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Malik Zafar Iqbal

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An Appraisal of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy to Counter Terrorism

MALIK ZAFAR IQBAL

In the nearly nine years since 9/11, the United States is still trying to determine a viable strategy to combat terrorism. With regard to the US efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Washington appears on the verge of proving Churchill's quip, "the United States always does the right thing after first trying everything else."¹ Correspondingly, current relations between Pakistan and the United States are a paradox. Never before has their security depended so much on mutual cooperation and support, yet both sides are plagued by mutual mistrust and misgivings.² If Pakistan is to emerge from this conflict as a stable, prosperous, culturally diverse, peaceful, and stabilizing influence within the region, the United States and Pakistan need to dispel their suspicions and reconcile differences. Because of the globalized nature of the ominous terrorist threat, the success of Pakistan is critical to the security of the United States, the region, and indeed the entire international community.³ Trust and suspicion, cooperation and dissension, agreement and disagreement, accusations and atonement continue to pervade the US-Pakistan relationship.

Strategic events have forced the United States and Pakistan into close cooperation on three separate occasions: during the Cold War (the 1950s and 1960s); during fight against the Russians (the 1980s); and currently in the global war against terrorism.⁴ Despite differences in a number of areas, the relationship between the two countries has been inexorably drawn together by re-emerging coincident interests. The current war on terrorism is

Brigadier Malik Zafar Iqbal is an infantry officer in the Pakistan Army and has held many instructional, command, and staff assignments. He is a graduate of the Command and Staff College (Pakistan), Royal Staff College (Jordan), Armed Forces War Course (NDU Pakistan), as well as a 2010 graduate of the US Army War College.

the most recent and provides considerable impetus for further cooperation. The recently announced Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Strategy adopted by the current US Administration provides a starting point for furthering cooperation between the United States and Pakistan in the war on terrorism and yet there are a number of issues remaining to be addressed.

This article examines the history of US-Pakistan relations providing insight on previous oscillations in the relationship, assesses the current US-Pakistani cooperation in the war against terrorism within the context of the recently announced AFPAK Strategy, and recommends ways to enhance the relationship and improve cooperation between both nations.

Background

The birth of India and Pakistan coincided with the early years of the Cold War. Significantly, the partitioning of India and Pakistan led to the two countries' different alignments with the contending superpowers. India joined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) camp while Pakistan chose to align with the West.⁵ This initial alignment logically evolved into US-Pakistan military cooperation and support. As a consequence Pakistan received much needed military support in terms of training and military hardware. This was a period of close cooperation and, according to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pakistan became "America's most allied ally in Asia."⁶ The United States' suspension of aid during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, and the repeat of the same action six years later during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, destroyed Pakistan's trust in the fidelity of the US-Pakistan relationship. For example, when India attacked East Pakistan in 1971 with military support from the USSR, Pakistan approached the United States for support, the request was denied. Shortly thereafter, East Pakistan became an independent country, Bangladesh. This was followed by India's development of a nuclear weapons program (dramatically tested in 1974) that essentially drove Pakistan into developing a similar program.

Pakistan's pursuit of a nuclear program cast a dark shroud over US-Pakistan relations and undermined cooperative efforts ever since. Most notably, President Jimmy Carter and Congress suspended all US aid to Pakistan in April 1979 because of the nuclear program. Just nine months later, however, in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States offered Pakistan a \$400 million aid package (much larger than the previously proffered package). Notwithstanding the size of the package, Pakistan eventually rejected the offer. Not until June 1981 did Pakistan agree to an annual \$500 million aid package, but it came with strings attached: a limited six-year waiver of the previously imposed nuclear nonproliferation sanctions.⁷ Pakistan became the springboard for a US-sponsored proxy war

waged by the Mujahedeen against the Soviet Union within Afghanistan. The seeds of militancy planted with the intent of defeating the Soviets continued

The success of Pakistan is critical to the security of the United States.

to spread and afflict Afghanistan and Pakistan long after the Soviet withdrawal.⁸ The jihadist culture, which took root at that time continues to haunt the world in the shape of al Qaeda and extremist elements of the Taliban. In retrospect, the

United States played an essential role in creating the conditions that spawned al Qaeda and the Taliban, with the United States, Pakistan, and the region suffering the consequences.⁹ The sharp rise in the number of madrassas and a large influx of Afghan refugees that brought with them a gun and heroin culture undermined the social fabric of Pakistani society and created favorable conditions for the growth of extremists. Correspondingly, there was no follow-on strategy or commitment of resources for reconstruction and stabilization. The abrupt disengagement by the United States intensified anti-US feeling in Pakistan as the nation was left alone to face the Afghan imbroglio.

