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REPORT



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UNITED STATES-PAKISTAN RELATIONS: Facing a Critical Juncture

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Introduction

Few would disagree that 2011 was a difficult year for the United States and Pakistan. The shaky relationship deteriorated rapidly over the past twelve months as a result of a series of incidents shortly after the American raid on the Pakistani compound that killed Osama bin Laden on May 2 of last year. It has become a cliché to compare the rocky relationship to a bad marriage, one in which divorce is impossible yet both parties are forced to trudge along unhappily. Never smooth even during the best of times,¹ the past year has brought the relationship to an all-time low. In a November 2011 CBS poll, a majority of Americans said that Pakistan is either unfriendly (39%) or an enemy (24%). Only 2% called it an ally.² For their part, Pakistanis don't see the relationship as any healthier. A June 2011 Pew Research poll showed that most Pakistanis see the United States as an enemy and a potential threat to their country's security.³ This paper will address the tumultuous relationship between these two countries including recent turmoil, regional dynamics, often opposed agendas of each country, and options for rebuilding the relationship.

On the one hand, since joining hands in late 2001, Washington has been praising Islamabad for its commitment and sacrifice of more than 3,500 military personnel and as many as 35,000 Pakistani civilians in the "war on terror." Last year, soon after the killing of Osama bin Laden inside Pakistan, President Barack Obama said, "We have been able to kill more terrorists on Pakistani soil than just about anyplace else. We could not have done that without Pakistani cooperation."⁴ On the other hand, American officials have suspected and often accused the Pakistani military of supporting militant groups, particularly the Afghan Taliban. Although Washington and Islamabad have never been on the same page since 9/11, both sides have always made an effort to maintain their ties.

The two countries have longstanding historic and contemporary reasons for their paradoxical love-hate relationship⁵, but as of now the existing friction has largely been over strategic policy differences as regards Afghanistan.⁶ With bin Laden's killing and al-Qaeda's leadership greatly diminished by drone strikes in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)

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region, the United States' highest priority is to develop an exit strategy so that it can withdraw its combat troops from Afghanistan by 2014. To this end, the major challenge is the resilience of the Afghan Taliban, who have been fighting the American-led NATO and Afghan forces for the past decade.⁷ Perhaps the most important source of tension is the fact that Pakistan is being accused of supporting Taliban groups.

Evidently, Afghanistan's end game is the major hurdle because both Islamabad and Washington have been pursuing quite different objectives. But it is not the only factor, for at times both countries pursue quite different strategic objectives that have no major overlapping mutual interests.⁸

There are other factors as well, such as Pakistan's troubled relationship with India, the distribution of power within Pakistan's civil-military divide (the military has supremacy over critical issues, including relations with Washington), and the recent emergence of an internal vibrant and mostly anti-American media. In addition, there are several new realities: Washington's assessment of Islamabad has changed since 9/11, it has down-scaled its objectives in Afghanistan quite radically since the original Operation Enduring Freedom and first Bonn conference, and it has made mistakes in its Pakistani policy.⁹

Pakistan has also changed markedly in socioeconomic ways, not all of which are favorable to Washington. One of the most unfavorable ways has been the rapidly growing and widespread leverage of intolerant religious and sectarian groups such as the recent rise of Difa-e Pakistan Council (DPC) or the Defense Council of Pakistan – a group of more than 40 religious parties and Islamists—whose main focus is to prevent the Pakistani state from improving relations with the United States and India.¹⁰ Perhaps Washington has lost hope of a moderate Pakistan as American policy makers scratch their heads at how “an ally and recipient of so much U.S aid- about \$20 billion since 9/11, when military and civilian totals are calculated—can be so ungrateful and so uncooperative in what should be a common cause of eradicating terrorism.”¹¹ Nevertheless, the relationship remains extremely vital for both sides, though perhaps more so for the United States because of its involvement in neighboring Afghanistan.

2011: A Year of Change

In the words of Washington-based Pakistani journalist Anwar Iqbal, “the year 2011 was like 2001—a game changer,” for it exposed the fragile nature of the relationship. He compares the two years by stating that “while the September 11, 2001 terrorists’ attacks brought Pakistan back into the game, events happening in 2011 are pushing [the country] out.”¹² These driving events are described briefly below:

- On January 27, 2011, CIA contractor Raymond Davis was arrested in Lahore for killing two Pakistanis. Some media reports said these men were robbers; other suggested they were Pakistani intelligence operatives who had been chasing Davis. The resulting diplomatic heat exposed the bilateral discord and suggested a war of spies.¹³ The trial became a hot show in Pakistan, which rejected the option of diplomatic immunity. So intense was the “Davis affair” that Obama had to intervene by publicly remarking that Davis enjoyed diplomatic immunity. He was later released after paying compensation (blood money) to the victims’ family.
- In May 2011, a Special Operations team of United States Navy Seals conducted a unilateral operation against Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad that put Pakistan in an untenable position. Despite Islamabad’s persistent denials that bin Laden was in the country, he was found in a house in a garrison town. For Washington, the next puzzle to solve was the nature of Pakistan’s military “understanding” with bin Laden. Either the military was complicit in harboring the world’s most-wanted terrorist, or it was somehow so incompetent that it could not discover him in the neighborhood of its training academy.¹⁴ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ruled out any evidence showing complicity of top-level Pakistani military or government officials.¹⁵ The resulting night-time military operation, which was perceived as a clear violation of Pakistani sovereignty, further deteriorated relations and fueled anti-Americanism. A sense of insecurity was also expressed. According to a poll, at that time 73 percent of Pakistanis had an unfavorable view of the United States; a mere 14 percent favored bin Laden’s killing.⁶ One Pakistani army officer, Brigadier Ali Khan was later arrested for “subverting the government” by stating what he thought of Pakistan’s complicity in not resisting the United States.¹⁷

- During his September 2011 testimony before the Senate, Admiral Michael Mullen ([outgoing] chairman, United States Joint Chiefs of Staff) called the Haqqani Network¹⁸ a veritable arm of the ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence].” This was the first time that a high ranking Obama administration official had spoken candidly about the Pakistani spy agency’s¹⁹ collusion with the network,²⁰ a militant group led by the family of Jalaluddin Haqqani, a veteran of the anti-Soviet Afghan war. The network is present among the Zadran tribe in eastern Afghanistan as well as in Miranshah, a town in Pakistan’s North Waziristan tribal agency. The network has been involved in some high profile attacks in Afghanistan including the latest brazen and well-orchestrated attack on Kabul on April 15.²¹ Mullen’s blatant charge created a stir in Pakistan. An All Parties Conference (APC) of Pakistan’s diverse political parties was called to condemn his accusation.²² Although Mullen’s testimony is believed to have been approved by the Washington’s National Security Council, Pakistan’s strong reaction forced the Obama administration to not support Mullen’s statement openly.²³
- The dust from Mullen’s testimony had barely settled when a controversial memo emerged, one allegedly asking the Pentagon to help thwart a possible military coup in the wake of bin Laden’s killing. The memo further rattled the country’s strained civil-military imbalance by painting the civilians as hidden partners of the United States in defaming the military. ²⁴ The resulting “Memogate” controversy aroused the military’s fear that the civilian head of state had tried to use American influence to pressure the military and to interfere in Pakistan’s internal affairs. Many Pakistanis, including politicians from the ruling Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), called the memo an American conspiracy to destabilize the country and malign its military forces.²⁵
- On November 26, 2011, NATO aircraft and ground troops attacked two military check posts in the Mohmand tribal agency area; twenty-four Pakistani soldiers were killed. These deadly attacks triggered widespread rallies and a severe official response: Islamabad stopped NATO’s Afghanistan-bound supplies, asked Washington to vacate one of the airbases it rented from Pakistan, and boycotted the December 4, 2011, conference to be held in Bonn to decide Afghanistan’s future.²⁶ Some believe that this attack may be the end of Pakistan’s role as an American ally in the “war on terror.”²⁷

United States-Pakistan Relations

Toward the Post-9/11 Phase

Pakistan joined hands with the United States in the American-led operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan for harboring al-Qaeda, the party responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Despite being allies, they agreed to disagree on which group should qualify as the primary terrorist threat. Apparently, this alliance shifted Pakistan's decades-long policy toward Afghanistan. Pakistan was one of the few countries to establish diplomatic ties with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Religious parties harshly opposed this American-dictated "u-turn." In a controversial interview, former president General Pervez Musharraf also said that top American official Richard Armitage had threatened that Pakistan would be bombed into the Stone Age if it did not cooperate in the campaign against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.²⁸ This "shift," however, politically legitimized Musharraf, who had staged a bloodless military coup in October 1999. All of a sudden, the dictator, who ruled the country till August 2008, was Washington's favorite.²⁹

History clearly shows that relations between the two countries have almost always been short-sighted, for they have been based almost totally on perceived security requirements instead of on genuine shared interests and values.³⁰ Throughout the cold war, they were committed allies against the perceived threat of communist expansion in South Asia. Yet Pakistan continues to complain about American perfidy in 1965 and 1971, when Washington did not help it in its war against India. Both countries were the key players in backing the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviet army in the 1980s; however, just a year after the latter's withdrawal, Washington suspended its aid to Pakistan under the Pressler Amendment, citing Pakistan's continued nuclear ambitions.

