

# Pakistan: Putting the Relationship Back on the Right Track

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## Overview

Pakistan continues to frustrate U.S. policymakers and the public. Some are tempted to punish Pakistan by cutting financial ties and walking away from this relationship. Others say Pakistan is too important to walk away but too difficult to improve.

What, then, should American policymakers do? After all, the U.S. has too much at stake to simply satisfy a short-term impulse for retribution, or to stand idly by in the face of real Pakistani misconduct. In this memo, we provide one path for the U.S. to improve its rocky bilateral relationship. This centrist course would not only improve the tenor of the relationship, but also protect America's national security. Our recommendations:

1. The Administration should appoint someone to manage the relationship with Pakistan, and give them resources. The country is too complex and important to be viewed a subset of U.S. Afghanistan policy.
2. Rebalance the relationship with Pakistan with less emphasis on intelligence and military to gain a broader view of U.S. strategic interests.
3. Increase exchanges with up-and-coming Pakistani leaders to develop a next generation with more favorable views of the U.S.

## Defining the Stakes

**Whither Pakistan:** Each week new revelations shake America's faith in Pakistan's capacity to achieve our common goals. After all, its authorities failed to find Osama bin Laden, despite the fact he was hiding almost in plain sight for years.

Its government was recently implicated in the killing of a journalist who had exposed extremist infiltration of the military.<sup>1</sup> Its primary intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), may have played a role in the horrific terror attacks in Mumbai, India in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Its military has been closely linked to a number of insurgent and terrorist groups and has diverted U.S. funds for unapproved uses.<sup>3</sup> And to add insult to injury, the Pakistani people don't even like America—a recent Pew survey found that the U.S. remains about as popular in Pakistan as al Qaeda.<sup>4</sup>

**Why should the U.S. maintain this relationship?** Despite all of these challenges, the U.S. cannot walk away from Pakistan, as America has a broad range of vital national security interests at stake. Some of these include:

- Pakistan hosts the primary supply line to U.S. forces in Afghanistan, providing passage for gas, food, and military equipment.<sup>5</sup>
- The ISI has helped the U.S. capture or kill hundreds of al Qaeda targets in the last decade.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, 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.<sup>7</sup>
- Pakistan has tacitly endorsed U.S. unmanned aircraft strikes against terrorist targets within its borders.<sup>8</sup>
- Pakistan is one of eight declared nuclear weapons states, possessing over a hundred nuclear weapons in its arsenal.<sup>9</sup>
- Pakistan has a tense relationship with India and a strong relationship with our competitor China.

America's relationship with Pakistan is complex and multi-faceted. Indeed, the Administration's 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism discussed the relationship in broad terms:



*“We will defeat al-Qa‘ida only through a sustained partnership with Pakistan...greater Pakistani-U.S. strategic cooperation across a broader range of political, military, and economic pursuits will be necessary to achieve the defeat of al-Qa‘ida in Pakistan and Afghanistan.”<sup>10</sup>*

Unfortunately, America’s relationship with Pakistan lacks not only focus but also the balance necessary to address the entire range of strategic challenges. A centrist approach would (1) appoint and empower a high-level official who would focus solely upon the U.S.-Pakistan relationship; (2) restore balance to the relationship; and (3) strengthen the long term relationship by increasing exchanges.

## **Put Someone in Charge of the Relationship**

***An experienced and qualified senior official should be in place to develop and implement a strategic policy towards Pakistan and have the resources to do so.***

Despite the importance of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, the Obama Administration currently does not have a high-level coordinator specifically assigned to manage Pakistan issues. Complicating this situation is that many long-time (if ad hoc) Pakistan interlocutors—such as Adm. Michael Mullen and Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute—are retiring, while others, like Gen. David Petraeus, have assumed larger political portfolios. This confluence of events has further degraded America’s personal connections with top Pakistani officials.

The White House made strides in appointing the late Richard Holbrooke as a Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP), but by assigning responsibility for two countries to one person, the U.S. relationship with Pakistan became subsumed by the conflict in Afghanistan. The security challenges faced by both countries are interrelated, but blurring the distinction between the two nations does not serve broader U.S. national security goals. Even if American

troops departed from Afghanistan tomorrow, the U.S. would still interact with Pakistan.

Not surprisingly, Marc Grossman, Ambassador Holbrooke's replacement as SRAP, is currently consumed with trying to manage the American involvement in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> Ending a war in one country is a task that requires full-time attention; adding the responsibility of managing a separate, difficult bilateral relationship is probably too much work for any one individual. And, of course, Senator John Kerry, who chairs the Foreign Relations Committee and who has forged close links with Pakistan's leaders in recent years, has other difficult problems to confront and cannot be the full-time interlocutor for the U.S.

