

# Conflict & Security

## Domestic Disputes

### *Pakistani Internal Security*

C. Christine Fair and Peter Chalk

In the two and a half years following 9/11, Pakistan has emerged as an indispensable player in Washington's "global war on terrorism." Without comprehensive and effectual cooperation from Islamabad, it is impossible for the Bush administration to seriously degrade the operational capabilities of al Qaeda and affiliated Taliban remnants. Further, a stable and operative government accompanied by a revitalized civil society is essential to ensure durable success in the international effort to rehabilitate Afghanistan. While Pakistan has initially responded positively to U.S. requests to cooperate in the war on terror, by almost every measure the country's ability to sustain effective cooperation over the long term remains in question. Not only is Pakistan's internal law and order structure deficient and largely inutile, it is also riddled with corruption, a lack of cross-agency interoperability, and insufficient technical support and resources.

This essay focuses on Pakistan's internal security environment and expositis some of the crucial concerns that are confounding efforts to fortify the country's overall intelligence and law enforcement infrastructure. Current domestic arrangements are likely to remain inadequate and ineffective without extensive external support and concomitant monitoring from outside sovereign actors, such as the United

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States. Unlike *madrassah* reform, which has received wide attention in various venues, Pakistan's internal security remain neglected by the international community. Yet, as we argue here, there are several reasons why this matter requires the attention of the United States and others.

First, as noted above, full cooperation from Pakistan is fundamental to reducing the operational capabilities of al Qaeda and sympathizers who have taken refuge in Pakistan and in the interstices of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Second, Pakistan's internal security system impinges upon other enduring and important U.S. interests in the region. Beyond the question of Afghanistan, these include: extradition of suspected terrorists, combating money laundering and human trafficking, counter-narcotics operations (e.g. demand reduction and drug abuse control, alternative development, and poppy eradication), and the issue of Pakistani nationals detained in the United States for immigration-related matters.<sup>1</sup>

Third, the United States has a major incentive to narrow the possibility of an India-Pakistan conflict and ensure that terrorist groups are unable to exploit this threat for their own purposes. The danger of a conflict occurring was clearly demonstrated by the 13 December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament (alleged to have been conducted by groups backed by Islamabad), which triggered an extensive military build-up along the India-Pakistan border that nearly culminated in a limited inter-state conflict during mid-2002. The current thawing of Indo-Pakistan relations, at least at this juncture, does not merit diminishing attention to this issue.

While the recent meetings between the

ultra-hawkish Indian Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and a moderate faction of the All Party Hurriyat Conference of Kashmir are encouraging signs, they at best warrant cautious optimism. Because Pakistan-backed militants are not part of the negotiation process, they likely have the ability to abort this nascent détente. These so-called jihadists are thoroughly vested in the ongoing conflict, and they have little incentive to support a cease-fire. Just as importantly, Islamabad will be reluctant to move strategically away from the use of proxy fighters until it feels some degree of security with India.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, improving Pakistan's internal security environment will help fortify U.S.-led efforts in the war on terrorism and increase the likelihood of meeting other U.S. objectives within Pakistan. Moreover, such intervention will likely temper Indo-Pakistan risk scenarios.

**Background.** Despite Pakistan's pivotal role in the war on terrorism and South Asian regional stability, the country remains plagued by a multitude of extremist and criminal threats, many of which have direct impacts upon U.S. regional objectives. Terrorism of many varieties remains a particularly serious challenge, with random killings and bomb attacks (increasingly targeting U.S. and Western interests) emerging as almost daily occurrences over the last few years.<sup>3</sup>

Militant Islam has a history in Pakistan that has spanned more than two decades and has enjoyed nearly unbroken support from Islamabad's military and intelligence infrastructure. From the early 1980s onward, Pakistan was the main battlefield in which Arab states and Iran fought for influence by establishing and supporting opposing Sunni and Shi'a

groups and madrassahs. However, it was the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan that was directly responsible for the contemporary rise of extremist Islam in Pakistan. Both the United States and Pakistan, seeing this as the most effective way to battle the occupying Soviet forces, contributed to the development of an expansive *mujahedeen* infrastructure (complete with camps, indoctrination centers, and arms pipelines) during the 1980s. Unfortunately, these facilities were not dismantled upon Moscow's departure from Kabul and were, instead, appropriated by Pakistan and used to produce jihadist mercenaries who could be used to prosecute Islamabad's own foreign policy objectives in Indian-held Kashmir and Afghanistan.

