



Doubling Down on Civilian Engagement in Pakistan

How to Help The Country Help Itself

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For a decade, the United States sought to allure -- and increasingly cajole -- Pakistan into better military and intelligence cooperation. The United States believed that it needed Pakistan to secure Afghanistan, fight terrorism, and control nuclear proliferation. It also believed that Pakistan needed American support, even though the country often argues that China could easily fill the United States' shoes. All the while, U.S. policymakers simply resisted countenancing the simple reality that, security-wise, Pakistan and the United States hold fundamentally divergent priorities.

In the wake of frequent revelations this spring about Pakistan's extensive support of militant groups in Afghanistan and elsewhere, however, U.S. citizens and policymakers became increasingly wary of continuing to provide Pakistan military and financial assistance. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen's recent testimony that the Jalaluddin Haqqani network -- which has attacked the Indian and American embassies, as well as a number of other high-profile targets -- is a "virtual arm of the ISI" exacerbated congressional and public outrage towards Pakistan. Some members of the U.S. Congress, such as Senators Lindsey Graham and Carl Levin, are increasingly hesitant to continue writing checks to the country.

For its part, Pakistan has also been cooling to the United States. After the notorious January 2011 Raymond Davis affair, in which Davis, a CIA contractor, shot two men whom the ISI had hired to menace him, Pakistan slowed intelligence and counterterrorism partnership with the United States. Pakistan even ousted U.S. military trainers who were helping its Frontier Corps develop basic combat and survival skills. Then, following the unilateral May 2011 U.S. operation to kill Osama bin Laden, Pakistan called off cooperation indefinitely and arrested Pakistani citizens who had helped the CIA in the bin Laden operation. Americans were dismayed to learn that the ISI was more interested in ferreting out "traitors" than discerning how bin Laden could find sanctuary in a cantonment town near Pakistan's prestigious military academy at Kakul.

Oddly enough, all this may be a good thing. Washington's search for military and intelligence partnership in Pakistan has dominated the bilateral relationship to the exclusion of other power centers. Washington's support has buttressed the praetorian tendencies of the army, leaving civilian institutions

ever less capable of functioning effectively. In turn, these institutions are less and less able to fend off military aspirations to power. Meanwhile, the United States' military involvement in the region has even made it more difficult for the country to fight extremists, which would be seen by the Pakistani public as "fighting America's war."

The 2009 Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation aimed at rebalancing U.S. engagement somewhat toward civilian institutions. Due to execution problems, security issues, and budgetary shortfalls, however, the bill is moribund. As U.S. legislators increasingly view Pakistan as dangerously duplicitous, they may well decide to defund the program completely. This would be disastrous. Despite the widening gap in U.S. and Pakistani interests and objectives, the United States must continue to try and engage Pakistan, particularly its civilian institutions, in the hope that one day Pakistan will be more firmly controlled by civilians. That is the most likely path toward a Pakistan that is stable and at peace with itself and its neighbors.

No matter how challenging, in the immediate future, Washington will still have to engage Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies as much as possible. However, there are ways to adjust the parameters of the relationship and, indeed, normalize those ties to the greater benefit of everyone. For one, the United States should follow its standard protocol for high-level exchanges. The Pakistani chief of army staff should meet and communicate with his American counterpart, not with the secretary of state or the president, as he does now. Rather than consult on political issues, the two countries' military leadership should focus on security matters, such as the war in Afghanistan, continued joint training, and foreign military sales -- preferably all geared toward supporting Pakistan's counterterrorism and insurgency capabilities. It is worth remembering that the U.S. secretary of state meets with the military leadership of virtually no other country. Meanwhile, flagrant disregard for diplomatic protocol in almost every high-level exchange between Pakistan and the United States, is frustrating for even ordinary Pakistanis who are exhausted with U.S. pandering to their men on horseback, even if Americans are oblivious to it.

Alongside diminished contact with the military, the United States should engage Pakistan's civilian centers of power, including the parliament, the judiciary, educational institutions, and the economy. Pakistan's parliament desperately needs assistance of all kinds. Its parliamentarians lack fundamental legislative skills, are beholden to systems of patronage, and have little interest in advancing the lives of ordinary Pakistanis. Without a doubt, their performance will improve on its own the longer the country stays democratic, but much more can and should be done in the short term. Given the entrenched patronage networks around current national and even provincial-level politicians, the United States (and partner organizations such as the United Nations Development Program) should focus on fostering a commitment to sound and transparent policymaking among the younger generations of legislators.

Similarly, over time, voter education programs may help the public evaluate their politicians on the basis of the policies they deliver rather than on payments, bribes, and other perquisites. For example, many Pakistani voters are unlikely to select candidates dedicated to reforming water and electricity provision as long as they can use political connections to get their own homes serviced.

