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Pakistan

Can the United States Secure an Insecure State?

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Summary

In the days following the tragic events of 9/11, Pakistan became a crucial partner in the U.S. counterattack on al Qaeda and al Qaeda's ally, the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan permitted the United States to use its airspace; granted overland access to Afghanistan; and employed its army, police, and paramilitary organizations to capture al Qaeda activists. With the resurgence of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan in 2005, the United States refocused on stabilizing Afghanistan. It began pressuring Islamabad to counter the Afghan Taliban, which had ensconced themselves in the tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. To secure Pakistan's cooperation in pursuit of U.S. policy goals, the United States provided the country some \$11 billion in assistance between September 11, 2001, and the end of 2008.

Despite this largesse, Pakistan has become more—not less—insecure; anti-Americanism has intensified, rather than diminished. Despite its early commitments to fighting al Qaeda, Pakistan has been hesitant to prosecute the fight against the Afghan Taliban; some of the military and political leadership of the Afghan Taliban openly operates out of the Pakistani cities of Quetta, Peshawar, and Karachi. While Pakistan has lost more military, paramilitary, and police personnel than any other ally, disturbing reports continue to surface about Pakistan's continued support for the Afghan Taliban. The use of militant groups, including the Taliban, has remained an important instrument for Pakistan's security forces in its regional strategy. In recent years, Pakistan moderated but did not eliminate support for jihadi groups that had focused on Kashmir. Many of these groups have relocated to

the tribal areas, from which they stage attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. From 2004 to the time of this writing,¹ Pakistani security forces have launched various campaigns to oust Pakistani Taliban from parts of the tribal areas and the Northwest Frontier Province.

Although the Musharraf era came to an end in 2008 and the country returned to civilian rule, it is uncertain whether the current change will prove enduring or whether Pakistan will follow its historical pattern of alternating between civilian and military rule. The ability of Pakistan to combat militants is questionable, as are the country's economic prospects. These problems persist alongside concerns about nuclear proliferation from Pakistan. Because of this combination of concerns about nuclear proliferation and stability, Pakistan's role as sanctuary for al Qaeda and Afghan insurgents, and political instability, calls are mounting in the United States for a new approach to Pakistan.

The broad expanse of U.S.-Pakistan engagement shows that both countries hold a fundamentally different hierarchy of goals that each seeks to secure through engagement. Until very recently, Washington has not tried to persuade Islamabad to reorder its goals or at least to be more engaged in helping Washington achieve its goals in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the wider region in exchange for U.S. financial assistance. Yet, until U.S. and Pakistani goals are brought into greater alignment and unless meaningful progress is made in securing critical U.S. interests, Washington may grow increasingly disinclined to lavish Islamabad with financial inducements and may even conclude that Pakistan is an unsuitable partner for some or all forms of U.S. allurements.

Where Is Pakistan Heading?

Arguably, a Pakistan at peace with itself and with its neighbors is a necessary but insufficient condition for security in South Asia. Yet it is far from clear that such a future is possible for Pakistan, even though

¹ August 2009.

it is perhaps optimal. The most likely near-term future is a Pakistan that “muddles” along, neither failing outright nor managing to right its course. Less likely futures include an increasingly theocratic or Islamist state or even a breakup of the state itself. More likely, Pakistan may evolve into a praetorian and authoritarian state tightly under the control of the military and intelligence agencies. All of these options augur more instability inside and outside Pakistan and merit significant efforts to retard their eventuation.

While a stable Pakistan is the preferred outcome to minimize the threats within and emanating from Pakistan, the country’s troublesome past and contemporary problems suggest that it is likely to continue to be politically unstable, engage in dangerous attempts to alter the territorial status quo with India, interfere in Afghanistan, and rely upon militants as a tool of foreign policy. Pakistani military and civilian elites are divided over who should wield power and how. High illiteracy rates and poor health care combine to cloud Pakistan’s future. The influx of poor and poorly educated young men into the labor force provides fodder for militant radicalization. Wide disparities in income contribute to political instability. The surge in food and energy prices on international markets in 2007 and 2008 led to popular unrest.

However, not all is dark. Population growth has slowed. Pakistanis are slowly becoming better educated. Economic growth accelerated between 2000 and 2007, in great part because of improved economic policies, as the Pakistani government has haltingly liberalized the economy and privatized state-owned enterprises. Employment had grown substantially. The Persian Gulf provided an outlet for poorer, less well-educated Pakistanis to find work. Remittances had boosted living standards sharply in the home districts of these expatriate workers. More recently, the decline in international prices of fuels and food have made these products more affordable. The key question is how quickly Pakistan can restore rapid growth following the balance-of-payments crisis in fall 2008 and the global economic recession.

