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Achieve Counter-insurgency Cooperation in Afghanistan by Resolving the Indo-Pakistani Rivalry

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Executive Summary

This essay examines post-September 11 Afghanistan-Pakistan relations in the context of the ongoing militant threat faced by each country.

Main Argument

The outlook for improved Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, particularly in terms of dealing with the counter-insurgency, is not good. Both the Afghan and Pakistani states are not capable of engaging in effective counter-insurgency in the Pashtun areas, let alone of coordinating a counter-insurgency campaign. Many key players in Pakistan, including those within state institutions, see no reason to engage in counter-insurgency because of complex and intertwined interests, sympathy with insurgents, differing priorities, concern over India, dislike of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, and the likelihood that the Taliban will outlast both the U.S. presence and the Karzai government in Afghanistan.

Policy Implications

- The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and inside of Pakistan is so unpopular in both countries that the U.S. cannot play a high-profile role in bringing Afghan and Pakistani leaders together without discrediting these leaders within their own constituencies.
- Though the U.S. and the Karzai government cannot hope to defeat challengers with bases of support across the border in Pakistan, attacking the safe havens of the Taliban and al Qaeda across the border will produce a worst-case scenario for the U.S. because the jihad in Pakistan would be even more intense than in Afghanistan. Jihad in Pakistan would attract the support, one way or another, of hundreds of millions of South Asian Muslims. It could also lead to the breakup of Pakistan, the possible collapse of the Pakistani military, and the risk of losing sight of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.
- The only reasonable course for the U.S. to gain the support of Pakistanis is to reduce Indian involvement in Afghanistan in order to assuage Pakistani fears, actively push for a comprehensive and final agreement on Kashmir, provide guarantees that a strong Afghan state will not woo Pashtun support across the Durand Line, and commit to a large, long-term program of economic and military aid in Pakistan, consisting of \$2–3 billion per year over ten to fifteen years.

This essay explores Afghan perspectives, interests, and options regarding Afghan-Pakistani relations from the angle of the conflicts taking place on both sides of the Durand Line. It argues that there are no short-term solutions to the challenge posed to the United States and the Karzai government by the presence of safe havens for the Taliban and other *mujahideen* across the border in Pakistan. Both the Afghan and Pakistani states are weak and, as of now, are incapable of engaging in effective counter-insurgency in Pashtun areas, let alone of coordinating a complex and draining counter-insurgency campaign. Many key players in Pakistan, including some within state institutions, see no reason to engage in counter-insurgency because of complex and intertwined interests, sympathy toward the insurgents, differing priorities, concern over India, dislike of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, and the likelihood that the Taliban will outlast the U.S. occupation and the Karzai government in Afghanistan. The Afghan government is perceived as weak and unlikely to survive long enough to encourage Pakistani leaders and other actors on both sides of the border to form an alliance to defeat the Taliban.

As for the United States, the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and inside of Pakistan is so unpopular in both countries that the U.S. government cannot play a high-profile role in bringing Afghan and Pakistani leaders together without discrediting these leaders within their own constituencies. The United States should resist the temptation to expand the military conflict into Pakistan in order to avoid breaking up that country and producing a disastrous regional conflict. The only reasonable course for the United States to gain the support of Pakistanis is to reduce Indian involvement in Afghanistan; actively push for a comprehensive and final agreement on Kashmir; commit to a large, long-term aid program (\$2–3 billion per year over ten to fifteen years) in order both to help Pakistan develop economically and to consolidate Pakistani institutions; and provide guarantees that a strong Afghanistan state will not woo Pashtun support across the Durand Line.

The first section of this essay describes the key actors and their preferences on both sides of the border in order to explain the current situation and forecast the possibility for change. The second section describes the current state of U.S.-Afghan-Pakistani relations. The essay concludes with a discussion of policy alternatives available for the United States and the Karzai government to deprive the Taliban and other *mujahideen* of safe havens in Pakistan.

Key Actors in the Conflict and Their Preferences

Afghanistan and Pakistan have different priorities, preferences, alliances, and goals. Post-September 11 Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, particularly in the context of cross-border militancy, should not be understood as a matter of state-to-state relations. Instead, relations between the two countries should be understood as the product of the interaction of a large constellation of diverse actors, including organizations as small as clans with a few dozen fighters and as large as the U.S. and Pakistani militaries. The essay begins by describing some of the key actors and classes of actors.

The Western Presence

There is a very complex (and still uncoordinated and ineffective) international presence in Afghanistan. Its military component consists of two large fighting forces totaling some 60,000 troops—a multinational force under NATO's banner and a separate U.S. one. Different countries with troops in Afghanistan obey different rules of engagement (leaving the brunt of confrontation to U.S., Canadian, British, and Dutch troops), and their governments have to contend with publics that largely do not support military involvement. Most NATO countries will likely try to minimize casualties and withdraw their troops from Afghanistan by 2011, leaving the United States to continue the occupation on its own if Washington opts to do so.

