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## America and Pakistan: Frenemies for Life

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

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

Yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* [reports](#)<sup>[3]</sup> that Pakistan has asked the United States to suspend drone strikes on its territory and to reduce the number of American intelligence personnel in its country. "The bottom line is that joint cooperation is essential to the security of the two nations," said a U.S. official briefed on the meeting between Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, and Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha, the head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI).

Some observers claim that Pakistan's demand for cessation of the strikes is a byproduct of the diplomatic imbroglio over Raymond Davis, the CIA contractor detained in January for allegedly shooting and killing two Pakistani citizens. However, the Raymond Davis case was itself a symptom of an underlying problem between America and Pakistan.

Consider comments made by Lt. Gen. Pasha, who only two years ago [defended](#)<sup>[4]</sup> the Taliban and its leader, Mullah Omar, to the German publication *Der Spiegel*:

"Shouldn't they be allowed to think and say what they please? They believe that jihad is their obligation. Isn't that freedom of opinion?"

Of course, Mullah Omar's "freedom of opinion" exhorts militants to pour over the border into neighboring Afghanistan and kill infidel American troops. Pasha's insistence that such repellent views are defensible encapsulates Washington's enduring challenge with Islamabad.

For decades, Pakistan's military has believed that its country's existence depends on supporting Islamist proxies, not strictly for ideological reasons, but as a means to bog down India, its primary enemy. After 9/11, rather than restructure, Pakistan rebalanced: President and Army General Pervez Musharraf and his army corps commanders decided to ally openly with the United States in the "War on Terror" and preserve their proxy assets as a hedge against Indian influence. As a result, Pakistan is feeling the heat on both sides, with American officials blasting Islamabad for refusing to cooperate fully, while Islamist extremists from inside Pakistan have turned against the government for throwing its support behind the United States.

Under such circumstances, the bilateral relationship has been punctuated by a number of

melodramatic sideshows. Remember when last year Pakistan halted [5] the flow of supply convoys for the NATO mission in Afghanistan? Or when right after President Obama took office U.S. officials began going into convulsions [6] after learning that the Pakistani Taliban was only 60 miles from Islamabad? [7]

Despite all the feel-good talk about partnership and cooperation, the reality is that America and Pakistan are not “allies,” but “frenemies” [8]: an enemy disguised as a friend or a friend who is simultaneously an enemy. Clearly, the two governments are pursuing very different and fundamentally antagonistic definitions of “joint cooperation.”

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[4] <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,599724,00.html>

[5] <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/09/30/world/main6913605.shtml>

[6] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/5257571/US-general-says-Pakistan-could-be-two-weeks-from-collapse.html>

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[8] <http://nationalinterest.org/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frenemy>