With the Soviet withdrawal, the need for US-Pakistani cooperation was removed and 18 months later the United States re-imposed the Pressler Amendment, inflicting nonproliferation-related sanctions and halting all US economic and military aid. Since little had changed with respect to the Pakistan nuclear posture, it appeared that the US alliance was one of convenience, easily cast aside whenever Pakistan had served its transactional purpose. As the 1990s rolled on, the economic sanctions took their toll. Pakistan's nascent and fragile democracy struggled under the increased weight and societal influence of Afghan refugees and the sanctions.¹⁰ As a consequence, the 1990s became the decade of non-engagement.

US-Pakistan Cooperation in Countering Terrorism

General Pervaiz Musharraf, then-Chief of Army Staff, assumed the role of chief executive after a bloodless coup in October 1999. Pakistan was faced with intense diplomatic pressure and security challenges related to the military coup; economic difficulties due to the Pressler Amendment; a continuous threat of a hostile and nuclear-capable India in the east; and a destabilized Afghanistan under Taliban control in the west. With the potential emergence of a second security threat from Afghanistan, Pakistan chose to build amiable relations with the Taliban as both countries sought peace. Despite its recognition of the Taliban, however, Pakistan had identified the growing threat of extremism and had taken aggressive actions to curb extremism and combat terrorism within its borders.¹¹ Pakistan's efforts

to combat terrorism were intensified following 9/11 as the interests of both nations again coincided.

The tragic events of 9/11 dramatically changed the South Asia, Central Asia, and Middle East landscapes. The resultant Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) aimed at defeating al Qaeda and the Taliban once again thrust Pakistan to the forefront of US strategy. "September 11 marked an irrevocable turn from the past into an unknown future. The world would never be the same."¹² Interests of both countries converged. Despite strong public opposition, Pakistan again aligned itself with the United States. Similarly, the United States responded by assisting Pakistan in reducing its foreign debt burden, providing economic and military assistance, eliminating sanctions related to its nuclear program and military coup, and recognizing Pakistan as a major ally.¹³

The Global War on Terrorism began with the relatively broad support of the world and within three months the limited numbers of allied ground forces supported by lethal air assets together with the significant forces of the Northern Alliance ousted Afghanistan's Taliban government. Following the removal of the Taliban, however, the conflict shifted to an insurgency.

As the Taliban transitioned into a full-fledged insurgency and began rebuilding its strength, the United States and many of its allies invaded Iraq. Not only did this invasion distract efforts to consolidate the gains in Afghanistan and stabilize the country, it also alienated many of those who supported the invasion of Afghanistan and increased those sympathetic to the displaced Taliban in Pakistan.¹⁴ The diversion gave breathing room to al Qaeda and the Taliban, who expanded their influence in areas beyond Afghanistan and sought refuge and support in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan. In the FATA, a confluence of Pashtun nationalism and the Taliban brand of Islam helped spread militancy within the tribes in South and North Waziristan, presenting a difficult challenge to both the allied forces in Afghanistan and security forces in Pakistan.¹⁵

Since the inception of GWOT, Pakistan and the United States have pursued operations consistent with their own unique political interests and public support. Pakistan faced difficult challenges ranging from public support for al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Osama bin Laden; to the public's unfavorable view of the US-led war on terror; and to their dissatisfaction with their own country's leadership.¹⁶ Initially the government of Pakistan took a measured and deliberate approach in combating terrorism with an acute sensitivity to the fragility of public support for US-Pakistan cooperation. The distrust caused by historic US reversals permeates public perceptions: "fully 64 percent of the public regards the United States as an enemy."¹⁷ This is especially significant in the FATA where the culture, social norms, historical administration, law enforcement, and political and tribal influences are

dramatically different than the rest of the country, causing even Pakistani regular military forces to be considered outsiders.¹⁸

