

**Testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of
Representatives, “Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding and Engaging
Regional Stakeholders”**

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March 31, 2009**

I will discuss elements of a U.S. regional diplomatic strategy to help stabilize Afghanistan and Pakistan, focusing most of my remarks on India–Pakistan tensions and how we might encourage confidence-building between these historical rivals. I will also discuss the need for Pakistan to change its regional security perceptions and suggest ways for the U.S. to encourage such a shift in thinking.

In his speech last Friday, President Obama provided a clear signal that his Administration intends to dedicate the time, resources, and, most important, U.S. leadership necessary to stabilize the region and contain the terrorist threat in South Asia. President Obama presented a well-reasoned case for why the U.S. needs to remain committed to the region, reminding the American people that terrorists responsible for the attacks on September 11, 2001 (and subsequent international attacks) are still in Pakistan and continue to threaten regimes there and in Afghanistan. Until Pakistan and Afghanistan are stable and no longer vulnerable to these extremist forces, vital U.S. national security interests will be at risk.

Administration officials said the new plan reflects a shift in U.S. strategy toward more regional diplomacy and civilian aid to both countries. In reality, the plan builds on many of the same policies the Bush Administration pursued, although the Obama team appears more focused on establishing benchmarks for the Afghan government to root out corruption within its ranks and for the Pakistan

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government to improve its efforts against terrorists within its borders. President Obama supports a vast increase in non-military assistance to the Pakistani people (even in the midst of the global economic downturn), but also explained that the U.S. would no longer provide a “blank check” to the Pakistani military and would expect more cooperation in combating the Taliban and other extremist groups. The President called the Pakistani tribal areas the source of the greatest danger to the American people.

A regional strategy involves identifying and nurturing genuine allies in the effort to stabilize Afghanistan, while isolating those intent on undermining the international coalition’s goals. General David Barno, in his testimony to this subcommittee last Thursday, framed a regional strategy in a similar way, saying we need to “expand U.S. influence with a regional circle of friends and diminish the influence of enemies of the U.S.”

This raises the difficult question of how to create an effective partnership against terrorism with Pakistan when some within the Pakistani security establishment are unconvinced that a Taliban-free Afghanistan is in their own national security interest. The links to Taliban elements within Pakistan’s security forces occur even as Pakistani soldiers fight extremists along the border with Afghanistan and Pakistani civilians and security forces alike suffer from repeated terror attacks across the country. Events over the last four days in Pakistan, including a suicide bombing of a mosque in the tribal areas last Friday that left over 50 dead and a gun attack on a police training facility in Lahore on Monday that killed at least 26, demonstrate the increasingly precarious and volatile situation in Pakistan. Still, there remains a gap between U.S. and Pakistani expectations for Afghanistan. Pakistan still views parts of the Taliban as supportive of its own regional interests, especially in the event the coalition forces depart Afghanistan. This gap undermines U.S. goals in Afghanistan and threatens the viability and long-term sustainability of U.S.–Pakistan ties.

Transforming the Pakistan–Afghanistan Relationship

President Obama has committed to pursuing a trilateral framework with Afghan and Pakistani leaders. The meetings in Washington between the U.S. Secretary of State and the Afghan and Pakistani foreign ministers last month was a useful first step in the process. This framework recognizes that Pakistan and Afghanistan are inextricably tied through shared borders, history, culture, and commerce, creating an opportunity for greater collaboration between the two nations in the interest of stability and prosperity. The strategy further recognizes that cross-border extremist movements present a serious threat to both nations. Al-Qaeda’s growing capabilities and the insurgency in Afghanistan cannot be addressed effectively until the sanctuaries in Pakistan are shut down. In turn, Pakistan cannot expect to address growing internal terrorist threats or to expand economic development without a stable and friendly Afghanistan.