Pakistan's Ability to Mitigate Sources of Insecurity

On its own, Pakistan is poorly positioned to contend with its perceived external threats. Unfortunately, Pakistani leaders are unlikely to fundamentally reconsider the way they view their neighborhood. Neither India nor Afghanistan currently has an interest in or faces the necessity to acquiesce to Pakistan's territorial demands. India, in particular, contends that Pakistani claims to Kashmir are illegitimate and tends to argue that Pakistan's fears of India are ill-founded. India rightly notes that Pakistan has commenced every war between the two with the exception of the 1971 war and has been primarily responsible for the enduring proxy war over Kashmir. Afghanistan's reluctance to recognize its border with Pakistan and episodic irredentist claims on Pakistan's Pashtun territories serve to exacerbate the insecurities of Pakistan's leaders. Many of Pakistan's security and military elites have yet to conclude that militant groups endanger the Pakistani state and therefore pose more harm than good to supreme national interests. This view lingers because many within the security forces still see militant groups as a useful instrument to keep Afghanistan and India off balance. In light of the existential nature of Pakistan's concerns, Pakistan's leaders are likely to continue policies of subconventional warfare absent a concerted international effort to make such policies more costly to Pakistan.

Notwithstanding elegant political rhetoric, many political elites have been reluctant to embrace their own war on terror, even though the state itself has been targeted by militants. Until recently, rather than trying to extirpate internal threats, Pakistan's leaders often attempted to placate these groups. Such decisionmaking was based on the belief that the state has been targeted because of its alliance with the United States, not because militant groups wish to take power. Some of Pakistan's leaders believed the danger from militants would disappear if Islamabad were to step back from Washington's embrace. More recently, some Pakistani officials and analysts have called for the need to counter the threat posed by militants. Beginning in April 2009, operations in the Swat valley and southern Waziristan are per-

haps outcomes of this putative change in beliefs about Pakistan's internal threats.

Unfortunately, even if the entire Pakistani government resolved to eliminate the threats it faces, it lacks the ability to do so effectively. The armed forces are not trained or proficient in counterinsurgency operations; the country lacks a competent domestic intelligence agency geared toward fighting militancy; and Pakistan's police are poorly trained, ill-equipped, and often corrupt. Indeed, the country's entire system of justice is decrepit. To achieve constitutional rule of law, politicians will need to seriously address the failings of the system of justice.

If the Pakistani state is to become healthier, military and civilian elites will have to agree on the constitutional basis for running the country and rigorously commit to upholding the constitution. Such steps most certainly include competent civilian control over the military. If the military remains chastened and if the civilian political elite refrains from turning to the military to advance its own intrigues, Pakistan could enter an extended period of civilian rule. However, based on Pakistan's history, the country's ruling elites are more likely to resort to business as usual unless they experience a major shock.

On a more positive note, Pakistan's armed forces appear to have developed procedures and systems to better prevent the proliferation of nuclear materials unsanctioned by the state. Pakistan's armed forces have shown no interest in letting subnational groups obtain nuclear materials or technologies. They have been interested in securing "stand-off" assistance from the United States to improve nuclear security. Such assistance would allow Pakistan to ensure that the United States gains little visibility into the program.

Pakistan will not only need to continue to follow prudent macroeconomic policies, including adherence to the terms of its Standby Agreement with the International Monetary Fund, it will also need to invest more in infrastructure, especially roads and electric power, if growth is to rebound from the current downturn. More and more-effective public spending on education and health care is also needed if Pakistan's human capital is to be improved. The Pakistani government does not currently have institutions, policies, or procedures in place to make these improvements.

How Effective Have U.S. Policies Toward Pakistan Been?

Despite Washington's provision of considerable assistance, the United States and Pakistan have different goals concerning Afghanistan and the numerous militant groups operating in and from Pakistan. The last eight years have seen too few returns on the massive U.S. expenditures on Pakistan. While Pakistan's military has provided sporadic support against al Qaeda, it stands accused of facilitating the Taliban's efforts to regain power in Afghanistan. The military has failed to pursue policies that would advance security in the region, owing to shortcomings both in political will and capability.

Pakistan's military has little enthusiasm for counterinsurgency. In addition, it faces institutional motivations to sabotage peace overtures to its neighbors. If civilians are able to hold on to power and take a more assertive role in formulating Pakistan's security policy, Pakistan may be able to adopt more-peaceful policies toward its neighbors.

Pakistan and the United States have not yet forged a consensus on goals and how to use the resources available to achieve these goals. Regrettably, the United States has not seriously held Pakistan accountable for its activities and policies that undermine U.S. policy objectives in Afghanistan and elsewhere, fearing that reproof will cause Pakistan to cease cooperating with the United States even on the limited basis that it currently does. Part of the failure was due to the U.S. focus on Pres. (and Gen.) Pervez Musharraf and the Pakistan Army. But after eight years of U.S. funding to Pakistan, we have seen that possibly no amount of money could have convinced Pakistan's government to engage in effective and comprehensive counterinsurgency operations.

