

PAKISTAN AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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Pakistan is facing a serious crisis today and despite the proclivity of the nation's elites to blame external forces, the wounds are largely self-inflicted. India is not the biggest danger Pakistan faces today. It is the extremist groups that the security establishment has nurtured over the years that have turned against the Pakistani state. The Pakistani army has yet to reconcile itself to the idea that Afghanistan should be something other than its strategic backyard, under the control of its proxies such as the Taliban, and continues to struggle with its paranoia that India is encroaching on Afghanistan to encircle its old enemy. As a result, Pakistan is unable to take corrective measures that can bring some semblance of stability to a conflict-ridden nation.

As the dust settled in the aftermath of Usama bin Ladin's death at the hands of U.S. Special forces in May 2011, it was clear that either the Pakistani state was in league with al-Qa'ida or it was so weak and incompetent that it was not able to control rogue elements within its structures.[1] Bin Ladin, the world's most wanted fugitive, was found living in the heart of a garrison town within commuting distance of Islamabad just a week after Pakistani Army Chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani had declared that his troops had "broken the backs" of militants during his visit to the military academy in Abbottabad. The failure to locate Bin Ladin and the unilateral U.S. decision to capture and kill him led to allegations of complicity and incompetence in Pakistan. The security establishment and in particular the Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) came in for rare and sustained public criticism, forcing its head Lieutenant-General Ahmed Shuja Pasha to offer his resignation after admitting to an intelligence failure.

It was indeed ironical then, when five days after the Abbottabad raid, Pakistani army chief, Kayani, demanded that the number of American forces in the country be reduced "to the minimum essential" and that any similar American action ought to warrant a "review" of the whole relationship between the two countries.[2] The civilian authorities too tried their best to shield the security services. Declaring that "this was an intelligence failure of the whole world, not Pakistan alone," Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani absolved the army and the ISI of "either complicity or incompetence." [3] The Pakistani army has long been viewed as one institution that can keep a nation beset by militancy and weak civilian governments intact. The U.S. Navy Seal raid, however, has raised profound questions about the very credibility of the army and whether the assurances provided by it can be trusted, including the security of its nuclear arsenal.[4]

Despite receiving massive aid from the United States and the United States virtually underwriting Pakistan's military expansion, Pakistan today is one of the most anti-American countries in the world and an economic basket case. The Pakistani security establishment openly supported the Taliban until September 11, 2001, and since then, despite official disavowal, support has continued. So long as Pakistan continues to harbor and support the Taliban and other extremist groups, Afghanistan won't be able to achieve lasting stability.

The consequences of Pakistan's short-sighted policies are there for all to see: an unstable Afghanistan and a Pakistan on the verge of a breakdown. Pakistan is under attack today, but the wounds are

self-inflicted. Despite the rhetoric, India is not the biggest danger Pakistan faces today. It is the extremist groups that the security establishment has nurtured over the years that have turned against the Pakistani state. The Pakistani army has yet to reconcile itself to the idea that Afghanistan should be something other than its strategic backyard, under the control of its proxies such as the Taliban, and continues to struggle with its paranoia that India is encroaching on Afghanistan to encircle its old enemy. It remains angry with the United States for abandoning them after the Afghan jihad and for sanctioning them over the nuclear program.

FACING BOTH SIDES OF THE WAR ON TERROR

Pakistan's long-running and highly lucrative double game with Washington began the day then President Pervez Musharraf committed his nation to help the United States to avenge September 11, 2001, attacks. Islamabad never believed that the United States would stay in Afghanistan, so it continued to work toward the restoration of the Taliban even as it took billions in military aid from the U.S. government to do the reverse. Pakistan has viewed Afghanistan as a good means of balancing out India's preponderance in South Asia.^[5]

Good India-Afghanistan ties are seen by Pakistan as detrimental to its national security interests as the two states flank the two sides of Pakistan's borders. A friendly political dispensation in Kabul is viewed by Pakistan as essential to escape the strategic dilemma of being caught between a powerful adversary in India in the east and an irredentist Afghanistan with claims on the Pashtun-dominated areas in the west.^[6] Given its Pashtun-ethnic linkage with Afghanistan, Pakistan considers its role to be a privileged one in the affairs of Afghanistan. Given these imperatives from the very beginning, Pakistan tried to neutralize the growing influence of India in the affairs of Afghanistan since the rout of the Taliban in 2001.

While Pakistan, along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, was the main supporter of the Taliban, India, along with Russia and Iran, threw its weight behind the Northern Alliance. As a consequence, Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan peaked with the coming to power of the Taliban in 1996. It viewed the Taliban as a means of controlling Afghanistan and undercutting India's influence. Pakistan has long believed that it can gain "strategic depth" vis-à-vis India by influencing the domestic politics of Afghanistan, something Islamabad felt it achieved during the 1980s and the 1990s. The perceived gains of the last two decades came under threat with the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. After the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, then President Pervez Musharraf had to choose between support for the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and its "war on terrorism" or isolation as a backer of radical Islamist extremism.

