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**With Allies
Like This:
Pakistan
and the
War on
Terrorism**

Stephen Philip Cohen

During his 1999–2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush could not name the leader of Pakistan. In June 2003, President (and army chief) Pervez Musharraf spent a high-profile day at Camp David, where a multiyear \$3 billion American aid package was announced. We learn from this little anecdote that the September 11 attacks on the United States have propelled Pakistan into the limelight of U.S. national security concerns. There it remains today, labeled a “frontline ally” in the war on terrorism.¹

To some extent, this recent contretemps repeats an old pattern of alliance and estrangement that has characterized

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1. The term “terrorism” is defined differently by many people—we treat it as attacks on unarmed civilians; a perfected definition would term it a hatred that finds an expression in violence, often designed to shock and horrify.

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U.S.-Pakistan relations since the early 1950s.² Pakistan was, in turn, an instrument of American policy in containing the Soviets and then the Chinese and then in removing the Soviets from Afghanistan. However, this time there is a difference: Pakistan is a critical ally, but it is also a potential source of terrorism, as well as a declared nuclear weapons state. Some have pointed to Pakistan's growing social extremism, its use of terror as an instrument of state policy in Kashmir, its continuing meddling in Afghanistan, and evidence of leakage of Pakistani nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea, and perhaps other states. If Pakistan is an ally as far as Afghanistan is concerned, it has not behaved like a friend of the United States in many other respects.

A closer look at Pakistan reveals that radical groups do not enjoy widespread support in the country. Despite recent electoral trends, most middle-class and urban Pakistanis do not subscribe to the radical agenda. They believe Pakistan should be a modern but Islamic state—with "Islamic" being confined to a few spheres of public life.

Nonetheless, Pakistan today finds itself at a critical juncture. Radical Islam has found a home in Pakistan, and the danger of the spread of extremism, though by no means imminent, is greater than it was a decade ago. Pakistan is also one of the world's most anti-American countries, which makes Americans especially vulnerable there.³ If its radicalism

2. For an outstanding overview of the relationship, see Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947–2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001).

3. Graham Fuller notes that there is widespread unfavorable opinion of the United States in the Muslim world (53%) with less than half of that (22%) holding a positive view. He states that anti-American perception is the highest in Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Graham E. Fuller, "The Youth Factor: The New Demographics of the Middle East and Implications for U.S. Policy," *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World*, Analysis Paper 3, July 2003, 22–25.

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is left unchecked, Pakistan could indeed evolve into a nuclear-armed terrorist state. Washington must seize the opportunity presented by its current alliance to help move Pakistan in the direction of moderation and stability.

To do this requires a policy of engagement on two parallel tracks. The first is short-term and “curative,” ensuring that Pakistan’s present terrorist groups are checked by better police, army, and intelligence operations and addressing the specific causes that motivate their acts. The second policy track is “preventive,” a long-term engagement to revitalize Pakistan’s enfeebled civilian and social institutions. This second track is a daunting but essential task.

Typologies of Terrorism

Terrorism in Pakistan has several dimensions. Three distinct types can be distinguished.

Type I concerns terrorism in Afghanistan and is the focus of the new American relationship with Pakistan, which derives primarily from the latter’s importance in combating al Qaeda and the Taliban. Pakistan has been cooperative in rounding up al Qaeda cadres but much less obliging about the Taliban, which receives significant support from Pakistani Pashtuns and some of Pakistan’s Islamist parties. In all, about five hundred al Qaeda members have been captured by the Pakistanis and turned over to the United States.

