



Beguiling Americans: a guide for Indian diplomats

By C. Christine Fair

Over the years, I've had the occasion to meet various officials from the Indian Embassy in Washington D.C. They have all at one point or another asked the same question "How do the Pakistanis keep beguiling you Americans? Why does this country continue to receive billions of aid and military assistance while supporting terrorism and being an irresponsible nuclear weapons state?" The short answer is that the Pakistanis can extract such resources from the Americans precisely because it a nuclear-armed menace perpetrating terrorism through its varied proxies.

But Pakistan also operates through "soft power" to cultivate American sympathies through "hospitality" and well-spoken lies. It can do so only because the Americans on the Pakistan portfolio, especially at the operational level, tend to be green ingénues, unfamiliar with the region and America's vexing relations with Pakistan.

There is no reason why Pakistan should have all the fun. Here's a guide that should enable India's own Ministry of External Affairs to join the game.

The Liability of Newbies

Pakistanis succeed in part due to the fact that their American counterparts are woefully unacquainted with the history of Pakistan generally, and of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in particular.¹ Readers beyond the U.S. may find this difficult to believe given the global perception of the all-knowing Americans and their highly competent CIA that provides cogent intelligence to the diplomats in the field. Alas, this simply is not true.

To give a flavour of what I mean, let me recount a somewhat recent experience with an outgoing public affairs officer. Her main qualification for this job, apart from being affable and energetic, was that she had published a coffee-table book of photography on a completely unrelated Asian country, and apparently was willing to go to Islamabad. This particular woman came to me in the two days prior to departing for Islamabad. She insisted upon discussing a military ruler named "Bhutto". I informed her that there was no such person and she insisted that she had read this and that she was certain she was correct. I didn't bother further. Clearly she knew what she needed to know. I thought to myself, the folks who will handle her at the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), the Ministry of Information, and the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) are going to have a field day with this one.

Hers is not an unusual case. I had met several others similar to her in the past. The reasons for this are structural. Since Pakistan is a hazard post, personnel deploy without their families for year-long tours that can be renewed at the officer's initiative. The conditions for serving in Pakistan present a host of moral hazard problems in that they result in attracting the wrong people: people who want to escape their families or other problems back home, danger junkies who want to pretend to be fighting the good fight from the safety of Compound America, and most importantly, people who selected Pakistan as an nth-order preference of ranking, but were not selected for the posts they actually wanted. Collectively, this means that the U.S. has had difficulty recruiting qualified and experienced Foreign Service officers and other personnel, particularly at the operational and functional level. Worse yet, by the time they finally get to meet and interact with the selected few interlocutors handed down to them by their numerous predecessors, they are already looking for their next posting. Instead of having the A team for this important post, the U.S. Department of State gets a B, C or even D team.

It is true at the more strategic level of ambassadors and consuls general; the State Department sometimes has better luck. And on occasion, the mission gets a superb person who actually has interest in the country and has bothered to educate herself or himself about the place and its tortured relations with the U.S. Nonetheless, the personnel engaging in routine business of the mission leave much to be desired.

One major issue identified by Alexander Evans of the Asia Society Policy Institute is that the U.S. State Department has no dedicated cadre of 'South Asianists' because it has no dedicated language community. In contrast, the State Department has a steady fleet of Arab, Japanese and Chinese experts.² Evans recommends that this must be remedied. While Evans refers to South Asia as a whole, the Pakistan mission suffers more than India. After all, India is a highly desired post that attracts competitive persons who stay in the country for more than one year.

Finally, the U.S. Department of State has abysmal record-keeping. Most communications are conveyed via emails (of late) or cables. In principle, these electronic forms of record-keeping should be accessible to personnel working on Pakistan or any other country or functional portfolio. However, in practice, it is very difficult to access these records comprehensively and in fact, few do. One former U.S. official noted to the author, "Our capacity for record-keeping is awful, truly awful. Email has spoiled us; in the days of only telegrams, we know what was said most of the time. Today, one is hard pressed to find a coherent record of any negotiation. And with a system of political appointees, everyone thinks he's/she's had the same great idea first—recurrently, every four years."³ In contrast, Pakistani counterparts have an actual file and they know every detail in that file.

