

## Open letter to Barack Obama - to be published in the Los Angeles Times

Dear Senator Obama,

The phrase "climate of fear" is a cliché. But it is an accurate description of the current mood in Peshawar, Pakistan.

U.S. Consulate - the last major western diplomatic representation in the city - is surrounded by Green-Zone style fortifications. Moderate Muslims are intimidated. Threats have been made to shops selling CDs, barbers who have the temerity to cut men's' beards and to girls' schools. The threat of a "Talibanization" of Pakistan is by no means confined to Peshawar. Few months ago there was a dangerous stand-off in Islamabad, where a radical mosque - associated with suicide bombers - had kidnapped some policemen. Things are much worse in the wilder fringes of the country. Karachi: a city that extends lifeline to the whole of Pakistan. Karachi, the first Capital of Pakistan is being besieged by the creeping Taliban. There is a well planned conspiracy in the works to destabilize this port city of Pakistan.

I know your strengths as a genuine progressive with a vision rooted in social justice movements and a trenchant critique of our political system.

These smart progressive people are getting really cynical about the rhetoric of "hope" and "uniting people" when it's not backed up by substance. And there I have to sympathize with them. Hope is an empty diversion without substantive, original arguments on issues.

The Taliban are the ideological antithesis of what Pakistan is and should be. Encouraging them in Afghanistan and - as a result - in Pakistan, would be a suicidal policy. For all its many problems, Pakistan is a modern country, which is politically and economically integrated with the rest of the world. The entire Taliban offer is a violent trip back to the 'Middle Ages'.

Some Pakistanis are inclined to blame the Americans for all this - tracing the rise of local militancy to the US decision to sponsor Jihadis in the first Afghan war. There is an element of truth in that. But it evades Pakistan's own responsibility for creating the monster of the Taliban. The Pakistanis were so obsessed with having a pliant, anti-Indian government in charge of Afghanistan (the policy known as "strategic depth") that they were prepared to get into bed with the Taliban. Even now, it seems pretty certain that elements of the Pakistani secret service are working with the remnants of the Taliban.

The twisted thinking behind this is (allegedly) that a successful Karzai government is likely to move determinedly into the pro-American, pro-Indian camp. By contrast, a continuing insurgency in Afghanistan will keep the country weak and a war on Pakistan's borders keeps the money flowing to the Pakistani military. What is more, the Pakistani establishment does not believe the Americans and their allies are

committed to Afghanistan for the long haul. If and when they withdraw, the Taliban may take over again. So it is a good idea to keep in with them.

Now both the men's and women's wings of this emerging brand of the Pakistani Taliban have started to impose new rules of morality by forcibly shutting down video and music shops in Islamabad, and by abducting women whom they believe are engaged in 'immoral' activities.

Finally, Mr. Obama we must do whatever we can to stop the creeping coup of Taliban into the most important city of Karachi and I know you and your esteemed staff will see that it becomes a possibility.

With continued commitment to you and your candidacy for president,

Wasim Zaidi  
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