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## The Death of bin Laden and U.S.-Pakistan Relations

| [More](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

|  
May 3, 2011

[Malou Innocent](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

No one is certain how Osama bin Laden's death will affect the future of U.S.-Pakistan relations. We will likely have a better grasp once more details about the operation come to light. For now at least, it appears that the circumstances surrounding bin Laden's demise exemplify a troubling feature of the U.S.-Pakistan partnership, and one that we've known for some time: Washington and Islamabad are [enemies disguised as friends](#) <sup>[3]</sup>.

America's former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice once [observed](#) <sup>[4]</sup>:

America's al-Qaida policy wasn't working because our Afghanistan policy wasn't working. And our Afghanistan policy wasn't working because our Pakistan policy wasn't working . . . al-Qaida was both client of and patron to the Taliban, which in turn was supported by Pakistan. Those relationships provided al-Qaida with a powerful umbrella of protection, and we had to sever them.

This problem more or less persists. Still, the United States and Pakistan cooperate jointly on counterterrorism. Although the efficacy and depth of that cooperation is up for dispute, it seems bilateral cooperation has been more successful in that area of the relationship than another: America's endeavor to erect a U.S.-backed and India-friendly client regime in Kabul.

Pakistan will never cede Afghanistan to Indian influence. It's an [open secret](#) <sup>[5]</sup> that elements of Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) meets regularly with insurgent commanders to orchestrate the scope and tempo of the Afghan insurgency. Indeed, a [report](#) <sup>[6]</sup> last year by the London School of Economics suggested that the ISI not only funds Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, but is officially represented on the militant movement's leadership council. What is debatable is the extent to which the ISI functions independently of the civilian government.

Just last week, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani [said](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, "Wrong propaganda is being floated about intelligence agencies through newspapers. I want to tell them that the intelligence

agencies are under the Pakistan government.” It has long been believed that Pakistan’s civilian political leaders have limited say over policy articulation. That argument, however, is not synonymous with the contention that civilian leaders operate under the direction of ISI. It seems highly improbable that bin Laden would be living in an urban area 35 miles north of Islamabad with the knowledge of only Pakistani intelligence and military units. Perhaps bin Laden went undetected by the civilians, but if not, what kind of support system do other militants enjoy inside Pakistan? Does that bring U.S. foreign aid under Kerry-Lugar into question? Are the civilians using plausible deniability by pointing to the power of the ISI?

Pakistani officials and President Asif Ali Zardari expressed [8] amazement about bin Laden’s whereabouts within their country, even though in his statement on Sunday night President Obama said, “Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding.” Obama’s chief counterterrorism advisor, John Brennan, does not believe, for now, that the Pakistani government knew of bin Laden’s locations. But he does think it is entirely possible an official(s) within the “Pakistani establishment” knew of his location and provided cover.

The divergence in official claims and the very fact that individuals within Pakistan’s establishment may have harbored Osama bin Laden brings the most pressing issues in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship to the forefront. We knew about the assistance to specific insurgents, but now it is entirely possible Pakistan was hiding our worst enemy.

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[4] <http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/nss/WH/20040408.pdf>

[5] [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/world/asia/26tribal.html?\\_r=2&ref=todayspaper](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/world/asia/26tribal.html?_r=2&ref=todayspaper)

[6] <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2010/06/taliban.aspx>

[7] [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-04-27/pakistan/29478206\\_1\\_spy-agency-intelligence-agencies-minister-yousuf-raza-gilani](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-04-27/pakistan/29478206_1_spy-agency-intelligence-agencies-minister-yousuf-raza-gilani)

[8] [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/pakistan-did-its-part/2011/05/02/AFHxmybF\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/pakistan-did-its-part/2011/05/02/AFHxmybF_story.html)