The U.S. military has been expanding its troop presence in Afghanistan because the Bush administration forecasts that fewer troops will be needed for Iraq. This is a risky decision because the conflict in Iraq may intensify again and the U.S. military may become overstretched between the two countries. If the Soviet experience in Afghanistan is any indication, even another 30,000 troops will still not be enough to hold ground or seal borders—the official reasons for the deployment of additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan. The deployment of more U.S. troops will provide additional targets and increase the cost of occupation. Ultimately the outcome of this conflict will be decided by the willingness of Washington to sustain the cost of a draining long-term insurgency in the context of a deteriorating economy, and this cost is beginning to rise already.

As of now, U.S. strategy consists of engaging in a low-cost counter-insurgency that is largely ineffectual and sometimes even counterproductive. This strategy consists of propping allied warlords, attempting to decapitate the Taliban, monitoring and occasionally attacking Taliban and allied mujahideen in Pakistan, ignoring drug production to avoid a broader insurgency, building the Afghan National Army while

tolerating a corrupt police force, maintaining the facade of a democratic Afghan state, engaging in superficial development, and encouraging allies to contribute more. One of the aspects of this strategy that has been particularly disappointing over the last several years has been the U.S. support for local leaders, such as Hazrat Ali in Nangarhar and Pacha Khan Zadran in Paktia, who have stolen aid money, preyed on the population, supported drug production, and weakened the reach of the state.

Other international agencies and NGOs have proven to be quite ineffective because of corruption, insufficient funding, poor security, wastage, focus on prestige and ineffectual projects, high insurance costs and expatriate salaries, and poor understanding of Afghanistan. More importantly from a counter-insurgency perspective, the activities of international agencies are not well-coordinated with the activities of the military forces as part of a broader strategic plan. This lack of coordination and poor strategic vision explains in part why the counter-insurgency is so unsuccessful in Afghanistan.

Key Afghan Actors

The Afghan state is weak, corrupt, and dependent on international support at every level. President Karzai is enmeshed in a complex web of alliances and commitments that reduces his ability to take bold steps in reforming state institutions. State institutions from the parliament to the police are saturated with warlords, profiteers, and drug dealers. The most reliable Afghan institution, the Afghan National Army, is completely dependent on the U.S. military presence and would be prohibitively expensive for an independent Afghan state to maintain at \$2 billion a year—40% of GDP—for a projected force of 120,000. Even elections, flawed as they may be, would cost an astounding 5% of GDP to hold. Afghans have little confidence in state institutions or in the prospects for the survival of these institutions beyond the U.S. and NATO occupation. The main attraction of the state has been its ability to attract foreign aid to Afghanistan. Karzai's primary goals are to win re-election in 2009 and to strengthen state institutions without alienating too many influential Afghan players.

The state and its NATO backers are being overtly challenged by the Taliban and other allied mujahideen organizations, some of which are not Afghan. These organizations have built alliances on both sides of the border with local and tribal leaders, drug networks, like-minded activists, members of Pakistani military and intelligence agencies, and Pakistani political figures. Their goal is to win a long war of attrition with the United States and to replace Karzai's state institutions with an Islamic state, perhaps similar to that which preceded the U.S. invasion in October 2001.

In addition, many local and tribal Pashtun leaders in Afghanistan are sitting on the fence waiting to see which way the winds will blow before openly supporting either the government or the Taliban. These leaders are the ones who will tip the balance of power within Afghanistan.

Finally, there are Afghan minority leaders with the ability to quickly energize massive fighting forces the moment they may need to face a resurgent Taliban or some other Pashtun fighting force. Abdul Rashid Dostum's followers in the Uzbek areas as well as lesser groups in Balkh, Faryab, and Badghis have done so already.

Key Pakistani Actors

On the Pakistani side, the polity is fragmented on many levels. The country has strong regional divisions, with insurgencies in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. The military is highly influential in politics and its powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) branch may be too independent from the chain of command. There is a large number of armed militant and tribal groups across the country—particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the NWFP—such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (led by Baitullah Mehsud), that are not particularly influenced by Pakistani state institutions and often defy them. Political parties (e.g., Jamiat-i Ulema Islam Party), some of which support militant organizations and armed tribal groups, are highly polarized and fragmented.

The Pakistani military is focused on the rivalry with India, and its policy toward Afghanistan is driven by a desire to reduce Indian influence in that country. The primary goals of tribal armed groups are to maintain local autonomy from state institutions and to dominate rival clans. Politicians are often too concerned with short-term goals and placating the military to be able to formulate and implement an independent long-term strategy.

The interaction of all these actors, or classes of actors, shapes U.S.-Afghan-Pakistani relations.