The decade preceding 9/11 was also important because of what was happening in Afghanistan. By 1996, the Taliban were a rising power in Afghanistan. Pakistan was one of the few countries to have supported, rather facilitated, their rise. Once in power, the Taliban would later shelter bin Laden, who had masterminded the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. From 1998 to 2001, the Clinton administration pressed Islamabad to use its influence over the Taliban to hand over bin Laden; the efforts failed. In the end, Pakistan's ties with the Taliban and its failure to be helpful against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan disappointed Washington and made it suspicious of Pakistan.

The September 11 attacks necessitated another United States-Pakistan alliance. The George W. Bush administration buried the past and built a new partnership that focused on capturing al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders and disrupting their safe havens in Pakistan. Washington lifted its sanctions, which brought financial benefits to the Musharraf government for its “unconditional” support.³¹ The Coalition Support Funds (CSF) compensated Pakistan’s military for the costs of its operations against the Taliban.

Obama’s War

In a major policy speech at West Point on December 1, 2009, Obama identified Pakistan as a focal point for success in Afghanistan: “Moving forward, we are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interest, mutual respect, and mutual trust. We will strengthen Pakistan’s capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries, and have made it clear that we cannot tolerate a safe haven for terrorists whose location is known and whose intentions are clear.”³² The Obama administration recognized that “a fractured or incapacitated Pakistan would threaten core U.S. interests, not least because its nuclear weapons would be vulnerable to al Qaeda or similar terrorists groups.”³³ Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the late presidential envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan who devised the acronym “AfPak,” treated both countries as part of a single theater of war. Pakistan was not happy with this, for it wanted to include the Kashmir dispute as part of the envoy’s regional mandate.

Holbrooke staunchly advocated this strategic partnership with Pakistan to show Washington’s long-term and durable commitment to the region. According to Vali Nasr, one of his top advisors, “he [Holbrooke] did have a grand strategy . . . He believed that we need to stabilize the government and we needed to close the gap in trust that had developed for decades.”³⁴ In the context of Pakistan, Holbrooke knew of two factors that could change the game on counter-militancy: the strong military and the ISI, and the hearts and minds of ordinary Pakistanis. He also focused on such insurgency-affected areas as the FATA and Swat regions. Despite his success in establishing terms with the Pakistani leadership, as compared to his relations with the Afghan leadership, Holbrooke faced problems from the Obama administration and is reported to have been completely sidelined at one point. It is even said that after the June 2010 ousting of General Stanley McChrystal, the American military commander in Afghanistan, there were rumors that Holbrooke was the next to be fired.³⁵

In March 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Kerry-Lugar Bill to help Pakistan deal with its precarious economic conditions as a front-line state in the “war on terror.” This bill, which sought to triple the amount of aid to \$1.5 billion a year for the next five years as part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism with socioeconomic development, also included military aid and was conditional on Pakistan’s commitment to fight terrorist groups. Pakistan’s military, which responded through a strong worded press statement about its “serious concern regarding clauses impacting National Security,” ultimately rejected the aid.³⁶

As part of its revised strategy, Washington has responded quickly to the various humanitarian crises in Pakistan. Since October 2009, it has provided millions of dollars, including \$550 million in emergency humanitarian assistance after the massive 2010 floods. Not only was it the largest international donor to flood victims, it was also the first one to respond. Washington has also tried to use aid to improve its image among Pakistanis.³⁷ Although the Obama administration has expanded its civilian aid program, disagreements remain even on the issue of aid. Finance Minister Abdul Hafiz Shaikh, for instance, said in a 2011 speech, “It is largely a myth that Pakistan is a beneficiary of tens of billions of dollars. The truth is that in the Kerry-Lugar-Berman arrangement this year we have not received \$300 million.”³⁸

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Pressing Issues

Safe Havens

In the aftermath of 9/11, Islamabad promised four main things to Washington: (1) it would break ties with the Afghan Taliban and provide full support to the United States in the war; (2) arrest and turn over al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders who fled to Pakistan; (3) seal the border and prevent al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban from establishing safe havens on Pakistani soil, which could be used to attack American and allied forces in Afghanistan; and (4) work with the American-led international community for peace and stability in Afghanistan. These promises have been only partially fulfilled. Despite deploying troops, the Pakistani military has failed to deny safe havens to al-Qaeda-linked militants because, according to Pakistani officials, it is hard to seal the long and porous border. Dozens of illegal entry points have allowed Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda commanders to enter FATA, especially to the South and North Waziristan tribal agencies.

At the same time, however, Pakistani forces did capture many al-Qaeda commanders who had entered the country through FATA and then slipped into urban parts of the country. Among them are Abu Zubadah (Faisalabad, March 2002), Ramzi Binalshib (Karachi, September 2002), 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammad (Rawalpindi, March 2003), and al-Qaeda's No. 3 man Abu Faraj Al-Libbi (Mardan, May 2005). Many other top operational commanders have also been killed in drone strikes in FATA, most probably due to intelligence shared by Pakistan.

A persistent bone of contention remains, however: Pakistan has turned a blind eye toward the Afghan Taliban and only watches al-Qaeda leaders. Under immense American pressure, in March 2004 it launched full-fledged military operations in South Waziristan. During 2004 to 2007, Pakistan alternated between military operations and controversial peace deals that allowed the local Pakistani Taliban to regroup and consolidate.³⁹ In December 2007, Pakistan-based militants formed the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a confederation of militant groups that is based in the tribal regions but operational in the rest of Pakistan.

Anti-Americanism

Dealing with Pakistan's mainstream media has proven to be one of the toughest jobs for American officials.⁴⁰ Although anti-Americanism is nothing new in Pakistan, the country's relatively new electronic media has assiduously focused on sensationalism in a bid for achieving higher ratings in order to

attract advertising money. This contest has added a new flavor in recent years: the creation of public hysteria by spreading rumors and conspiracy theories regarding the United States, its presence, and its motives both in the region and inside Pakistan.

After decades of repression, in recent years Pakistan's broadcast media has won unprecedented freedom and grown by leaps and bounds. Prime-time talk show hosts on private television channels not only reflect popular themes and trends in the country's politics, but the hosts themselves are also regarded as movers and shakers of Pakistani society. The United States has been a particularly favorite topic for sensationalism and better ratings. Pakistani journalists, however, reject the accusation that they are fanning anti-Americanism and contend that the media is open to all views, including Washington's, which they say buys time on the mainstream public media. Thus its message does reach the Pakistani masses.⁴¹

Part of Washington's image problem also lies in its perplexing public diplomacy, which enables the local media to fuel anti-American stories. Realizing the critical importance of confronting the Pakistani media, none other than Secretary Clinton herself sat down with powerful Pakistani media figures during special interview sessions to challenge their views and, at times, correct facts and figures on a range of bilateral issues. For the first time since the relationship began, she addressed town halls and interacted with students and the general public in an effort to explain the relationship's critical importance as well as Washington's position on many important issues. Described as a "charm offensive" by media, this interaction was well received and had a positive impact.

