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## LOOKING A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH: IS THE COMMITMENT OF THE UNITED STATES' NEW ALLIES SINCERE?

*Frank Biggio\**

Of all the ways in which our world has changed since September 11<sup>th</sup>, perhaps one of the most significant has been in the status of the relations between the United States and other nations. Not surprisingly, the bonds between long-time European allies were reaffirmed, most notably with Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, being almost a de facto Secretary of State in his efforts to win support in the U.S.-led war on terror. The relations between the U.S. and Russia that had been steadily improving in recent years were accelerated after the terrorist attacks and squabbling about missile defense shields and differences on how Russia's war in Chechnya should be conducted took a back seat to the more immediate threat of how to combat terrorist threats.

More surprising, however, has been the change of heart by countries that were previously on the U.S.'s blacklist of foreign affairs to assist in the war on terrorism. Whether the leaders of those countries are inspired by purely benign intentions, by President Bush's declaration that they were either with the U.S. or with the terrorists, or were driven by a fear of seeing their own grasp on power suffer a similar fate to Afghanistan's Taliban, these former pariahs have now become useful and valued partners in the first stages of what will be a long task. Some of these cooperative gestures may have been made with self-serving interests in mind, but in the immediate aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, any such self-interests are overshadowed by the need to take swift action against terrorist havens throughout the world. The true test of these new allies' commitment will be revealed over time and until a genuine dedication to the long-term fight against terror is made, the U.S. should be mindful of the possibility of hidden agendas behind these friendly overtures.

Pakistan has been one of the most notable countries that have aligned closely with the U.S. since September 11<sup>th</sup>. By opening its doors to U.S. forces as a staging area to conduct the military operations in Afghanistan, it contributed significantly to the swift organization and implementation of the war's opening phase. Pakistan's leader, Pervez Musharraf, initiated legislation banning the most notorious groups that use a distorted interpretation of Islam to justify violent actions against western targets and directed the detention of hundreds of the followers of those groups. In a move that would leave First Amendment advocates speechless, he even

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warned Pakistan's mosques that they would be shut down if they served as a sounding board for the promotion of terror. As a result, Pakistan has enjoyed the restructuring of billions of dollars worth of debt it owed, reduction in tariff barriers, and the restoration of military contacts with the U.S., including a deal by which it would be able to purchase upgrades to many of its weapons systems from the U.S. Musharraf has also performed commendably in handling the increasing Hindu-Muslim violence focused on the disputed Kashmir region.

But there are two areas where Pakistan's commitment will need to become further entrenched in order for it to have a significant lasting impact in the fight against terror. First is the reformation of its powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI). The Pakistani equivalent to a combined FBI/CIA is so rife with corruption that acts like Aldrich Ames's or Robert Hanssen's seem like petty crime. The ISI has been closely linked with numerous Al-Qaeda operatives, both before and after September 11<sup>th</sup> and has been suspected of having close ties to the group believed to be responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl. A drastic reformation of the ISI will be necessary to rid it of the members who use it only as a useful medium to promote a deadly philosophy.

Second, Pakistan will be well-served by using some of its forthcoming aid money to develop a viable public school system. The present state-supported schools are virtually non-existent or completely laughable and the only "quality" education available to many of Pakistan's youth is through privately run schools whose curriculum is heavily inculcated with training in a violent interpretation of Islam. Nurturing young minds will have predictable and unfortunate results if Pakistan makes an effort to improve the educational options available to its citizens beyond indoctrination.

Yemen, which just over 18 months ago hindered the *USS Cole* bombing investigation, has also been a surprising new-found friend. Though it was slow out of the starting blocks after September 11<sup>th</sup>, Yemen has launched a steady campaign of rooting out terrorist hotbeds in its territory and claims to have captured several people on the U.S. list of suspected terrorists, some of who are suspects in the *Cole* bombing. After Vice President Cheney's recent visit during his tour of the region, Yemen has become one of the most recent countries that may see U.S. soldiers serving as advisors to its military. But Yemen definitely has a collateral interest in receiving U.S. financial and military aid—a problem of 'warlordism' similar to that which is hindering Afghanistan's interim president from establishing a truly cohesive unified government. While some of the tribes in Yemen may be contributing to terrorist activities or providing haven for fugitive terrorists, there is a possibility that Yemen's president Ali Abdullah Saleh could strike against some of these tribes simply because they pose a threat to his hold on power rather than play a role in the terrorist network

existing in Yemen. Similar activity recently took place in Macedonia when several alleged Islamic extremists were gunned down by government troops. While the Macedonian killings were made to look like a strike in the war on terrorism, some foreign diplomats questioned the actions as a calculated ploy to win favor with the U.S. while simultaneously promoting a policy that ethnic Albanians living in the region were contributing to a terrorist threat in the region. Yemen's assistance thus far should be applauded, but neither it nor any other country must be allowed to pursue a policy of violence against random groups who may oppose the ruling party under the guise of helping in the fight against terrorism.

Libya's self-proclaimed "great ruler" Muammar Gaddafi, once considered one of the United States' chief bogeymen and a target of U.S. bombs in 1986, has made a surprising about face in his relations with the U.S. since September 11<sup>th</sup>. While still not likely to be invited to a casual meeting in the Oval Office, Gaddafi was quick to denounce the attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. and met with an assistant Secretary of State soon after September 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss intelligence issues between the two countries. Libya's friendly overtures would certainly flabbergast administration officials who dealt with Gaddafi in the 1980's. However, the extent to which it can be a trusted colleague in this new fight is limited by unresolved issues relating to Gaddafi's involvement with the Pan Am 103 bombing and the fact that Libya still involves itself in the development of weapons of mass destruction.

Sudan behaved similarly to Libya immediately after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Sudan was quick to move against extremist groups, such as Hezbollah and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, that had been operating out of its territory by detainingsuspected militants and questioning them about their affiliations with those groups. (Many are still in custody). In addition, Sudan shared with U.S. officials a potential treasure chest of intelligence information that it had kept on Osama bin Laden during the time he lived there in the mid 1990's. In response to Sudan's assistance, long-standing U.N. sanctions against it were removed. Thinking this was a green light from the U.S. to help in the fight against terror, Sudan promptly redefined their political opponents in its southern territory (who they have been fighting against in a fierce civil war for years) as terrorists and initiated a new bombing campaign against them before U.S. officials could respond to that misguided aggression.

These are just a few of the countries who have extended their hand in an offer of support to the U.S. since September 11<sup>th</sup>, but the list is certain to expand as others see an opportunity to get a share of the \$5 billion increase in foreign aid that President Bush announced in March of 2002. This increase in bilateral cooperation enabled the initial phase of the daunting task of fighting terrorist networks to be carried out with amazing proficiency, and will need to continue in the years to come. Many of these offers are sincerely rooted in a desire to provide a useful benefit in the fight

against terrorism. Others, however, may be made with self-serving hidden agendas that use the war against terrorism as a rationale for reclassifying some groups and individuals as terrorist sponsors, a convenient excuse to get rid of otherwise legitimate organizations whose only real crime may be to have a contrary view to the government's. While the U.S. desperately needs the cooperation of what were prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> unlikely allies, it should view these offers with a wary eye and accept them with cautious optimism until a commitment to real, long-term changes is demonstrated.