Type II terrorism is Pakistan’s direct and indirect support for Kashmir-related groups that have attacked Indian forces and innocent civilians. A few such groups seem to be intent on precipitating a war between Delhi and Islamabad and oppose the latter government because it abandoned the Taliban and reversed course on Afghanistan.⁴

4. These Kashmir-specific groups may have a wider reach. A group was

Type III terrorism in Pakistan refers to the domestic dimension. Many of Pakistan's terrorists are sectarian, and some have links to one or another group operating in Kashmir/India and Afghanistan. A number of these groups have links to various Pakistani political parties, Islamabad's intelligence services, or the army. In the past, the state had used some of these groups for domestic purposes.⁵

Pakistanis do not necessarily perceive terrorism in one location in the same way as they perceive it in another location. Although sectarian violence is stigmatized, the use of terrorism in Kashmir is widely seen as a legitimate last resort in the Kashmiri "freedom struggle"—although this struggle is never called terrorism. This difference in view complicates any strategy to deal with one kind of terrorism, for the types overlap in practice. In addition, some groups are involved in more than one kind of terrorism.

The Curative Track

An American policy designed to curb existing terrorism in Pakistan should deal with all three types. But America should take care not to get preoccupied with Type I terrorism while ignoring the other two. Along the curative track, three policies recommend themselves.

First, there should be continued support to improve the professionalism of Pakistan's police forces, which are notori-

charged in northern Virginia as being part of a Lashkar-e-Toiba cell and accused of plotting attacks on a "friendly country" (i.e. India); at least two of the eight arrested were Pakistani nationals, with others being born in Pakistan. *Dawn*, June 28, 2003.

5. Examples of such groups include Jaish-e-Muhammad, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Pakistan.

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ous for their abuse of power. The police are viewed by most citizens as predators, not protectors, and support for terrorist groups is often a by-product of alienation from the Pakistani state. For its part, the Pakistani government should ensure that the police receive salaries and support commensurate with their grave responsibilities; in the long run, this expenditure is more important for the security and stability of Pakistan than money spent on advanced weapons and military hardware.

Second, because the Pakistani army remains politically important, Washington should link the quantity and quality of *military assistance* to Pakistan to good performance in countering all three kinds of terrorist groups. The effort should begin, obviously, with the first category but should eventually include the second and third, as well. Many steps have been discussed between American and Pakistani officials in this regard, including exerting greater control over the *madrassas*, providing closer surveillance of suspect groups, shutting down terrorist training camps, improving surveillance along the Line of Control in Kashmir, and countering extremist propaganda. If Pakistan demonstrates vigor and competence in such matters, military aid and cooperation from the United States should be increased.

Finally, the United States should address the two major foreign policy issues that are the focus of some Pakistani terrorists and that give them broader legitimacy. Pakistan's movement against terrorists operating in Kashmir will have to be linked to progress in a peace process with India. Absent such progress, Pakistan will not unilaterally strip itself of a vital, if provocative and risky, policy instrument. The United States must notch up its engagement in the region and promote a peace process between the two countries, even if this

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process is disguised as “facilitation.”⁶ American support for a peace process, which has as a major component the well-being of the Kashmiri people, will blunt one of the “causes” of radical Islamists. Such a process will meet with strong resistance from the radical Pakistanis and may well include violence and terrorism designed to disrupt it. However, engagement is essential, not only for long-term U.S. interests but also for the stability of the Pakistani state.

Similarly, any comprehensive policy toward Pakistan must address Pakistan’s relationship with Afghanistan. The two states have a long and complex relationship that took an astonishing turn when American forces removed the Taliban government with Pakistan’s help. Despite recent events, there remains sympathy for the Taliban and al Qaeda among the Pakistani Pashtuns. Radical Islamic groups in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province are especially attuned to developments in Afghanistan. A continuing U.S. presence next door, without any tangible positive results for the Afghan people, will further intensify grievances in Pakistan.

The best American policy is one of prevention: ensuring that Afghanistan does not collapse into chaos and that Pakistan remains supportive of the Hamid Karzai regime. The United States needs to advance the effective neutralization of Afghanistan in the region as it helps Afghans to rebuild the country from within. Clearly, Afghanistan needs substantial and long-term outside assistance to help manage its own security. Washington should actively support the process, with the

6. American officials vehemently rejected “facilitation” at one point but now accept it as a legitimate American role. Secretary of State Powell mentioned the matter in a September 5, 2003, speech at George Washington University. The Council on Foreign Relations, in a forthcoming report, will recommend the appointment of a high-level American facilitator based in the White House.

