

# *Explaining America and Pakistan's Troubling Mutual Dependence (and Hostility)*



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As Americans begin to question the efficacy of interfering politically (via aid) in Egypt, recent unrest in Pakistan highlights other troublesome dynamics that emerge with the dispersal of U.S. foreign aid.

Last month, U.S. citizen and government employee Raymond Davis shot and killed two armed Pakistani men whom he thought were trying to rob him. U.S. officials claim that Davis is a diplomatic employee (despite not having a diplomatic visa) and that his detention violates the Geneva Convention.

Pakistan disagrees. It certainly does not help matters when the U.S. Consulate vehicle summoned to the scene by Davis drove the wrong way down a one way street, killing a motorcyclist and then speeding away. Even worse, *The Express Tribune* (with the *International Herald Tribune*) reported that Pakistani prosecutors recommended that Davis be charged with espionage after police retrieved photographs of sensitive areas and defense installations from his camera. Adding to existing outrage is news that the widow of one of Davis's victims recently committed suicide.

The diplomatic chasm that has opened between Islamabad and Washington might grow even larger. A senior delegation of U.S. lawmakers flew to Pakistan demanding the release of Davis, threatening that \$1.5 billion of annual assistance for Pakistan may be at risk as well as a \$7.5 billion, five-year civilian aid package. When asked if aid would be at risk if Davis stayed in custody, U.S. Representative Buck McKeon (R-CA), who heads the House Armed Services Committee, said: "It very well could be." And U.S. Representative John Kline

(R-MN) said it was imperative that Pakistan release Davis and that there may be repercussions otherwise.

Pakistani authorities are terrified of what will happen if they cave to American pressures. They fear, justifiably so, that *not* detaining Davis will spark a public backlash. Imagine for a moment if the situation were reversed: rather than in Lahore, this incident happened in New York, and rather than an American shooting two Pakistanis it was a Pakistani who shot and killed two Americans in broad daylight. The zeitgeist would put last year's "Ground Zero mosque" debate to shame. A 24-hour cable news media firestorm would erupt; U.S. officials would consider it an act of domestic terrorism; New York and other major American cities would be on lock down; and American Muslims would be subject to even more popular criticism than they are now.

All of this is not to say that Mr. Davis is in the wrong. Innocent until proven guilty is the motto America lives by, even though it is not always the principle it champions. However, we also must consider how *we* would react if the situation were flipped: would U.S. officials not also feel public pressure to detain a Pakistani who killed two American citizens, regardless of diplomatic immunity? Would Washington bend to Islamabad's will? What if Pakistan threatened to stop assisting America's war in neighboring Afghanistan?

As I have [written](#) before, America's dependence on Pakistan constrains the usefulness of its support. Islamabad and Washington's troubling mutual dependence makes it so that each country must rely on the other whether or not their long-term interests are best served by the partnership. It's a hostile coexistence that underscores one of the many—and there are a lot of them—problems with U.S. foreign aid.

The United States is Pakistan's largest provider of military and economic assistance. Though this gives leaders in Washington some degree of leverage over Islamabad, aid is in no way harmless. Aside from ignoring the role of traditional elites—in that foreign aid keeps established political institutions not only in power but also unaccountable—foreign countries receiving U.S. foreign

aid become sensitive to the possibility that that aid could be used as a punitive weapon to impose implicit and explicit pressures. After all, when times are good, U.S. officials crow about the altruism of aid, but when times are bad, they threaten to take aid away.

Naturally, injured dignities breed a palpable sense of resentment toward the United States. But U.S. policymakers have yet to internalize what dumping mounds of cash into a country does to Washington's relationship with the country (or vassal) in question. Perhaps even worse, U.S. policymakers have yet to internalize what it does to the relationship between foreign leaders and their citizens who, thanks to foreign aid, inevitably devolve into subjects.