

The Threat to Journalists in Pakistan and Its Wider Implications

- The Skeptics

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The enduring strain between America and Pakistan is back in the news today. The *New York Times* reports that Pakistan's top spy agency, ISI, has arrested five informants who fed the C.I.A. information before last month's raid on Osama bin Laden. In the report, deputy C.I.A. director, Michael J. Morell, rated Pakistan's cooperation with the United States a "three" on a scale of 1 to 10.

This topic should rightly receive coverage in the mainstream media, as Pakistan's behavior (among a host of factors) underscores the futility of fighting a land war in Asia. But another important dimension to the partnership—which the *New York Times* explored in an editorial and an opinion piece—surrounds the deteriorating security conditions for Pakistani journalists.

Reporters Without Borders ranks Pakistan 151st out of 178 countries in its 2010 World Press Freedom Index. This was all too evident with the recent death of Syed Saleem Shahzad, an intrepid Pakistani journalist found dead in Islamabad late last month. His death brings the total number of Pakistani journalists killed since 2010 to 16. Shahzad was an excellent reporter who had phenomenal access to senior al Qaeda leaders and underlings, as well as those of the Taliban, the TTP, and other militant groups. Before his death, Shahzad published a book based on interviews with senior al Qaeda leaders entitled, *Inside al Qaeda and the Taliban: Beyond bin Laden and 9/11*. It reveals, contrary to speculation:

- That Osama bin Laden was, indeed, a figurehead;
- Al Qaeda's second-in-command, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, was the one devising operational plans;
- Al Qaeda's goal was to use U.S. policy to polarize the Muslim world;
- The movement sought to exploit America's "cowboy" mentality, drag out the war in Afghanistan, and make American leaders turn bin Laden into a 30-foot-tall boogeyman;
- And that there are profound strategic differences between the AQ and Taliban leadership.

These insights are merely a snapshot of al Qaeda's strategic and tactical thinking. And Shahzad's death, which comes as a huge blow for civil society *and* quality reporting in Pakistan, helped many analysts piece together the confounding puzzle of South Asian extremists. But these and other like-minded insights largely contradict Washington's official story line, which should give Americans pause when they hear their leaders trot out an endless array of justifications for prolonging the nation-building/counterinsurgency amalgam in Afghanistan. As Sen. Chris Coons (D-Del.) wrote this morning in Delaware's *News Journal*, the July drawdown should be "the beginning of a new, more targeted counter-terrorism strategy that more wisely focuses our military and diplomatic resources on defending America's security interests." Indeed, being pro-military does not mean endorsing endless war.

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