

Pakistan Country Brief



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Pakistan



Population: 190 million

Capital: Islamabad

Head of State: President Asif Ali Zardari
(AH-sihf AH-lee zahr-
DAH-ree); since 2008,
leaving March 2013

Chief of Army Staff: General Ashfaq Kayani
(AHSH-fahk kah-AH-nee)



CIA World Factbook, 2012

Pakistan is important to U.S. strategic interests in Central Asia, the fight against al Qaeda, and our efforts in Afghanistan. Despite Pakistan's continuing intransigence on a range of issues, Washington cannot walk away from a close and continuing relationship with Islamabad.

Fighting al Qaeda

In the aftermath of 9/11, Pakistan helped the U.S. in its counterterrorism efforts. However, this cooperation has been inconsistent over the last decade.

- The Pakistani intelligence service (called the ISI) has helped the U.S. capture or kill hundreds of al Qaeda targets.¹
- Pakistan has borne most of the burden of clearing out its side of the border region with Afghanistan, deploying more than 100,000 soldiers to battle insurgents in the area.²
- Pakistan has tacitly endorsed U.S. unmanned aircraft strikes against terrorist targets within its borders, even if it continues to deny this or criticizes us for carrying them out.³
- Since 2001, the U.S. has provided Pakistan with over \$20 billion in foreign aid to support these efforts.⁴

However, the raid on bin Laden strained an already tense relationship. The May 2011 raid on the compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan crystalized deep misgivings that the U.S. had with Pakistan's government, and vice versa.

- Six months after the attack, Admiral Mike Mullen, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the ISI was behind some of the deadly attacks against U.S. forces in Afghanistan.
- In June 2012, Gen. Martin Dempsey, the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters that he was "extraordinarily dissatisfied" with Pakistani actions against the Haqqani insurgents that kill American troops across the border in Afghanistan.⁵

- Pakistan continues to provide some support to various insurgent groups that fight U.S. troops in Afghanistan and commit terrorist acts outside of the country. This is fueling the cycle of violence.⁶

Nevertheless, the U.S. is forced to rely upon Pakistan to prosecute the war in Afghanistan, providing the Pakistanis great leverage in bilateral relations. For example, from November 2011 to July 2012, Pakistan closed the Khyber Pass —the primary supply line for gas, food, and military equipment to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. This occurred after American forces killed 24 Pakistani troops in a border skirmish.⁷ As a result, the U.S. had to route its supplies thousands of miles out of the way across several states of the former Soviet Union at a cost of \$2.1 billion.⁸

Other Geopolitical issues

Beyond fighting terrorists, Pakistan should remain important to U.S. policymakers because:

- **Pakistan has more than one hundred nuclear weapons.**⁹ These weapons are pointed at neighboring India, a fellow nuclear power.
- **Pakistan has been responsible for the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology.** The father of its nuclear weapons program, A.Q. Khan, provided nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea, and Libya over a period of over two decades.¹⁰
- **Pakistan has a long-simmering border dispute with India.** Each nation views the other as its primary national security threat. In fact, much of the frustration the U.S. has with Pakistan stems from Islamabad's focus on a possible conflict with India, often over the contested area of Kashmir. Other urgent priorities, such as crushing al Qaeda or stabilizing Afghanistan, are subsumed by its obsession with countering India.¹¹

- **Pakistan maintains a close, long-standing political relationship with China.** Both nations rely upon each other in part to counter U.S. and Indian influence in the region.¹²

Despite these challenges, Pakistan is too large and too strategically located to ignore politically. Punitive actions against Pakistan may have unintended consequences and should be considered very carefully.

END NOTES

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