Post-September 11 Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations in the Context of Cross-border Militancy

Militancy on the Afghan side of the Durand Line is driven by several loosely coordinated groups under the banner of the Taliban, such as the force led by Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani, and a number of other groups, including Hizb-i Islami (led

by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar). The Afghan mujahideen have considerable support from within Afghanistan in a crescent spanning the eastern and southern parts as well as sections of the western part of the country for reasons that have little to do with outside support. The mujahideen have a clear message of driving occupiers out of Afghanistan, restoring an Islamic state, and ridding the country of an inept regime with corrupt institutions and a predatory police force. They are opposed by a debilitated government that lacks ideological appeal and is incapable of providing services, a poorly coordinated international presence, and a counter-insurgency effort that is short on human intelligence, strategic planning, and resources. The mujahideen's operations are financed by trade in narcotics and donations from supporters inside and outside of Afghanistan. They have safe havens where they can operate openly day or night in large swaths in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan. The Taliban have already begun building parallel state institutions inside Afghanistan to provide their brand of order and justice and to wean the population from the influence of the state. Opposition to the Taliban comes mostly from local leaders who benefit from alliances with NATO and the government. Despite claims from the U.S. military and the Karzai government, the insurgency is likely to continue, albeit less actively, even without safe havens in Pakistan and backing from Pakistani agencies. The United States and the Karzai government, however, blame their failure to establish, secure, and develop state institutions on outside influences because it is expedient to do so.

Support for the mujahideen from Pakistan comes from different quarters with varying motivations: tribesmen in the Pashtun areas and in Baluchistan (such as the Ahmadzai and Mehsuds), foreign mujahideen established in the FATA, Pakistani Islamist volunteers, Pakistani Islamist parties, the government, the military leadership, and in particular the ISI. Support from all these parties, excluding the government and the military, can be expected to remain strong and consistent regardless of U.S. or Afghan policies. The United States and the Karzai regime do not possess enough credibility or lasting power to convince militarized Pashtun leaders across the border to break ties with old allies. Having already tried and failed to reconcile part of the Taliban inside of Afghanistan (such as when Karzai offered a key government post to Jalaluddin Haqqani), the U.S. military and Afghan government are even less likely to woo the Taliban's supporters across the border where they have less leverage. The Pakistani government itself has tried and failed to do so several times. The Taliban and their supporters are gaining strength and know that time is on their side, and, therefore, they see little reason to negotiate.

Under General Musharraf, the Pakistani government and military supported the emergent Taliban to balance India's rising influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan feared that

Indian influence under Karzai was growing too fast and that if it were not to support the Taliban, India's allies would rule Afghanistan after the United States leaves.

Although the election of Asif Ali Zardari as president of Pakistan seems to have been welcomed by the Karzai government, a rapprochement is unlikely to last long because of the military's pressure on the new civilian government. President Zardari has little room to maneuver as long as the military, which is considered the most effective Pakistani institution, asserts itself as defender of Pakistani sovereignty against Indian threats and U.S. encroachments across the border from Afghanistan. Fear of India, whether justified or not, is very real among Pakistani elites and the Pakistani public.

The key to reducing support from Pakistan for the Afghan mujahideen is therefore to convince Pakistani military leaders that India is not a threat to Pakistan, that India will not have influence in Afghanistan, and that a consolidated Afghan state will not present a threat to Pakistani security. This means that Afghanistan will not become a second front in a war with India and that Afghanistan will not make future claims on the Pashtun areas of Pakistan (the issue of "Pashtunistan") as it did until the 1970s. Only then can Pakistani military leaders be expected to rein in ISI operatives who are overly zealous in their support of the Taliban, contribute substantial resources and energy to subdue militarized tribal leaders in the areas bordering Afghanistan, clamp down on foreign mujahideen groups, and stop supporting political parties that back a militant agenda. This task, of course, can only be accomplished if the Kashmir conflict is resolved in a way that Pakistan considers fair, the United States guarantees the economic and military security of Pakistan, India is persuaded to reduce its involvement in Afghanistan, and the Afghan government renounces any claims on Pakistan's Pashtun areas. This last issue should not be difficult to resolve because support for the unification of the Pashtun areas in one state has fizzled among Pakistani Pashtuns since 1979, and the Karzai government has not expressed any desire to revive the issue.

Consequences for U.S. Foreign Policy

Such a course will require a sustained and well-funded U.S. diplomatic engagement in South Asia. The United States will need to actively pursue a complete and equitable settlement in Kashmir. India could be lured to accept such a settlement with trade concessions and other economic incentives. The Pakistani state and military could also be lured by a substantial economic and military aid program—on the scale of \$2–3 billion per year—that would help stabilize the country, jumpstart economic growth, consolidate state institutions, and maintain security. The United States will need to

convince both India and Pakistan that there will be less need to project power within Afghanistan after their rivalry becomes less intense.

