**[Absolutely not](https://www.dawn.com/news/1632900/absolutely-not)**

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PAKISTAN lost 83,000 lives and the war on terror cost the country almost $126 billion, according to a statement made earlier this year by the DG ISPR Maj Gen Iftikhar Babar. It is astounding then that Prime Minister Imran Khan would refer to Osama Bin Laden as *shaheed* while addressing parliament in 2020.

Recently, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, was interviewed by Afghan journalist, Lotfullah Najafizada, for *Tolo News* and the point was again raised so as to back the oft-repeated Afghan claim that Pakistan tacitly supports the Afghan Taliban. Mr Qureshi [responded](https://www.dawn.com/news/1630566/fm-refrains-from-calling-osama-bin-laden-martyr-or-terrorist) by saying that the prime minister’s statement had been taken out of context and hyped up by segments of the media. The shrewd Afghan journalist then asked him to clarify whether OBL was a terrorist or a martyr. Mr Qureshi, after pausing for an extraordinarily long time, could not clarify and said, “I will let it pass.”

What has Pakistan lost by lacking a coherent policy on the Taliban?

Pakistan has repeatedly complained that the global community does not value its sacrifices in the war on terror. But if the foreign minister, after losing so many citizens, is still confused about whether OBL is a martyr or a terrorist, on what grounds can Pakistan complain to the world for lack of sympathy?

**Editorial:** [*FM Qureshi's refusal to call Osama bin Laden a terrorist is perplexing and defies logic*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1630814/describing-obl)

Although Minister Fawad Chaudhry belatedly tried to make amends by saying it was a [“slip of the tongue”](https://www.dawn.com/news/1631790) on the part of the prime minister, the damage had already been done. His whimsical explanation may satisfy the PTI’s support base but won’t convince those responsible for FATF grey lists. A slip of the tongue needs to be rectified by the person whose tongue slipped, particularly when he happens to be prime minister and his foreign minister is also confused.

In a recent *Washington Post* opinion piece Mr Imran Khan [wrote](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/06/21/afghanistan-pakistan-imran-khan-peace-security-cooperation-us/) that “Pakistan is ready to be a partner in Afghanistan with the United States”, and “both countries have the same interest in that long suffering country”. But is that an accurate statement if he thinks OBL is a martyr and the Americans think of him as an evil terrorist?

Prime Minister Khan is adamant that Pakistan will not provide the US any bases or assistance in counterterrorism operations.

“Absolutely not!” he said to Jonathan Swan in an *Axios* interview. But is the US-Pakistani relationship at that level of trust where such an arrangement would even be considered?

**Read:** [*Pakistan will ‘absolutely not’ allow bases to US for action in Afghanistan: PM Imran*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1630278)

Let’s not forget that according to Barack Obama’s memoirs, Pakistan was not informed of the Abbottabad raid to kill OBL. And although Obama writes that then vice president Joe Biden was against the raid violating Pakistani sovereignty, President Biden is yet to talk to Prime Minister Imran Khan five months into his presidency despite America’s plans to withdraw all troops from neighbouring Afghanistan by Sept 11, 2021.

Given this trust deficit would it even make sense for the Americans to ask for bases in Pakistan?

Historically, the Americans are accustomed to collaborating with the Pakistani military. It was Field Marshal Ayub Khan who first provided the Americans a base in Badaber, near Peshawar, back in 1959, which was used by them as a listening post against the Soviets.

During Gen Zia’s time there was active cooperation between the Pakistani and American intelligence agencies to set up jihad training centres and recruit and settle mujahideen in our region to fight off the Soviets. Once the Americans achieved their objectives in terms of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, they abruptly left Pakistan to deal with the messy aftermath.

As Pakistanis we should ask what objective Pakistan achieved in setting up these mujahideen to fight off the Soviets other than prolonging Gen Zia’s military dictatorship which had previously been snubbed by the Carter administration but was embraced wholeheartedly by Ronald Reagan in the fight against the Soviets?

Under Gen Pervez Musharraf, once again a military dictator previously snubbed by a Democratic president Clinton, was courted by Republican president George Bush even as he served him the ultimatum of “being with or against the United States in the war on terror”.

Musharraf too provided bases and used the military collaboration with the US to prolong his own rule. Every time, the decision to give bases or to collaborate extensively with American military ambitions was taken by a military dictator and did not have democratic sanction within Pakistan.

The paramount question today isn’t whether Pakistan should give the US bases, as that is unlikely. The question is: what has Pakistan lost by lacking a coherent policy on the Taliban? Schoolchildren have died, bazaars have been blown up, military men perished and financial constraints have grown. Was this ‘strategic depth’ worth it?

Foreign Minister Qureshi suggested in his interview that the world approach to the Taliban should change. But Pakistan’s appro­ach has scarcely been beneficial. Perhaps it’s time for a better, clearer policy.

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