What are the consequences of this endless parade of newbies churning through the U.S. mission in Pakistan under these conditions of information asymmetry? They are numerous and range from poor reportage and understanding of the country which feeds into a shamefully deficient process through which policy towards Pakistan churns, to being easily manipulated by Pakistani

officials who—unlike their American counterparts across the table—know their brief. A favoured Pakistani canard is that the Americans have used and misused Pakistan when convenient and then tossed it away like a used tissue when the need passes. The American neophyte, touched by the feigned sincerity of these entreaties and the world-renowned hospitality of their official interlocutors, inevitably concede and vow that this time it will be different. This time, the money will continue to flow.

The facts are more complicated. The U.S. and Pakistan have been partners of convenience but the relationship has not always been at the behest of the Pakistanis. In fact, the first “alliance” that began in 1954 was the culmination of years of Pakistani pleading to be included in the U.S.’s security system. The U.S., which deferred to the UK on South Asia, was uninterested until the Korean War at which point the Americans decided to become more aggressive. The Americans were very clear that the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), both of which Pakistan insisted upon joining, were not against India; rather a communist aggressor. When Pakistan started its war with India in 1965, the U.S. sanctioned both countries. Pakistan, which had become more dependent upon U.S. weapons systems, was hurt more. Pakistani officials cried foul that the U.S. did not help a treaty partner. The claim was outrageous because the treaties did not apply to Pakistan, the aggressor, who started a war with India, a non-communist state.

Pakistan similarly cried foul in 1971. After years of exploiting the ethnic Bengalis in what was then East Pakistan, the Bengalis began rising up against the State. At first, they wanted federalism. However, after vicious Pakistani repression, they demanded independence. As Pakistani brutality deepened, India began training rebels known as Mukti Bahini. India also provide artillery and other significant military support. The 1971 war technically began when Pakistan’s air force attacked Indian forward airbases and radar installations on December 3, 1971. The war was short and swift and ended on December 16 with Pakistan’s surrender and the birth of an independent Bangladesh from erstwhile East Pakistan. Again, the Pakistanis cried foul that the U.S. did not support its treaty ally.⁴

Technically, Pakistan was still under sanctions from the 1965 war. However, as Gary Bass has brilliantly detailed, the U.S. did provide Pakistan with military support in complete violation and contempt of American law. President Richard Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, believed that it was necessary to help the military general-cum-president, Yahya Khan, who was in charge of the country because Khan was facilitating the famed opening to China. As Bass details, Khan was not the only option for this opening. However, Nixon and Kissinger had personal feelings for him and equal contempt for India’s Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Pakistanis also point to the notorious [F-16 fiasco](#).⁵ In this sob story, they note that Pakistan paid for but did not receive due to the imposition of the [Pressler Amendment](#) in 1990. Not only did the U.S. refuse to release the aircraft, it also refused to reimburse Pakistan the amount remitted to

the manufacturer, and it even charged Pakistan with storage fees as the aircraft sat in a desert hangar.

As with all Pakistani narratives of US perfidy, it is based upon several fictions and half-truths alike. First, the U.S. initially sanctioned Pakistan for nuclear proliferation in April of 1979, which made it illegal for the U.S. to provide security assistance to Pakistan. After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Washington chose to subordinate its nonproliferation policies to other regional interests. According to [Steve Coll](#), then-national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski told American president Jimmy Carter that Washington needs to secure Pakistan's support to oust the Soviets and that this will "require... more guarantees to [Pakistan], more arms aid, and, alas, a decision that our security policy cannot be dictated by our nonproliferation policy". Despite full knowledge of Pakistan's advancing nuclear program, [Congress added Section 620E to the FAA](#), which endowed the US president with the authority to waive sanctions for six years, allowing the U.S. to fund and equip Pakistan for the anti-Soviet jihad. Congress next appropriated annual funds for a six-year program of economic and military aid that totalled \$3.2 billion. Despite continued warnings from the U.S. about its nuclear program, Pakistan continued developing a weapons capability. Pakistan's military dictator, [Zia ul Haq](#), asserted that it was Pakistan's right to do so.

In 1985, the U.S. passed the [Pressler Amendment](#) which permitted US assistance to Pakistan conditional on an annual presidential assessment and certification that Pakistan did not have nuclear weapons. Contrary to [Pakistani assertions](#) as well as [some historically ill-informed American commentators'](#) laments, this legislation was not punitive. Rather, the amendment allowed the U.S. to continue providing assistance to Pakistan even though other parts of the U.S. government increasingly believed that Pakistan had crossed the nuclear threshold, meriting sanctions under various U.S. laws. Most importantly, the amendment was [passed with the active involvement of Pakistan's foreign office](#), which was keen to resolve the emergent strategic impasse over competing U.S. nonproliferation and regional objectives on one hand and Pakistan's resolute intentions to acquire nuclear weapons on the other.

