

## **How to curb Anti-American Sentiments in Pakistan**

**By Raza Bokhari**

In recent months Pakistani politics has hit a boiling point and Anti-American sentiments are at an all time high at the grass-root level amongst 160 million Pakistanis.

Law and order has rapidly deteriorated in Pakistan; civilians, law enforcement agencies, the armed forces and moderate leaders are increasingly becoming a target of terrorism through suicide bombing. There is a resurgence of extremism in the Northern Western Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces are strengthening their stronghold along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

However, the majority of the people in Pakistan, including the moderates, unfortunately do not recognize that the war against terrorism is a global problem and consider it to be an American war in which they are unnecessarily involved and have become an unintended victim.

President Musharraf's strong alliance with the United States in fighting terrorism has minimized his recognition, in spite of his concerted efforts of the past eight years to promote moderation, empower women, catalyze unprecedented economic expansion, foster permanent peace in the sub-continent and completely returning Pakistan to a democratic rule.

While Anti-American sentiments are not new in Pakistan, they have recently surged to a new proportion largely on account of the following reasons:

1. Threats by some US Presidential candidates to unilaterally attack al-Qaeda targets in Pakistan and take control of Pakistan's nuclear assets in the wake of political instability.
2. Threats to curtail economic and military assistance to Pakistan by the Democrats in congress.
3. Unilateral nuclear deal with India and lukewarm reaction to Pakistan's energy needs.
4. Inaccurately characterizing \$10 billion received by Pakistan since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 as aid; contrary to the truth that more than half of this money has been for reimbursement of services provided by Pakistan to support the coalition forces to fight in Afghanistan.
5. Lack of recognition that Pakistan has captured or killed more than 700 Al-Qaeda operatives and has lost more than 1000 troops.
6. Widespread misperception that the war against terrorism is actually a war against Islam, and Muslims in America are living under duress.

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7. Frequent suicide bombings, which Pakistanis believe are provoked by President Musharraf's now unpopular policy of supporting United States in fighting terrorism and deploying nearly 100,000 combat troops in the tribal areas along Pakistan Afghanistan border.

It is important to underscore, that we have 150,000 combat troops in Iraq, and we are spending more than \$2 billion a week to support them and we are still not doing enough for our troops. At the same time, we only reimburse less than \$1 billion a year to Pakistan to deploy nearly 100,000 troops in perhaps the most treacherous and dangerous terrain in the world to fight Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists.

An agenda to curb Anti-American sentiments in Pakistan should be front and center for Presidential candidates and law makers and as a minimum it should include the following steps:

1. Refrain from threatening to unilaterally attack Al-Qaeda targets in Pakistan. It is a sovereign nation with a willing Army ready to strike on actionable intelligence.
2. Actively expand economic and military assistance to Pakistan including supporting the Reconstruction opportunity zones for Afghanistan and tribal areas of Pakistan.
3. Rapidly expand trading opportunities including fast tracking a bilateral trade agreement between United States and Pakistan.
4. Double the number of immigrant, non-immigrant and student visas issued to Pakistanis.
5. Increase the coalition support funding to \$2 billion a year to support NATO forces in Afghanistan and generously acknowledge the important role of Pakistan in fighting terrorism.
6. Offer a packaged nuclear deal to both India and Pakistan to help address the rapidly growing energy needs of the region.
7. All Presidential candidates should embrace Senator Obama's pledge to deliver a keynote speech to a major Muslim forum in the first 100 days of office to dispel misperceptions that war against terrorism is a war against Islam and make Pakistan as the venue to make that speech.
8. President Musharraf has been a reliable partner of the United States and has led the way in fighting terrorism, restoring civilian rule in Pakistan and encouraging political reconciliation. If we choose not to acknowledge his pivotal role for other considerations, we should also not unreasonably condemn him. Let people of Pakistan be the judge of him.
9. Appoint a special envoy of public diplomacy to Pakistan who should be a strong advocate of great American values and traditions of plurality, tolerance, compassion and hard work.



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