

## The Road from Abbottabad Leads to Lame Analysis

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Enough fresh ink has been spilled about the harrowing straits through which the U.S.-Pakistan relationship is passing. While cooler heads such as Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Husain Haqqani and U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates are seeking to explain to audiences at home and abroad the importance of the relationship, the genuine challenges that inhere in the bilateral partnership, and imagine a workable path forward; many other commentators have taken the recent events in Pakistan as an opportunity to stoke further anger and mistrust between the wary governments and their peoples.

While the Pakistani press is rife with caricatures of U.S. policy, distorted versions of history, and outright falsehoods, American journalists are capable of equal chicanery. Mr. Christopher Hitchens' latest offering in *Vanity Fair*, "[From Abbottabad to Worse](#)," is an appalling example of American commentary that undermines the efforts of saner voices in this critical debate.

His piece commences with a dramatic reference to rape -- not as a crime but as a punishment -- and honor killing. The former refers to the rare, horrific instances where women and girls are subject to sexual assault by, in the words of the author, "tribal and religious kangaroo courts." The latter refers to killing women (and sometimes men) in the name of honor. In this paragraph a complex polity of 180 million -- most of whom condemn both practices -- are essentialized as a barbarous people who embrace the notion that "moral courage consists of the willingness to butcher your own daughter." This literary amuse bouche foretells the absurdities, fallacies and dubious assertions in the rest of his troubling account of Pakistan's malaise.

He next characterizes President Asif Zardari as a man who "cringes daily in front of the forces who [sic] openly murdered his wife... A man so lacking in pride -- indeed lacking in manliness -- will seek desperately to compensate in other ways. Swelling his puny chest even more, he promises to resist the mighty United States, and to defend Pakistan's holy "sovereignty." This offensive passage reveals more about the psychology of the author than it does about that of President Zardari.

What are these "forces" that killed Benazir Bhutto? Mr. Hitchens wants the bravado of casting aspersions upon the Pakistani government. After all, only the government would have the authority to "contemptuously" order the crime scene to be "cleansed with fire hoses, as if to spit even on the pretense of an investigation." (Regrettably, all crime scenes -- big and small --are handled in this way in Pakistan.) However, there is no evidence that the government of Pakistan -

- then under President Musharraf -- ordered her death. However, Mr. Hitchens here and throughout takes refuge in the pusillanimity of the passive tense by which he can intimate all the outlandish claims he wants without the responsibility of employing the active tense which requires him to name the agent of the action suggested. In fact, the U.S. government has consistently claimed that elements of the Pakistan Taliban ordered her death.

President Musharraf suffered considerably from her murder. Those with even a 4-year recollection of politics in Pakistan would remember that the United States had brokered a bizarre condominium by which Pervez Musharraf would remain president while Ms. Bhutto would become the Prime Minister following elections which were scheduled for late 2007. Musharraf had become politically isolated following a series of horrendous missteps and abuses of power. However, Washington was unwilling to let Musharraf sink into oblivion. So it devised a compact by which Mr. Musharraf could be laundered through the electoral legitimacy of Ms. Bhutto. With her demise -- and even public suspicion that he or his government had her killed -- Mr. Musharraf's political life in Pakistan was finished. He now lives in London with various legal woes awaiting him in Pakistan.

Mr. Hitchens' answer to "Why do they hate us" is no less preposterous and misleading. He contends that Pakistanis dislike the United States because they "owe us, and are dependent upon us." This is simply a mathematical canard. According to the USAID Green Book, in 2009, total economic assistance to Pakistan came to \$1.35 billion and military assistance totaled \$0.429 (for a grand sum of \$1.78 billion). In 2009, Pakistan's gross domestic product was \$162 billion. Calling this a dependency is an obvious stretch. (In fairness, I too have been guilty of lapsing into this idiom until I crunched the numbers.)

By way of contrast, the United States gave Israel \$2.43 billion in total economic and military assistance in 2009. Israel's GDP was \$204 billion. As a percentage of GDP, U.S. total assistance to both countries are nearly the same (around 1 percent). Between 1962 and 2009, total economic and military assistance to Israel totaled \$178 billion in constant 2009 U.S. dollars. In the same period, U.S. military and economic aid to Pakistan comes to \$37 billion in constant 2009 U.S. dollars. But would Mr. Hitchens describe Israel as being dependent upon Washington? By his own argumentation, he would have to answer in the affirmative.

However, from the optic of the American legislator and citizen alike, U.S. assistance to Pakistan appears to be a relatively large sum that should prompt positive feelings for America, or at least dampen raging anti-U.S. sentiment, among Pakistanis. And Americans do expect their funds will be used to a good end rather than be gobbled up by corruption in the host nation and by their own national contractors who are often first-tier executors of U.S. projects. Americans also expect their economic assistance to buy them some sway with Pakistan due to other larger economic factors such as the U.S. role in the International Monetary Fund and other multi-lateral actors which has helped Pakistan considerably. Other forms of assistance such as debt relief are also important beyond the sum it totals. And the United States has been the biggest investor in Pakistan's human development, trumping Saudi Arabia and China long embraced as Pakistan's enduring friends. Mr. Hitchens characterization of Pakistan as "our goddam [sic] lapdog" is out of line.