Winning the hearts and minds of the FATA populace and their cooperation is not just a goal, it is an imperative. Effective operations simply cannot be accomplished without the support of the populace and definitely not if they actively oppose those operations. Thus, the Pakistan government and the military have taken a nuanced and long-term approach to operations against the Taliban and al Qaeda. By exercising patience and allowing the Taliban enough “rope to hang themselves” the prospects for long-term success substantially increased. In general, the extremist Taliban and al Qaeda cannot help themselves; they impose an abusive and brutal dogma and become their own worst enemy. The Taliban and al Qaeda have alienated major portions of the populace, permitting Pakistan to secure local support for the government’s military intervention. This is a phenomenon similar to the “Anbar Awakening” that helped the 2008 US surge to be successful in Iraq.¹⁹ The critical issue is that for the viability of the government of Pakistan and the strategic success of the counterterrorism campaign to be ensured, operations are undertaken with a long-term view of the regional and public context. Operations cannot be solely based on the near-term concerns of Afghanistan or the United States, despite their mutual desire for military responses to curtail cross-border terrorist activities. Hurried military operations are often ineffective and costly, forcing tribal elders toward increased support of the extremist Taliban and al Qaeda. The success of the Swat and South Waziristan operations, in addition to the sacrifices made by the Pakistan Army, is the outcome of the cohesion between the local populace, government, and military.

Pakistan deserves recognition for conducting a number of challenging operations in the region throughout the post-9/11 period, providing critical support to the United States and its allies in Afghanistan. These operations have led to the capture of some 500 al Qaeda militants. Additionally, Pakistan has provided major support for the US-led antiterrorism coalition.²⁰ According to the US Departments of State and Defense, Pakistan has provided the United States with unprecedented levels of cooperation by permitting the US military access to bases within the country, aiding in the identification and detention of extremists, helping to seal the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and blocking terrorist financing.²¹ Not only has Pakistan lost more personnel in this conflict than any other US ally, large quantities of critical military materials move through Pakistan into Afghanistan.²² Without this logistical network, both the US Operation Enduring Freedom and NATO operations in Afghanistan would be severely constrained. “Over the last seven months Pakistani military had launched

209 major and 510 minor operations in 10 regions . . . and 2,273 Pakistani army officers and soldiers had been killed in the fighting so far.”²³

The AFPAC Strategy

As with most US strategies, the AFPAC strategy has been iteratively developed. The strategy was first articulated by President Obama in March 2009, and then updated based upon feedback from his military leadership and subsequently redefined in a December 2009 speech at West Point. The strategy was further expanded in the Department of State’s *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy* subsequently published in January 2010 and summarized in the recently issued Quadrennial Defense Review.²⁴ The AFPAC strategy is highly amenable to an “ends, ways, and means” analysis.

Ends. The strategy succinctly outlines the overall goal: “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future. . . .”²⁵ Significantly, the “prevention of return” portion of the “goal” implies a long-term and comprehensive approach to supporting operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Ways. As suggested by the title, the strategy considers both Afghanistan and Pakistan within its preview. Importantly, it goes beyond just military cooperation and looks at increasing economic and social support to Pakistan. In outlining the strategy, President Obama recognized the mistrust that remains between the two countries due to a mottled historical relationship. He promises to overcome that past by building a long and enduring relationship: “In the past, we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. Those days are over.” Moreover, the President commits to building a foundation of “mutual interest, mutual respect, and mutual trust. . . . Going forward, the Pakistan people must know America will remain a strong supporter of Pakistan’s security and prosperity long after the guns have fallen silent, so that the great potential of its people can be unleashed.”²⁶

The most detailed description of the ways of the strategic concept is outlined in the supporting *State Department Stabilization Strategy*. The strategy promises a broad “whole of government” approach with the United States “leading the international community in helping Pakistan overcome the political, economic, and security challenges that threaten its stability, and in turn undermine regional stability.”²⁷ The Pakistan strategy proposes multifaceted ways addressing a comprehensive assistance program as well as security assistance, communications, strengthening people-to-people ties, and enhanced bilateral engagement measures. Additionally, the US security assistance efforts will continue the current counterinsurgency support and provide other requested assistance to Pakistan’s military and police intended

to better prepare them to fight against the insurgents while simultaneously helping to support the populace negatively affected by the militants.²⁸

