

Spies, Lies and Pakistan

Christine Fair [2] May 11, 2011

The revelation that Osama bin Laden had ensconced himself in a spartan but capacious compound in the garrison town of Abbottabad, a few kilometers from Pakistan's military academy, continues to wrack the minds of U.S. policy makers and American citizens alike. [Abbottabad](#) [3] is a picturesque hill city some [4,120 feet](#) [4] above sea level and a [three-hour drive](#) [5] from Islamabad. Clearly, reports that the town is a "[suburb of Islamabad](#) [6]" are patently and absurdly false.

There are numerous fundamental problems with the way in which the events of the last week have been covered in the international media and described by U.S. officials. The repercussions of these characterizations are dangerous and profound.

First and foremost, *all* accounts and statements attesting to Pakistan's official facilitation of bin Laden's tenure are irresponsibly *speculative*. The United States had been monitoring the compound since August 2010 and had even erected a CIA house to do so. If there is credible evidence of such facilitation, the U.S. government should say so. In the absence of evidence, conjecture is reckless. I spent last week in Islamabad interviewing journalists working on their stories—several of them outright confessed that they had nothing of substance and were running with sheer conjecture. Some relied upon dubious and tentative accounts from children playing near the house, milkmen and paperboys as well as night watchmen. As one journalist conceded, "the standards go down" in situations like this. Unfortunately, these sloppy articles will form the contemporary and historical understanding of this momentous event. But let's be clear: this is not reportage; rather, it is the substance of tabloid.

What is required right now is coolheaded investigation into what happened, how it happened and with what—if *any*—official, government of Pakistan facilitation. Baseless speculation will only fuel the inclinations in the U.S. government to cut off Pakistan, and this would be a catastrophic strategic blunder. Washington needs Islamabad's help. Pakistan needs the United States just as much—and China isn't coming to the rescue anytime soon.

From Tora Bora to Abbottabad

Of course, this is not the first hint that things are not as hoped in Pakistan. Since 9/11, Washington has given Pakistan some [\\$20 billion](#) [7] in aid, military assistance and lucrative reimbursements for its efforts in the war on terror. All the while, Islamabad has continued to support the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network, which operate in Afghanistan and are responsible for thousands of coalition deaths and tens of thousands of Afghan deaths, as well as groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba in India.

In an effort to persuade Pakistan to cease and desist, the 2009 Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act (also known as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill) made security assistance dependent upon the U.S. secretary of state's certification that Pakistan is working to eliminate these groups and cease state support of them, among other actions such as providing visibility into nuclear-proliferation networks, tightening money-laundering legislation and ensuring that the military does not undermine democracy in Pakistan. Astonishingly, Secretary Clinton gave that [certification](#) [8] on March 18 of this year—even while plans to capture bin Laden were under way. Bogus certification is not an auspicious way to begin enforcing the new legislation's efforts to deal with Pakistan-based security threats.

However, to American policy makers and officials, the discovery of bin Laden tucked away in Abbottabad is unquestionably the most outrageous provocation yet. Support for Pakistan is waning. Among those contemplating whether Pakistan is a fraught and troublesome ally or an enemy that abets and harbors U.S. foes while accepting U.S. funds purportedly to counter those same foes, new seeds of doubt have been sown. Dianne Feinstein, the chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said on Monday that the U.S.-Pakistan relationship “[makes less and less sense](#) [9]” and questioned the utility if not wisdom of continuing to invest in Pakistan's people and government. This put Feinstein at odds with the two other top-ranking members of the committee, Democrat John Kerry and Republican Dick Lugar, who call for continued assistance to Pakistan, arguing it will remain critical in achieving U.S. long-term objectives—from controlling nuclear proliferation to countering a growing array of terrorist groups apart from al-Qaeda.

Recriminations, Obfuscation and Demurrals

The responses within Pakistan's political and military establishments to bin Laden's elimination have not helped. Rather than focusing on how it is that bin Laden was able to hide in plain sight in a military garrison town for six years, Islamabad has chosen to focus the country's outrage upon violations of sovereignty that occurred when a team of U.S. SEALs flew into town and did the necessary. Needless to say, bin Laden himself—and a host of other terrorists—mightily infringed upon Pakistan's sovereignty well before the commando team or U.S. drones appeared in Pakistan.

Adding to the diversion, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, in his [speech to Pakistan's parliament on Monday](#) [10], offered a bizarre rendition of the country's violent period in the 1990s, when, he claims, the international community was responsible for emergence of al-Qaeda and “making the myth of Osama bin Laden.” Gilani—in hopes of spreading the blame for this intelligence failure—said that “Pakistan alone cannot be held to account for flawed policies and blunders of others.”

