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Pakistani Power Play

If the United States wants to curb terrorism and nuclear proliferation, it needs to fundamentally rethink its relationship with Pakistan.

BY C. CHRISTINE FAIR | NOVEMBER 5, 2012



Long after the last U.S. or NATO soldier leaves Afghanistan -- and no matter who wins on Tuesday -- Pakistan will continue to present fundamental challenges to U.S. regional interests and international security.

The self-proclaimed "land of the pure" has used Islamist militants as tools of foreign policy since its earliest days of independence. In the fall of 1947, tribal marauders from Pakistan's Pashtun areas, benefiting from extensive government support, rushed into the princely state of Kashmir in

hopes of seizing it for Pakistan. Leaders of the newborn Pakistani state feared that the king of the Muslim-dominant state of Kashmir would seek independence or agree to join India. The strategy triggered the very event Islamabad was trying to prevent: The king, watching with apprehension as his own security forces failed to stave off the attackers, sought India's help. India agreed to come to his aid, provided that the *maharaja* join India's dominion. Indian troops thus joined the fight to defend its newly acquired territory. The eventual ceasefire left the princely state divided between the dominions of India and Pakistan.

To wrest all of Kashmir from India, Pakistan has since then raised and nurtured numerous Islamist militant groups. In 1989, an indigenous insurgency erupted in Kashmir in response to gross Indian malfeasance. Pakistan swiftly took advantage of the surge of so-called *mujahideen* who had trained in Afghanistan fighting the Soviets. Pakistan's "foreign" militants overtook the Kashmiri insurgency. By the mid-1990s, the violence in the valley was mostly conducted by Pakistani terrorists -- predominantly ethnic Punjabis -- ostensibly on behalf of Kashmiris.

Given Pakistan's unrelenting pursuit of Kashmir, its inability to coerce concessions from a militarily superior India and its failure to muster international diplomatic and political support for its agenda, Islamabad has increasingly relied upon its expanding nuclear umbrella to advance its goals. Today, Pakistan deters the Indians from responding militarily to any number of Pakistani outrages by invoking the ever-present possibility of nuclear escalation. Nuclear weapons have also served to ensure that the United States will always intervene in an Indo-Pakistan crisis to preclude it from escalating to full-scale war.

"Asymmetric conflict under the nuclear umbrella" has served Pakistan well. Pakistan has been able to rely upon thousands of Islamist terrorists to prosecute its policies in India as well as Afghanistan with impunity, confident that its nuclear program makes any punitive response infeasible. The United States, Pakistani leaders know, will have difficulty isolating, punishing or even containing Pakistan in response, if for no other reason than the United States needs to remain engaged in order to monitor Pakistan's discomfiting nuclear program.

Pakistani leaders learned the lessons of 1989 when the United States finally sanctioned Pakistan for nuclear proliferation. Throughout the 1980s, Washington bent its own laws so that it could continue providing security assistance and weapons to Pakistan during the anti-Soviet jihad with full knowledge that Pakistan was developing a nuclear weapon. When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988, the United States was no longer dependent upon Pakistan and pursued anew its nonproliferation objectives in South Asia. Finally in 1990, Washington imposed proliferation-related sanctions that had been deferred under the Pressler Amendment. Soon thereafter, Washington denounced Pakistan for its reliance upon Islamist terrorists in Kashmir and elsewhere and even threatened to declare it a state sponsor of terrorism. In 1999, following Pervez Musharraf's military coup, the United States applied coup-related sanctions. On Sept. 10, 2001, Pakistan was a virtual pariah state encumbered by layers of nuclear and missile-proliferation sanctions and was viewed suspiciously for its close ties to the Taliban and dozens of Islamist terror groups.

As the current war winds down in Afghanistan, Pakistan knows full well that the United States is deeply frustrated with its duplicitous behavior. Having taken billions in military assistance with

the explicit purpose of supporting the U.S. war in Afghanistan, Pakistan has supported the very forces killing Americans and their allies. Howsoever discordant U.S. and Pakistan interests are and will remain, Pakistan wants to keep the United States -- and its checkbook -- around for a while longer. And it has a shrewd strategy to ensure that this happens.

Far from accommodating U.S. concerns, Pakistan has chosen a path of brazen confrontation. It refuses to shut down the international terrorist proxies in its employ: The murderous Lashkar-e-Taiba, Islamist militants dedicated to fighting India in Kashmir, operates openly. Its leaders routinely address large crowds in an effort to develop a political presence. Hafez Saeed, the head of the terrorist syndicate, taunted U.S. officials by offering to provide relief to Hurricane Sandy victims. Pakistan's support to the Taliban and the Haqqani network continues unfettered. It has shown no interest in conducting a genuine investigation into how Osama bin Laden could hide for so long in a cantonment town near Pakistan's famed military academy. The only person Pakistan has arrested was a physician who helped the United States eliminate the notorious al Qaeda chief.

Change is floating in the air. The recent U.S. move to designate the Haqqani Network as a foreign terrorist organization and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's refusal to certify that Pakistan is making progress toward ending support for Islamist militant groups are important signs that Washington is exhausted with Pakistan's chicanery.