The U.S. must change security perceptions in the region, turning Afghanistan and Pakistan away from zero-sum geopolitical calculations that fuel religious extremism and terrorism and toward a focus on enhancing cooperation and regional integration. Efforts such as the Peace Jirga process started in 2007; the trilateral military commission between NATO, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; and the establishment of border-crossing centers that are jointly manned by NATO, Afghan, and Pakistani intelligence and security officials are useful initiatives that can begin the process of changing regional security perceptions.

India–Pakistan Ties

A transformation of Pakistan–Afghanistan ties can only take place in an overall context of improved Pakistani–Indian relations that enhances Pakistani confidence in its regional position. Washington should avoid falling into the trap of trying directly to mediate the decades-old Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir, however. The U.S. is more likely to have a positive impact in terms of defusing Indo-Pakistani tensions if it plays a quiet role in prodding the two sides to resume talks that had made progress from 2004 to 2007. Through this dialogue, the two sides strengthened mutual confidence by increasing people-to-people exchanges, augmenting annual bilateral trade to over \$1 billion, launching several cross-border bus and train services, and liberalizing visa regimes to encourage travel between the two countries.

There was even progress on the vexed Kashmir issue. In 2006, then-President Musharraf and Prime Minister Singh had begun to craft their statements on Kashmir in ways that narrowed the gap between their countries' long-held official positions on the disputed territory. For instance, Musharraf declared in December 2006 that Pakistan would give up its claim to Kashmir if India agreed to a four-part solution that involves 1) keeping the current boundaries intact and making the Line of Control (LOC) that divides Kashmir irrelevant; 2) demilitarizing both sides of the LOC; 3) developing a plan for self-governance of Kashmir; and 4) instituting a mechanism for India and Pakistan to jointly supervise the region. Musharraf's plan followed Singh's call in March 2006 for making the LOC "irrelevant" and for a "joint mechanism" between the two parts of Kashmir to facilitate cooperation in social and economic development.

The resumption of India–Pakistan talks now hinges on Pakistani steps to shut down the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), the group responsible for last November's terrorist attacks in Mumbai. If Pakistan takes decisive action to close this group down and to prosecute the individuals involved in the attacks, Indo–Pakistani talks would likely resume, and the two sides could pick up the threads of where they left off in early 2007.

India's Role in Afghanistan

Continued Pakistani ambivalence toward the Taliban stems from its concern that India is trying to encircle Pakistan by gaining influence in Afghanistan. Pakistani security officials calculate that the Taliban offers the best chance for countering India's regional influence. Pakistan believes that ethnic Tajiks in the Afghan government receive support from New Delhi and that India foments separatism in Pakistan's Baluchistan province from its Afghan consulates near the Pakistan border. It is in India's interest to ensure that its involvement in Afghanistan is transparent to Pakistan. The U.S. also has a role to play in addressing forthrightly Pakistani claims about India's role in Afghanistan and dismissing those accusations that may be exaggerated or misinformed.

India has built close ties with Afghanistan over the past six years and has become a major donor for the reconstruction of the country, pledging over \$1.2 billion. New Delhi has developed a wide array of political contacts and provided assistance for the new parliament building and a major highway in Afghanistan's Nimruz province. An estimated 4,000 Indians are currently in Afghanistan working on development projects. India has sent about 500 Indo–Tibetan border police to guard its workers following attacks, such as an April 12, 2008 suicide bombing that killed two Indian engineers in Nimruz. India blames the attacks on Taliban militants backed by Pakistani intelligence.

India shares the international community's goal of promoting a stable democracy in Afghanistan that is free of Taliban influence. U.S. diplomacy must demonstrate that collaboration between the U.S., India, and Afghanistan to fight terrorism does not mean the three sides are colluding against Pakistan.