In 1990, when the U.S. withdrew from the region after the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, President George H.W. Bush declined to certify Pakistan, and the sanctions came into force. This was not a bolt out of the blue as U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, [Robert Oakley, repeatedly warned Pakistani leadership of the inevitable consequences of proliferation](#). Pakistan's leadership made a calculated gamble. And they lost.

Most problematic is the simple fact that the entire issue had long ago been resolved under President Bill Clinton. However, Pakistan's narrative on the F-16 drama ultimately prevailed as Bush announced that he would at least make good and provide Pakistan with F-16s. This was a shameful demonstration of American ignorance imbricated with cupidity that Pakistan could be a trusted American ally.

A final rent-seeking narrative propounded by Pakistan is that the U.S. sucked a naïve Pakistan into its jihad in the 1980s. And, when its interests were satisfied with the Soviet exeunt, it left Pakistan, awash in small arms and enmeshed in criminal networks, to contend with the morass that had become Afghanistan. . As usual, this is not the entire story and this account falls short on the veracity scale. As [Husain Haqqani](#),⁶ among others have shown, Pakistan began its jihad policy in 1974 when Pakistan's civilian autocrat, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, set up the ISI Afghanistan Cell to begin instrumenting Islamists who were fleeing Afghanistan after Mohammad Daoud Khan's crackdown on Islamists who opposed his various pro-Soviet policies. By the time the Soviets crossed the Amu Darya on Christmas Day 1979, the main jihadi groups had already been formed. Pakistan did this all with its own funds because manipulating events in Afghanistan has been an enduring strategic objective since 1947.

Clearly the U.S. could not have intended to “suck” Pakistani into its jihad because it had sanctioned Pakistan in April of 1947. However, once President Ronald Reagan came into the White House, American assistance began flowing to Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia matched the U.S. contribution. While it is true that the Americans withdrew and left Pakistan to clean up the mess, this outcome was not entirely undesired. Pakistan continued manipulating the conflict in Afghanistan and supporting its preferred combatants in hopes of managing its interests there as it had been doing for decades.

The lesson is that with a bit of dedication to perfecting an ossified fiction to a conveyor belt of woefully naïve Americans, any number of things can be accomplished.

And that hospitality

No doubt the secret to Pakistan's success in taking the Americans for endless rides around the block is that their American passengers cannot recognise the scenery. However, such ruses would not likely succeed for as long as it has if it were not for Pakistan's hospitality. Here is where India's own Ministry of External Affairs can learn some lessons.

First, protocol needs to be loosened. Whereas Indian protocol requires American officials to meet only their counterparts in India, Pakistanis open the doors. Even a junior analyst at think tanks (like me when I was at the RAND Corporation) can meet virtually anyone. (President Pervez Musharraf even autographed a portrait of my beloved, now deceased, canine associate Ms Oppenheimer). U.S. Congressional delegates are particularly delighted when they get to meet the army chief. They may have to suffer a meeting with the irrelevant prime minister, but they all swoon before the army chief, who inevitably is seen as a straight shooter with whom the U.S. can do business.

In contrast to Indian officials who are often stiff, hectoring, disinterested, and often seem bored, the (much higher ranked) Pakistani official is engaging, jocular, (seemingly) forthcoming, self-effacing, humorous and charming. Whereas Indian ministry officials will serve you tea in a chipped mug embossed with a faded graphic of the ministry's logo, Pakistani hosts will serve you in a mug... and they will even gift you with that mug. The Pakistanis have studied what Americans like and how best to cater to these preferences. Right down to the mug. This gives

rise to the chattering among diplomats, journalists, scholars and think-tank analysts who visit both countries who are wont to observe, “The Pakistanis may lie like rugs and kill our troops, but they sure are accommodating.”

Second, consider war tourism. The Pakistanis cultivate American sympathies for the brutality of their neighborhood by taking scholars, think tank analysts, state department officials, congressional delegations, journalists and anyone else they want to groom on tours of its warzones and front. During my decades visiting the country, I was regaled with a trip to the border with Afghanistan with an amazing trip through the Khyber Pass. My American entourage was equipped with an enormous security detail. The Frontier Scouts delighted us with their dances and we ate piles of kebabs in their mess hall. We also received mugs with the Frontier Scout logo. We were given a scenic overview at a forward operating base where our Pakistani military briefer explained the dangers of this frontier. I had similar tours in North and South Waziristan and Swat.