Although such an approach may seem both too costly and too slow, it is the only reasonable alternative available for the United States. The other obvious approach—to carry the conflict into the tribal areas of Pakistan—is simply too costly and damaging for U.S. interests. To attack the safe havens of the Taliban and al Qaeda across the border will produce a worst-case scenario for the United States because the jihad in Pakistan will be even more intense than in Afghanistan. Jihad in Pakistan will attract the support, one way or another, of hundreds of millions of South Asian Muslims, including well-trained Pakistani soldiers who, having been trained to defend Islam and Pakistan at any cost, will likely do so with or without official sanction. Such a course will also lead to the breakup of Pakistan in the wake of a possible civil war, the possible collapse of the Pakistani military, and the risk of losing sight of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have already strained the U.S. military and budget near the breaking point; each could reach this breaking point if U.S. soldiers continue to enter Pakistan and invite a jihad on both sides of the border.

Some Afghan factions, in particular the Tajik groups led by the Panjshiris, might resist reducing Indian influence because they view Indian support as a hedge against the failure of the U.S.-led state-building venture. The Afghan government, however, has everything to gain and little to lose from an end to the Indo-Pakistani rivalry.

In sum, the Afghan government and U.S. military may not be able to defeat an increasingly confident and adept Taliban even if they deprive it of its safe haven across the border in Pakistan, but the Taliban certainly cannot be defeated as long as it enjoys such a sanctuary. Of the three alternatives available to the U.S. and Afghan governments—reconciling Pashtun and other supporters across the border, increasing military activities inside Pakistan, and resolving the Indo-Pakistani rivalry—only the last one will lead to lasting stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the wider region. Although this strategy may be costly in the short and medium terms, it would be one of the best and most cost-effective investments of U.S. diplomacy in the post-Cold War era.

Afghanistan and Pakistan: Difficult Neighbors

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Executive Summary

This essay examines the difficulties that Afghanistan and Pakistan face in structuring a stable relationship based on trust, cooperation, and mutual interest.

Main Argument

Afghanistan and Pakistan have yet to overcome the difficulties of the past and shape a new strategic relationship to meet the challenges of the Taliban and al Qaeda. Pakistan has a great stake in a stable and peaceful Afghanistan but faces problems in convincing post-Taliban Afghan leaders of its sincerity. Pakistan believes Afghanistan's territory is being used by India, in connivance with Afghan leaders and intelligence agencies, to interfere in the Baluchistan Province of Pakistan and in other trouble spots. Afghanistan has not ceased accusing Pakistan of intervention and using the Afghan Taliban as an instrument of Pakistani regional policy.

Policy Implications

- Problems between Afghanistan and Pakistan have adversely affected, and will continue to adversely affect, international efforts to defeat transnational terrorism.
- The growing Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and in the tribal regions of Pakistan may gain further strength if the two countries continue to squabble and play the blame game.
- The international community may have difficulty in isolating the war on terrorism from the divisive regional issues of the India-Pakistan conflict and from the simmering distrust between Kabul and Islamabad.
- The success of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan requires deeper and more effective regional cooperation, particularly regarding settling Afghan-Pakistani problems, including the issue of the Durand Line.
- The international community may help promote latent interdependence within the larger region through the power of trade, economic opportunity, and gas pipelines in order to change the structure of state-to-state relations and create a popular stake in peace and stability.

Afghanistan and Pakistan share multiple strands of culture, history, religion, and civilization, but the two countries have never succeeded in establishing bilateral relations free of tensions. Rather, passive antagonism and mistrust have marked bilateral ties for the larger part of more than half a century following the creation of Pakistan. The intensity of hostility has varied under different regimes in Afghanistan, however, and though brief periods of cordiality have occurred as well, these have never been enough to provide a consistent positive direction.

Although relations were stable to some extent under the Afghan monarchy and opposing claims over the boundary and tribes in the frontier region did not provoke serious conflict, a feeling of estrangement prevailed. The two states developed very different strategic visions and perceptions of regional roles, and became enmeshed in competing structures of global power. Their opposite tendencies in foreign and security policies manifested finally in the superpower contest of the 1980s; the Afghan government hosted the Soviet forces while Pakistan aligned with both the Afghan *mujahideen* rebels and the United States to defeat the Red Army. As the effects of the Soviet-Afghan War spilled over into Pakistan in the form of millions of Afghan refugees and tens of thousands of armed fighters, Pakistan became deeply involved in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The civil war between the Taliban and the Northern Front (comprised of Afghan factions), which forced every neighboring country to engage in a regional "great game," drew Pakistan closer to the Taliban. The Northern Front leaders, who benefited from Pakistan during the Soviet-Afghan War, blamed Pakistan for the suffering and pain that the Taliban inflicted on them.