Musharraf promptly signed Pakistan up as an ally of Washington. This committed Pakistan to supporting efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and to strengthen the administration of President Hamid Karzai, but doubts soon started emerging about Islamabad's capacity, and commitment, to crack down on militants. Pakistan's ISI is linked to the resurgence of the Taliban, whose leadership is thought to be operating from tribal border regions. The rejuvenation of the Taliban does allow the Pakistani military to underline their nation's role as a frontline state in the war on terrorism, thereby securing engagement from the United States.

Musharraf and his successor Asif Ali Zardari have been unable to dismantle the infrastructure that has provided funding, training, and arms for the Taliban, though the ISI has been brought under more direct control since 2001. The security problems in Afghanistan can be linked to military's continuing position as the predominant force in Pakistan, an institution that has, since the 1990s, viewed the Taliban as a means of controlling Afghanistan and undercutting India's influence there.^[7] Having focused exclusively on the Taliban, it is struggling to abandon it now. The tendency in the higher echelons of the Pakistani government and military to turn a blind eye to jihadi violence if that violence is focused outward on Afghanistan, Kashmir, or other parts of India also remains as potent as ever.

The costs of such a policy to the Pakistani polity and society are evident with the growing hold of the Taliban in Pakistan itself. As many Pakistanis themselves are arguing, "the common belief in Pakistan is that Islam's radicalism is a problem only in FATA, and the madrassas are the only institutions serving as jihad factories. This is a serious misconception." This mindset, it is suggested, "may eventually lead to Pakistan's demise as a nation-state."^[8] The liberal space in the country is shrinking rapidly. Pakistani liberals are increasingly being silenced by Islamist hardliners willing to use violence against those who do not share their views.

Two high profile assassinations—of the former Pakistani minorities minister, Shahbaz Bhatti, and of the governor of Punjab province, Salman Taseer—have shaken the foundations of whatever was left of liberal politics in Pakistan. More disturbing has been the reactions to these murders. The government-employed bodyguard who killed Taseer [was showered with petals](#) at his court appearances while the mainstream politicians have done their best to disassociate themselves from Taseer. Since the murder of Wall Street Journal's Daniel Pearl in 2002, more than 15 journalists have been murdered in Pakistan, making the country the deadliest place in the world for journalists.^[9] One of the targets of the Pakistani security establishment has been Syed Saleem Shahzad, a correspondent for the Hong Kong-based *Asia Times Online* news service who had written that the Pakistani military secretly negotiated with al-Qa'ida over the release of naval officials who had been arrested for possible links to the terrorist network.^[10]

Pakistan's policy of using Islamist militants for power projection vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan has continued for the last several decades, resulting in a nexus of local and foreign militants with elements of state security organs. Until recently, the Islamist militant groups nurtured by Pakistan's military and intelligence apparatus were focused on external conflicts, especially the dispute over Indian Kashmir, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s, and the presence of U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001. In the past few years, however, extremist groups along the Afghan border have turned inward, spreading violence and religious fanaticism among the ethnic Pashtun populace in Pakistan's northwest. The increasing pattern of insurgent assaults against high-profile government and civilian targets in other regions of the country—especially in Punjab, the traditional home of Pakistan's armed forces—suggests that militancy has spun out of the government's control. Yet there has been little rethinking in the Pakistani security establishment about its policy toward either Afghanistan or India.

CHANGING REGIONAL BALANCE OF POWER

Pakistan, which has traditionally viewed itself as the ultimate arbiter of power in Afghanistan, is finding it

difficult to reconcile itself to a situation where the balance of power seems to have shifted in favor of India. [11] Its frustration at the loss of political influence in Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban has been compounded by the welcoming attitude of the Karzai government toward India. Karzai may not be deliberately crafting a Delhi-Kabul alliance against Islamabad, but he is certainly hoping to push Pakistan into taking his concerns seriously.

In a sign of its growing influence in Afghanistan, India has opened consulates in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, in addition to its embassy in Kabul. Pakistan has accused India's Kabul embassy of spreading anti-Pakistani propaganda and views the establishment of the consulates as a way for Delhi to improve intelligence-gathering against it. Islamabad is also wary of Afghanistan or India exerting influence on restive populations in its border regions such as Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Pakistan claims that much of the funding and arms for the Baluch tribal leaders, grouped under the umbrella of the Baluchistan Liberation Army, are funneled through the Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar.

Pakistan has long backed separatists in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in the name of self-determination, and India has over the years been a major victim of the radicalization of Islamist forces in Kashmir, which have been successful in expanding their network across India. Much before the Islamist extremists attacked the United States, they were training their guns at India with great lethality. Any breeding ground of radical Islamists under the aegis of Pakistan has a direct impact on the security of India, resulting in a rise in infiltration of terrorists across borders as well attacks. It is vital for both India and Afghanistan that the latter would never again emerge as a safe haven for terrorism and extremism.