In previous years, they arranged for me to visit “Azad Kashmir”. Foreigners require a permit and thus, free travel is not legal. Once I reached, my Pakistani official guests placed me in a chair and a series of women lined up in front of me. I was told that they had been raped by Indian forces and the women, per force, began narrating their practices tales of assault. I put a stop to this immediately and protested that this was hideous. Despite Pakistan’s efforts to shape my views against Indian behaviour in Kashmir and despite their assertions that there were no militants here, I saw plenty of signs posted by militant groups.

India should consider taking a page out of this playbook. When congressional delegates and the like file through India, why not take them to Kashmir and show them maps of Pakistani terror camps? Why not take them to Aksai Chin or Arunachal Pradesh and show them the problems India encounters with China? How about the problematic areas of the Northeast and the long, open borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar? How about demonstrating how Pakistani militants have long used the border with Nepal as a route of infiltration? India will have one enormous advantage of Pakistan’s industry of war tourism: India’s complaints are based in truth. That counts for something.

Third, the brass counts. A lot. Americans love meeting militaries. Americans hold their own military in high esteem. Nothing flatters an American visiting Pakistan more than a visit to General Headquarters, the Peshawar or Quetta Corps Headquarters, the Strategic Plans Directorate, ISI headquarters, the majestic headquarters of the Frontier Scouts in Peshawar’s famed Bala Hisar fort, and the like. If one gets to meet the army chief or the ISI chief, a trip is made. She or he will have dinner party fodder for years. Americans find the feigned candour of Pakistan military personnel to be very refreshing, especially in contrast to Pakistani civilians who are viewed with disdain by Americans. Americans also sympathise with the “threats” that the Pakistan military demonstrates it faces and they are persuaded by the seemingly genuine efforts that men in green are making to stem the threat of terrorism. Too few Americans seem to know that Pakistan cultivates more terrorists than it kills. But why let facts get in the way of war tourism?

In contrast, it requires any number of approvals from India's Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Defence to meet anyone in uniform. Persons in uniform who meet with foreigners without approval are subject to the wrath of the bureaucracy. Americans view this with suspicion and frustration. After all, if India *really* were under such threat from Pakistan and China, why are they not doing what Pakistan does? In fact, India should consider providing more access to the military along the lines of "war tourism" noted above. Why not arrange for the 15th Corps commander in Kashmir to brief American visitors? That Corps has witnessed much Pakistani perfidy. Similarly, access to the police and paramilitary outfits in Kashmir and other areas under threat would benefit India tremendously.

Why should Pakistan have all the fun?

It is relatively easy to beguile Americans as Pakistan's track record amply shows. Despite supporting any number of terrorist and insurgent groups; despite continued funding of the Afghan Taliban who have killed thousands of our troops and civilians as well as tens of thousands of our allies; and despite developing tactical nuclear weapons, the U.S. has given Pakistan over \$30 billion since the September 11, 2001 attacks, and access to weapons systems best suited to fight India, a democratic partner, rather than the insurgents and terrorists Pakistan claims to be fighting.

As a U.S. citizen who believes that my country's interests are best served by a better and more robust relationship with India, I make the humble request that India's leadership learn from the best and adopt a more flexible way in dealing with the Americans. In the end, both India and the U.S. will benefit.

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References

¹ There is no paucity of information on this subject. Dennis Kux's has written two books on this subject, both of which should be compulsory reading: University Press of the Pacific, *India and The United States: Estranged*, Kux Dennis, 2002; and Johns Hopkins University Press, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies*, Kux Dennis, 2001. Husain Haqqani's book on the subject should be required reading- Public Affairs, *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding*, Haqqani Husain, 2013. If the budding U.S. official balks at reading such hefty tomes then the more pithy, brief and extremely insightful monograph by the a pair of former U.S. diplomats, Howard B. Schaffer and Teresita C. Schaffer- USIP, *How Pakistan Negotiates with the United States: Riding the Roller Coaster*, Schaffer B. Hoffer, Teresita C. Schaffer, 2011- should suffice.

² Asia Society, *The U.S. and South Asia After Afghanistan: The United States and South Asia After Afghanistan*, Evans Alexander, 2012.

³ Email exchange with an anonymous former official from June 25, 2015.

⁴ Hurst and Co., *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide*, Bass Jonathan Gary, 2014.

⁵ Foreign Policy, *The U.S.-Pakistan F-16 fiasco*, Fair C. Christine, February 2011,

<<http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/02/03/the-u-s-pakistan-f-16-fiasco/>>

⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*, Haqqani Husain, 2005.