In terms of the war on terrorism, the past continues to overshadow the shared quest of defeating terrorist groups that threaten both countries and to frustrate the efforts of countries in the international community that also share this interest. This essay examines the difficulties that Afghanistan and Pakistan face in structuring a stable relationship based on trust, cooperation, and mutual interest. The three sections that follow respectively: (1) evaluate the impact of the war on terrorism on these relations, (2) present differing Afghan and Pakistani perspectives on the key challenges facing post-September 11 bilateral relations and the ability of these countries to successfully defeat the Taliban and transnational terrorism, and (3) conclude with a brief discussion of policy implications emerging from the essay's findings.

The Impact of the War on Terrorism on Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

The post-September 11 overthrow of the Taliban regime by a coalition of international forces led by the United States and the famous U-turn in Pakistan's Afghanistan policy together created a new regional and international environment that required Kabul and Islamabad to cooperate closely to defeat militancy and terrorism. The change in U.S. policy from benign indifference during the Taliban years to active engagement in the security and stability of Afghanistan fundamentally altered the role Pakistan and other regional states would play. As a first step, Pakistan turned its back on the Taliban and extended intelligence and logistical support to the United States and international security forces in their efforts to remove the Taliban regime.¹

Pakistan has been quite consistent over the past seven years in supporting the reconstruction of Afghanistan and in cooperating with the international coalition. Pakistan does face the problem of credibility, however, as militants from Pakistan have been crossing over into Afghanistan and joining the Taliban. It is questionable how infiltration from Pakistan contributes to the growing Taliban insurgency and how much it owes to the problems rooted in the Afghan state and society. Though authorities in Pakistan do admit that some movement of Pakistani militants into Afghanistan is taking place, this is not a major factor. The Afghan-Pakistani border is long, porous, and populated by tribes that share common lineages, ethnicity, and hostility toward the Afghan and Pakistani states for their cooperation with the international coalition of forces.

In post-Musharraf Pakistan there is strong consensus among the coalition parties that have formed governments both in the provinces and in the central government that Pakistan should continue the policy of supporting Afghanistan and the United States in the war on terrorism. The dominant political players in Pakistan today are the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the PPP's regional allies, such as the Awami National Party (ANP). These parties want to continue the current policy toward Afghanistan without significant change.² The second-largest party, the Pakistan Muslim League, headed by Nawaz Sharif, wants to end military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), as do some minor groups. These groups, however, are aware of the threat that terrorism poses, though they may make noise to win political favor with the conservative religious constituency. There is also an emerging view that government may enter into dialogue with "reconcilable" militants and may use force whenever

¹ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

² "Foreign Policy after Musharraf," *Daily Times* (Islamabad), August 21, 2008.

necessary and inevitable. NATO commanders think that negotiations and ceasefire deals have allowed the militants to regroup and expand their sanctuaries, which have been used as points from which to attack coalition forces inside Afghanistan.³

The war on terrorism—with a focus on the defeat of the Taliban movement and its transnational allies, mainly the al Qaeda network—brought Pakistan back to the center of U.S. policy. Aligning with Pakistan made strategic sense for the international coalition because the state was geographically proximate to Afghanistan, could provide logistical support, and possessed a robust intelligence network that no other country could match.⁴ Pakistan was also important for the links and leverage it had with several Afghan groups that could be used to help in the international effort to reconstruct the Afghan state and society.

The international coalition set ambitious and long-term objectives regarding state- and nation-building in Afghanistan. Success in achieving these lofty goals was premised on two things: first, the international community would realize the dangers of statelessness in Afghanistan and extend economic and security cooperation to rebuild the state's institutions. Second, the international coalition would neutralize and end the mini-great game that Afghanistan's neighbors had engaged in to advance their respective strategic objectives. Pakistan's role, however, was assumed to be greater than that of Afghanistan's other neighbors: Pakistan needed to engage in Afghanistan once again as a front-line state, and on a larger scale, particularly in the western borderlands from where Pakistan had staged supportive interventions in defeating Soviet aggression in the 1980s.

Challenges in Post-September 11 Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

With the departure of the Taliban from the political and security scene in Afghanistan, Pakistan attempted to redefine relations with the new regime that emerged as a result of the Bonn process and subsequent international support and legitimacy.⁵ While repeating its old call for the need for a peaceful, unified, and friendly Afghanistan, Pakistan committed itself to support the birth of a new Afghanistan through international efforts led by the United States. In addition to bilateral security

³ "NATO Blames Taliban Hold in FATA for Attack," *Dawn*, August 21, 2008.

⁴ The role of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Afghanistan since the mujahideen resistance has been high.