Gauging Pakistani Counterterrorism Cooperation

A central part of the Obama Administration's strategy is focused on establishing benchmarks, or metrics, to gauge Pakistan's role in fighting al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists. The U.S. should work with Pakistan to develop a new strategic perception of the region based on economic integration and cooperation with neighbors and tougher policies toward terrorists, including severing official ties with all militant organizations and taking steps to close down militant training camps. Washington needs to demonstrate that it is interested in establishing a long-term partnership with Pakistan but will not abandon efforts to build strategic ties with India as well. The U.S. should indicate that it values its relationships with Pakistan and India equally and will not choose between the historical rivals.

The re-doubling of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan should help convince Pakistanis that America will not repeat its past mistake of turning its back on South Asia like it did in the early 1990s. This fateful decision still haunts U.S.–Pakistani relations and perpetuates a debilitating distrust between our two countries.

In turn, Pakistan must end its dual policies of fighting some terrorists while supporting others. The front-page story on continued Pakistani links to the Taliban and other terrorists targeting coalition forces in Afghanistan that ran in the March 26 *New York Times* indicates the enormous challenge the U.S. faces in seeking a counterterrorism partnership with Pakistan. U.S. officials have long been aware that Pakistani security officials maintain contacts with the Afghan Taliban and related militant networks. Pakistani officials argue that such ties are necessary to keep tabs on the groups. There is growing recognition by U.S. officials, however, that Pakistan's contacts with these groups involve much more than "keeping tabs" on them. There is mounting evidence that Pakistani security officials support, and even guide, the terrorists in planning their attacks and evading coalition forces.

This disturbing fact was brought home last spring when U.S. intelligence agencies apparently intercepted messages in which Pakistani army chief General Kayani referred to Afghan militant commander Jalaluddin Haqqani as a "strategic asset." Jalaluddin Haqqani is a powerful independent militant leader who operates in the border areas between the Khost province in Afghanistan and the North Waziristan agency of Pakistan's tribal border areas. He has been allied with the Taliban for nearly 15 years, having served as tribal affairs minister in the Taliban regime in the late 1990s.

The Haqqani network has reportedly been behind several high-profile attacks in Afghanistan, including a truck bombing that killed two U.S. soldiers in Khost in March 2008 and the storming of the Serena Hotel in Kabul during a high-level visit by Norwegian officials in January 2008. Credible media reports, quoting U.S. officials, further reveal a Pakistani intelligence link to the Haqqani network's planning and execution of a suicide-bomb attack against India's embassy in Kabul last July that left over 50 Afghan civilians and two senior Indian officials dead. So while Pakistani military leaders may consider Haqqani a "strategic asset," the international coalition considers him a ruthless terrorist enemy of the Afghan people and of the coalition forces fighting to protect them.

Continued links between extremists and elements of the Pakistani security establishment have led to confusion both within the security services and among the broader Pakistani population about the

genuine threat to the nation. This ambivalence toward extremist groups fuels conspiracy theories against outsiders (mainly India and the U.S.) that are aired in the Pakistani media and lead to a public discourse that diminishes the threat posed by terrorists.

To end this vicious cycle, the Pakistani army must fully break its links to terrorist groups and recognize that its own interests as a unified and stable institution will ultimately be jeopardized unless it reins in individuals who are pressing an extremist agenda.

Strengthen Pakistani Democratic Forces

Even as the Obama team sets benchmarks to gauge the Pakistani military's commitment to uprooting terrorism from the region, it needs to promote civilian democracy and demonstrate its support for the common Pakistani. In the current environment of extremism and terrorism, Pakistani politicians are often powerless to bring change for fear of violent retaliation. The assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007 is a stark example of the dangerous forces at play in Pakistan.

The capitulation of the government of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), led by the Awami National Party (ANP), to the pro-Taliban forces in the Swat valley is another example of the violent intimidation of the secular forces in the country. Prior to the Swat valley agreement, several ANP politicians, including party leader Asfandiyar Wali Khan, were targeted for assassination by pro-Taliban forces. Until the security situation improves in Pakistan, it will be difficult for civilian politicians and civil society leaders to make bold policy moves toward building civil society and democratic institutions. Pakistani civilian leaders need and deserve U.S. assistance. Tripling non-military assistance to Pakistan, as President Obama has supported, is a critical component of bolstering the Pakistani state against the forces of extremism.

