

## Pakistanis have given up on Obama.

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Some years ago it was common for Pakistanis to joke that they deserved a vote in American elections because the two countries are such close allies. Not any more. The noise coming out of Washington today is more likely to be Pakistan bashing than Pakistan loving. In the Pakistani city of Lahore, from where I write, attitudes toward the US have similarly soured.

Ahead of the US presidential election on November 6 [BBC polling in 21 countries](#) has shown that voters in all but one prefer Barack Obama to his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney. Pakistan is that exception. Obama would get just 11 percent of the vote in Pakistan. 60 percent of Pakistanis said they had no confidence in the current US president. Other polls show that 90 percent of Pakistanis are now anti-American

Last year the two so-called allies had a seven month falling out [as Pakistan closed the road that carried NATO goods to the Afghan border](#). For part of this period all [contact between the governments in Washington and Islamabad](#) was cut off.

Traditionally the Pakistani military and political establishment have always favoured the Republican candidate in US presidential elections because it has been during Republican administrations that Pakistan's multiple military regimes have flourished and received massive US aid. Ronald Reagan turned a blind eye to Pakistan's clandestine nuclear programme. Under President George W. Bush Pakistan received nearly \$20bn in aid after September 11 - 80 per cent of which went to the military. The younger Bush also turned a blind eye to the continued Taliban presence in Pakistan after 2001.

Democrat Presidents such as Carter and Clinton, on the other hand, have at times insisted on greater democracy and less aid for the military. Democrats tried to curb Pakistan's nuclear programme, which is now believed to [have around 100 operational weapons](#), and used sanctions on Pakistan in the 1990s while cosyng up closely to arch rival India. As a result Democrat administrations have had a far more difficult relationship with Pakistan's army and politicians

But Islamabad's affiliations - Republican or Democrat - are now in the past.

It has been a big shock for Pakistan's military to see Republican members of Congress insisting on a total cut off of aid to Pakistan and demanding Pakistan be treated as an unfriendly country. If Romney wins the assumption is that he will be under pressure to reduce foreign aid across the board but particularly for Pakistan.

Yet Pakistanis also feel deeply slighted by Obama's term in office which has seen the use of drones to attack terrorist targets in Pakistan reach unprecedented levels along with regular US special forces incursions into Pakistan, notably during the killing of Osama bin Laden.

Instead of favouring Republicans over Democrats, or vice-versa, many Pakistanis are now simply gripped by anti-Americanism. Anti-US sentiment is now so rampant and Americans perceived as so hostile to Pakistan that most Pakistanis do not care who wins the presidential election, because they expect both candidates to continue to bash Pakistan.

Yet what Pakistanis are often not told by their leaders, is that Islamabad has so far done little to rectify the meltdown in the country. The government has not introduced economic reforms, curbed terrorist groups or put sectarian murderers, who are killing Pakistanis and Afghans as well as US forces in Afghanistan, into jail.

Pakistan has never had a comprehensive counter terrorism strategy. The intelligence agencies have always divided Islamic extremist groups into two categories - those friendly to Pakistan, who are not to be touched, and those unfriendly who are to be killed.

In the biggest irony of the US-Pakistan relationship senior Pakistani generals and religious leaders mouth their hatred of and sense of betrayal by the US, while large numbers of their family members live in the US. Such hypocrisy is mirrored at all levels of society as tens of thousands of Pakistanis try to get a Green Card and visa lines still snake around the US Embassy in Islamabad.

As a result of dynamics on both sides, the relationship between the US and Pakistan has now become extremely complicated. Although dialogue has been resumed neither side has a comprehensive plan or strategy to rebuild the relationship. The Americans would like to keep Pakistan sweet until the US withdrawal from Afghanistan is completed in 2014.

What happens afterwards will be fraught. Pakistan is strongly opposed to the US leaving behind 20,000 troops for the next five years to ostensibly train Afghans because that means drone attacks will continue. So will US incursions: [many in Pakistan expect](#) the US military to keep specially trained teams on its Afghan bases to dismember or seize Pakistan's nuclear weapons were there ever a threat of extremists getting their hands on them.

That means for Pakistan's military the Americans in Afghanistan will continue to remain a threat not an ally. As far as the Pakistani "street" is concerned, at the moment most Pakistanis would refuse to vote for either candidate in the US elections. Sadly that is how bad the relationship has got.