⁵ Devin T. Hagerty, "The United States-Pakistan Entente: Third Time's Charm?" in *Pakistan on the Brink*, ed. Craig Baxter (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-20.

cooperation with Washington, Islamabad began to refashion relations with the new leaders of Afghanistan on the opposite side of the Afghan political divide. Most of these leaders, who belonged to non-Pashtun social groups, firmly believed that Pakistan was instrumental in causing the destruction of their country by supporting the Taliban.⁶ These leaders also regarded Pakistan as being aggressive, imperialistic, interventionist, and in pursuit of a strategy that would undermine the independence and sovereignty of Afghanistan and reduce it to a vassal status.

Since the emergence of the new regime in Afghanistan, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been overshadowed by the complex and difficult past between the two countries, notably by Pakistan's support of the Taliban and, before that, persistent interference through equipping and training the mujahideen factions. It should be stressed, however, that Pakistan had legitimate concerns and fears over Afghanistan being used during the Cold War as a staging ground by Pakistan's adversaries, India and the former Soviet Union. The Soviet penetration of, and later strong military presence in, the Afghan state posed a serious challenge to Pakistan's security, as both Kabul and Moscow supported Baloch insurgents in the 1980s.⁷ The attitude of the Afghan leaders at the time was not comforting to Pakistan—these leaders disputed the legitimacy of the Durand Line,⁸ supported creation of Pashtunistan, and drew dangerously closer to Moscow, bringing the Red Army to Pakistan's borders.⁹ After the Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan pursued a policy of “strategic depth,” meaning that Islamabad would contest the influence of non-friendly states in Afghanistan by retaining some degree of influence.¹⁰

Pakistan's quest for a dominant position in Afghanistan abruptly ended when the international coalition decided to dislodge the Taliban and put in place a new regime that would build a moderate state with pro-Western positions on regional

⁶ Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 219–25.

⁷ Selig S. Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981).

⁸ The Durand Line is an international boundary that Afghan ruler Amir Abdul Rehman and the British Indian Empire agreed upon in 1893. After the creation of Pakistan, Afghanistan insisted on re-demarcating this boundary, which Pakistan had claimed final. See Ainslee T. Embree, ed., *Pakistan's Western Borderlands* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1977).

⁹ Stephen P. Cohen “South Asia After Afghanistan,” *Problems of Communism* 34, no. 1 (January–February 1985): 18–31.

¹⁰ This is a widely debated issue among security experts on Pakistan. It means that Afghanistan does not allow itself to become a base to powers adversarial to Pakistan—a defensive interpretation. It also means that Pakistan will have dominant position in Afghanistan in its rivalry with other regional powers, including preventing a Kabul–New Delhi nexus.

and international security issues. Pakistan understood the logic of the new security environment and prudently fell in line by changing course from supporting the Taliban to joining the international coalition in war against it.

It is widely acknowledged that Pakistan has played a crucial role in removing the Taliban and in extending significant support toward rebuilding peace, security, and a new political order in Afghanistan.¹¹ Pakistan has undertaken a number of political and security initiatives toward achieving the ends of the international coalition in Afghanistan. For instance, Islamabad deployed security forces in the tribal region close to the Afghan border for the first time, a move that Pashtun tribes have perceived as offensive and in violation of the pledges of autonomy that were made to the tribes when they joined Pakistan in 1947.¹² The objective of these military deployments and later operations was to flush out foreign militants and local Taliban—who have been using the region as a sanctuary and staging ground for crossing the border and attacking international coalition forces. The United States has helped improve the military capability of Pakistan through the transfer of defense equipment, the provision of intelligence support, and the implementation of training programs, thereby allowing Pakistan to much more effectively combat militant outfits in the tribal region.¹³

Kabul and Washington have often expressed the opposite view, however, that Pakistan has not done as much as it could have to counter the cross-border insurgency, which these two governments believe is responsible for keeping adjacent Afghan provinces unstable. These two governments believe that Pakistan can and must do more than it has so far.¹⁴ With the regrouping of the Taliban and rising frequency of attacks against the coalition forces over the past few years, the tone that the two governments have taken toward Pakistan has grown more aggressive and accusatory. Afghanistan, NATO, and the United States want Pakistan to destroy the sanctuaries they believe that the Taliban and al Qaeda operatives have found in Pakistan's tribal agencies.

¹¹ The United States does acknowledge the role that Pakistan has played in stabilizing Afghanistan, but generally commentary in recent years has been mixed. See, for instance, "US Asks Pakistan to Live Up to 'War on Terror' Commitment," *Daily Times* (Lahore), May 7, 2008.

¹² Four tribal agencies—Khyber, Kurram, South Waziristan, and North Waziristan—signed an instrument of accession with Pakistan, and the new state reciprocated by granting them autonomy and by not basing troops on their territory. "Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants," International Crisis Group, Asia Report, no. 125, December 11, 2006, 2–3.

¹³ On U.S. support to Pakistan's capability for the war on terrorism, see K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan-U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report, RL33498, October 18, 2007.

¹⁴ "Afghans Can Do Little If Pak, Border Remains Porous," *Daily Times* (Lahore), May 7, 2008.

