

Stop Spoiling My Country

by Fatima Bhutto



Pete Souza, The White House / Getty Images

If the U.S. wants to give money to unstable nuclear regimes like Pakistan’s, maybe it should cozy up to others as well—I hear North Korea could use a little all-American can-do support.

Pakistan has nuclear capabilities, this is not a surprise. Pakistan is run by a corrupt government that essentially voted itself into power, we all know that. Pakistan is surrounded on all sides by large and imposing—and often worrisome, for the White House—countries: Iran, Afghanistan, India, a bit of China (check a map if you don’t believe me.)

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And, after President Zardari’s first stateside visit at the start of this month, we have confirmation that Pakistan is verging on BFF status with Barack Obama’s administration. Obama said he stood united with Pakistan in the war on al Qaeda; Secretary of State Hillary Clinton mused on the “personal” dimensions of the trip, fondly recalling the days when she and Zardari were mere First Spouses; and the U.S. House Appropriations Committee sped through a hefty \$2 billion handout to help Pakistan with its newly created internally displaced population of nearly two million people—which, though I’m opposed to buckets of international aid being thrown at Pakistan, is only fair because U.S. predator drones keep our internal refugee population growing.

Under the guise of this new war on the Northwest Frontier Province, being fought jointly by the American and Pakistani armies—the largest and seventh largest in the world, respectively—the Obama administration’s modus operandi is looking remarkably Bush-like. Afghanistan is the new Iraq, Zardari is the new Musharraf, and, according to Seymour Hersh, Obama is bringing Cheney’s boys back into action in the form of General Stanley McChrystal, who is heading the new Afghan war push. It’s all a little macabre.

But back to the nukes. According to The New York Times, the U.S. Congress is suddenly worried about them. It’s not the first time. Two years ago, the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute helpfully suggested launching a Special Forces operation to dive

into the country and safeguard our nuclear arsenal. And last month, Hillary Clinton made a surprisingly good point: America spends a great deal of time worrying about Iran going nuclear, but perhaps they aren't the problem. Pakistan already has nukes, and satellite images show we're industriously at work building up our stock of nuclear weapons and producing some plutonium while we're at it—because you never know when we'll need more.

Yet depending on the date, America's attitude toward Pakistan's nukes ranges from nonchalant to nervous breakdown. On May 4, Obama expressed grave concern about the potential of Pakistan's nuclear proliferation, calling the threat one of the administration's "highest priorities." Then on Sunday, Obama said he was confident that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal was safe. And now, says the Times, Congress is in big huff over Pakistan "rapidly adding nuclear arms."

Why? I thought we were friends! Look how well everything worked out between us in the 1980s—you know, the last time America ventured out into the wilds of Afghanistan to fight the bad guys. Things went just swell when you, Congress, funneled millions of dollars through our army and intelligence services, the ISI. You remember the ISI, right? Big fellows? Very powerful thanks to all that clout you gave them when you put them between millions of dollars and the original Afghan Mujahideen, who coincidentally turned out to be the first set of Taliban to terrorize South Asia?

Today, the ISI isn't a dangerous force that exists as an independent state within the increasingly weak Pakistani state. Pakistan's army respects the right of the people to choose their own governments. Afghanistan has flourished as a safe and progressive country, thanks to the fact that they were mercifully freed from the evil scourge of communism. And everyone in Pakistan lived happily ever after.

That would have been nice, wouldn't it? Unfortunately, none of it happened. The ISI is a many-headed hydra, the Pakistani army is currently at war with its own people, and Afghanistan is still a lawless and dangerous country that the Taliban cannot be forced out of. Except now we in Pakistan also have a Taliban. They help each other out sometimes.

Recently, President Zardari has proved his steadfast commitment to fighting terror by capitulating to the Tehreek-e-Taliban's demands for Shariah law, ordering the release of the ideological mastermind Maulana Abdul Aziz of the infamously militant Red Mosque—who, by the by, was in jail on charges of terrorism—and creating a gargantuan internal refugee population that is perfectly attuned for fundamentalists seeking to capitalize on the Pakistani state's lack of care for its own citizens.

If that's the criteria for America turning a blind eye toward nuclear empowerment, why stop at Pakistan? Why isn't the U.S. helping out Omar al Bashir of Sudan? I hear he's got a pesky problem over in Darfur he could use a hand with. While you're at it, why not give Robert Mugabe some air support while he spreads democracy in Zimbabwe? And don't even get me started on North Korea—talk about a regime that could benefit from a little all-American can-do assistance.

The possibilities are endless.

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