Means. The means are defined by the committed resources (funds and personnel) as well as supporting activities designed to accomplish the major objectives outlined in the strategic concept. The Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation proposes \$7.5 billion in US civilian assistance over a five-year period. This commitment of funds is aimed at assistance measures designed to improve the social and economic conditions in the country and, in so doing, will provide an environment that decreases the appeal of the extremists' dogma. From the military perspective, the US President has decided to commit an additional 30,000 US forces to Afghanistan. These forces will deploy to reinforce the 68,000 Americans and 39,000 non-US International Security Assistance Forces already there. This increase will enable the allies to target the insurgency, break its momentum, better secure Afghanistan's population centers, and strengthen the Afghan security forces and Afghan government to a point where they can take the lead across all these areas.²⁹ Conversely, Pakistan views the huge surge negatively as it will likely have a destabilizing influence on the border region and indeed the entire country.³⁰

Within Pakistan, there is a broad range of planned initiatives addressing energy, agriculture, water, health, education, and assistance to displaced Pakistanis. These initiatives also call for assistance to build the capacity of Pakistan's democratic institutions at the national, provincial, and local levels. Possibly the most promising of the assistance programs are the efforts to address Pakistan's challenging social and economic issues. All these efforts are designed to empower Pakistan to sustain long-term growth across social, political, economic, and military domains and directly or indirectly aid in the campaign against extremists both in Pakistan and the region.³¹

Clearly, these planning efforts are significant and, if executed, will aid in the war against the Taliban extremists and al Qaeda. The strategy, however, could be improved in several critical areas.

Appraisal of AFPAC Strategy

The AFPAC strategy is an opportunity for the United States to expand its heretofore rather myopic Iraq/Afghanistan-centric perspective. In some respects it provides a degree of optimism by attempting to address the exigent issues with regard to more than a single actor. It does make a number of provisions that will undoubtedly have a positive impact on both Afghanistan and Pakistan. These include significant increases for Afghanistan and Pakistan in essential economic aid; proffered assistance to help improve the security capabilities of both countries; the recognition of the difference between the Taliban and al Qaeda and a willingness to negotiate with the former; and directly

addressing the pervasive narcotics trafficking.³² Unfortunately, the strategy also raises numerous issues and concerns that may derail its implementation. These include the announcement of a timetable for a US withdrawal that harkens back to the US precipitous exodus from the region following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. It also contains inappropriate and dubious linkage of the United States' overall strategy for Afghanistan with the overall strategy for Pakistan; the superficial treatment of the India-Pakistan challenges and a lack of appreciation for the perceived threat India's activities in Afghanistan pose for Pakistan's security; the proposed limitations and conditions (strings) on proffered assistance; the limited focus and relatively modest amount of the proposed economic aid package. It fails to provide specifics on improved US-Pakistan military cooperation such as suspending US covert operations within Pakistan, sharing intelligence, and providing drones and other capabilities to better enable Pakistan's campaign against the extremists. These issues are key to crafting a more comprehensive strategy.

Announcement of a Timetable

Conceivably, the most unsettling aspect of the announced AFPAK strategy centers on the establishment of a withdrawal timeline for US forces.³³ To grasp the magnitude of this element of the strategy one must first recognize the profound impact on the public psyche of past instances of US withdrawals and policy reversals that had appalling strategic consequences for Pakistan and the region. While establishing a timeline may help to energize Afghanistan toward accepting responsibility for security and governance reforms and plays well with a US public growing weary with the war, it significantly undermines Pakistan's public confidence in US resolve. While President Obama alluded to "conditions-based" withdrawal criteria, his emphasis on a timed 18-month withdrawal was unmistakable. It implied and was understood to mean that the United States was leaving according to the timeline despite "conditions." To mitigate this perception, it is imperative that future public pronouncements deliberately address the "conditions" that will dictate the degree of US presence and emphasize the United States' long-term commitment to regional stability and prosperity.