Afghanistan and coalition members believe that these sanctuaries and training camps have adversely affected efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.¹⁵

In recent months the United States and Afghanistan have blamed Pakistan's premier intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), for supporting terrorist bombings in Afghanistan. In addition, Afghan leaders have frequently accused the ISI of targeting Afghan security forces, and have regularly accused Pakistan of both providing protection to Taliban leaders and allowing these leaders to operate freely from Pakistani territory.¹⁶ These serious accusations cast doubt on whether Pakistan is part of the solution or in fact part of the problem. In this author's view, though militants take advantage of a porous border and weak defenses on the Afghan side, the ISI cannot operate as a state within the Pakistani state or run a parallel foreign and security policy.

Afghanistan and the United States are very critical of Pakistan's policy of negotiating peace deals with militants in the tribal region, arguing that this policy amounts to appeasement and allows the militants to regroup, reorganize, and buy time before starting a new wave of war.¹⁷ Washington and Kabul prefer that persistent military pressure be applied on the militants leading to their ultimate defeat. The alarming rise in the number of attacks against U.S. and NATO forces during the past two years has been cited as evidence of the failure of Pakistan's political approach to militancy.

In recent months Afghanistan and the United States have threatened to directly attack targets inside Pakistan if Pakistani security forces continue to be unable to combat the militants effectively.¹⁸ These are no longer mere threats: the United States has regularly launched missile attacks on suspected Taliban hideouts and gatherings in the tribal regions, some from bases inside Pakistan.¹⁹ Retaliatory strikes and incidents of hot pursuit have also increased.

¹⁵ Frederic Grare, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Papers, no. 76, October 2006, 6–7.

¹⁶ C. Christine Fair, Nicholas Howenstein, and J. Alexander Thier, *Trouble on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border*, USIPeace Briefing, December 2006, http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2006/1207_pakistan_afghanistan-border.html.

¹⁷ Khalid Hasan, "Negroponte Expresses US Concerns over FATA Peace Deals," *Daily Times* (Lahore), May 21, 2008.

¹⁸ Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Commanders Seeking to Widen Pakistan Attacks," *New York Times*, April 20, 2008; and "World Urged to Help Stop NATO Attacks on Tribal Areas," *Daily Times* (Lahore), July 19, 2008.

¹⁹ Eric Schmitt and David E. Sanger, "Pakistan Shift Could Curtail Drone Strikes," *New York Times*, February 22, 2008.

Afghanistan and its allies consider the tribal regions adjacent to the border as the main source of trouble. They argue that until the Taliban, which has also been at war with Pakistan's security forces since the siege at Lal Masjid in July 2007, is eliminated, peace and stability in the region remain distant goals. Pakistan, in contrast, cites historical legacies that left the tribal regions as self-governing units, complex tribal social structures, ethnic and religious factors, and the difficult terrain as complicating an exclusively military approach to the issue. Military operations in the tribal areas are extremely unpopular among the general public, which is not enthusiastic about extending any cooperation to the U.S. war on terrorism. Elected governments in Pakistan have echoed that sentiment by insisting that they would negotiate with the Taliban and other militants.

Pakistan contends that it has done a great deal in fighting terrorism in the region and that its security forces have suffered the greatest casualties among the coalition forces fighting the Taliban.²⁰ Though Afghanistan has rejected Pakistan's proposition to fence the border, Pakistan has established approximately one thousand military posts along the 1,400-mile border and has insisted that Afghanistan, which maintains only one hundred such posts, must expand its border presence. Islamabad wants Afghan and NATO forces to improve control over the Afghan side of the border in order to prevent the Taliban from crossing over from Pakistan.

It is generally accepted in official circles in Pakistan that the militants both possess bases in the tribal region used to recruit, train, and equip fighters and also run a parallel security system that denies the Pakistani state effective control.²¹ Pakistani officials argue, however, that the major reason for conflict and security challenges in the border regions is the war in Afghanistan. A mixture of factors—Pashtun ethnicity, traditional Afghan sentiment against the presence of foreign forces, and religion—have fuelled insurgency in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has also emerged as the largest producer of the opium poppy that is cultivated mostly in Pashtun areas where the Taliban insurgency is on the rise. There is a linkage between the production and trade of narcotics and the insurgency; the Taliban, like similar insurgent groups in other countries, has benefited greatly from the drug trade.²²

From Pakistan's point of view, the failures of the international coalition in Afghanistan both in reconstructing the infrastructure of the Afghan state and in

²⁰ The official figure of Pakistani casualties is more than seven hundred dead and thousands injured.

²¹ Author interview with military officials, Islamabad, July 12, 2008.