People's perceptions are changed more by actions than by stated intentions. Mistakes made by the local public diplomacy offices in Islamabad nullify even the best of efforts, even those by Secretary Clinton. For example, six weeks after bin Laden was killed and Washington was struggling to maintain an already strained relationship, the American embassy hosted the first-ever GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) Pride Celebration on June 26, 2011 on its premises. A press release circulated to local media stated that the gathering "demonstrated continued U.S. Embassy support for human rights, including LGBT rights, in Pakistan at a time when those rights are increasingly under attack from extremist elements throughout Pakistani society."⁴² The event was not only strongly condemned by Pakistan's Parliament, but also sparked nationwide protest rallies with slogans of "Go America Go." Religious parties and a large segment of society described this event as "cultural terrorism."⁴³

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Drone Strikes

Although “Obama’s war” was a direct reference to the 2010 troop surge in Afghanistan, the policy was soon more active in next-door Pakistan,⁴⁴ where the drone campaign was aggressively stepped up and focused on al-Qaeda commanders in South and North Waziristan, which are strongholds of local and foreign militants. According to the New America Foundation, Obama has so far approved four times the number of drone strikes issued under the two terms of the George W. Bush administration.⁴⁵

Generally speaking, drone attacks are very precise in the sense that they are laser- or GPS-guided. Precise targeting has become more sophisticated over time, due to increasing improvements in gathering on-the-ground intelligence in FATA. With good intelligence and the latest technology, it is easier to decide when and where to strike in a way designed to minimize collateral damage. In the last few years, drones have killed some high-profile al-Qaeda commanders and leading Pakistani Taliban commanders including its former chief Baitullah Mehsud on August 5, 2009.⁴⁶ It is not yet known, however, whether American success depends primarily on its own intelligence gathering network or partly on help received from Pakistan. Probably it is a combination of the two.

Despite such tactical successes, this program remains controversial due to conflicting and critical reports about drone targets and collateral damage.⁴⁷ Pakistani media and politicians continue to report that the majority of the victims are civilians, which only contributes to the ongoing militancy and suicide bombing within the country. Some international organizations have also taken up the issue of civilian casualties; the latest one, the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism, highlights civilian casualties in its detailed reports.⁴⁸ Other researchers strongly oppose such views and claim that there are relatively few civilian casualties.⁴⁹

Since the region is not open to outside journalists and researchers, it is pretty hard to investigate and confirm drone strike-related reports independently. Most of the time, the Pakistani media goes along with the Taliban or the establishment version.⁵⁰ The fact of civilian casualties is not denied; however, it is also true that the targeted militant commanders always try to deliberately hide among those who are not necessarily militants or volunteer supporters, thereby catching innocent civilians in the crossfire. Pakistan’s army has more on-the-ground human intelligence in FATA, and thus can help identify militants and limit collateral damage.

Part of the controversy also lies in the non-transparent way in which the drone operations are conducted. While there is increasing opposition in the United States on moral and legal grounds,⁵¹ in Pakistan's case it reveals the indigenous military and civilian elites' deceptive and dishonest behavior toward the masses. Pakistan's Parliament passed a unanimous resolution against drone attacks that called for an immediate halt to these operations in FATA.⁵² On several occasions, the military and civilian leaderships have claimed that Washington is conducting these strikes without Islamabad's permission. But Wikileaks cables make it clear that both Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and Army Chief General Ashafq Kiyani have requested more drone strikes.⁵³

Although the pro-establishment parties have held anti-drone rallies to create outrage, there has been no significant mass opposition on the issue so far. In a major move, a group of civil society organizations in the Khybr Pakhtunkhwa province strongly supported these strikes in FATA in a joint resolution called the "Peshawar Declaration" in December 2009.⁵⁴

American drones violate Pakistan's sovereignty, just as al-Qaeda's continued presence in Pakistan displays the government's failure to exercise sovereignty. Islamabad will neither be able to generate public support against the drone attacks nor plead its case with Washington or the international community until it is honest with its own people on this issue. And being honest also means flushing al-Qaeda out of the tribal region and going after all militant groups. Unless Pakistan does this, its sovereignty will remain a joke and be equally violated by al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Americans.

Regional Dynamics

The End Game in Afghanistan

The United States toppled the Taliban a decade ago, and yet the security situation in major regions of the war-torn country remains far from stable. The brazen and well-coordinated attacks by the Taliban inside the capital of Kabul on April 13 once again revealed the weak security situation even in the heavily guarded and most secure parts of the city. Overall, violence in the first half of 2011 was 39 percent higher than it was during the same period in 2010.⁵⁵ According to one report, the Taliban run shadow governments in all but one of the country's thirty-four provinces.⁵⁶ With bin Laden's killing and the al-Qaeda leadership's diminishment, Washington is already seriously looking for ways to bring some sort of peace to the country before withdrawing its combat forces in 2014. Given the latest incidents of Qur'an burnings in February and the killing of sixteen civilians by an American soldier in March, this process may now be speeded up.⁵⁷

Right now, the major question is how to bring peace to Afghanistan at a time when Washington and Kabul have not yet defeated the various Taliban groups. Thus Pakistan's support to insurgent Afghan groups⁵⁸ (e.g., the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network) has emerged as a crucial bilateral issue.⁵⁹ Washington believes that Pakistan's protective policy toward both groups jeopardizes the American and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to deny that it collaborates with the Taliban or has a hidden agenda on Afghanistan,⁶⁰ but the latest NATO report suggests that Islamabad knows about Taliban locations and continues to manipulate the Taliban unabatedly.⁶¹

While there is no doubt that Pakistan bears a large share of responsibility for the ongoing mess in Afghanistan, one cannot ignore other factors, such as US/NATO blunders, Iran's interference and local dynamics (e.g., the Karzai government's incompetence, alleged corruption,⁶² and internal ethnic rivalries). This point is important not only from Pakistan's perspective, but also from both the American and Afghani perspectives.

In the regional context, however, Afghanistan's peace and stability in the near future hinges on two important factors: reconciliation with the Taliban and a regional understanding that neighboring countries will give peace a chance by not interfering. Pakistan, seen as integral to both spheres, can play either a positive or a negative role or a mixture of both. While denying that Islamabad is playing any negative or adverse role, the country's prime minister recently said, "Pakistan wanted a sovereign,

independent, prosperous and stable Afghanistan, which is in the Pakistan's interest... Pakistan is part of the solution and not part of the problem."⁶³

Washington, however, has already concluded that support from across the border enables Afghan Taliban groups to kill American and NATO soldiers in Afghanistan. This is an untenable condition for any American-Pakistani security collaboration or partnership. From Washington's point of view, Pakistan's alleged support jeopardizes regional peace efforts and threatens American interests, as well as causes American blood to be shed.

As the US/NATO intervention enters into its end-game phase, Washington and Islamabad have very different ideas of what constitutes "peace and stability" in Afghanistan.⁶⁴

Strategic Depth

In the Pakistani context, strategic depth is an outcome of national insecurity as regards India. In order to curtail Indian influence, Pakistan has long supported anti-India proxies in the form of various militant groups. Other people believe that the Pakistani army uses militant proxies on the pretext of strategic depth not only to pursue its strategic designs in neighboring countries, but also to obtain foreign aid.⁶⁵

Despite paying a high price for following this policy, Pakistan's military establishment still seems stuck to it, meaning that it continues to rely on Afghan Taliban groups as proxies for its so-called strategic interest. But this has proven to be an unrealistic approach, for despite the unprecedented sacrifices made by its people to host millions of Afghan refugees since the 1980s, today Pakistan is one of the most hated countries in Afghanistan.⁶⁶ This hostility is no longer confined to the Northern Alliance or elements in the Afghan government, but now runs so deep that most Afghans have stopped differentiating between Pakistan's military and the general population.⁶⁷

But in the eyes of Pakistan's security establishment, strategic depth is a genuine requirement for the country's security and survival, for it is now a security state increasingly encircled by "enemies." The recently signed "strategic partnership" between Afghanistan and India once again sends the wrong signal at a critical time,⁶⁸ for all it does is reinforce Pakistani paranoia and, perhaps, might push the country to provide even more support to its proxies. Apart from the stern opposition, many of the country's intelligentsia share the same views and strongly support the concept of strategic depth,

arguing that it must be seen in relation to Pakistan's critical geostrategic location. Given Pakistan's rivalries with its neighbors, some analysts even argue that it needs strategic depth more than other countries.⁶⁹ "If Mexico was hostile and six times the size of the United States and Canada was allied with Mexico, would the American security establishment not be paranoid," the British writer, Anatol Lieven, was quoted as saying on Twitter during his talk at Lahore in February this year.

