

The Pakistani Monster

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The tempestuous relationship between the United States and Pakistan is akin to a sordid soap opera featuring a fickle, selfish lover and her unpredictable mistress prone to volatile tantrums.

The ensuing violence and instability paralyzing Central Asia is their inevitable progeny.

Recently, a top US diplomat [warned](#) that [Pakistan](#) poses a [bigger security threat](#) to the world than [Afghanistan](#). This ominous statement tracks a series of alarming developments: the surreal [video of twelve gunmen brazenly attacking](#) the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore's broad daylight; Pakistan's capitulation to the Taliban on [implementing sharia law in the Swat Valley](#); several days of [riots](#) after the Supreme Court banned popular opposition leader Nawaz Sharif and his brother from holding office; evidence directly linking Pakistani terrorist groups to November's Mumbai tragedy; a significant increase in suicide bombings within Pakistan; and, of course, the rapid Talibanization of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) – a [Grand Central Station](#) for multicultural extremists seeking training, support and safe haven.

Although Barack Obama's initial language, tone and action towards Pakistan reflected a unilateral belligerence reminiscent of his [predecessor](#) (he'd launched two controversial predator drone attacks as of March), the new president recently conceded: "We've been thinking very militarily, but we haven't been as effective in thinking diplomatically – we haven't been thinking effectively around the development side of the equation."

In fact, neither the leaders of the US nor Pakistan have ever sincerely committed their resources and money to empowering Pakistan's electorate, building infrastructure or creating sustainable social, economic and political reform programs.

California senator Dianne Feinstein's recent [disclosure](#) regarding CIA predator drones doesn't bolster Pakistanis' confidence in their ineffectual leadership – despite the government's assurance to citizens that it will never compromise its "sovereignty." Feinstein revealed the painfully obvious: the unmanned CIA predator aircraft responsible for successfully eliminating 11 to 20 high-profile threats – as well as killing hundreds of innocent Pakistani civilians – were flown from Pakistani air bases. A prominent Pakistani attorney and activist told me last year that the prevailing attitude among Pakistanis is that their government is either a complete ghulam (servant) of the US or a toothless, complicit partner, since "the road to Islamabad leads through the White House."

That "road" was paved by the CIA and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence during the 1980s as the US funded and supported the dictatorship of General [Zia ul Haq](#), whose "Islamization" period nurtured the proliferation of radical Islamic madrassas and trained the

mujahideen soldiers – future Taliban and [al-Qaeda](#) members – to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Insisting on supporting military dictators to the detriment of Pakistan's democratically inclined electorate, the Bush administration championed [General Pervez Musharraf](#), who spearheaded freedom and democracy by imposing martial law, sacking a critical and independent judiciary, arresting activists and lawyers and shutting down private television stations. He was rewarded with nearly \$12bn as an ally in the "war on terror."

According to Ahmed Rashid in his book [Descent into Chaos](#), the ISI played Jekyll and Hyde as it spent some of these resources providing valuable intelligence, while covertly supporting the Taliban as a buffer between Pakistan and India – which they believe uses Afghanistan to gain "strategic depth" and fund [Balochi insurgents](#) to undermine Pakistan. Musharraf's India obsession also gave deferential, protective treatment to terrorist organizations such as [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#) – which initially fought for the nationalist, political struggle in Kashmir, but then flourished into a full-fledged, ideological militant jihad responsible in part for the Mumbai tragedy.

The bargain myopically forged by the US and Pakistan in training radicalized militias to fight as their proxies spawned a terrible monster that has effectively escaped from the laboratory, set it on fire and then evolved into a multi-headed hydra chasing its own creators.

FATA now serves as a haven for international jihadists of all stripes. The Taliban are no longer a homogenous group, as they have splintered operationally into the "Afghan Taliban" and "Pakistan Taliban", which in turn have divergent movements. For example, [Jalaluddin Haqqani](#)'s Taliban and Mullah Omar exhort limiting jihad against US and NATO forces in Afghanistan and criticize those who commit acts of terrorism on Pakistan, as they are "bringing a bad name to mujahideen," according to Omar.

However, [Baitullah Mehsud](#)'s group, which is indigenous to Pakistan, openly perpetrates attacks on the Pakistani government and its security forces.

As [Brookings scholar Stephen Cohen](#) told me, "the root problem is that Pakistan is unable to exercise sovereign control over its own territory in FATA." If the [Obama administration](#) is sincere about changing America's egregiously short-sighted Pakistan policy and truly embracing the tools of diplomacy, then it requires a dedicated partnership with Pakistan's military and leadership. Too bad Pakistan's leadership has been equally self-serving, callous and foolish in its policy initiatives and cynical alliances.

Only by mutually endorsing a long-term vision that gradually invites those operating in FATA – including some of the radical elements – to join a committed program of political reform, economic aid, social welfare and educational development can the US and Pakistan hope to satiate, tame and ultimately pacify the unleashed beast forged by their own hands.

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