Inappropriate Linkage of Pakistan and Afghanistan Strategies

Developing a capstone strategy applicable to the diverse and unique strategic environments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan at best reduces the applicability to each and at worst can undermine efforts in both countries. Strategic activities in one country often work at cross-purposes to those of

the other. Pakistan is not Afghanistan and vice versa. While the intention may have been to better unify counterterrorism efforts and simplify the strategy, it may have had the opposite effect.³⁴ Islamabad harbors deep reservations about approaching the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas as a single area of operations. There are substantial differences in the strategic consequences of US operations depending upon which side of the border they are conducted, and it is shortsighted to treat them as being the same. The unintended consequence of treating these as the same is to provide greater rationale for militants on both sides of the border to form an alliance to oppose the external threat posed by US troop increases.³⁵ Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has criticized the US Administration's linkage of Pakistan and Afghanistan under a single strategy and in an interview with the *Financial Times* pointed out that Afghanistan and Pakistan are distinctly different countries, and cannot be lumped together for any reason.³⁶ The differences are significant: Pakistan is an established democracy, possesses a large professional military that is nuclear capable, has a growing middle class and comparatively stable economy, well-established and widespread news and communications networks, and is a country of 170 million people with a colonial history of exercising local, provincial, and state governance. Conversely, Afghanistan is a near-failed state with a nascent democracy, insurgency prone, and with a history of spotty, corrupt, and ineffective governance. The context and associated strategic consequences of counterterrorist operations can vary dramatically between the two nations. Very bluntly, within Pakistan, public opinion counts. For example, President Obama's implication that the United States will take action against targets in Pakistan only serves to further inflame Pakistani public opinion and undermine the strategic aims of both nations.³⁷ These differences make a single AFPAC strategic approach for countries involved extremely difficult if not utterly impracticable.

Importance of the India-Pakistan Rapprochement

It is difficult to overstate the central role that the threat of India plays in Pakistani security concerns.³⁸ Over the course of its brief 63-year history there have been three shooting wars and four near-wars; the juxtaposition of significant armed forces from both countries on their common border; an ongoing bitter dispute over Kashmir; a nuclear arms race; and increased animosity over the terrorist attack in Mumbai in 2008.³⁹ President Obama has acknowledged this issue in his 27 March 2009 speech and while he was on the campaign trail in 2008,⁴⁰ but his strategy falls short of addressing solutions to the underlying Pakistan-India disputes and, due to Indian opposition, he has dropped any references in his public presentations to resolving

the Kashmir issue.⁴¹ Nevertheless, strategies need to conform and adapt to the exigencies of the strategic environment and not vice versa. “The success of Obama’s strategy will be contingent on how calm relations are between Delhi and Islamabad.”⁴² Thus, if the United States hopes to be successful in its campaign against terrorists in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, it should assuage the tension between India and Pakistan and actively pursue the resolution of the Kashmir issue. This could result in a reduction of Indian and Pakistani security forces along their common border. Additionally, it could result in a bilateral agreement seeking the maintenance of a degree of balance between the two nations’ nuclear and conventional forces. Only then can Pakistan act decisively against the militants in the border area, and only then will the AFPAK strategy have an improved likelihood of success.⁴³

Related to the perceived threat posed by India to Pakistan is the increase in Indian activity and influence within Afghanistan that further complicates and diverts Pakistani focus against extremists in the border region. Addressing the India-Pakistan relationship requires the United States to exercise substantial influence in curbing India’s provocative activities on Pakistan’s western border. There is evidence that India is conducting operations from their consulates in Afghanistan (Jalalabad and Qandahar) on the border of Pakistan, infusing money into Baluchistan, engaging in provocative actions such as utilizing the Border Roads Organization to construct particularly controversial portions of the Ring Road, and erecting schools in contentious areas such as in Kunar that is next to Bajaur.⁴⁴ This activity, combined with India’s previous provocative actions in establishing a base in Farkhor, Tajikistan,⁴⁵ and new evidence of India supplying ammunitions to militants in the Swat and FATA,⁴⁶ portend dire consequences for the AFPAK strategy.