An objective analysis of this concept, however, would show that the army, due to its decades of direct and indirect role in the country's politics and its particularly massive influence on foreign policy, has turned Pakistan into an Indo-centric prison. Beginning in 1958 with General Ayub Khan, the country's first military dictator, it has only acquired more power. Within the last three decades, this concept has gradually become a full-fledged "security doctrine" and part of the military establishment's DNA. Despite elections and civilian governments, the elected leadership must still contend with the military's near complete hold on all major foreign policy matters.

For Pakistan, securing its interests in Afghanistan is important; however, Pakistan needs a "rational" approach that does not rely on or support proxies fighting in neighboring countries. It does not make any sense to fight with your own Taliban groups inside Pakistan and support other Taliban groups in Afghanistan.

While the army has been doing all of this in the name of "national interest," it has recently been facing unprecedented pressure from various quarters inside the country. This reality implies its failure to protect the "national interest." The military has recently come under severe criticism for being unable to protect what are seen to be the country's most secure places. In October 2009, militants attacked the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi, known as "Pakistan's Pentagon"; it took several hours to clear the military compound. In another spectacular attack, in May 2011 a group of militants entered a secure base in Karachi and blew up three P-3C Orion maritime surveillance planes bought from the United States. These two high-profile attacks inside supposedly secure military compounds raised serious questions about the armed forces' preparedness and shook the people's confidence in them.⁷⁰

In addition, the military has not fully recovered ground lost to the militants throughout the tribal region since it launched military operations there in 2004. Also, the deepening economic crisis causes many Pakistanis to ask whether the army deserves to continue receiving such a large portion of the national exchequer. The military establishment needs to realize that its myopic security doctrine has caused it to pay an enormous price in terms of destroyed national infrastructure, human lives,

ongoing political and economic instability, and increasing international isolation.⁷¹ If Pakistan does not abandon its focus on solving its disputes with India on Afghan soil, it cannot expect any better treatment from its neighbors.

Dangerous Connections

The Quetta Shura, led by the Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, is considered to be the main insurgent group in Afghanistan. But the latest bogeyman, at least for the US/NATO forces, has become the Haqqani Network.⁷²

The story of the Haqqani Network's connections to the Pakistani military goes back to the Afghan jihad of the 1980s when Pakistan, with American support and Saudi money, helped train the Afghan mujahideen.⁷³ Jalaluddin Haqqani, the network's founder and a top beneficiary of CIA and ISI money, later joined the Taliban government and became a central minister. Although the network is accustomed to operating separately from the mainstream Afghan Taliban led by Mullah Mohammad Omar, it has recently declared that it is part of the Taliban and supports Mullah Omar. Still, it has maintained its distinctive position as regards the Quetta Shura, the main Taliban group.

Jalaluddin Haqqani has long since been replaced by his son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is known as the khalifah (caliph) among his followers as well as among journalists in the tribal region. Now in his mid-thirties, this active operational leader carries a US\$ 5 million bounty on his head.⁷⁴ Coming from the Zadran tribe, the Haqqanis have long been influential in eastern Afghanistan, which includes parts of Paktia, Paktika, and Khost provinces. They had close ties with Arab fighters and al-Qaeda leaders during the anti-Soviet war and under the Taliban. According to Kathy Gannon, a senior American journalist in the region, "Had he wanted, Haqqani (Jalaluddin) could have hand[ed] over the United States the entire al Qaeda network."⁷⁵

Jalaluddin Haqqani, who went into hiding after the Taliban's collapse, made a rare appearance on a video interview in May 2008 on Al Jazeera TV, in which he vowed renewed attacks on what he called "the U.S. and NATO invaders in Afghanistan."⁷⁶ His son Sirajuddin has practically replaced him and is now, with the help of his brothers, heading the network.

Since the resurgence of the Taliban in 2004, the network has carried out high-profile attacks in Kabul and elsewhere in the country.⁷⁷ Some of the major attacks against highly symbolic targets in Kabul

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and on the Pakistan-Afghan border are increasingly attributed to it, such as the latest attack inside Kabul early this month and the deadly September 2011 attack on the American embassy in Kabul.⁷⁸ So, why are the Haqqanis regarded as so dangerous to the US/NATO effort?

Some Afghan experts in the region believe that the western media has given the network too much attention. According to Rustom Shah Mohmand, former Pakistan ambassador to Afghanistan, the "Haqqani network has been operating only in three provinces such as Khost, Paktia and Paktika having control over 65-70 per cent of the area, while the US and NATO forces suffered losses other than these provinces, meaning that there are other effective Taliban groups besides the Haqqani network."⁷⁹ Local journalists estimate that there are 3,000-6,000 Haqqani fighters; Rahimullah Yousafzai, one of few journalists to have interviewed Sirajuddin, cites him as saying that it has only 2,000 fighters.⁸⁰

The point here is as follows: Even if there are 6,000 fighters, does the network pose a serious threat to a country in which the world's most sophisticated military is deployed in far larger numbers? This question must be answered not only from Pakistan's perspective, but also from the American perspective, for the violence in Afghanistan is not necessarily restricted to supposedly Haqqani-controlled areas. Yet the network does have a critical importance in the insurgency not only because of its physical strength and number of fighters, but also because of its operational scale. Thus the extent of its "power" has to be determined.

First, the network controls a geographically critical border region where it can easily funnel fighters on both sides: eastern Afghanistan's Paktia, Paktika, and Khost provinces. The recent attack inside Kabul on April 15 is also attributed to the Haqqani network which suggests that they may have expanded operations in closer provinces to Kabul.⁸¹ Second, its operational region hosts a plethora of other militant organizations, such as al-Qaeda, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, splinter groups of the Pakistani Taliban, and militants belonging to what is now referred to as the Punjabi Taliban (e.g., the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi [LeJ] and the Harkatul Mujahideen [HuM] etc). Third, its "military" strength as an "armed militia" is relevant; but even more important is its "multiplier" strength in terms of tribal supporters in the areas they control, where they enjoy the population's tacit support, either by intimidation or inducement, or sympathy.

The network's most important source of strength within Afghanistan today is Pakistan's support, which may range from passivity (unwillingness to fight it) to information-sharing. Washington, however, believes that Islamabad also actively backs the network's cause and perhaps even provides it with money, weapons, and ammunition.⁸² This "support" certainly makes its presence secure in the adjacent Pakistani area of North Waziristan.

In early 2011 the Haqqani Network, along with other militant groups, was reportedly no longer able to use Pakistani safe havens in the tribal region due to the increased cooperation between Islamabad and Washington.⁸³ Sirajuddin Haqqani himself told media figures in the region recently that he has moved from FATA to a secure area inside Afghanistan. Furthermore, he categorically denied links with the ISI and said that such accusations sought "to hide failure and to confuse people's minds."⁸⁴

Despite this claim, media reports have recently suggested that Haqqani Network leaders actually have free movement throughout Pakistan. It is widely believed that the Haqqanis have been hiding in the Kurram tribal agency for quite a while now. Official Pakistani support can be gauged from media reports, which say that some Haqqani family members have been living close to Islamabad with full knowledge of the country's military and civilian leaderships.⁸⁵ Perhaps this is why American officials believe that the job of US/NATO and the Afghan National Army (ANA) would be much easier if the Pakistani-supported Haqqani Network did not exist. However, Pakistan continuously rejects all these allegations of connections with militant groups creating unrest in the region.⁸⁶

The Players

Washington's Expectations

Washington apparently believes that it could establish a durable and long-lasting friendship with Pakistan if the latter would honestly support American expectations or at least clearly try to meet them. Unfortunately for the United States, Pakistan's own concerns and diverging strategic interests often lead it to pursue its own course, but usually in a non-transparent way. Thus the bilateral friendship breaks down and political animosity increases. Washington wants several things from Pakistan: that it (1) grind down the militant groups that pose a threat to its strategy in Afghanistan and, if possible, grind them down to ensure a stable Pakistan; (2) safeguard its nuclear assets and weapons from unauthorized use, transfer, or theft⁸⁷; (3) form a stable and responsive government; and (4) establish friendly relations with its neighbors.⁸⁸

Washington's main expectations from Islamabad with respect to Afghanistan are:

1. **Actions against Militant Safe Havens.** First and foremost, Islamabad has to take effective actions against terrorist safe havens in its border regions. The main goal here is to curtail and prevent cross-border movements of those fighting the US/NATO/Afghan security forces in Afghanistan. In addition, Washington wants support to those militants based inside Pakistan to be terminated and good-faith efforts made to stop FATA-based militant groups from attacks inside Afghanistan. Washington believes that it is in the interest of all three countries to bring these groups under control and quell their active involvement in the insurgency.
2. **Sincere Talks with the Taliban.** Washington wants Islamabad to make sincere and genuine efforts to use its influence to get the Afghan insurgents to adopt a reconciliation-based negotiation policy. Of specific concern here are the Haqqani Network and the Quetta Shura. Washington also believes that Islamabad can influence the currently less combat-active former Afghan mujahideen commander Gulbadin Hikmatyar, head of the Hizb-e-Islami. He and his family are believed to be hiding in Pakistan. Although this group is no longer one of the more influential militant groups in Afghanistan's current insurgency, Hikmatyar does have followers among the country's religious conservatives. Washington would like Islamabad's support in encouraging these groups to open talks.
3. **Actions against Pakistani Militant Groups.** Washington wants Islamabad to take effective actions against the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) via a multi-faceted approach and negotiate only when the end goal is to end combat or suicide bombing forays and produce stability. Even though the

Pakistani Taliban are separate from the Afghan Taliban and mainly concentrates on fighting Pakistani military, they nevertheless have close ties with the latter and help them in FATA, which contributes to instability in Afghanistan.⁸⁹

4. Safe Passage of NATO Supplies. Since 2002, Pakistan has been the most important bulk carrier of logistical support and motor fuel for the American-led NATO forces in landlocked Afghanistan, for it offers the shortest and most economic land and air routes. Road-borne supplies are shipped to the port city of Karachi and then driven to Afghanistan either through the Khyber Pass (eastern Afghanistan) or Chaman (Baluchistan province). Although both routes pass through Taliban strongholds, they have been used to transport more than 70 percent of the bulk supplies and equipment.⁹⁰ The use of overland Pakistani routes was reduced after spates of attacks on supply trucks in various locations, particularly in Peshawar; however, they still carry around one-third of the needed supplies. Islamabad is now seriously considering new rules of engagement for the NATO supplies, such as levying taxes and new transit fees on this traffic as a condition of reopening its routes.⁹¹

5. Mainstreaming FATA. Washington has long expected Islamabad to begin bringing FATA under its full writ, extend economic opportunities and facilities, and integrate the region into the country's normal political institutions. Although successive Pakistani regimes have said that doing so is a top priority, this remains a distant dream. The present PPP government has announced several times that it is pursuing this goal, and yet proclaimed the much-needed political reforms only in August 2011.⁹² For Washington, such "paper" steps are insufficient because the militants continue to use FATA as a safe haven. This reality remains a huge barrier to a lasting regional peace. Washington says it's ready to provide assistance to achieve this objective.⁹³

6. Normalizing Relations with India. Washington is fully aware that Pakistan's Indo-centric security policy is an enormous hindrance to regional peace and stability and that genuine normalization could engender far-reaching results for the region. Given that Pakistan has long used its influence in Afghanistan as a backstop to tackle India on other fronts, building bridges with India could effectively lead to peace in Afghanistan.

Islamabad's Grievances

Islamabad believes that Washington has its own ulterior regional objectives and leaves it in the dark when dealing with many issues of great concern to it. Islamabad has started to accuse Washington

of exerting inordinate pressure and of bullying the country to submit to American expectations. There also seems to be an increasing consensus among Pakistani officials and media circles that since the United States is actually failing to achieve its stated objectives in Afghanistan, it is now twisting Pakistan's arm for its own face-saving purposes.⁹⁴ This perception may be one of the principal reasons why Pakistan has been unwilling to abandon its contrary policy.

Pakistan has its own list of grievances and expectations, as listed below:

1. The United States Is an Opportunistic Friend. "What guarantee can the Americans give Pakistanis that we can trust you ... and that you guys are not going to be betraying us like you did in the past?" a Pakistani student asked Secretary Clinton in one of her 2011 town hall meetings in Lahore.⁹⁵ This perception of American unfaithfulness and unreliability is built into Pakistan's interpretation of past engagements during the cold war. Pakistan complains that despite its past friendship and commitment, Washington has not bailed it out during critical times. Moreover, Pakistan finds no reason to believe that it will not once again leave the area and abandon cooperation with Pakistan as soon as things are ironed out in Afghanistan. As Pakistanis read about Washington's back-channel negotiations with the Afghan Taliban, the belief that the latter is again backtracking from its commitments is reinforced. Similarly, a majority of Pakistanis believe that Washington has always supported personalities and military dictators for its own interests, rather than in the interest of the Pakistani people.⁹⁶

2. The Indian Factor. Pakistan's past commitments with the United States, such as during the cold war, sought to engage the latter primarily as a means to protect it from possible Indian designs. Nothing has changed, and Washington's tendency to favor India still feeds the Pakistani impression of the United States as a perfidious friend.

First, Pakistan increasingly fears that it is being encircled by "enemies."⁹⁷ In particular, it has long accused India of using its consulates in the Afghanistan border region to stir up such anti-Pakistan activities as supporting Baluch insurgent groups⁹⁸ and even funding FATA-based Pakistani militant groups' fight with Islamabad. Its fear of increasing Indian influence next door, although exaggerated, cannot be dismissed as one element of the United States' strategic dilemma. Washington is aware of this anxiety, and American officials believe that there may be elements of truth as regards India's alleged support of anti-Pakistan groups; however, they believe that such reports are exaggerated.

Second, Pakistan envies the United States-India civil nuclear deal and wants something comparable.⁹⁹

Apparently, this is not likely to happen any time soon. Islamabad views this deal as a move toward legitimizing India's status as a nuclear power, even though, along with Pakistan, it has rejected the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Pakistani establishment desperately wants a similar status, even if it is not exactly the same.

3. Respect for Its National Sovereignty.¹⁰⁰ Although Pakistan has been cooperating behind the scenes in drone strikes, it denies this publically and the media propagates a very different view of Pakistan's defense of its national sovereignty. Thus the drone campaign, perceived as an ongoing violation of national sovereignty, remains a sore point between the two countries.¹⁰¹ If Pakistan's security establishment and Washington have reached a tacit understanding of this issue, which seems to be the case, one wonders why Islamabad continues to put it forward as a major grievance. Does it do so, perhaps, to enhance its domestic reputation while enhancing its leverage with Washington?

4. Pakistani Taliban Safe Havens in Afghanistan: This is a very recent complaint. Just as Washington wants Islamabad to stop the flow of militants into Afghanistan, Pakistan insists that the US/NATO forces are unable to control the movement of the country's enemies across the Afghan border into Pakistan. This demand implies that Washington may be turning a blind eye to the presence of Pakistani Taliban in the Afghan border areas and their cross-border movements. Pakistan says that fugitive Pakistani Taliban have found shelter in Afghanistan's border provinces.¹⁰² For example Maulana Fazlullah, a top Pakistani Taliban commander from the Swat valley, escaped to Afghanistan after the Pakistani military reasserted its control over the valley in 2009; he is widely believed to be hiding in Afghanistan's Kunar province. Pakistan has also accused Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (the Afghan intelligence agency) of supporting his attacks inside Pakistan.¹⁰³ While this allegation may be true, it is also true that the Pakistani army has failed to capture or kill top Pakistani Taliban leader, including Maulana Fazlullah, on its soil despite dozens of military operations.

5. Trade, Not Aid. Pakistan has asked the United States to open itself to tariff-free textile exports, the country's most important value-added export product. Opening trade opportunities, instead of merely relying on military means, will increase the two countries' sense of interdependence and add to feelings of mutual good will. While the sector most often proposed is the textile industry, there is a related sub-issue: creating tariff-free zones for new products that could be exported from FATA, as proposed in the Reconstruction Opportunities Zones (ROZs).

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China has shown increased concern over the rising militancy in Pakistan, which has resulted in the death of Chinese nationals during some terrorist incidents over the last few years.