As a result of these regional events and Pakistan's willingness to sponsor and employ proxies, a wide variety of militant organizations have assumed tremendous importance in the country. The large

*Jhangvi* (LeJ), *Sipah-e-Mohammad* and *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, and the Shi'a *Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan* (TJP), all especially active in Rawalpindi, Lahore and Multan. The anti-statist *Muttahida Quami Movement* (MQM) and its associated splinters, the *MQM-Haqiqi* (MQM-H) and *MQM-Altaf* (MQM-A)—all of which claim to be fighting for a separate Mohajir province in Sindh—have also caused serious problems, frequently engaging in internecine urban violence that has targeted both civilians and law enforcement personnel.

Historically, these sectarian militant groups operated against different targets from those outfits that were focused on Indian-held Kashmir - even though they often shared overlapping membership. However, since 9/11, groups that previously operated only in the Kashmir theater appear to have formed alliances with sectarian groups. One reported umbrella movement in this regard is *Lashkar-e-Omar* (Army of Omar—named after

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degree of independence enjoyed by these extremist groups has remained unchecked and, indeed, was only re-evaluated after the momentous events of 9/11, which forced Islamabad to review the explicit use of proxy Islamist groups as tools of state policy.

Sectarian and ethnic militant organizations have been at the forefront of much of the extremist activity in Pakistan, accounting for some 400 killings in the year 2001 alone.<sup>4</sup> Principal organizations of concern include the Sunni *Lashkar-e-*

Daniel Pearl's killer, Ahmed Omar Sheikh), which includes elements drawn from the three main groups operating in Kashmir—*Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT), *Harakat-ul-Mujahideen* (HuM), and *Jaish-e-Muhammad* (JeM)—and which has been tied to several recent attacks in Karachi.<sup>5</sup> Such coalition-building suggests a dangerous new dynamic to militant extremism in Pakistan, one that is working to extend considerably the operational range, scope, and tempo of individual groups acting in and from the country.

## The Impact of 9/11 and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Shortly after Musharraf's post-9/11 decision to align with the West, his administration adopted a pragmatic approach toward indigenously-based militants. While the Pakistani leader has unquestionably turned on jihadists linked to al Qaeda and some elements tied to the Taliban, his stand on Kashmiri extremists has been less clear. For example, despite outlawing major groups (e.g. LeT and JeM) operating across the Line of Control (LoC) in the disputed province, these organizations have reorganized, some simply changing names, and remain active and even sanctioned by Islamabad. The effectiveness of this approach has become increasingly questionable, not least because many of these organizations are deeply opposed to Musharraf's policy reversal on Afghanistan and his subsequent cooperation with the U.S. war on terrorism. Indeed, jihadist outfits are now moving to target the Pakistani leader himself, leading to at least three assassination attempts taking place in 2002-03.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, despite the widespread praise the Pakistani military has received for its cooperation in the war on terrorism, small cadres of Army personnel have recently been implicated in harboring fugitive al Qaeda members. It is now known, for instance, that Mohammad Sheikh Khalid—described by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the tactical mastermind behind Bin Laden's terror network—was in the “protective custody” of an active Major prior to his capture in early 2003.<sup>7</sup> Nearly six months after the arrest of Khalid, the Pakistan Army announced the detention of several low and mid-level army officers, including a lieutenant colonel, on charges of helping to coordinate the activities of al

Qaeda and facilitate links with groups such as JeM and LeJ.<sup>8</sup> While the military claims that externally based extremists have no support within its ranks beyond this “tiny cell,” the degree and form of latent assistance emanating from the security forces remains highly uncertain.<sup>9</sup>

Cooperation between Pakistan and the United States is hampered by several interrelated factors, most of which pivot around massive popular resentment over the Bush Administration's policies toward Pakistan and Afghanistan and perceived treatment of Pakistanis within the United States.<sup>10</sup> This ubiquitous vexation appears to have had a number of untoward consequences for U.S.-Pakistan cooperation.

