

# Groundhog Day in U.S.-Pakistan Relations

C. Christine  
Fair

The United States generally, and the U.S. State Department in particular, seem perennially unwilling to grasp the realities of Pakistan. Refusing to recognize that Pakistan pursues ideological goals through the use of terrorism under its ever-expanding nuclear umbrella, the United States persists with the same strategy it has always used to handle the “Pakistan problem” – namely, attempt to induce better Pakistani comportment through handsome allurements. The most Panglossian American policy makers believe that there is some magical combination of rewards and engagement that, over some time horizon, will transform Pakistan from the regional menace it is today, into a state that is at peace with itself and its neighbors. The most pusillanimous of policy-making poltroons fret that should the United States curb its generosity and demand that Pakistan honor its varied commitments like any other responsible state, Pakistan may fail and the Islamist barbarians will knock down the nuclear gates with grisly consequences for humanity.

Once again, the U.S. State Department revealed that it has no intention of taking the Pakistan problem seriously. This week, Foggy Bottom approved Pakistan’s request to purchase some \$952 million of American military hardware which includes attack helicopters, missiles, and communications equipment. In an explanatory press release [from April 6](#), the State Department justified this decision by arguing that

*This proposed sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a country vital to U.S. foreign policy and national security goals in South Asia.*

While in some sense such foreign military sales benefit the U.S. defense industry, approval of these sales evidences perduring obfuscation of the root causes of Pakistan’s problems and abjuration of what a better course of action might be. After all, Pakistan’s problem is not a lack of capability to fight the various terrorists ensconced in its territory; rather the will to do so comprehensively. Equally important, Pakistan continues to create new militant proxies while sustaining old ones even while it attempts to fight those who have turned against the state and who cannot be bullied or bribed back into the fold of the deep state.

The time for such folly has long passed. The United States needs a more realistic policy towards Pakistan. In this essay, I argue why these decades-long policies have long failed and I put forward several propositions that should inform a new policy towards a state that is the problem from hell.

## A Laundry List of Dirty Deeds

To summarize briefly, since FY 2002, [the United States has provided Pakistan](#) \$7.6 billion in security-related assistance, \$13.0 billion in lucrative reimbursements under the dubiously-named “Coalition Support Fund” program, and another \$10.5 billion in economic assistance. This largesse was both to reward Pakistan for its putative support in the war on terrorism while incentivizing future support. Has the United States secured value for this \$31 billion? Let’s recount how Pakistan has “contributed” to the war on terrorism.

Pakistan has persistently supported the Afghan Taliban, who are responsible for the deaths of [2,356 U.S.](#) military personnel, another [677](#) coalition military deaths, and the deaths of [thousands of civilian contractors](#), for whom there is [no official count under U.S. reporting requirements](#). This is in addition to the more than [21,000 Afghan civilians](#) who have died since 2001. The death toll of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is a tightly guarded secret; however,

various sources estimate that more than [20,000](#) Afghan police and army personnel have been killed since 2003. More than [5,000](#) ANSF were killed by insurgents in 2014 alone. Without Pakistan's direct military, diplomatic, political and financial support as well as secure sanctuaries in Pakistani territory, the Taliban would not be as lethal or capable. The Taliban might even not be viable as an insurgent movement without these vast Pakistani amenities. In addition to the Afghan Taliban under Mullah Omar, Pakistan continues to support the [Jalaludin Haqqani network](#), which has conducted sophisticated, deadly suicide operations at U.S., NATO and Indian facilities in Afghanistan.

Copyright © 2015 [War on the Rocks](#)