However, the circus of inaccuracy is far from over. Mr. Hitchens then proceeds to announce that "Everybody knew that al-Qaeda forces were being sheltered in the Pakistani frontier town of Quetta..." Mr. Hitchens of course takes refuge again in the passive voice to avoid saying precisely who sheltered al Qaeda. It would appear that the author has confused al Qaeda (an international terrorist organization) and the Afghan Taliban (a regressive Pashtun-dominated Deobandi insurgent organization presently focused upon the international occupation of Afghanistan). The former has not been harbored by the Pakistani state while the latter has been a long-standing client.

He continues to distort the entire record of Pakistan when it comes to al Qaeda. Pakistan has been a critical partner in capturing al Qaeda leadership in Pakistan. In fact, had it not been for this baseline cooperation, the United States would not have even been in a position to kill bin Laden in the first instance.

There is at least one practical reason for Pakistan's cooperation: al Qaeda has targeted Pakistan's military and civilian leadership for years. In 2009, al Zawahiri denounced Pakistan's constitution as un-Islamic. Al Qaeda's sectarian allies such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipha-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan have killed or maimed tens of thousands of Pakistanis since 2004. Al Qaeda is not an asset for Pakistan as the author suggests.

Pakistan's record on al Qaeda has been evident and positive even while Pakistan sustains ties with the Afghan Taliban and groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba. While these groups are foes of the United States, neither the Afghan Taliban nor Lashkar-e-Taiba has targeted Pakistan nor have they embraced the Pakistani Taliban. This has been an invariant truth since the onset of the Global War on Terror in 2001. The United States and Pakistan have an ever-more restricted overlap of foes which makes future cooperation seem increasingly unproductive if not counterproductive to both nations' aims.

Hitchens next describes his own shock that "Osama bin Laden himself would be given a villa in a Pakistani garrison town on Islamabad's periphery." Dodging again behind the passive tense, he offers no evidence for this reckless and dangerous assertion. In contrast to Mr. Hitchens, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said that he had seen evidence that suggested Pakistan's senior officials were unaware of bin Laden's whereabouts. Hitchens' claim that the state sheltered bin Laden is feckless journalism that encourages further ignorant speculation among publics who have no real understanding of the other and their governments.

And, for the record, Abbottabad is not on the periphery of Islamabad unless one redefines the word periphery. The word is defined as "the edge or outskirts, as of a city or urban area." While the distance between the two cities, as a crow would fly, is about 67 miles, because Abbottabad is "hill station" resort town, the road is windy, indirect and covers an altitude climb of about 2,500 feet. Periphery implies a jaunt to the suburbs. But the drive is about 2.5 hours depending upon conditions and the quality of your car. Describing Abbottabad as in the periphery of Islamabad is either geographically obtuse or a deliberate attempt to make it sound as if bin Laden was pacing back and forth in a suburb of the nation's capital. Someone should introduce Mr. Hitchens to Google Earth and if not him, then *Vanity Fair's* fact checker --should there be one.

Hitchens is correct in noting that Pakistanis of all strata are deeply outraged that U.S. Navy SEALs came into Abbottabad -- a garrison-town -- to catch bin Laden without hindrance and with impunity. However, his outrage at Pakistani outrage is misplaced. Of course, Pakistanis should feel so violated because they were. As an American, I support the raid that eliminated this terrorist. However, from the optic of many Pakistanis, they first had to contend with the notion that bin Laden was in their country and second that the United States stormed their airspace, conducted a firefight for 40 minutes in a garrison town and then escaped with its dead quarry all before the Pakistanis could even scramble their F-16s.

Pakistanis themselves began wondering whether their military could protect them from India and whether the United States could act with equal ease to eliminate their nuclear program. Needless to say, all of this came on the back of years of drone attacks against terrorists in Pakistan's tribal areas. While the facts about the drone program in Pakistan are grotesquely distorted and obscured by Pakistani and American officials, ultimately perception matters more than reality. Pakistanis, especially beyond FATA, loathe them as weekly assaults upon their nation's sovereignty. The bin Laden raid was just the latest and most brazen of assaults on the country and demonstrated the incapacity or will of the military or intelligence agencies to stop the United States. Who would not be demoralized and outraged by these events?

Pakistanis -- more than Mr. Hitchens -- understand the limits of their country's ability to extend rule of law throughout the land, to protect them from the ravages of terrorists and proxies gone wild alike, to grow the economy fast enough to accommodate Pakistan's burgeoning population, among other challenges.

Similarly the American hysteria over Pakistan's capture and detention of Pakistanis who collaborated on the raid -- while understandable -- is unfair. Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI, knows full well that the CIA is operating against the organization perhaps as much if not more than it cooperates with it. The Pakistanis who assisted the raid were traitors to Pakistan by law because they aided and abetted a foreign intelligence agency. This is what domestic law enforcement and intelligence agencies do: ferret out and capture traitors. The United States does the same thing when their citizens help foreign spy organizations. Americans and Pakistanis alike hope that Pakistan will show equal diligence to determining who knew about bin Laden and who was involved in giving the mass murderer succor. Time will tell if this is the case.

Navigating this strained relationship under the pressures of reality is hard enough. However, accounts like that of Hitchens and others here and in Pakistan, dims the prospects for salvaging a relationship that is extremely important for the United States if not for Pakistan. And one has to wonder if that's not the very goal of such fact-free musings.

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