First, hardened public sentiments against the United States and Musharraf have reportedly fostered an increased willingness to harbor Taliban and al Qaeda fugitives and hindered counterterrorist activities throughout Pakistan. Informed observers further attest that the surge in anti-Americanism has precipitated a rise in militant recruitment for Kashmiri and sectarian outfits despite the fact that these groups have been outlawed for the past two years.<sup>11</sup>

Second, such sentiments have undoubtedly helped fuel the success of the alliance of religious parties, the *Mutahida Majlis-i-Amal* (MMA), particularly in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), a critical state in the war on terrorism. The hardened resolve of the residents in these areas has seriously complicated efforts to apprehend fugitive terrorist suspects.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly disconcerting given the growing indications that foreign extremists connected to the Taliban and al Qaeda have relocated to the NWFP and Baluchistan and are using these areas to consolidate resources

for anti-Western attacks as well as renewed offensives in Afghanistan.

Third, and with direct consequences for Indo-Pakistani détente, is the growing risk that militants disenchanted with the Musharraf regime will be tempted to stage terrorist attacks deep inside Indian territory. Recent assassination attempts on Musharraf show that these groups remain a wildcard. A wide array of Pakistani and American analysts concur that, while some of these jihadist groups are still within the hold of the Interservices Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, many are not—having possibly developed their own sources of funding and intelligence. The main danger is that these organizations may decide to act according to their own

Syndicates have emerged in many cities, engaging in everything from document forgery and money laundering to drug smuggling and arms trafficking. The narcotics trade has proven to be an especially favored illicit activity, with dealers and sub-contractors in Karachi and Quetta playing a key role in the transportation of Afghan heroin to Central and Western European markets.<sup>13</sup> The country's most powerful organized crime entity is the Karachi mafia, which controls most of the international conduits used to transport South Asian opiates and has emerged as a key player in the smuggling of light weapons and explosives. Intelligence sources in Delhi believe that the Karachi syndicate has

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imperatives with total disregard for Pakistan's national interests. This situation is unnerving, not least given the aggressive posture adopted by India since the December 2001 attack on its national parliament and Delhi's explicit pursuit of a limited war doctrine. The United States still considers it a high priority to limit the impact of indigenously-based extremist groups on the Indo-Pakistan conflict.

**U.S. Interests Require Robust Pakistani Internal Security Structures.** While the anti-terrorist focus discussed above is important, additional problems within Pakistan have implications for U.S. regional objectives. Particularly serious in this regard is the endemic culture of organized crime.

established a working relationship with the Indian underworld and is currently providing safe haven to Ibrahim Dawood, the ostensible "Don" of the Bombay mob and one of the most wanted men in India.<sup>14</sup>

Another serious issue for the United States and the international community in general regards the admission that the prominent Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, sold atomic secrets to Iran, North Korea, Libya, and possibly others. Musharraf, in a recent statement, suggested that Khan engaged in a number of private transactions to enhance his personal wealth, amassing a fortune worth millions of dollars in property and overseas bank account.<sup>15</sup> If Musharraf's explanation is remotely

meritorious, it suggests a very serious malfunction of key customs and airport-based agencies, as well as other prominent security institutions such as Military Intelligence and the ISI.

### **Critical Problems within Pakistan's Internal Security Establishments.**

Unfortunately, Pakistan has only limited capability to deal with these myriad threats. The police lack basic skills in collecting evidence, following chains of custody, and instituting "end-to-end" investigative operations. The state has no centralized criminal database and, until recently, no forensic laboratories were available for collecting and assembling evidence against criminal or terrorist suspects. The immigration system was equally archaic until the infusion of U.S. computerized systems at major airports, which have only recently begun implementing a digitized system for tracking those entering and leaving the country (all previous records had been hardcopy). Land borders pose an even greater challenge, particularly in the remote northern areas where frontier posts are largely devoid of any formal regulations or controls.

Furthermore, Pakistani police, with their wealth of local intelligence, are inadequately linked with the principal federal intelligence collection asset, the ISI, and with major U.S. institutions operating in the country such as the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Journalists who have interacted with police in Karachi report that the ISI frequently fails to disseminate operational intelligence to local officials but always expects free access to law enforcement information, leading to a relationship that is neither balanced nor, indeed, "two-way."<sup>16</sup>

Exacerbating the situation is a perva-

sive and endemic culture of corruption. Despite Musharraf's post-1999 commitment to recover approximately \$4 billion from the country's politicians and industrialists as part of a vigorous accountability campaign, problems continue to plague the political and criminal justice sectors. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), for instance, specifically excludes serving judges and, according to Transparency International, is mostly used as a tool to discredit and undermine Musharraf's political opponents.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Pakistan is in dire need of judicial reform as both federal and local officials are subject to coercion and manipulation by political authorities and elites.<sup>18</sup> Well-connected individuals can easily draw on that rapport to extricate themselves from legal difficulties. Moreover, in many cases dealing with suspected terrorists (as in the Daniel Pearl trial), the ISI has actively suppressed evidence that could be used to implicate intelligence officials.