While Pakistani concerns about India’s increasing influence in Afghanistan has been largely downplayed by the United States, it has in fact significantly grown to the point where Pakistan no longer views its flanks as secure. Correspondingly, General Stanley McChrystal reported on the sensitivity of Indian activities in Afghanistan in his initial assessment in August 2009. He warned that the increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan would probably aggravate the regional tensions and cause Pakistan to directly counter India’s subterfuge in Afghanistan. The consequence of moving the India-Pakistan conflict into Afghanistan and escalating the activities of both countries could in and of itself derail the existing AFPAK strategy and, with two nuclear-armed states jockeying for an advantage in new and volatile areas, lead to catastrophic consequences.⁴⁷ General Kayani, Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff, has aptly and candidly described the threat dynamics to Pakistan when he said:

While the Pakistan Army is alert to and fighting the threat posed by militancy, it remains an “India-centric” institution and that reality will not change in any significant way until the Kashmir issue and water disputes are resolved.⁴⁸

The success of the AFPAK strategy will depend upon the United States recognizing and applying its diplomatic clout to address and diffuse the India-Pakistan dispute by resolving Kashmir and water issues.

Conditions and Sufficiency of Economic Support Efforts

As previously noted, the prevailing strategy calls for an expanded support effort addressing a wide range of civilian support activities in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This includes pursuing the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation authorizing \$1.5 billion a year to support Pakistani civil support activities over a five-year period; a request for Congress to pursue a bipartisan bill creating Reconstruction Opportunity Zones in Afghanistan and the border regions of Pakistan; and soliciting international support for a new Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan to bring together all nations that have a stake in establishing security and prosperity in the region.⁴⁹

While significant, these efforts will likely be insufficient given the scope and severity of the challenges facing Pakistan and the region. To stem the growing groups of militants, Pakistan needs to provide a viable economic and social alternative especially for the significant pool of disaffected young men who are particularly susceptible to recruitment by the extremists. Moreover, the legislation’s \$7.5 billion budget neither reflects the ascribed central role that Pakistan plays within US strategy, nor will it likely resolve the immediate Pakistan solvency crisis. Current estimates are that Pakistan will require at least \$20 billion of international support within the next few years if it is to be financially stable. This level of international support is not unreasonable given the fact that Pakistan has spent an estimated \$35 billion in the war on terrorism since 9/11.⁵⁰

The imposition of “conditions” for the provision of aid, which pervades US strategy and rhetoric, undermines Pakistani public and governmental support for the United States. For instance, President Obama not so subtly intimated an ultimatum in his 27 March speech: “Pakistan must demonstrate its commitment to rooting out al Qaeda and the violent extremists within its borders. And we will insist that action be taken, one way or another, when we have intelligence about high-level terrorist targets.”⁵¹ Correspondingly, Bruce Riedel, a retired Central Intelligence Agency expert on South Asia who chaired the special interagency committee to develop the AFPAK strategy, warned against the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation being loaded with conditions. He strongly opposes conditions

because they represent a transitory “conditions-based relationship.”⁵² This sentiment is shared by Islamabad. Umbrage is taken where imposed conditions or benchmarking of support efforts are used to gauge performance in the war on terrorism. Striking a particularly sensitive nerve was President Obama’s insistence that the United States would not provide a “blank check,” implying that Pakistan was little more than hired help rather than a valuable ally. Also in an interview, Senator John Kerry reinforced this perspective by offering a possible conditions-based metric that would measure whether Pakistan was moving its security forces away from India and toward the Afghanistan border region. “Any effort to impose conditions that aim to change Pakistan’s national security calculus would be misguided and doomed to fail. No country’s national security priorities or structures can be reconfigured from outside.”⁵³ If Pakistan is to continue to be a critical ally in the war against terrorism, it needs both the full support and assistance of the United States and the international community.

Military-to-Military Cooperation and Support

While Pakistan and Afghanistan have dramatically different operational and strategic environments, there are some potential benefits for improved coordination between allied efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan operations in the border region. In establishing the guiding principles to improve the cohesiveness of the AFPAK strategy, it is important to place it within the context of effective counterinsurgency doctrine. The following principles should guide counterterrorist operations for both nations.

- The battle for the hearts and minds of the population will likely decide the success of the campaign and the strategy. The campaign should first separate the Taliban from al Qaeda, then reconcile with the moderate Taliban and use that support to help locate, defeat, and destroy the isolated extremists.

