim has two components: economic and human.

With respect to the first, American and Pakistani interlocutors disagree on the actual amount of funding Pakistan has received and where that money went once it arrived in Pakistan. Much (\$10.7 billion) of the American cash flowing to Pakistan has been in the form of [Coalition Support Funds](#), which were intended to reimburse Pakistan’s military for the marginal costs associated with supporting the GWOT. Americans note that the terms of reimbursement were lucrative and lament there was little oversight of the program. That is the fault of the United States for poor scrutiny as much as it is Pakistan’s for submitting bogus or inflated claims. Pakistan’s military has complained that it has [seen only a portion](#) of this amount as the Pakistan government took a share first. The army grouses that it has become an “army for rent” in the eyes of Pakistanis and has suffered considerable losses while being deprived its economic dues.

So Pakistan is right to question the degree of American generosity and it is right to question whether payments for “services rendered” is even generosity. However, Pakistan is one of the biggest reasons why we are fighting the GWOT in the first place. The Pakistanis made the Taliban the effective force that they were on September 10, 2001, and Pakistan continues to undermine U.S. efforts to retard the Taliban’s efforts to retake power in Afghanistan. Osama Bin Laden was safely ensconced in Abbottabad despite ten years of Pakistan assurances that he was [not in Pakistan](#). And apart from the Taliban, Pakistan is responsible for much of the Islamist terrorism in India.

With respect to the second consideration, Pakistan asserts that it has been a victim of terror since 2001. Pakistanis claim that this is due to militant anger with Pakistan’s support of the United States and its various war efforts. There is some truth to this claim. However, the very militants savaging Pakistan are offshoots of the same militants that the state has long nurtured. Whose fault is this?

In fact, there is a strong case to be made that Pakistan owes India and the West generally, and the United States in particular, because of the enormous human and financial costs these states have had to undertake to manage a terrorism problem, much of which has a Pakistani “return address.”

7. “We care about Usama Bin Laden as much as you.”

Prove it. Pakistan’s government undertook a [“comprehensive” examination](#) of how it is that the world’s most wanted terrorist was found a stone’s throw from Pakistan’s premier military academy. The leaked report from the so-called [Abbottabad Commission](#) details Herculean [incompetence and ineptitude](#). However, no one has been arrested for harboring Bin Laden. In fact, the only person that Pakistan has arrested was the doctor, [Shakil Afridi](#), who cooperated with the CIA’s efforts to locate him. If Pakistan’s military and intelligence agency seriously understood the gravity of the problem associated with Mr. Bin Laden’s lengthy sanctuary in an important cantonment town, someone should have been sacked (for example, the Intelligence Chief, the Army Chief, police and/or ministry of interior officials). And, if Pakistan was as serious about the “UBL” problem as it claims, it certainly should have identified and arrested collaborators who facilitated Bin Laden’s peri-urban redoubt.

8. “Pakistan has an enduring interest with peace with India.”

Really? Tell me more. Pakistan has started every war with India over Kashmir and then failed to win any of them. Pakistan continues to sustain a flotilla of militant groups whose stated objectives are to coerce India to make some concession to Pakistan on Kashmir and generally to foment communal violence between India’s Hindu and Muslim communities. [These groups now operate throughout India](#). Under Pakistan’s expanding nuclear umbrella, these groups have been able to undertake attacks far beyond Kashmir including the 2001 attack on India’s parliament, the 2006 attack on Mumbai’s commuter rail system and the 2008 multi-day siege of Mumbai among numerous other lesser known rampages. While it is true that Pakistan must implement a defense policy based on India’s defense capabilities rather than assumptions about India’s most magnanimous intentions, it is also true that India would have no interest in Pakistan if it were not for the numerous terrorist groups that Pakistan supports.

9. “Pakistan wants a stable Afghanistan.”

Maybe. Pakistan does want a stable Afghanistan provided that it is hostile to India and amenable to Pakistan. Pakistan has never accepted Afghanistan as a neighbor and insists upon it being a client state. If Pakistan cannot create an Islamist, pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul that is inhospitable to India, it would prefer chaos that it can manage.

Pakistan is seeking to calibrate many different developments in Afghanistan. First, it wants the United States to retain some presence such that it can continue marketing its relevance to Washington. Second, it wants some degree of Taliban representation in the Afghan government. However, it is not in Pakistan's interests that the Taliban reconquer Afghanistan. After all, some Talibs hate Pakistan as much if not more than they hate the United States. An anti-Pakistan Taliban government could even offer reverse sanctuary to the Pakistani Taliban who fight the Pakistani state.

This means that the Pakistanis prefer that the United States prop up a weak regime in Kabul. This will ensure permanent Pakistani relevance to Washington (and a concomitant stream of revenue) and it will encourage the Afghan Taliban to remain focused on Afghanistan—not Pakistan. As the U.S. security umbrella retracts, Pakistan can be sure that India will make a hasty retreat from the areas most important to Pakistan in the south and east of Afghanistan.

10. “The biggest hindrance to U.S.-Pakistan relations is a ‘trust deficit.’”

Is it Ground Hog Day? Pakistan has long marshalled a highly stylized history of American perfidy such that it can guilt the Americans into continued support. However, as the above shows, the problem is not a deficit of trust, but rather, a surplus of certitude. Both sides fully understand that America's allies such as India are Pakistan's enemies and Pakistan's allies, such as the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba, are the enemies of the United States. Both sides are certain that they want fundamentally different futures in Afghanistan and in India. Thus the biggest hindrance is the obfuscated reality that, in many ways, the United States and Pakistan are more enemies than they are allies.

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