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knowledge that the greatest danger of an Afghan collapse might be the radicalization of large parts of Pakistan.

To summarize, nothing will happen if America merely demands an end to Pakistani support for terrorist groups. The United States must also offer positive inducements in the form of additional aid to Pakistan, political support for a dialogue with India, and assurance of a friendly and stable Afghanistan.

All this is absolutely necessary, but not sufficient. Washington must also move beyond short-term cures to address the deeper causes of radicalism and terrorism in Pakistan. That brings us to the preventive track.

The Preventive Track

The second policy track the United States needs to follow in Pakistan should focus on the mushrooming growth of extremism from which terrorists of several sorts are recruited. Pakistan is not an inherently extremist Islamic country. Despite its having reared some prominent Islamist theorists, it is not like Saudi Arabia, whose form of Salafi Islam is organic to its state formation. Pakistan's radical groups are a mixed lot. Some are criminals trying to wrap themselves in the mantle of divine justice. Some have modest, Pakistan-related objectives. Some are seized with sectarian hatred. A few are internationalist apocalyptic terrorists in tune with the al Qaeda philosophy.

The rise of all radical groups to prominence, however, can in large part be attributed to the patronage they have received from the Pakistan army. Over the years, the army has used these groups as instruments of domestic as well as foreign policy. But although the Pakistani state must bear responsibility for its cultivation of some of these terrorist groups, other problems now overwhelm the question of origins. There is cur-

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rently increasing frustration with the lack of economic opportunities, the rise in crime and violence (especially against women) and a growing pool of unemployed college students and graduates who are potential supporters of terrorism. Pakistan's adverse educational and demographic trends, its enfeebled institutions, and its stagnant economy will eventually produce a situation where even the army cannot stem the growth of radical Islamism, and might even be captured by it.

To avert such a scenario, Washington must provide support to revitalize Pakistan's core institutions. Pakistan's economy requires an overhaul, its educational system must be reconstructed, and, above all, as political and administrative institutions gain strength, the army must curb its meddling in political affairs. Let us look at these three areas in turn.

The Economy

Since the 1999 coup, international assistance, close monitoring of expenditures, and consistent policies have produced a modest economic recovery in Pakistan. The country has moved away from default, but it still has a large international debt, and both unemployment and underemployment remain high.⁷ America should continue to support the economy with macro-level assistance. Continued (and even expanded) economic aid, however, should be linked to several key policy changes.

One such change is that the Pakistani people must see tangible evidence that its government's tilt in favor of the United States brings significant benefits to all layers of society and all corners of the country. Most U.S. aid is invisible to the average

7. For an assessment of prospects, see "Pakistan Plans \$500 Million Return to Bond Market," *Financial Times*, June 20, 2003.

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Pakistani, who cares little about debt relief or balance of payment problems. Without being obtrusive or boasting, the message should be that America is vitally concerned about Pakistan's economic progress and wants to see the economy adapt to a fast-changing world. Specific projects in the arena of high technology, improving indigenous manufacturing, and research and development capabilities would demonstrate that a globally competitive Pakistan is in America's interest.⁸ Further, Washington should encourage American companies to invest in Pakistan in areas that are seen to be important for balanced Pakistani growth, not merely the source of fat profits for a few American companies.⁹

Aid accountability is vital. Benchmarks and guidelines should certainly be negotiated with Pakistani authorities, as usual. But once the terms are agreed upon, economic assistance should be closely monitored to ensure that the funds are not funneled into other purposes and that corruption is kept to a minimum. The United States and other donors have every right to link economic assistance with conditions that ensure that the money is being properly utilized.¹⁰ The essential principle that American aid administrators must keep in mind is that aid is not merely a payoff to a regime; its purpose,

8. For an outstanding review of Pakistan's economic and governmental problems, see Dr. Akmal Hussain, *Pakistan: National Human Development Report, 2003* (Islamabad: UNDP, 2003). For a discussion of American economic policy options, see Ambassador Teresita C. Schaffer, *Reviving Pakistan's Economy: A Report from the CSIS Project* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2002).

