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**At War**

Notes From the Front Lines

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**Pakistanis View U.S. Aid Warily**

Christoph Bangert for The New York Times Ali Rizvi, left, and Umair Anjum outside a McDonald's in Islamabad. The men say the Kerry-Lugar aid bill will undermine Pakistan's sovereignty.

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — As the Obama administration weighs a shift in its military strategy in Afghanistan, it is also stepping up its efforts to increase [aid to neighboring Pakistan](#). The Senate on Sept. 24 approved legislation to triple nonmilitary aid to Pakistan to about \$1.5 billion a year for the next five years. However, [conditions laid out in the bill](#), authored by Senators John Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, and Richard Lugar, Republican of Indiana, have [unleashed street protests and a flood of criticism from Pakistanis](#) who say the bill compromises their country's sovereignty.

President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan has agreed to the stipulations in the Kerry-Lugar bill, but he is coming under sharp criticism from opposition parties and many Pakistanis who view America as a cavalier and condescending ally. [Pakistan's Parliament is discussing the Kerry-Lugar aid bill](#) Wednesday, and it is expected to be a fiery debate.

I spoke with several Pakistanis who shared their concerns about the bill and America's relationship with Pakistan.

Enver Baig, 63, a former senator, said he felt that America needed to change how it has treated Pakistan and its democratic governments. "We always loved the Americans, but they deserted us soon after the first Afghan war," he said. "Since then, the trust is gone. It is time to rebuild that trust, but with the introduction of Kerry-Lugar bill, distance between America and Pakistan is increasing because of some severe conditions in the aid package."

Mr. Baig said. "There is an impression that America wants to micro-manage everything in Pakistan," he added.

Christoph Bangert for The New York Times Enver Baig says the "trust is gone" between Pakistan and America.

Mr. Baig said he thought the Pakistani government had poorly negotiated draft of the aid bill and instead of asking for aid, which he thought was "peanuts," the government should have asked that previous loans from the United States be "written off."

"There is a lot of pressure on the government to get this bill reviewed," he said. "There are serious reservations with the country's armed forces as well because the aid package puts curbs and conditions on them in various ways and means. I am sure the [armed forces will approach the government](#) and convey their reservations."

He suggested three things that the United States could do to win over the Pakistani people: It could improve the aid package, increase market access to Pakistani products and have more interaction with the country's public, politicians and opinion makers.

Umair Anjum, 21, and Ali Rizvi, 22, who said they were studying to be accountants, sat outside a McDonald's, enjoying a cigarette and the early October breeze. Their views reflected how many urban, educated, English-speaking young Pakistanis view the relationship between their country and America.

"Pakistanis hate America, to some extent because you don't bomb an ally," Mr. Rizvi said. "People here do not like the drone attacks. They are important in the war against terror, all right, but America should respect our sovereignty."

Mr. Anjum said he felt Pakistan was routinely betrayed by the United States. The Kerry-Lugar bill, he said, "is bound to undermine our sovereignty in every possible way. The Americans are trying to dictate us in every walk of life. America is working against our interests. It is promoting India, which has a huge presence in Afghanistan. Our armed forces and people should act like Iran and stand up to American pressure."

The young men also said that employees from private security firms such as Blackwater were operating with impunity inside Pakistan.

"There are thousands of Blackwater operatives in the country now if you go by the media reports," Mr. Anjum said. "They have been given a license to kill. They are not accountable to anyone here. Would India allow Blackwater on its territory? Not at all."

Mr. Rizvi said simply, "They are spies."

Mehmud ur-Rehman, who owns Peer Book Centre in Aabpara, a bustling market, said that American aid was not reaching many Pakistani people. "Had it been so, people would not be fighting for sugar and flour in long queues across the country," Mr. Rehman, 49, said. He is currently on bail, having spent a few weeks in prison on charges of selling Islamic books that had been banned by the former government.

Mr. Rehman said the economic crisis had hit him hard. "I have been selling books for 30 years," he said. "But now the earnings have dropped by half. I don't have money to timely pay the wholesale trader from whom I get stationery."

He said a friend of his, [Abid Rehman](#), died in the terrorist attack on World Food Program office in Islamabad. But he refused to accept that Taliban militants were behind the attack. It was a conspiracy, he said. Even the public claim of responsibility by a Taliban spokesman did not convince him.

Christoph Bangert for The New York Times  
Mehmud ur-Rehman, who owns the Peer Book Centre, also views U.S. aid with suspicion.

Like most Pakistanis, he also voiced suspicion over the United States' interests in Pakistan, saying that America wanted to denuclearize Pakistan.

During the conversation with Mr. Rehman, an old bearded man, leaning on a walking stick, entered the store. Everyone stood up in deference.

Fazl-e-Haq, 87, dressed in a blue striped shirt and gray trousers, was a former inspector general of the Pakistan Police. Since 1980, he has been writing a column in [Jang](#), the country's most widely read Urdu daily.

"There will be a revolution in Pakistan by the third quarter 2010," Mr. Haq said in a somber voice.

"In a country where people are dying of hunger, where women are being kidnapped and raped, where justice or flour is not available to the poor, revolution does not come by knocking at the door first," he added. "And this will not be a peaceful revolution. It will be a bloody revolution. We have lost our honor. We have sold ourselves."

Everyone gathered in the store nodded.

And what about America, I asked after having a little dose from this harbinger of doom.

"America is breathing its last," Mr. Haq replied in a trembling but sure-sounding voice.

"Afghanistan will be the graveyard of American imperialism."