²² Barnett R. Rubin and Jake Sherman, "Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication," Center on International Cooperation, New York University, February 2008, 9–16.

rehabilitating a legitimate economy through the revival of agriculture have driven despondent Pashtuns into the fold of the Taliban. Military operations against the Taliban have caused tremendous collateral damage, which has increased hostility against the foreign forces. The capacity of the Afghan state to deliver political and security goods remains very limited, leaving a large part of the country and the population to the care of warlords and the Taliban. The majority of Pakistanis believe that the roots of conflict are in Afghanistan and that until these challenges are addressed there, it will be difficult to effectively decouple the Pakistani Taliban from the Afghan Taliban.

The security situation along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and inside the two countries has recently deteriorated, with the Taliban launching more daring attacks and even issuing ultimatums to the government of the North-West Frontier Province to either resign or face war.²³ A sharp spike in violence in Afghanistan—a terrorist attack on President Karzai, the suicide bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul, and Taliban attacks in the southern provinces—has raised the level of bilateral tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. U.S. efforts to cool down the atmosphere have accomplished little, given that Washington has also threatened military action in the Pakistani borderlands.

The positive gains that the two countries secured in the economic, political, and security spheres following the establishment of the new regime in Afghanistan have been overshadowed by the security challenges posed by militancy in Pakistani tribal areas. It seems the multilateral security arrangements to normalize the situation in Afghanistan are under strain given the revival of the Taliban movement and its increased capacity to do harm. In tough times such as these, Islamabad and Kabul would benefit from security cooperation, the sharing of responsibility, and intelligence coordination rather than from bickering and the blame game.

Conclusion

The Taliban insurgency threatens both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and its effects go beyond the region. The international community is concerned with transnational terrorism and the ungoverned spaces that provide sanctuary to al Qaeda and the Taliban. The nature of ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan is critical to defeating terrorism. The prospects for stability in Afghanistan and peace in the entire region

²³ Baitullah Mehsud, one of the most notorious and most wanted leaders controlling North Waziristan, issued this ultimatum on July 17, 2008. See “Baitullah’s ‘Five-Day Ultimatum’ to NWFP Government,” *Dawn* (Lahore), July 18, 2008.

will largely be a function of how well the two countries can maintain good relations and meaningful cooperation with the international coalition. Squabbling and finger-pointing has weakened Afghanistan and Pakistan at a time when the Taliban insurgency has grown and become bolder on both sides of the border. The major international players involved in the war on terrorism need to step in and reconcile the differences, perceptual or real, between Afghanistan and Pakistan. If the two countries fail to close ranks, the security interests of the coalition states may suffer and the war on terrorism may not be effective.

In the view of this author, the real issue is not who has done more, why some options have failed, or what is a better option to address the multiple challenges that the Taliban and religious extremism in the borderlands pose. Afghanistan and Pakistan face common problems and common enemies that threaten their states, as the Taliban does not recognize the sanctity of international borders or the legitimacy of nation states conceived in the Western secular image. There is a serious security implication inherent in this world-view. The Taliban and its supporters believe that they have the right to enter Afghanistan and wage jihad against the international coalition—an old view with roots not only in this line of theological thinking but also in the tradition of Pashtuns on the Pakistani side of the border. The Pashtuns have been involved in all regional wars, most notably those where they defended larger Pashtun interests in internal power struggles as well as against the foreign powers.²⁴ Myth and tradition in this part of the world function as motivating factors and support the religious view that boundaries among Muslim states are meaningless.

The Taliban is not viewed as a common threat due to the distrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan and historical geopolitical factors. There is wide distrust of Pakistan among the Afghan leaders, who persistently blame Pakistan's intelligence agencies for anything that goes wrong inside Afghan borders. Pakistan thinks that it has become a convenient target for verbal attacks when Afghanistan, feeling the weight of the presence of international forces, is pressured by the United States to do more in the war on terrorism.

The historical geopolitical factors once again have vitiated the bilateral atmosphere between Afghanistan and Pakistan. India has re-entered the regional great game and seems to be better positioned given the hostile attitude of Afghan leaders toward Pakistan. The changed circumstances of the region have revived the traditional Kabul–New Delhi nexus, which is already having an impact on the national security

²⁴ For example, the Pashtun fought twice against Britain in the nineteenth century and against the Soviets in the twentieth century.

of Pakistan. Pakistan suspects that India and Afghanistan have a hand in some of the troubles in Balochistan and the North-West Frontier Province. For Afghan leaders, the best course of action is not to allow their country to become entangled in the India-Pakistan rivalry. Encouraged by the international support they have received, Afghan leaders have been careless in managing the India-Pakistan dimension of their regional policy.

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan consider each other as the most difficult neighbor, which may not augur well for the global war on terrorism. The two countries have already lost much ground along their shared border to Islamic radicals that threaten the stability of both states. Although Pakistan must treat Afghanistan as a sovereign state with the freedom to choose its friends regionally, Afghanistan should also show greater sensitivity to and understanding of Pakistan's legitimate security interests.

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