In short, Pakistan's internal security forces are continually being hampered from within by poor human and technical resources and from the outside by political and military establishments that interfere in order to protect their own self interests and assets.<sup>19</sup> Much of the reason for this failure undoubtedly stems from the entrenched feudalism that exists within Pakistani society and which privileges blood ties and Islamic and tribal loyalties over respect for the state and its institutions. As a result, feudal family structures and their political allies have assumed a significant role in the internal ordering of the country, preventing the rise of a fairly progressive ruling urban elite.

**Limited Improvements Since 9/11.** Cognizant that Pakistan needs substantial help to become a meaningful

coalition partner in the war against terrorism, the United States has made extensive investments in the country's law enforcement infrastructure.<sup>20</sup> A principal component of these external assistance efforts is the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Law Enforcement (JWG-CTLE), which was convened by former Minister of the Interior Moinuddin Haider. The forum's inaugural meeting was held in Washington D.C. in May 2002 and cov-

and perhaps more importantly, what leverage they have on central budgetary policy. Currently, the military consumes the lion's share of the country's national expenditure—29 percent according to official estimates, with actual figures likely much higher—an allocation largely justified by the need to ensure a continued armed presence along the LoC separating Indian and Pakistani-held Kashmir.<sup>22</sup> With the army's power base firmly entrenched as a result of the various con-

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ered a range of issues including: counter-narcotics, counterterrorism, extradition, money laundering, human trafficking, reducing demand for illegal substances, alternative development and poppy eradication, police and legal system reform, and issues pertaining to the repatriation of Pakistani nationals held on visa violations.<sup>21</sup> The second meeting of what is to become an annual affair was held on April 15, 2003, again in Washington D.C.

While the JWG-CTLE has made a promising start—if only by highlighting the extent to which Pakistan's counterterrorism and law enforcement mechanisms remain under-resourced and ineffectual—the Pakistani government needs to supplement their efforts by reforming its internal security apparatus. Somewhat problematically, however, the stance of the current Minister of the Interior on this critical issue is unknown.

It also remains to be seen how influential the Working Group's chief advocates are in the decision-making process or,

stitutional changes introduced by President Musharraf in 2002 (including, notably, a military-dominated National Security Council that has far-reaching executive powers) and the dearth of substantive political opposition from the newly elected National Assembly, there is little prospect of a formal change in policy towards Kashmir (liberation of the disputed state remains the marrow of national patriotism for the bulk of the Pakistani population).<sup>23</sup> Consequently, without consistent involvement, pressure, and monitoring from the United States and others, it is unlikely that a truly effective program of law enforcement reform will be implemented.

**Conclusion.** Washington clearly has an active interest in ensuring the continued momentum of internal security development in Pakistan. Establishing viable police, immigration, and judicial structures is not only necessary for shoring up Islamabad's own domestic stability and guarding against the possibility of a col-

lapsed (and nuclear-armed) state, it is also likely to help considerably with general confidence-building measures throughout the region. Indeed, one of the main points of tension between India and Pakistan revolves around the former's criticism of the latter's inability to control cross-border (but internally-based) jihadist extremism and failure to extradite known criminal and terrorist fugitives. Progress on these fronts, which cannot occur without effective systems of law enforcement, would undoubtedly go a long way toward stabilizing Indo-Pakistan relations.

One of the key challenges for the United States, therefore, as it seeks to define future policy towards Pakistan, is how best to support the current advocates of law enforcement reform—both in the context of their interaction with government officials as well as the population as a whole.

Clearly, Washington cannot be expected to take full responsibility for funding law enforcement reform across the board. Key areas of immediate priority will thus need to be identified and delineated in terms of likely cost effectiveness. In addition, a comprehensive, long-term program of internal security development will have to be mapped out and used to guide future investments in counterterrorist and crime fighting initiatives. Finally, the United States needs to direct a concerted, high-level lobbying effort at Islamabad—logically under the auspices of the JWG-CTLE—encouraging the Musharraf government to move toward a more fiscally and operationally balanced internal-external national security interplay.

**Author's Note:** The views expressed by the authors in this article are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of RAND or its sponsors.

#### NOTES

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