

Stop Funding My Failing State

by Fatima Bhutto



When Pakistan's president visits the White House next week, he's sure to ask for another handout. But *Fatima Bhutto*, niece of the late *Benazir Bhutto*, says the billions of dollars the U.S. gives are merely propping up a government that's capitulating to terror.

In Pakistan things move at a leisurely South Asian pace. We missed our goals to eradicate polio recently because we, a nuclear nation, could not sustain electricity across the country long enough to refrigerate the vaccines. Garbage disposal is a nonexistent concept, and plush neighborhoods in Karachi boast towers of rubbish piled on street corners and alleyways. Prisons and police cells are full of prisoners awaiting trials, and our justice system, despite the reinstatement of the Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudry, leaves a lot to be desired in terms of meting out free and fair access to justice.

One thing moving ridiculously fast, however, is the Taliban's stranglehold on the country. After two years of fighting off Taliban insurgents camped out in the lush Swat Valley, Pakistan's president, Asif Zardari, threw in the towel last week and gave the militants what they wanted—Shariah law.

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Never mind that Pakistan's constitution stipulates that no law contrary to Islam can be passed in the land. The no-goodnik president, who *The Wall Street Journal* called a "Category 5 disaster," went ahead and unilaterally—without a vote granted to the citizens of Swat—imposed Shariah. So perhaps it shouldn't be considered a great surprise that a week after the law was passed, the Taliban, in typical breakneck speed, have now advanced into the Buner district, a mere 70 miles from the capital.

Meanwhile, President Obama is set to meet with President Zardari (who locals have now taken to calling President Ghadari, or "traitor" in Urdu) in 10 days' time. There is, I'd imagine, much to discuss.

The most important question that will come from Pakistan, however, is a familiar one: Can we have some more please? Money, that is, not Taliban. It may surprise some Americans that even in the midst of this recession, billions of their tax dollars are given directly to the thievery corporation that is Pakistan's government, never to be seen again. George W. Bush gave Pakistan a whopping \$10 billion to fight terror, money that seems to have gone down the drain—or rather, into some pretty deep pockets. And it's not just the U.S.—last week, international donors from 30 countries met in Tokyo and pledged \$5 billion to Pakistan to “fight terror.” The IMF has given the country \$7.6 billion in a bailout deal that boggles the mind. Saudi Arabia has generously pledged \$700 million over the next four years, and the less-generous European Union an additional \$640 million over the same period. And then there's Obama's promise of \$1.5 billion a year, dependent, the White House says, on results.

It's phenomenally silly to give that kind of money to a president who, before becoming president, was facing corruption cases in Switzerland, Spain, and England. Zardari and his wife, the late Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, are estimated to have stolen upwards of \$3 billion from the Pakistani Treasury—a figure Zardari doesn't seem desperate to disprove, he placed his personal assets before becoming president at over \$1 billion.

It's also dangerous. No amount of money, especially in the hands of a famously corrupt government, is going to help Pakistan stave off terror, especially when said government seems more than willing to capitulate to the militants they're supposed to be using that money to save the world from. Since 2001, Pakistan has been a country in decline. We suffer a suicide-bombing rate that surpasses Iraq's. The billions of dollars we have received have not made Pakistan safer, they haven't made our neighbors safer, and they've done nothing in the way of eradicating terror. Instead, we now have our own version of the Taliban busy blowing up trade routes and flogging young girls.

The Taliban and their ilk, on the other hand, are able to seat themselves in towns and villages across Pakistan without much difficulty largely because they do not come empty-handed. In a country that has a literacy rate of around 30 percent, the Islamists set up madrassas and educate local children for free. In districts where government hospitals are not fit for animals, they set up medical camps—in fact, they've been doing medical relief work since the 2005 earthquake hit Northern Pakistan. Where there is no electricity, because the local government officials have placed their friends and relatives in charge of local electrical plants, the Islamists bring generators. In short, they fill a vacuum that the state, through political negligence and gross graft, has created.

To combat the Taliban's incursions further into poverty-stricken parts of the country, Pakistan's government only has to do its job less leisurely. That's the frightening truth.

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