As U.S.-Pakistani relations spiral downward, Pakistan has publicly pursued tactical nuclear weapons. These weapons are a response to Indian doctrinal evolution toward a limited war capability called Cold Start, which would allow India to quickly mobilize in the wake of a Pakistani terror attack and seize Pakistani territory before the international community galvanizes to diffuse the crisis. India could then use that seized territory to extract concessions on Kashmir from a weakened Pakistan. Tactical nuclear weapons are therefore intended to undermine India's ability to prosecute Cold Start without fears of Pakistani nuclear escalation. These weapons would also ensure that the United States becomes involved even earlier in a crisis to force Indian restraint.

There is a further insidious element to Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons program. Pakistan knows full well that even if its weapons are relatively safe from a domestic threat while in garrison, they are extremely vulnerable once forward deployed during a crisis. Pakistan also knows that the United States knows this. Thus this development will undercut any impetus in the United States to deal forthrightly with Pakistan's addiction to jihadist proxies, because of a need to keep an eye on this moving nuclear ball.

A Risky Agenda

The United States must frankly concede that it has subsidized and incentivized Pakistan to adopt this insane path to security. Pakistan's security managers believe that the United States cannot punish Pakistan for its use of terrorism as a policy tool -- but this is exactly what the United States must do. While this is not a risk-free proposition, the next administration should consider taking the following steps to deprive Pakistan of the coercive power it covets.

First, the United States must recognize that Pakistan's nuclear weapons coerce both India and the United States. U.S. intervention in the region's frequent crises has shielded Pakistan from bearing the direct cost of its misadventures.

The United States must remove itself from the Indo-Pakistan equation by declaring that it no longer entertains Pakistan's central claims on Kashmir. Pakistan was not entitled to Kashmir -- the legality of Pakistan's claims is specious and always has been. The king of Kashmir had a right to accede to India, which he exercised. The accession was prompted by the invasion of Pakistani marauders that enjoyed extensive direct civilian and military support.

Equally important, the United States should rubbish any notion that Pakistan has a positive role to play in ameliorating the suffering of Kashmiris, due to the decades of terrorism it has sponsored in Kashmir and beyond. The United States should instead focus its energies on persuading New Delhi to make right by the reasonable and constitutional demands of its Kashmiri citizenry. This will put India on the spot to follow through and consolidate a hard-won peace.

Second, the United States needs to make it clear that it will hold Pakistan responsible for any kind of proliferation of nuclear materials that occurs, whether from accident, theft, an insidious inside operation, or from a state decision to provide them to state or non-state actors. The United States should make it extremely clear that Pakistan will be held responsible for any terrorist attack conducted with fissile material with Pakistan's signature. There should be no scope for plausible deniability.

Third, the United States should stop seeking to buy Pakistan off with civilian aid or military assistance. This has not worked. Given the level of dysfunction in U.S. aid programs, the vast corruption in Pakistan, and popular anti-Americanism fueled both by U.S. actions and Pakistani officialdom, there is little these programs can accomplish except squandering treasure. Instead, the United States should focus on what it can do: facilitate trade and investment, increase the availability of scholarships for students, and encourage Pakistan to clean up its economic act by withdrawing support for the next tranche of IMF bailouts without signs of progress. Washington should provide military assistance only when it serves U.S. goals, such as providing equipment and training that improves Pakistan's ability to fight insurgents and terrorism.

Fourth, the Americans must communicate directly with Pakistanis. All too often, Pakistani officials promote a highly stylized version of the truth that aims to demonstrate American perfidy and exaggerate Pakistani exertions. The Americans need to be blunt with the Pakistani public about the nature of their state's nuclear jihad habit, push back on popular fictions, and do so in vernacular languages as well as English.

Finally, the drone program is currently unsustainable. Both the CIA and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate, Pakistan's premier spy agency, have conspired for their own reasons to keep this most public program "covert." This is absurd. Every Pakistani knows that drone strikes take place. Unfortunately, the Americans have no ability to influence the perceptions of this weapon system because it refuses to make the program public. Instead, Pakistanis receive what passes as information from ISI-influenced commentators and Taliban

spokesmen who overstate the civilian casualties, minimize terrorist casualties, obfuscate Pakistani involvement in the program, and opine that the Americans are trampling Pakistan's (nonexistent) sovereignty in the tribal areas.

The United States must be more accountable and transparent, and it must force the ISI to do the same. Congress must be engaged publicly in providing oversight and accountability for the program. Owing to its classified nature, perhaps the Senate Intelligence Committee and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence are the best venues for this (some [media reports](#) suggest that the Senate Intelligence Committee is already playing this role in some measure). U.S. embassy personnel in Pakistan must be able to say what happened in any given strike, state who was killed, what the targeted individuals did that made them "drone worthy," and state clearly what role the Pakistani government in that strike. Equally important, when individuals are genuinely innocent, the United States must apologize immediately and provide compensation to the aggrieved. The only way this program can continue is if the legal, technical, humanitarian, and ethical issues are resolved and if the Pakistanis are public partners in the effort.

All of these options have risks. But the next administration should also understand that the status quo also has risks. Continuing along the current course will likely lead to further international terrorism and nuclear proliferation, and the obvious implication that the United States enabled both.

A. MAJEED/AFP/Getty Images

C. Christine Fair is assistant professor at Georgetown University's Security Studies Program in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. Follow her at @CChristineFair.