Pakistan is at a critical juncture. The Obama Administration is demonstrating a willingness to invest significant resources to help the country become a prosperous, peaceful and thriving state. But achieving this goal requires Pakistan's leaders to adjust their own regional security perceptions and to view the internal terrorist threat as urgently as their counterparts in Washington do. Only through a strong and trusting U.S.–Pakistan partnership can Pakistan stabilize its economy and face down extremists bent on destroying its tolerant traditions, retarding its growth and development, and isolating the country from the global community.

What the U.S. Should Do

The U.S. should take a more active role in ensuring Indian activities in Afghanistan are transparent to Pakistan. The U.S. should seek to allay Pakistani concerns, yet make clear that it will not tolerate perpetual and unfounded Pakistani complaints and accusations. If and when bilateral Indo–Pakistani talks resume, Washington should encourage both sides to identify Afghanistan as a key plank of those discussions. Eventually, Washington should facilitate joint Indo–Pakistani development projects in Afghanistan as well as trade-transit agreements that begin to integrate the three countries economically.

The U.S. Congress should—immediately—pass the Afghanistan and Pakistan Reconstruction Opportunity Zones Act (ROZ) that provides U.S. duty-free access to items produced in industrial zones in the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. President Obama

called for the passage of the ROZ legislation in his speech last Friday, and the Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., Husain Haqqani, and the Afghan ambassador to the U.S., Said Jawad, have jointly supported the initiative, arguing that the establishment of ROZs would draw the Afghan and Pakistani economies closer together, increasing their cooperation and integration. Initiatives like the ROZ Act will give each country a vested interest in the stability of the other and help defuse conflicts that fuel support for radical ideologies and terrorism.

The U.S. Congress should condition future military assistance to Pakistan on Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism and permanently break the links between its security services and elements of the Taliban and other extremist groups. The "Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act 2008" introduced last year in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee seeks to simultaneously bolster support for democracy and economic development in Pakistan by tripling non-military assistance, while strengthening Pakistan's commitment to fighting terrorism by tying military assistance to preconditions. Beginning in fiscal year 2010, the bill would require the Secretary of State to certify that Pakistan is making concerted efforts to prevent al-Qaeda and associated terrorist groups from operating on its territory before the U.S. provides additional military assistance to Pakistan.

Conditioning military assistance to Pakistan is necessary to demonstrate that the U.S. will not tolerate dual policies toward terrorists—and that there will be consequences for Pakistani leaders if elements of the security services provide support to terrorists. Such consequences are necessary to stem regional and global terrorism. Rather than requiring certification of Pakistani efforts, however, the U.S. Congress can stipulate that all military assistance to Pakistan would come under immediate review if information comes to light that Pakistani officials have provided assistance to such groups or individuals. Assistance should be suspended until such time as the U.S. determines the Pakistani government has taken action against the individuals providing support for terrorism.

The inherent political instability in Pakistan and continued domination of the country's national security policies by the military will make it difficult to carry out a delicate policy of conditioning aid. It will require close coordination and consultation between the executive and legislative branches in order to understand clearly and respond quickly to developments inside Pakistan. In this regard, the inclusion in the legislation of a national security waiver that allows the executive branch the necessary flexibility to play its role as chief executor of the foreign policy of the United States is essential.

Conclusion

A key aspect of the Administration's effort to uproot terrorism from South Asia must include initiatives that encourage regional integration and cooperation among the Afghans, Pakistanis, and Indians. This will require more frequent, intrusive, and intensive interaction between U.S. officials and their Afghan, Pakistani, and Indian counterparts. More specifically, the U.S. will have to consider whether there are initiatives that reduce Pakistani fears of Indian hegemony and how Washington can improve ties to New Delhi without setting off alarm bells in Islamabad.