- Success will depend upon a nuanced approach to operations on both sides of the border. Any large surge or major escalation of operations in Afghanistan will likely create long-term negative consequences in the border region. There will undoubtedly be a large influx of fleeing militants, al Qaeda, and other refugees to Pakistan. Unfocused “sweep operations” generating large numbers of civilian displacements and collateral damage in the border areas will, in all likelihood, generate reprisal attacks against Pakistan for the government’s perceived role in supporting US aggression.⁵⁴ All of these likely outcomes serve to dilute and derail Pakistan’s own efforts to execute its counterinsurgency campaign in its portion of the border region.

- Conventional operations should be conducted only with the support of local tribal members to help locate and destroy the extremists. Because of the extreme sensitivity of the indigenous tribal members to foreign intervention, as the campaign progresses, operations in Afghanistan should be increasingly conducted by Afghan forces and only sparingly by US or allied units.
- With an emphasis on precision and select engagements, operations on each side of the border should be thoroughly coordinated but not integrated. Collateral or parallel operations can be conducted so as to limit the effect of terrorists moving back and forth across the border and avoiding the efforts by either the United States, allies, or the Pakistanis. This, however, requires a relative high level of local support on both sides of the border. As the pool of tribal terrorist sympathizers dries up, there will be fewer safe havens for which the extremists can seek shelter and support and, consequently, they will become more vulnerable. Thus, operations against suspected extremist locations should be increasingly “conditions-based” rather than time or opportunity driven.

The Way Ahead

All combat capability should be employed and operations limited within the confines of the respective national borders. The sovereignty of both nations should be observed and respected. This requires that all covert operations conducted by the United States within Pakistan territory must cease,⁵⁵ including US drone attacks against known or suspected terrorist locations in Pakistan. Despite President Obama’s assurances, the frequency of drone attacks within Pakistan’s border region has increased substantially since his election.⁵⁶ The “tactical” benefits of these attacks are usually far outweighed by the strategic liability caused by the loss of Pakistani public support for the United States and even for Pakistan’s own efforts against the terrorists.⁵⁷ A more strategically viable approach would be to share actionable intelligence between the United States and Pakistan and provide Pakistan with the technological capability (drones and supporting control system-of-systems) to conduct the operations within their own territory. The “United States should show strategic patience as well as respect for a sovereign country’s red lines in deeds and not just words.”⁵⁸

Pakistan should gradually assume the role in training and assisting the Afghan security forces. This would help relieve the burden on the overstressed Coalition forces and posture Afghanistan for continued long-term cooperation with its neighbor. It would also exploit the common cultural, language, religious and social affiliations of Pakistani and Afghan security personnel.

The military component of the AFPAK strategy needs to reflect the dramatically different contexts within each country, yet be sufficiently compatible so as to achieve complementary effects and not derail the military campaigns in either country. The negotiated de-escalation of military operations, together with the corresponding progressive reduction of indigenous support for al Qaeda and irreconcilable extremist Taliban, promises to collapse the insurgency to an extent where focused and aggressive operations can then eliminate extremists. Meanwhile, the fragile public sentiment within Pakistan will shift to support government military operations against the radical factions who choose to continue their extremist ideology.

Recommendations

The necessary improvements to the AFPAK strategy cut across diplomatic, informational, military, and economic domains and address important areas. The recommended modifications to the strategy that would enhance both US and Pakistan activities are summarized below.

US Focus

The AFPAK strategy should expand its aperture to encompass all the regional actors while simultaneously focusing its lens to capture the unique strategic and operational environments of each. Limiting the strategy to Afghanistan and Pakistan excludes many key regional nations that play a critical role in the existing insurgencies. Likewise, focusing on seemingly apparent commonalities ignores unique and unseen disparate causes of many of the same symptoms.

America needs to pursue, actively and with sincerity, a deliberate diplomatic strategy to achieve Pakistan-India rapprochement and resolve lingering disputes between the two countries. This should include addressing in priority: the Kashmir issue, conventional and nuclear arms limitations, suspension of provocative activities in the border areas by both countries, water issues, and diffusing other friction points.