Regional Variables

On the one hand, Pakistan's long-standing issues and rivalry with India have been among the major determinants of its foreign policy formulations. On the other hand, some members of Islamabad's strategic elites are beginning to revise their former strong belief about the real degree of American power and/or its changing role in the region. As a result, it is beginning to make some moves toward its neighbors, which also suggests that its strategic elites are desperately looking for alternatives to Washington as regards economic and security cooperation. Some of these regional variables are discussed below.

First, there is a strong impression that Washington has failed to achieve its original objectives in Afghanistan. Having become weary of the effort there, it is now trying to extricate itself. Thus Islamabad will formulate policies based on how it perceives the post-American situation. If this impression is correct, and if Pakistan strategic elites believe that their understanding of the on-the-ground situation has been vindicated, it is unlikely that Islamabad will fundamentally change its policy on the Haqqani Network and Quetta Shura any time soon.

Secondly, China has established a deep friendship with Pakistan and thus is another major regional variable. Pakistan's strategic pundits believe that China is bound to become more important than the United States in the region, and thus it will be able to help Pakistan in some critical areas (e.g., defense and meeting energy supply needs). Historically, Islamabad's basic objective in formulating strategic ties with Beijing has been to offset Indian influence in the region. Lately, China has also become a balancing act between Washington and Islamabad. For example, in September 2011 amid rising tension after Admiral Mullen's Senate testimony, Vice Prime Minister Meng Jianzhou made a quick trip to Islamabad to pledge China's help.

Pakistan's foreign office said the visit was already scheduled and had nothing to do with the mounting tension, and yet an anonymous official was quoted in media as saying that "the visit has a symbolic as well as substantive value ... it will definitely send a message across the Atlantic."¹⁰⁴ Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kiyani also visited Beijing. In addition China has shown increased concern over the rising militancy in Pakistan, which has resulted in the death of

Chinese nationals during some terrorist incidents over the last few years as well as over the Chinese Uighur militants from Xinjiang province who take shelter in FATA.¹⁰⁵ Beijing does not, however, bring these issues up as show-stoppers when it comes to maintaining relations with Pakistan in the regional equation.¹⁰⁶ In fact, it was reported that once when a U.S delegation showed concern over China's uncompromising support for Pakistan, the Chinese official sarcastically replied: "Pakistan is our Israel".¹⁰⁷

Thirdly, although Pakistan and India have both expressed jealousy over the other's relationship with Washington, recent improvements have arisen in the relations between the two neighboring countries. Despite the decades-long conflict over the Kashmir issue, there are fresh calls for demilitarization of the Siachen Glaciers where a recent avalanche killed around 150 Pakistani soldiers and civilians. In addition, the recent visit by President Asif Ali Zardari to India, Islamabad's flexibility on easing trade restrictions by granting the Most-Favored Nation (MFN) status to India, the cooperation on cultural exchange programs, and the development of economic linkages have all contributed to reducing tension and may lead to opening new avenues. Some security analysts believe that the even the Pakistani military have begun to show flexibility about improving ties with India. "Relations with the US face a major crisis and hence, with so many odds facing the country, it is only prudent to improve relations with India."¹⁰⁸ Despite the challenges, the process towards peace between India and Pakistan is vital to regional peace and stability. With fresh calls for peace talks, Washington must now find a way to maintain and encourage a balanced relationship between these two arch-rivals.

Fourth, Washington is unhappy with Pakistani and Irani efforts to work together to meet some of their mutual needs. For example, Pakistan's severe energy crisis has caused it to vigorously pursue a pipeline project with Iran despite Washington's objections and pressure. This energy connection is arguably a vital national interest, and so apparently it would pursue this project in any case.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, Iran needs all the support it can get to weaken American influence in the region. The current crisis in relations between Islamabad and Washington offers a good opportunity that Tehran can exploit in its favor. Still, Pakistan's relations with Iran would be more specific to the gas pipeline and may not translate into broader cooperation on other strategic matters. In fact drawing closer to Iran, given the latter's controversial nuclear program, may actually add to Pakistan's already negative proliferation reputation. In addition, its close ties with Saudi Arabia will limit its commitments to Iran in any strategic security field that could disturb the Saudi royals.

Red Lines

Recent events have shown that this overall crisis more or less revolves around crossing “red lines.” Some are fundamental and can be understood in black and white, whereas others may be subject to negotiation or tacit understandings. The fundamental red lines, if crossed, are the most likely to engender a permanent end to all mutual support or bring both countries into open and direct conflict—even a war-like situation. In fact, this post-9/11 alliance began with the first red line laid down by the United States to Pakistan: “You are either with us or against us.” Even though Washington has not been totally successful in enforcing this red line, it has not backed away from it.

From Washington’s side, there are two major red lines. First is the involvement of Pakistani militant individuals or groups in terror attacks inside the United States, such as the failed May 2010 attempt by Pakistani-American citizen Faisal Shahzad in Times Square. A successful attack traced to Pakistan would have severe consequences, regardless of whether the person was a “lone wolf” or acting on behalf of a militant Pakistani or terrorist group partly based in Pakistan. A few days after Shahzad’s failed attempt, Secretary Clinton warned Pakistan of severe consequences if a terror attack inside the United States were ever tracked back to Pakistan.¹¹⁰

Second is the Pakistanis’ killing of Americans (troops and civilians) in Afghanistan or being complicit in killing them via extremist groups operating out of Pakistani safe havens, particularly those accused of having links with the country’s military intelligence agencies. It goes without saying that Washington expects its diplomats to be protected in Pakistan, and that any failure to protect both them and all related facilities from terror attacks would precipitate deep anger and a very quick disruption of bilateral relations.

Islamabad has its own long list of red lines.¹¹¹ Some are clear; others are in the gray area. From Pakistan’s point of view, crossing these lines would lead its military either to end its full support of or to undermine American efforts in the region. Below are some of the readily visible red lines.

1. Pakistan’s Nukes. Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal is a long-standing concern because it is the first and thus far the only Islamic country to openly possess nuclear weapons. Moreover, from Pakistan’s standpoint, these weapons are its most vital guarantee of security against Indian threats or blackmail. There have been widespread allegations in the Pakistani broadcast media that the real motive behind Washington’s presence and war in Afghanistan is to take out Pakistan’s nukes. Naturally, such a suspicion

arouses wider public speculation. Although such allegations may sound like a conspiracy theory and rather implausible to Americans familiar with the situation, many in the Pakistani security establishment also seem to believe that this is a serious threat. Media reports abound in the local press on how the United States, with the help of Israel and India, has been working on getting information “leaks” on the locations and characteristics of its nuclear weapons-related facilities, as well as on what they contain. The security of such facilities from any outside action is Pakistan’s top red line, and thus it will not tolerate any American move on these facilities, even it proclaims that it only wants to safeguard them.

2. Boots on the Ground. This line was crossed twice in 2011, first during the bin Laden operation and then in the November 26 NATO strike inside FATA. Both incidents have helped bring relations to a precarious new low. In the wake of the November 26 NATO attack in Mohmand tribal agency, Pakistan not only blocked NATO supplies from entering Afghanistan and stopped cooperation with the United States, but also initiated a serious debate for formulating new terms of engagement with Washington. This particular incident suggests that it is one of the red lines, one that Islamabad is desperately trying to maximize in its bargaining with Washington.

3. Drone Strikes outside FATA. Apparently, the understanding is that the United States is allowed to carry out drones attacks only in FATA. During the fall of 2009, reports surfaced that the CIA had been told that it could also target the Quetta Shura in the Baluchistan province. This is, however, one of the red lines that could cause a harsh reaction and huge outcry if it were to be crossed.¹¹² Pakistan’s complaint of violated sovereignty is not entirely true because its airbases have been used with its knowledge and tacit permission.¹¹³ But so far, despite the hundreds of drone strikes carried out since June 2004, no target outside of FATA has been hit.