The United States has not invested in building a civilian government in Pakistan. U.S. funding to enhance civilian capabilities through investments in the police and rule of law, the parliament, and human development has been relatively small. U.S. assistance programs need to be better configured to meet these needs and contribute to the social and political development of Pakistan.

A New Approach to Pakistan

After more than eight years of ad-hoc U.S. engagement of Pakistan focused upon an individual (Musharraf) and his institution (the Pakistan Army), the United States undertook a number of reviews of the “Afghanistan-Pakistan Problem.” The newly elected Obama administration tasked Bruce Reidel to conduct a review of reviews that culminated in a white paper.² The strategy that emerged from this process identified the problem of “Af-Pak” and suggested that Pakistan must be stabilized to stabilize Afghanistan. While that document identified a set of strategic priorities with respect to Afghanistan, a new approach to Pakistan was only adumbrated.

Moreover, the document stepped back from some of the more-expansive notions laid out by then-presidential candidate Barack Obama. During the campaign, Obama stressed the need for a regional solution that recognized the role of the Indo-Pakistan security competition in stabilizing the region. However, neither the white paper nor the remit of Special Envoy to the “region” Richard Holbrooke includes this mandate, in large measure because of the efforts of the well-healed Indian lobby.³ It is not obvious how a regional approach that is not genuinely *regional* will prevail.

Our book compliments and advances some of the concepts in that white paper while proposing other initiatives not addressed in that document. We argue, as does the white paper, that the U.S. government should adopt policies that permit the United States to engage more effectively with Pakistan to secure mutual security interests. However, we further argue that the strategy should be officially reoriented to focus upon Pakistan, rather than Afghanistan. New policies should include the following:

- Develop a strategic framework to guide and restructure the relationship with Pakistan.

² White House, “White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan and Pakistan,” March 27, 2009.

³ Laura Rozen, “India’s Stealth Lobbying Against Holbrooke’s Brief,” *Cable*, January 23, 2009.

- Provide assistance for the development of civilian institutions and of Pakistan's civil society.
- Avoid the temptation to support a "strong man" to pursue U.S. interests.
- Restructure military assistance:
 - Rules concerning Coalition Support Funds should be tightened and rigorously enforced to make Pakistan more accountable for how it spends these funds.
 - Sales or grants of major weapon systems should be a conditional reward for actual cooperation, not an inducement for desired cooperation.
 - Communicate the desire to forge a lasting relationship with the military in the context of developing civilian control, including pursuit of a status of forces agreement (SOFA). Pakistani rejections of a SOFA may indicate Islamabad's actual unwillingness to forge a strategic relationship with the United States despite claims to the contrary.
- Develop a regional strategy that quietly emphasizes a Pakistan-India and a Pakistan-Afghanistan rapprochement while signaling the U.S. commitment to remain in Afghanistan. India's involvement in the region is critical to stabilizing the region, and, therefore, India needs to be engaged. However, India should be brought into this regional problem in a way that does not rehyphenate U.S. relations with both India and Pakistan.⁴

These policies should be implemented concurrently to the best extent possible. (See pp. 181–197.)

Recommendations for the U.S. Air Force

The U.S. Air Force can make a unique contribution to U.S. policy toward Pakistan. While Pakistan's military forces are dominated by

⁴ For a discussion of "de-hyphenation," see C. Christine Fair, *The Counterterrorism Coalitions: Cooperation with Pakistan and India*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-141-AF, 2004a.

the army, the U.S. Air Force can improve the U.S. government's understanding of Pakistani Air Force personnel, especially leaders; capabilities; and, perhaps most importantly, how Pakistani Air Force personnel perceive their strategic situation by interacting more through exchanges, training, and exercises. The U.S. Air Force should review the Military Personnel Exchange Program, the Attaché Program, and the International Affairs Specialist Program to increase the focus of each program on Pakistan.

The U.S. Air Force, like the rest of the U.S. armed forces, would benefit from a greater understanding of Pakistani society, the history of the U.S.-Pakistani relationship, and the operating environment in and around Pakistan. The U.S. Air Force would benefit from putting more resources into building and maintaining knowledge about Pakistan. The International Airman program will help but is too limited.

The U.S. Air Force can improve the Pakistani military's capability to conduct counterinsurgency operations by providing equipment and training. Pakistan has been a strong contributor to international peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. U.S. Air Force training can help Pakistan maintain and even enhance its capabilities in these areas. The U.S. Air Force should also consider increasing the number and duration of training events in Pakistan and with Pakistani officers in the United States. In addition to such high-profile events as RED FLAG, the U.S. Air Force, along with the other services, should do what it can to bring Pakistanis to the United States. The U.S. Air Force should support increasing the number of slots available through the International Military Education and Training grant program and other programs. Finally, given the dominance of the Pakistan Army over Pakistan's other armed forces, the United States should communicate the importance of "jointness" across the services. (See pp. 197–201.)