9. One group of companies to focus on would be those already invested in South Asia: General Electric, Microsoft, and Boeing already have experience in the region, and their products might help break the region's trade barriers.

10. Pakistan has resisted conditionality with the recent aid package. Strong political voices in Pakistan are pushing the government to reject any U.S. aid that comes with strings attached. See "Leghari Asks Govt to Reject US Aid With Strings: Congressmen's Bias Flayed," *Dawn*, July 29, 2003.

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in this case, is to help that regime make the structural changes that will prevent Pakistan from evolving into a dangerous state.

Education

Both the American and Pakistani governments are aware of the collapse of Pakistan's educational system, but they tend to look at different aspects of the problem. Washington has focused on the *madrassas*, the religious schools that are perceived to be teaching terror and preaching hatred toward the West.¹¹ Islamabad emphasizes the importance of improving advanced technical education and, thus, has started another scheme to massively train scientists and technicians.

While the United States must continue pressuring Pakistani authorities to revamp the *madrassa* system, as President Musharraf has promised to do, the agenda should not be confined to this dimension alone. The predominance of the *madrassas* in Pakistan is a consequence of the massive infusion of foreign, largely Saudi, funds for the conservative *madrassas* and of the Pakistani state's failure to provide adequate educational facilities to begin with.¹² If modern educational institutions are not revitalized, the *madrassas* will continue to thrive. The new U.S. aid package only allocates \$21.5 million to primary education and literacy in 2003, about a tenth of the cost of a single F-22 jet, and much of that will be swallowed up in administrative costs.

11. There were only 250 *madrassas* at independence and about 5,000 in the 1980s. This number has now jumped to 45,000, according to some estimates. Those that preach hatred may only constitute 10 to 15 percent of the total—but few offer an education that prepares their graduates for a modern occupation.

12. For a discussion of the Pakistani *madrassas*, see P. W. Singer, "Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education, Not Jihad," *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World*, Analysis Paper 14, November 2001.

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At the elementary and secondary education levels, more aid should be provided, but it must be conditional upon actual achievement in literacy levels and teacher training. Indeed, the problem of teacher training is so great that Pakistan should be encouraged to bring in foreign teachers, who will not only provide high levels of technical skill but who will also break down the cultural isolation of many Pakistanis.

At the graduate and postgraduate levels, American educational assistance should focus on restoring the many private institutions that once thrived in Pakistan (including some church-related schools) and on restoring Pakistan's liberal arts, humanities, and social science expertise, which is so necessary for the training of an informed citizenry. The present approach, elevating colleges to the university level, does not address the absence of quality faculty. Where will these instructors come from? A massive increase in the Fulbright program would make sense, as would an emergency training program for Pakistani educational administrators and faculty members. Moreover, Pakistan should follow the lead of Bangladesh and a few other states and send some advanced students to India for technical and nontechnical training.

Perhaps the most important condition that must be put on aid for the educational sector is that the Pakistan government itself should increasingly assume the responsibility for education's funding and administration. The share of government expenditures on education should increase; if it is cut, Pakistan should pay the price in terms of reduced military and economic aid.¹³

Finally, any educational aid program must calibrate the amount of aid relative to the sector's absorptive capacity.

13. Pakistan is showing signs of improvement in this regard. The latest federal budget (FY04) has increased the allocation for education expenditures to 1.05 percent of total expenditures, from 0.9 percent in FY03.