4. A Clandestine Spy Network. Pakistan’s ISI has long been accused of playing a double game with Washington; now, Islamabad has started accusing the CIA of the same thing: unilaterally running clandestine operations. The arrest of CIA contractor Raymond Davis in Lahore in January 2011 for killing two Pakistanis is an instance of an American agent crossing a red line. Some media reports identified the two killed people as robbers; other reports suggested that the incident was a “spy meeting gone awry.”¹¹⁴ Quoting a Pakistani official, the Washington Post reported in January 2012 that the American embassy in Islamabad rents more than 1,000 houses and that Islamabad does not know who lives in them.¹¹⁵ According to American journalist, David Ignatius: “The ISI is always playing both sides of the fence. But it’s not really very different from the way the United States behaves. We conduct joint operations with the ISI but there’s a lot that we don’t tell them—or don’t tell them until it’s too late.”¹¹⁶

Talking to the Taliban

Although the Taliban has been demanding a complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan,¹¹⁷ negotiating with them for an acceptable reconciliation within Afghanistan is one area in which both Pakistan and the United States are now finally working together. There have been some outcomes, despite the ongoing mistrust. In recent interactions, Washington may have persuaded Islamabad to engage in this “wheeling and dealing” with the Afghan Taliban groups in the hope that a relatively successful negotiation process may bring both parties closer together. But how can this occur when there are so many herculean tasks connected with getting the Taliban to sign on to an agreement that is acceptable to all stakeholders?

In the current standoff, however, the main question for Washington is whether peace and stability be brought to Afghanistan without Pakistan’s support, especially its military’s relations with the Afghan Taliban. While there remains some disagreement over how to engage Islamabad, there is hardly any disagreement over its relevance. Rightly or wrongly, Washington has drawn one conclusion: “Pakistan has to be part of the solution, or it will continue to be part of the problem.”¹¹⁸

Washington needs Pakistan’s full support if it is to move with the so-called process of negotiations with the Taliban. Some Taliban leaders have confirmed they are ready to talk with American representatives and have opened an office in Doha, Qatar.¹¹⁹ Pakistan seems to be willing to cooperate, but only if it gets center stage. It would also like to know just what it will get out of these negotiations. Apparently, it would like to be given an equal or greater weight than any other regional power. If it is accorded such a leading role, Islamabad may actually cooperate.¹²⁰ Anything less than that is likely to breed trouble proportionate to how far it is unable to realize this particular goal.

Although Pakistan has been using this leverage, the larger question is how much control it has over the Taliban. The Taliban are made up of different groups, all of which have their own local agendas, and thus the ISI cannot reasonably be expected to micro-manage them effectively. The Afghan Taliban movement is quite decentralized in operational matters. According to a Taliban expert, Antonio Giustozzi, it “operates as a “franchise” business, allowing disparate groups of insurgents to display the Taliban brand while retaining complete autonomy on the ground.”¹²¹ He divides the Taliban into four regional commands: southern, southeastern, eastern, and western Afghanistan. All of them are autonomous units that possess their own planning and implementation strategies.¹²²

Regarding relations with Pakistan, noted Pakistani journalist Salim Safi describes the Taliban thusly: "Some are strongly against Pakistan and are not prepared to have any confidence in them. Some have a moderate attitude towards Pakistan while some have soft corner for Pakistanis."¹²³ Others also believe that just as the United States does not trust the ISI, the Taliban also accuses it of playing a double game with them.¹²⁴

Apart from Pakistan's influence on Taliban groups, huge challenges will present themselves once the process is begun. First, which groups should be recognized as authentic negotiating partners, and what concessions must be made to ensure that successful negotiations? How much official power must be offered to the Taliban parties in a future Kabul government to bring them on board? Washington believes that it can accommodate the reconcilable elements of the Quetta Shura, but does not seem ready to include the Haqqani Network; Pakistan wants the network to be part of the solution, along with the Quetta Shura and Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami. But Pakistan's desire to involve the network in these negotiations has met with little positive response from Washington. Second, bringing hard-core Taliban to power in Afghanistan could reignite the violence and perpetuate the ongoing civil war, thereby destroying the social, economic, and infrastructural developments brought by international sources. Third, if negotiations with reconcilable Taliban are to work, what is to be allowed, resisted, or forbidden?

More importantly, although such negotiations could provide a face-saving solution for Washington and Pakistan to pursue their own interests, the major challenge is to make this process satisfactory to the Afghan people, even if it is not altogether satisfactory to the outsiders. Northern Alliance elements are extremely distrustful of what this process may bring,¹²⁵ and President Hamid Karzai will only be comfortable if he is also at its center. Most probably, he will play Washington and Islamabad against each other to acquire a leading role for himself and prevent anyone else from having a dominant role. Although Pakistan wants a leading role to ensure its interest, it is being accused of pitching its favorite Taliban groups to "dominate" the so-called peace process. These are the issues upon which all parties involved must reach some type of detailed agreement.

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Some leading American policy experts have begun urging that an aggressive “containment” strategy be applied to Pakistan.

Hard Options

Islamabad is currently reviewing its relations with Washington¹²⁶ and will try its level best to leverage its influence in devising the Afghan end game. Its main bargaining chip is reopening the NATO supply route to Afghanistan.¹²⁷ But it is unlikely that it would really seek to close this route permanently.¹²⁸ In addition, it can try to influence the Afghan groups and keep them out of the negotiation process if the apparent outcome goes against its wishes. It is more likely, however, that Pakistan will continue to support some Taliban groups in an attempt to leverage its influence in Afghanistan. In other words, Islamabad would like to keep things the way they are instead of doing something that could either end its leverage or invite Washington’s wrath (e.g., bringing down a drone or retaliating against American forces inside Afghanistan after a US/NATO hot pursuit).

Just a few years ago, Washington had various perspectives on how to deal with Pakistan. Almost all of them, which have been narrowed by the frustrations of the last few years and continue to narrow even further, now seem to point in one direction: getting tougher with Pakistan. None of Washington’s strategies has worked simply or as they were intended to work.¹²⁹ In other words, Washington appears to have concluded that it cannot force Islamabad to stop what is called its “double game.”¹³⁰

Some leading American policy experts have begun urging that an aggressive “containment” strategy be applied to Pakistan.¹³¹ One reason for this is the existence of an increasing consensus in Washington policy circles that Pakistan will not change its policies to fulfill Washington’s demands or expectations.¹³² Those advocating such a policy more or less want Pakistan to be treated as a rogue state, as the epicenter of the ideological threat of violent militant jihad, and thus to treat it in a way that resembles how Washington dealt with Moscow during the cold war.¹³³ Under this policy, the country would be cut off as far as possible from normal access to the international community and be subjected to tighter military and financial sanctions.

Yet cold war-era terminologies and containment theories may not be appropriate for dealing with Pakistan. First and foremost, the Soviet Union imploded because of the cold war containment policies. Its peaceful implosion, however, has no chance of being replicated in Pakistan. In fact, such an event would be a regional disaster with global implications due to the country’s nuclear arsenal and dozens of militant groups. Some advocates suggest cutting ties and current military aid to Pakistan entirely. There is a possibility that Congress may end military aid but continue to provide civilian aid. But cutting off military aid completely at this point may lead to a complete end of Pakistan’s cooperation, which

could undermine the efforts of the “war on terrorism” in a critical region.¹³⁴ Given this reality, such a move could prove counterproductive, given the Pakistan military’s strong influence on foreign policy. Certainly, Washington cannot afford such an outcome at this stage. Nor can it declare Pakistan an “enemy” and go after it with full aggression or afford to terminate all relations with Pakistan at this critical juncture.

The current tension with Pakistan revolves around two practical and entwined issues that need to be debated and analyzed in their specific contexts. The problem arises with Pakistan’s obsession with so-called strategic depth, which drives the objective of keeping Indian influence out of Afghanistan. This, in turn, relies on accommodating the quest for power in Afghanistan of such Afghan Taliban groups as the Quetta Shura and Haqqani Network. But not only has this policy been a main hindrance toward Washington’s efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, it has also led to complicity, either directly or indirectly, in the killing of American and NATO troops. What Pakistan’s military establishment is doing in Afghanistan, therefore, is in direct conflict with what Washington is trying to do.

One way of regaining some measure of the Pakistani army’s support is to consider and meet its fundamental security concerns in an attempt to lessen its support of Taliban groups. As mentioned above, Pakistan’s Afghan policy derives from its Indo-centric security objectives that, in turn, cause the military establishment to provide long-term support to proxies in Afghanistan. Considering their competitive development of nuclear weapons and territorial dispute over Kashmir, there is a high likelihood that Pakistan may continue using its proxies to thwart Indian influence in Afghanistan. While Washington cannot stop such Indian initiatives, it can find out exactly what Pakistan will tolerate and then work toward achieving other common goals.

