

The American-Pakistani Cold War?

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On September 10, 2001, Pakistan was, for all intents and purposes, a rogue state. It was encumbered by numerous layers of sanctions pertaining to nuclear and missile proliferation, the 1998 nuclear tests, as well as sanctions that resulted from General Pervez Musharraf's 1999 coup. When then president Bill Clinton visited the subcontinent in 2000, he spent five days in India and a mere few hours in Pakistan. During his Pakistan visit, Clinton refused to shake Musharraf's hand and hectored the dictator

on the necessity of democracy. Pakistan was one of the three countries that recognized the odious Taliban regime, and it had by the fall of 2001 secured a long track record of supporting terrorism. Back in 1993, Pakistan teetered upon a U.S. government designation as a state that supported terrorism.

The gruesome crimes of 9/11 changed Pakistan's fortunes and those of its military dictator, Musharraf. By joining with the United States in its so-called war on terror, Musharraf was transformed from U.S. pariah to U.S. ally. Pakistan was relieved of its sanctions, reaped billions in loan forgiveness and loan rescheduling, benefited from more than \$20 billion in military and economic assistance as well as lucrative reimbursements for military operations on its purportedly sovereign soil. Most importantly, the tragedy of 9/11 afforded Pakistan the opportunity to rehabilitate itself among nations and stave off what Musharraf believed would be an Indian effort to take advantage of Pakistan's precarious position.

Those heady days are gone. Pakistan has not been celebrated as a light of moderation or even a reliable partner in the war on terrorism for several years. Now, American analysts and policy makers realize the United States and Pakistan have strategic interests that diverge starkly even while there are some important—albeit retrenching—issues upon which they agree. After ten years of precarious military, intelligence and other security cooperation between Pakistan and the United States, the two countries could not loathe each other more. Worse, as much as they despise each other, they each know that their security depends in varying degrees upon the other.

It has been difficult for the United States to grasp the limits of its national power and accept that it cannot transform Pakistan. For nearly a decade, Washington has used financial allurements and

strategic weapons systems to persuade Islamabad to renounce Islamist militancy as a tool of foreign policy. However, none of these inducements has yielded significant dividends. At long last, Washington has concluded that it cannot metamorphose Pakistan or the generals that have variously run and ruined the country. Nor can Washington meaningfully transform Pakistan's civilian leadership, which has shown consistent preference towards avarice over governance.

The time has come for the United States to adopt a more modest and sustainable relationship with the country aimed at managing it as a security risk rather than embracing absurd transformational goals. At the most fundamental level, the United States has one overarching goal: work to ensure that Pakistan does not become an Islamist variation of North Korea. That is, the United States should work with the international community to prevent Pakistan from becoming an inward-focused, hostile and aggressive nuclear-armed rogue state that turns to other threatening states in the international system as its sole source of sustenance and support. This requires sustainable and practical engagement rather than isolation. This will require the U.S. Congress to resist its understandable urge to simply cut Pakistan off. While this path is no doubt tempting in an election year and during a period of economic austerity, such instincts should be rebuffed.

Under the prevailing circumstances, the Cold War may offer important lessons for U.S. policy makers restructuring U.S. relations with Pakistan. First, during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union maintained diplomatic missions and contacts at all levels. Second, they continued ordinary contacts with military and intelligence liaisons. However, these engagements were with the obvious lucidity that the two states were competitors, not partners. The two states understood that their strategic interests were divergent and that they would operate against each other even if there were opportunities elsewhere to cooperate. Third, the United States invested in civil society where it could and with the modest hope that one day that system would change. Finally, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the world learned that it could manage the numerous problems stemming from the Soviet Union's vast nuclear and missile arsenal. The world did not end when the Soviet Union collapsed.

Pakistan is not the Soviet Union, of course. Still, the Cold War offers insights for how the United States might view Pakistan's place in its national-security strategy. First, while the two countries may share some common interests in counternarcotics, maritime security, energy security, global warming, water scarcity, peacekeeping missions and the like, they also clash over Pakistan's reliance upon Islamist terrorism under its ever-expanding nuclear umbrella. Second, the United States may increasingly target Pakistan's intelligence operatives and terrorist assets in and beyond the South Asian theater, be it through restricting travel or freezing financial assets of Pakistani citizens—officials and civilians alike—supporting terrorism or nuclear proliferation. The United States may even increasingly work with local authorities to arrest or otherwise eliminate such persons in third countries. Pakistan and the United States will almost certainly clash over groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban, particularly if Afghanistan and Pakistan become renewed sources of international terrorism. However, both countries need to sustain diplomatic, political, military, intelligence and law-enforcement ties to the extent that it is mutually beneficial.

Most importantly, by remembering that when the Soviet Union collapsed, the global order did not come under threat due to its nuclear arsenal, the United States and its partners can undercut Pakistan's most potent strategy for wresting political and financial rents from the international community: nuclear blackmail.

Pakistan continually menaces the international community by appearing to be an out-of-control state chock full of tactical nuclear weapons and ever-expanding fissile material production—and ready to use them as soon as the first Indian sepoy tiptoes across the international border armed with a slingshot.

While one cannot underestimate the possibility of further destabilization in Pakistan, the international community may in fact help incentivize Pakistan to fix its numerous governance problems by embracing the possibility that Pakistan can fail. Then perhaps Pakistan would begin taking the necessary steps to become the sovereign state that Pakistanis and the rest of the world alike want Pakistan to become.

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