The United States needs to continue to expand its strategic perspective to include all the whole-of-government domains. The best means to prevent the surge of militancy in Pakistan is to resolve economic and social dissatisfaction and improve the conditions and hope of the populace. An immediate and substantial infusion of approximately \$20 billion should be made by the international community. This would “stop-the-bleeding” associated with the current financial crisis while more deliberate measures are instituted. Similarly, the comprehensive whole-of-government programs announced in the US State Department’s supporting strategy is a welcomed

and needed long-term approach to addressing many social and economic challenges; but more is needed. Specific measures to enhance Pakistan's textile trade exports to the United States and to other western nations would help spur the economy. The rapid implementation and establishment of Reconstruction Opportunity Zones as stated in the AFPAC strategy would also help alleviate some of the difficult economic conditions existing in the FATA and provide a real alternative to those young males who are vulnerable to al Qaeda and extremist Taliban recruiting efforts. Finally, dropping all strings or conditions to the proffered aid would also help in rebuilding the trust between the two countries.

The US-Pakistan trust deficit needs to be transformed into a fully cooperative transparent relationship. The United States should take positive steps to gain and sustain confidence in Pakistan's judgments regarding their military measures and efforts to combat terrorism within their own borders. Open dialog between the militaries and diplomats will dispel underlying mistrust and clarify the rationale and intent for differences in strategic and operational approaches. All parties should avoid accusations, finger-pointing, threats, and public condemnations that only serve to undermine the strategy, foment public unrest, and weaken the mutual trust and respect needed for effective collateral operations. With improved trust should come improved cooperation, increased shared intelligence, and the provision of US high-technology drones to Pakistan for Pakistan's employment of those assets in the campaign against terrorism.

Both the United States and Pakistan should take immediate and continued actions to improve military-to-military cooperation, as previously discussed, to rapidly bridge the current "coordination gap" in their dual efforts to combat terrorism.

Pakistan Focus

Pakistan needs to visibly tackle the challenges of providing good governance, improving security and economic viability if it is to restore the confidence in its future by the international community.⁵⁹

Recent successes in military operations in Swat and South Waziristan have helped to build international confidence and provided hope to many of the residents in these areas who have suffered under the abusive rule of the Taliban and endured the associated social and economic hardships. Following these successful operations, Pakistan will need to continue to establish favorable conditions within the remaining disputed areas through increased interaction and negotiations with the local populace. As conditions dictate, Pakistan should then conduct deliberate follow-on and focused operations to destroy the residual extremists and maintain the current strategic momentum.

Once security is established or re-established in the contested areas of the FATA, Pakistan can adopt a comprehensive plan to institute and stabilize the local governance of the tribal agencies. The plan should outline a set of related political processes designed to establish a centralized civilian authority to implement and sustain institutional, economic and political reforms.⁶⁰ These reforms include integrating the tribal areas into the federal constitutional framework; establishing political diversity and encouraging competition; improving employment opportunities; and providing constitutional rights and privileges as well as the civil protection of the court system to the residents of the FATA.⁶¹

Government initiatives need to continue to effect and expedite madrassas reform to ensure these educational institutions are brought within the framework of the mainstream educational system.

Conclusion

The AFPAK strategy is an important first step toward an integrated and comprehensive approach to a viable regional strategy. Although it breaks new ground in developing a whole-of-government approach for Afghanistan and Pakistan, it fails to recognize and adjust to the unique strategic and operational environments of each. This article examined a broad range of strategic requirements of the AFPAK strategy, focusing primarily on Pakistan, and identified several areas in need of improvement. Major proposed areas of improvement included: recant the premature announcement of the duration of the campaign; abandon the single unified strategic approach to the disparate insurgencies in the two diverse countries; recognize and accommodate other regional influences that profoundly affect the strategy; discard the unnecessary and provocative imposition of conditions on the proffered aid and support; cease military operations that violate Pakistan sovereignty; and curtail coarse and sweeping military operations that displace and cause the deaths of civilians and alienate the public. The reconciliation of policies and military operational approaches in critical areas of mutual concern is essential given the urgency of the issues at hand. In the process of enhancing mutual confidence, each side needs to demonstrate a greater understanding for the other's security concerns. Washington should demonstrate in practice and not just in words that it will no longer pursue an "America only" approach.⁶² Pakistan, for its part, needs to reform the political process in the FATA and integrate it with the rest of the nation, while aggressively pursuing the militants and undertaking major development activities in the FATA. In doing so, both nations can steady their oscillating relationship and move

toward a cooperative long-term alliance that improves the security of both nations, the region, and the world.

NOTES

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3. Ibid.

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An Appraisal of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy to Counter Terrorism

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