Pakistan has vital security interests in Afghanistan; however, the way it may be pursuing these can be debated. While the validity of Pakistan’s perception can be accepted or rejected vehemently, the fact that it is embedded in the military’s overall calculation cannot be denied. It can, however, be contested, as is now happening behind the scenes as well as increasingly in the open.

It seems that Washington will continue the carrot and stick policy by continuing to focus on drone attacks inside FATA as well as maintaining, as best it can, its prickly partnership with the army and the civilian government. Washington will try its best to avoid unilateral strikes or hot pursuit inside Pakistan in the absence of a high-profile case, such as the killing of bin Laden. It will also try to avoid incidents like the November 2011 NATO attacks in Mohmand Agency. Some changes have already

been made. For example, Washington not only suspended its drone strikes in FATA for two months in the wake of Mohmand attack, the longest halt since the aggressive campaign was launched in 2008,¹³⁵ but the CIA, in an unusual development, also contacted and asked Islamabad's permission to carry out a drone strike in North Waziristan in first week of January 2012.¹³⁶

Election Season

While the United States prepares for 2012 elections, Pakistan is currently enduring yet another political crisis, with chances for an early election later this year. With the rising popularity of Imran Khan, the cricket-hero-turned-politician, the United States will loom large as a target to bash. Although Khan has been campaigning for cleansing the country of corruption and hereditary politics, his top slogan has been framed by the idea of freeing Pakistan from its enslavement to American foreign policy objectives.¹³⁷ He is now widely perceived as a fast-rising third force who is threatening the two major parties: the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (N).

The anger arising from the many corruption charges hurled against mainstream politicians may be one reason for his growing popularity. Some observers, however, allege that the suddenness of his rise is also the result of the military establishment's support.¹³⁸ Even though Khan rejects such allegations,¹³⁹ there are increasing signs that the military establishment would prefer a populist politician like Khan with his nationalistic posture and anti-American views. Khan's political views and perception of the Taliban in FATA have invited harsh reactions from commentators, who claim that he is ignorant of the ground issues in FATA and is spreading false information about the Taliban, drones and the Pashtuns.¹⁴⁰

Although the American election will be contested mainly on economic issues (viz., job creation and health insurance), there is a chance that foreign policy issues will surface and that both parties will adopt strong positions on Pakistan. Apparently the Republican candidates are not much more sympathetic to Pakistan's plight than is the administration, and thus they cannot be expected to offer Pakistan anything special. Since the administration is already sending strong signals to Pakistan, Obama has positioned himself well so that he cannot be attacked for appeasement or spinelessness toward the country.

Conclusion

One fact needs to be understood: There will be ups and downs in this relationship for a while. Accusations and counter-accusations will be heard. As both countries are heading for the voting booths, finger-pointing may sharpen even further. Many political and religious parties in Pakistan may use the United States as a punching bag. Popular media in both countries may capture flashes of fiery speeches, thereby aggravating the situation. But this does not mean that doomsday is just around the corner, for both sides will try to preserve and rebuild the relationship.

The United States is not going to deliberately cut off ties with Pakistan, as it may resort to the carrot and stick policy. Nor is Pakistan likely to permanently end all support. There is no better person to sum up the current phase of relations between the two countries than the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter: "If we are going to get out of what has been a very tough period, it is going to be because both countries decided they are going to look at something bigger than themselves."¹⁴¹

Recommendations for Washington

- The United States needs to assure Pakistanis that it is with them for the long haul. Pakistan should be addressed on a broader, sustainable, and stable basis, rather than only as an ally in the "war on terror."
- Washington should stop "bribing" Pakistan for "good behavior" or perceiving it as a "rental state" as regards its "war on terror." While it should abandon its ongoing public demonization of Pakistan, as this only deepens the already existing mutual mistrust, it should use all of its diplomatic channels to involve other friendly countries in its attempt to hold Pakistan accountable for its actions and to become a reliable partner.
- The United States needs to look into issues in the AfPak region from a regional perspective, recognizing and addressing Islamabad's genuine and perceived concerns in a geopolitical context. It should consider Pakistan's apprehension of Indian activities in Afghanistan. Washington should try to reduce the Indo-Pakistani rivalry there and actively push for a peaceful resolution to the long-standing Kashmir dispute, which the United Nations also recognizes as an unresolved conflict.

- The United States should neither rely solely on the Pakistan army nor on any particular political party; rather, should it emphasize building relations with the Pakistani people, strengthening democratic institutions and democratic values, and maintaining a long-term commitment to regional security. It should stay out of Pakistan's internal affairs and take concrete steps to dispel the impression of being a "master" or a "king maker." Finally, it should not favor or align itself with one political party or its leadership to such an extent that the other parties become hostile or antagonistic.
- Washington must continue to give aid to the elected civilian government without regard to how quickly this improves its image among Pakistanis. In addition to promising economic and development aid, both of which have so far reached the intended recipients in far smaller amounts than those promised, Congress should make good on its promises of tariff relief in such key trade areas as textiles, which accounts for more than half of Pakistan's export and employs a huge number of people. This concession would significantly boost Pakistan's trade and, moreover, would not harm American levels of production or workers.
- Washington needs to target its aid. For example, it should invest in very visible mega-projects and large-scale development projects instead of in dozens of small and largely invisible projects. As Pakistan is currently facing its worst energy crisis, one of Washington's top priorities should be to help Pakistan build some large dams and power generation projects instead of opposing the Iran-Pakistan pipeline. These will have high visibility among masses.
- Even though Washington's military aid has become controversial, it should increase its focus on helping Pakistan's law enforcing capacity (e.g., the police and paramilitary). These forces, which have been the first line of defense against the militants, have completely failed in their task. Washington should therefore help set up a strong police force under civilian control.
- The United States needs to be more effective when it comes to aligning its tactics with a more long-term political and military strategic approach. Although unlikely to abandon its reliance on drone strikes in FATA, regardless of Pakistan's protests, these strikes should be limited to truly high-value targets. Moreover, it should try its level best to avoid civilian casualties. More importantly, drone strikes should be coupled with stronger efforts to confront the Haqqani Network and other fighters inside Afghanistan.

- The Obama administration should convince Congress to pass the legislation designed to establish Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZ) in the tribal region. Introduced in 2005, it has been stalled in Congress ever since. The underlying idea was that the items produced in these FATA-based special industrial zones would have duty-free access to the American market. The ultimate goal was to generate jobs and economic activities. This is equally important for the United States' interest in a critical border region.
- The United States should formulate an effective and sustained public diplomacy campaign that respects local norms and religious traditions. It should continue reaching out to the people, particularly to the Pashtuns in the border region who have long been vulnerable to the Taliban's extremist propaganda.

Recommendations for Islamabad

- Pakistan must own the war against homegrown militants without pretending that doing so is a favor to the United States. Pakistan is home to many militant groups, and its military and civilian leaderships must devise a strong and comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. It is extremely crucial for Pakistan's integrity in the international community and preservation as a state.
- Pakistan must clearly break its ties with all militant groups and stop differentiating between "good" and "bad" Taliban. No militant group or non-state actor should be allowed to operate, plan, and launch attacks from its soil in any neighboring country or beyond.
- Pakistan needs to change its strategic depth approach toward Afghanistan. It must stop interfering in that country by supporting Taliban groups in order to advance its own strategic objectives.
- Pakistan should seriously explore opportunities for improving relations with India by resolving its core issues and finding more avenues for cooperation. This is in Pakistan's own interest as well a key for regional peace and stability.

Pakistan must own the war against homegrown militants without pretending that doing so is a favor to the United States.

- Pakistan must change FATA's centuries-old buffer zone status by fully integrating it via political, legal, and economic reforms.
- Pakistan has serious internal issues: fighting a Taliban insurgency in the FATA region, a growing Baluch insurgency in Baluchistan province, and serious governance and economic issues. The army's overweening size and dominance has made it, for all practical purposes, a state within a state, one ruled by a strong feudal and industrial elite class. The state has failed to tax the real centers of wealth for the public good. Neither Washington nor outsiders can solve or force Pakistan to solve these problems; the United States can only try to be helpful. But its efforts are unlikely to be very productive unless Pakistan makes the tough decisions and makes a concerted effort to solve its own problems.

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