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Dedicational aid programs should begin small and increase only when Pakistan's capacity has grown. To reiterate, the essential principle to bear in mind is that this aid is not being given for its own sake but to achieve permanent and positive change in Pakistan.

Democratization

"Democratization" is one of the three benchmarks set forth by President Bush when he announced the 2003 aid package for Pakistan. Washington should encourage the Pakistani army to develop an informal timetable for the restoration of *complete* democracy and to stick to it. This timetable may last for several years, but now is the time to reshape the civil-military balance in Pakistan toward something resembling normalcy.

Although democracy in Pakistan may be difficult to bring about, the best way for the United States to forestall the rise of radical Islam, to safeguard a modicum of civil liberties, and to preempt separatist movements is to insist, as a condition of aid, that the Pakistani government allow the mainstream political parties (the Pakistan Muslim League and the Pakistan People's Party) to function freely.¹⁴ The goal should be a spectrum of Islamic and liberal parties that are willing to operate within a parliamentary context and that are tolerant of sectarian and other minorities. As long as the Pakistani establishment does not tolerate groups, parties, and leaders that have practiced and preached violence within Pakistan and across its borders in India and Afghanistan, the United States should not be concerned about the ideological outlook of the parties. Indeed, avowedly Islamic parties that eschew violence are particularly useful in a Pakistani context; they allow for the

14. In the October 2002 elections, the leaders of both mainstream parties were allowed neither to return to Pakistan nor to compete in the elections.

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expression of views whose believers, if excluded from the public realm, might more readily turn to violence and terror.

Finally, Washington must take seriously the fact that Pakistan is an important arena of *ideas*. Most educated Pakistanis are not ideologically anti-American, but they are angry with the United States for changing the regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and supporting President Musharraf. There is no one telling America's side of the story or engaging its critics in the realm of ideas and public discourse. American information programs in the country are practically nonexistent; these programs need to be revived and vastly expanded, and private organizations must be encouraged to increase their exchange and cultural programs, especially with younger Pakistanis, academics, journalists, and opinion leaders. In the long run the greatest challenge to the United States in Pakistan is in the realm of ideas—the field must not be abandoned to Islamic radicals or those who see the United States as an inherently evil state.

For the Long Haul

Despite its many problems, Pakistan is still one of the freest and most democratic Muslim states, even as it has become an increasingly dangerous one. While the threat from Islamic radicalism in Pakistan is not as high as is perceived by some in the West, the country is poised at a moment where further neglect could accelerate its descent into radicalism, producing a state that threatens regional and global security.

The United States should engage itself with Pakistan over the long haul, not just the short term. It needs to assist Pakistan in curbing the threat from radicalism at home while achieving a more normal relationship with India and Afghanistan. Equally important, the U.S. government should help

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Pakistan revitalize its enfeebled institutions and provide its population with much-needed opportunities for growth. The goal should not be to merely sustain a Pakistan that poses no threat but to help develop a stable Pakistan that can become a model for the Islamic world and, perhaps, a partner in establishing a more liberal order in parts of the Middle East and elsewhere. The best way to achieve this goal is to pursue a course of sustained engagement with Pakistan's civil side, breaking with the pattern of engagement and estrangement focusing on the military that characterized the past.

A necessary adjunct to such a policy would have global as well as Pakistan-specific components. A streamlining of laws in the United States to deal with terrorist-related detainees is in order. So is a still clearer message to repeatedly emphasize that the U.S. target in the war on terrorism is not Islam or Pakistanis, but solely terrorism.

There is no assurance that curative or preventive policies will succeed. Both would require active cooperation by the Pakistani government, as well as the support of key elites. Even with their support, some sectors of Pakistani society are so badly run down that a well-funded effort could still fail. However, we will only know this if such an attempt is made. What is certain is that without a concerted effort to curb Islamic radicalism in the short term, and to dry up its recruitment base in the long term, the worst predictions about a rogue, nuclear-armed, terrorist-supporting Pakistan are likely to come true.