The United States and other partner countries have considerable technical and procedural expertise from which Pakistani parliamentarians can benefit. The latter are notoriously paralyzed when it comes to bringing the military and intelligence agencies to civilian account -- something necessary for a functioning democracy. Many politicians are intimidated into believing that they cannot scrutinize military affairs because of the "classified nature" of Pakistan's defense programs -- including the secretive nuclear program.

Parliamentarian genuflection to the army and the ISI after the United States' killing of bin Laden demonstrated legislators' reticence to even inflame national outrage at the army's failure to protect its territory. This was an opportunity missed to capitalize upon the seething outrage of Pakistanis and lessen the army's grasp on power. To an unschooled observer, their behavior was baffling. After all, the Pakistani parliament has two standing defense committees -- one for each house -- which are constitutionally designed to oversee the military. However, these committees rarely take up business that could remotely be characterized as defense-related. The parliament cannot even compel the army chief to provide a detailed account of his budget and the justifications for it. U.S. congressional committee staff could offer enormous assistance in helping Pakistan's legislative oversight bodies function with a modicum of efficacy.

Commitment to standard U.S. diplomatic protocol could also be very helpful in addressing this problem. Like other U.S. civilian officials traveling to Pakistan, when congressional delegations visit, they rarely meet their legislative counterparts. Instead, they insist on meeting Pakistan's president or the chief of army staff. This must end. Congressional delegations should be purpose-driven and focused on transferring skills to Pakistani legislators. For example, the Senate intelligence committee -- and its professional staff -- could offer Pakistanis key insights into how their own department functions, including the processes for providing civilians with security clearances to review intelligence agencies.

Recently, Pakistan passed legislation to devolve many ministerial concerns, such as education, healthcare, welfare, and development, to the provincial governments. This move will open up some new opportunities for engagement below the central government in Islamabad. With devolution, provincial legislators -- an even less capable cohort than their national counterparts -- have new-found resources and power. The United States, with its diverse array of state assemblies, could offer insight into successful local governance. For example, U.S. state legislatures use a variety of models to set funding and budgetary priorities to meet the demands and needs of their constituents. They could share the most relevant of those with their Pakistani counterparts. Even more helpful might be engaging with local politicians to help them deliver services --not patronage -- to the public.

Washington should try to strengthen Pakistan's rule of law, by, among other things, routinely providing police with training assistance and proper equipment. After all, bulletproof vests do not last forever. Meanwhile, Pakistan's judiciary is shambolic. Because judges are poorly paid and are not provided security, prosecutors are loath to take on high-profile cases involving organized crime or terrorism. Witnesses are wary of testifying because there is no witness protection program. Fearing reprisals, judges are often too terrified to convict. And confessions (frequently extracted through abuse if not torture) and witness testimony are usually the only evidence available, which makes cases easily

dismissible. Pakistan's prisons are overcrowded and, in many cases, are used as safe headquarters from which criminals and terrorists can manage operations.

There are no easy fixes to these systemic problems. However, the United States could partner with Pakistani educational institutions to set up forensic science training programs, which would help build the human capital needed for longer-term improvements. Indeed, even if the United could strengthen Pakistan's judicial system, its efforts would be useless if it did not also help establish educational institutions to train future lawyers, police, and forensic lab technicians. It is worth remembering that the most successful investment the United States has ever made in Pakistan was its huge investment in Lahore's University of Management Sciences, Pakistan's premier institution of higher learning. LUMS is self-sustaining and even offers scholarships for poorer students, which ensures that the school is not only for Pakistan's elite. The legacy of that kind of investment is enduring. Every year, such universities produce a new generation of young, smart, well-educated adults to serve their country.

Finally, Pakistan desperately needs trade, not aid, to generate job growth and retain its most promising minds. Unfortunately, U.S. lobbies have resisted giving Pakistan access to domestic textile markets. Yet helping the economy should be an urgent U.S. national security interest that trumps parochial concerns. The country's economy is not growing fast enough to accommodate its population growth. And, thanks to the global economic slowdown, Pakistan can no longer bank on remittances. Unemployment and underemployment are rampant, as is criminality. Providing new avenue for economic growth is good for Pakistan and the region.

Pakistan's challenges are myriad, and Washington's current engagement is counterproductive by most measures. But that does not mean that it should give up. Although there should be no illusions that the aforementioned suggestions will transform Pakistan over any useful time horizon -- if ever -- it is critical that Pakistan not follow the path of North Korea. North Korea is diplomatically and politically isolated without any incentive to remain within the community of nations. Instead, the United States should make every effort to creatively forge a new, bold, and sustainable civilian engagement strategy while normalizing its ties with Pakistan's military. Although democratization efforts may take a long time to bear fruit, if they ever do, one thing is clear: the most likely path toward a stable country involves empowering Pakistan's civilians to exert control over security and foreign policy. U.S. assistance to help Pakistanis do so is a high-stakes gamble worth taking.

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