This history is disingenuous, despite being popularly believed among Pakistanis. Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Husain Haqqani's own volume, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*, explains it more accurately: When Afghanistan's Islamists were ousted by then-President Sardar Mohammed Daoud Khan, fleeing to Pakistan in 1974, Islamabad turned them into its own instruments. Pakistan began its forward policy in Afghanistan under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, president and then prime minister of Pakistan in the 1970s—long before the infamous President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq. Still Zia, the most important user of Islamism in Pakistan and the region, played his part. Facing a Soviet threat, he

repeatedly approached Jimmy Carter to launch a jihad against the Soviets before they invaded in 1979. Reluctantly, Carter did so in December 1979. However, the U.S. president had to first waive sanctions against giving Islamabad security assistance that had been levied in April 1979 as a result of Pakistan's enrichment of fissile material. By the time the Russians crossed the Amu Darya river on Afghanistan's northern border, Pakistan had already assembled on its own the seven militant groupsthat would be instrumental in waging the anti-Soviet jihad. It is important to note that Pakistan—not the United States—wanted to liberate Afghanistan through jihad, rather than ethno-nationalist insurgency against a foreign occupation. The United States, along with Saudi Arabia and others, funded a strategy that was essentially formulated in Islamabad long before the Soviets invaded.

And long after the Soviets left, Pakistan—not the United States—continued to support its preferred Afghan militia leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and goaded him into destroying Kabul with his rival warlords such as Ahmad Shah Mahsood. When Hekmatyar failed to deliver, Islamabad turned to a new client: the Taliban. Meanwhile, Pakistan also deployed battle-hardened militants to Indian-administered Kashmir and elsewhere in India.

This history was not in his speech. It certainly should have been.

However, amid the political theater, Gilani was right about one thing: We all need to know what happened, how and why—Pakistanis as well as the international community.

U.S.-Pakistan Over the Long Haul

The simple truth is that the United States has few other options; it must engage Pakistan. Washington cannot put together adequate political carrots and deployable sticks to compel Pakistan to abandon its reliance upon militants because the U.S. government lacks the will to do so. Washington needs to step up engagement in order to maximally secure U.S. interests, be it proliferation of nuclear technology or terrorism. Moreover, the only hope for Pakistan's future is continued investment in its people and civilian institutions, albeit with greater clarity of purpose, efficacy of programming and attention to outcomes. Humiliating Pakistan to the point of no return is not a useful strategy.

Pakistan too has few choices. Pakistanis are fond of pointing to China as their longtime and reliable friend. Gilani even made this allusion in his speech. Nothing is further from the truth. China has never helped Pakistan in any of its wars with India (1947, 1965, 1971, 1999). China has sided with India over the Kargil conflict. In 2009, Beijing voted at the UN Security Council to declare Pakistan's asset the Jamaat-ud-Dawa a terrorist organization. China sells Pakistan subpar military equipment. (China does not have access to high-quality international arms procurements following the crackdown at *Tiananmen Square* in 1989.) In fact, the rising power hopes to encourage Islamabad to remain at conflict with New Delhi to ensure India remains focused on Pakistan rather than China. Yet Beijing does not want an actual fight, as that would mean revealing—yet again—that it will not come to Pakistan's assistance. Pakistanis point to China's "investment" in Pakistan. Pipe dreams. Beijing's investments are exploitative, aim to serve China's interests and do little for Pakistanis. Finally, China has invested virtually nothing in human

development in Pakistan because it has no such interests. Its assistance during the 2010 floods was a mere \$100 million dollars, compared to more than \$500 million by the Americans.

Pakistanis should consider a public inquiry akin to the U.S. Congress' 9/11 Commission, or even India's review committee in the wake of its worst intelligence failure when Pakistani military and paramilitary forces seized territory several kilometers inside Indian territory. Both of those reviews were highly public and debated. Of course, implementing the recommendations of those reports remains a work in progress. Indeed, this is an important time for Pakistan's civilian leadership to hold its powerful military and spy agency to account for what was either grievous incompetence or dangerous collusion with the world's most wanted terrorist mastermind. Pakistanis are mindful that bin Laden—despite his claims to target the Crusader-Zionist alliance—killed far more Muslims than Kafirs.

The United States and Pakistan need each other, albeit for different but intertwined reasons. Both governments will have to resist the urge to undermine the other for domestic considerations. The security of both of populations depends upon it in the near and far term.

Links:

- [1] <http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=nationalinterest>
- [2] <http://nationalinterest.org/profile/christine-fair>
- [3] <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/pakistan/karakoram-highway/abbottabad>
- [4] http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-02/world/bin.laden.abbottabad_1_al-qaeda-facilitator-ashfaq-parvez-kayani-north-waziristan?_s=PM:WORLD
- [5] <http://www.nationaljournal.com/map-abbottabad-in-relation-to-islamabad-20110502>
- [6] http://www.myfoxov.com/dpps/news/osama-bin-laden-mansion-in-abbottabad-pakistan-dpgoha-20110503-fc_13028707
- [7] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/21/us-pakistan-usa-aid-factbox-idUSTRE73K7F420110421>
- [8] <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/05/05/2203568/us-pakistan-policy-sets-low-bar.html>
- [9] <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0511/54625.html>
- [10] <http://nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Regional/Islamabad/09-May-2011/PM-admits-intelligence-failure-in-tracing-Osama>