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Tensions With Pakistan A New Excuse for Keeping Afghan War Going

By Jason Ditz

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The Obama Administration's strategy for the war in Afghanistan centers on a policy of securing an agreement with President Hamid Karzai to [keep ground troops in the nation through 2024](#). At the same time, officials have to keep up the public pretense of an imminent drawdown.

The excuses for the drawdown's delay have usually been that the war is going too well or too poorly to change troop levels. [The excuse now, it seems, is "anti-American" sentiment of Pakistan is making the withdrawal inconvenient.](#)

Pakistan has been keeping the border to Afghanistan closed since November in retaliation for a random (and still inexplicable) US attack on a pair of their military bases. The Pakistani government has made reopening the border conditional on the US apologizing and also stopping the drone strikes against the tribal areas.

There was a surprising well of political support for the United States in Pakistan, and it has taken over a decade for the Bush and Obama Administrations to successfully burn through it all. Now, the US is so politically untouchable that Pakistani MPs fear nothing so much as being branded an "ally" of the US.

Though this has been a public relations nightmare for US diplomats and no small source of destabilization in Pakistan, it gives the administration a fresh new excuse for why Afghan troop levels are staying flat, even though there was no indication before the border's closure that any

US troops were going to leave the country by way of Pakistan and it seems a ridiculously unsafe route at any rate.

Of course, keeping Pakistanis so angry that they'll hold massive anti-US rallies on a near-weekly basis takes some unkeep. To that end, the [State Department today announced a \\$10 million bounty on Hafiz Mohammed Saeed](#). Saeed, a founding member of the Lashkar-e Taiba is being accused by the US of being behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Saeed is currently the head of a banned charity in Pakistan, the Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD). The group has run afoul of the Pakistani government as many other Islamist charities have, for being a successful foil to the government's mostly inept attempts at humanitarian efforts. The JuD's Islamist policies may make them an enemy to be targeted in the West, but the group's history of charitable effort, particularly in helping refugees from US and Pakistani military adventures, has made them a lot of friends.

Pakistan's government is unlikely to do much about Saeed either, having tried and failed to tie him to Mumbai and eventually being forced to abandon his house arrest over lack of evidence. The sudden US interest is likely to be one more reason Pakistani officials won't want to touch him.