*Therefore, we recommend the SRAP empower a senior-level coordinator—perhaps the SRAP's chief deputy—to exclusively handle Pakistan policy.* This person should be at a senior level within the State Department and should have the requisite experience, credibility, and access to truly coordinate and help direct the Pakistan relationship.

In addition, a June 2011 State Department IG report noted serious and chronic under-resourcing at the South and Central Asia Bureau, the organization at the State Department responsible for Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and other Central Asian countries.<sup>12</sup> The Bureau is the smallest of the regional bureaus at State, but handles some of the most complex problems facing our nation. *Staffing this bureau more robustly would also allow for more detailed strategic policy development.*

## **Restore Balance to the Relationship**

At the moment, America's relationship with Pakistan is almost entirely focused on military and intelligence requirements. This is unsurprising, as U.S. efforts to capture and kill al Qaeda and Taliban leaders on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border require close coordination with Pakistan's military and intelligence services.<sup>13</sup> The bilateral relationship has come to depend on the military and the ISI

because they are generally the most competent political entities in Pakistan's governing landscape.

In order to meet the goals in the White House's National Counterterrorism Strategy, however, the U.S. must broaden the relationship with Pakistan beyond the CIA and the Pentagon. Without competent and committed partners across the full spectrum of Pakistan's government, the U.S. cannot meet its security needs, and some of the recent gains on the ground could be reversed.

Centering America's focus on the military and the ISI also sends the wrong message to the Pakistanis about the importance of credible civilian governance. America's emissaries to that nation cannot just be uniformed officers meeting with other men in uniform, or the CIA Director huddling with the ISI chief. Rather, the U.S. must have civilian leaders interacting with Pakistani elected and appointed civilian officials, regularly and visibly. The U.S. must send the signal that while some Pakistani governing institutions may be weak or dysfunctional, such democratically elected leaders are important counterparts.

## **Increase and Sustain U.S.-Pakistani Exchanges**

A centrist approach to the U.S.-Pakistan relationship would aim our long-term efforts at strengthening the bonds between the two countries' government and civic institutions. While these efforts are currently ongoing, they should not be reduced or severed. Doing so would create a generation of leaders who will lack first-hand familiarity with the United States. Exchanges are a long-term investment in our relationship, and the U.S. must continue them, even through times when the relationship is strained.

***Increase civilian-to-civilian exchanges:*** American government and academic institutions should be encouraged and incentivized to increase exchanges with Pakistani counterparts. As rising elites come to the U.S., it will instill a sense of civic consciousness (often in short supply in

Pakistan), and provide for a burgeoning group of pro-American Pakistani government officials and thinkers.

Pakistan does not have a tradition of robust oversight of the military. After the death of Osama bin Laden, the leadership of Pakistan's military was called, for the first time, to account for his presence in that country. Members of Congress can demonstrate what robust oversight looks like, and what the role of a legislative body is in the policymaking process. To do so, Congress should increase exchanges with its own counterparts through inter-parliamentary exchanges, especially with those legislators who conduct oversight of the security services.

***Increase military-to-military exchanges:*** Some of Pakistan's most senior military leaders, like Chief of Army Staff Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, participated in the U.S. military's educational exchanges (via the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program).<sup>14</sup> This helped create a level of relative cooperation at the top of the military that the two countries now enjoy. But Congress suspended IMET for Pakistan from 1990-2001 to express disapproval of their clandestine nuclear weapons program. This led to a generation of Pakistani officers—many now in senior positions—who have few personal contacts with their U.S. counterparts. Some of these individuals may be susceptible to influence by anti-American insurgents.

The U.S. lifted the ban on Pakistani officer training after 9/11, but the American military can do more to further increase the billets allocated for mid-level Pakistani military officers. Given America's long-term commitments in the region, one goal should be to create a cadre of military officers who, by virtue of spending a year studying in the U.S., will feel a closer connection as allies and perhaps more appreciative of the American point of view.

Military-to-military exchanges can also have the added benefit of demonstrating that civilian control of the military works and does not interfere with operational effectiveness. Military officers in the United States can demonstrate their

own commitment to democracy and thereby serve as a model for their Pakistani counterparts.

## Conclusion

Any effort to restructure our relationship with Pakistan will be controversial, complex, and fraught with difficulties. Pakistan's many missteps, combined with high-profile incidents within the country have allowed calls in the U.S. to walk away from this ally to grow stronger. The United States, however, simply cannot afford to abandon or neglect this fragile, critical country.

For better or for worse, America needs Pakistan to remain an ally for our long-term security. We believe that a centrist course that combines some new approaches with patience and sustained attention will allow the U.S. and Pakistan to weather these current storms and emerge as strong, reliable partners.

### END NOTES

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