

After the Breakup: What Next for U.S.-Pakistan Relations

By C. Christine Fair

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Since 9/11, the United States and Pakistan have struggled to sustain military and intelligence cooperation. Their efforts long strained under diverging priorities, unmet expectations and opposing strategic interests. After the unilateral U.S. military raid that resulted in Osama bin Laden's death, Pakistan has arrested this cooperation indefinitely. This may be a good thing.

To Washington, military and intelligence cooperation has dominated the relationship. The [Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation](#) aimed to rebalance U.S. engagement towards civilian institutions but is moribund. As U.S. legislators increasingly view Pakistan skeptically, funding for that program is doubtful. Washington's cupidity for Pakistan's men on horseback has vitiated Washington's creativity to develop a sustainable relationship with Pakistan to secure U.S. interests.

Worse, Washington's khaki addiction undermines its own interests. Many Pakistanis see their army as a "rental army." Pakistanis believe the Pakistan Taliban insurgency is due to their army's cooperation with the United States rather than blowback from decades of using Islamist militants to secure Pakistan's interests in India and Afghanistan. Pakistan's support to the U.S. global war on terror has motivated some of Pakistan's erstwhile proxies to rebel against the state and under the banner of the Pakistani Taliban. Pakistan's military alliance with the United States has dissuaded it from acting against these militants due to the perception that it is "fighting America's war." Finally, in unflinchingly supporting Pakistan's military, Washington has buttressed authoritarianism and left civilian institutions less able to fend against the military's praetorian tendencies.

Washington should try to engage with Pakistan's military; however, military relations should be normalized to high-level exchanges, consultation on issues like the war in Afghanistan, continued training and foreign military sales -- preferably channeled to support Pakistan's ability to counter terrorism and insurgency. Increasingly, America should engage Pakistan's emerging civilian centers of power.

Pakistan's parliament needs assistance. Parliamentarians -- while improving through the simple fact that democracy has survived -- lack fundamental legislative skills. They cannot exercise parliamentary powers which could slowly bring the military and intelligence agencies to account, even though there are standing defense committees in both houses, which are constitutionally empowered to do so. Many politicians claim that they cannot scrutinize military affairs because of the "classified nature" of Pakistan's defense programs -- including its secretive nuclear program.

The United States, working with parliamentary countries and multi-lateral institutions like the UNDP, can help. Rather than congressional delegations rotating through Pakistan to pander to their constituents, Congressional delegations should be purpose-driven. For example, the Senate intelligence committee -- and its professional staff -- could offer Pakistanis key insights into how this organization functions, including processing for providing civilians with security clearances to review intelligence affairs.

Washington should focus resources upon expanding Pakistan's parliamentary capacities at provincial levels, too. With devolution, the provinces have new found resources and power with even less capable cohorts of legislators. America has a diverse array of state assemblies which could offer important insights into local governance under constrained resources.

Washington should work to fortify Pakistan's institutions of rule of law by providing coherent police training assistance. However, it cannot provide Pakistan's police with a forensics capability without a human capital base to support such an effort. Establishing educational institutions dedicated to building basic science and forensic training is a necessary component. Even if police could be trained (a big if) to collect forensic evidence, without proper labs and evidence storage such efforts are absolutely useless.

Pakistan's judiciary is shambolic. There are too few judges who are poorly paid and lacking security. Prosecutors are loath to take on high profile cases involving organized crime or terrorism. Witnesses are wary of testifying and judges are often too terrified to convict. Police inability to build a forensics case means that confessions and witness testimony are often the only evidence. Judges can easily dismiss a case if there is evidence of coercion and/or if witnesses are unwilling to come forward. And Pakistan's prisons are overcrowded, decrepit institutions of learning for criminals and terrorists alike.

The most successful investment the United States has ever made in Pakistan is Lahore's University of Management Sciences (LUMS), the premier institution of higher learning. It offers scholarships to poorer students ensuring that is not a school only for Pakistan's elites. Pakistan needs more of these institutions.

Pakistan also needs trade, not aid, to generate job growth. Notably, American lobbies have resisted giving Pakistan access to U.S. textile markets. Helping Pakistan's economy should be an urgent U.S. national security interest that trumps parochial lobbies concerns.

The United States should seize this opportunity. The most likely path to a stable Pakistan involves empowering civilians to exert control over its security and foreign policies.

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