Pakistan, in response, has worked hard to limit India's involvement in Afghanistan. It made transit rights to Afghanistan conditional upon a resolution of the Kashmir issue. By not allowing India transit rights to Afghanistan through its territory, Pakistan has sought to leverage Afghanistan's reliance on the Karachi port as its only gateway to the world. Kabul, however, has pushed back and has used Iran and India to find an alternative route so as to reduce its historic dependence on Pakistan for transit trade. Though it has failed to achieve its objectives in the economic realm, it has been successful in limiting India's military involvement in Afghanistan. It did not even allow India to send a few hundred military transport vehicles to Kabul, which India had to ultimately route through Iran. [12] As the casualties have mounted with the Taliban regaining lost ground, Pakistan's role is once again coming under a scanner over a range of activities from helping to plot a prison break in Kandahar to even aiding an assassination attempt against Karzai. [13]

After continued violence from the Taliban, Karzai has suggested that peace talks with the Taliban are futile unless they involve the Pakistani authorities, who he argues exert control over the insurgents. Afghan officials have also suggested that the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was leading peace talk with the Taliban, was plotted in the Pakistani city of Quetta and that ISI was behind the planning. [14] In Afghanistan's first strategic pact with any country, Kabul and New Delhi signed a landmark strategic partnership agreement in October 2011 that commits India to "training, equipping and capacity building" of the Afghan National Security Services. This pact is an attempt by New Delhi and Kabul to keep an ever more adventurous Pakistan in check.

ISLAMIST EXTREMISM AS AN INSTRUMENT OF STATE POLICY

A friendly Afghanistan where religious extremism continues to flourish is seen by Pakistan as essential to keep the pressure on India by providing a base where militants could be trained for fighting against the Indian forces. The *mujahidin* fighting in Kashmir have not only drawn inspiration from the Afghan resistance against the Soviets but have also drawn resources and materiel support from Pakistan.[15] Kashmiri militants were among the thousands of “volunteers” from various Islamic countries that participated in the war against the Soviet forces. They went back indoctrinated in a version of Islam that destined their victory over the “infidels” as well as with important knowledge of guerrilla warfare.[16] India rightly perceived that the victors of mujahidin against the Soviet Union would fundamentally alter the direction of Islamist extremism, as Afghanistan would end up playing a crucial role in the shaping of an Islamic geopolitics sitting as it does astride the Islamic heartland, involving South and Central Asia as well as Middle East.

While India would like to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a springboard for terrorism directed against India once again, the resurgence of the Taliban and Pakistan’s ambivalent approach toward this growing menace remains a major headache for India. The pattern of medieval Islamist ideology challenging the writ of the state is more evident along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, where the resurgence of the Taliban is manifest in myriad ways. The Taliban forces have attacked Indian nationals working in reconstruction and development projects in different parts of Afghanistan in an effort to intimidate the Indian government. With the leadership of al-Qa’ida and the Taliban operating from Baluchistan, the NWFP, and the Waziristan area of Pakistan, these attacks continue to enjoy Pakistan’s tacit support due to its concerns about the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan. Despite his status as a Western ally in the “war on terror,” Musharraf refused to renounce unequivocally the terrorist option as far as Kashmir and Afghanistan were concerned, and his successor has given no indications yet that he intends to change that policy.[17]

The terror strikes in Mumbai in November 2008 further confirmed Indian suspicions that sections of Pakistani political and military establishment have no interest in renouncing terrorism as an instrument of their foreign policy. Pakistani-American David Coleman Headley, who has pleaded guilty to all terror charges before a U.S. court in Chicago, facilitated the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) attack on Mumbai in 2008 with direct involvement of Pakistan’s ISI. Handlers from Pakistan’s ISI were in close and regular contacts with the militants who stormed Mumbai in November 2008 and launched an assault that left more than 160 people dead.[18]

The political-military establishment in Pakistan is yet to clear the cobwebs in their minds — in thinking through, and operationalizing, a policy of no tolerance towards the jihadists.[19] As the operatives and partisans of al-Qa’ida and the Taliban move about with ease and propagate their ideology even in those parts of Pakistan where the federal government exercises real control, these organizations face little difficulty in recruiting cadres or raising funds. The resurgence of the Taliban is being supported by Pakistan’s intelligence agencies not only because they are under the spell of the forces of radical Islam but also because of their entrenched opinion that the jihadi movement allows them to assert greater influence on Pakistan’s vulnerable western flank.

Pakistan has yet to deliver meaningfully on its promise of reforming madrasas so that none of them can function as training schools for jihadists. From the beginning of the U.S.-led war on al-Qa’ida and the

Taliban, it has been clear that Islamabad would not be able to compartmentalize the jihadi groups. The strategy of keeping the Kashmir terrorist groups active while clamping down on outfits operating in Afghanistan was never going to work, for the simple reason that there was no question of those who believed they were fighting a holy war of terror accepting a diktat that they should cross only one national border or fight only one enemy.[20]

The Pakistani Army has been successful in rebuilding its image as the guarantor of nation's security against the Taliban as well as India over the last few years. When General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani took over as the Army chief from the former President Musharraf at the end of 2007, the army had lost all credibility, and public anger against the military was at its peak. Among Kayani's first moves to retrieve lost ground was to reduce the visibility of the Army in Pakistan's governance. Meanwhile, the Mumbai terror attacks, which saw the Pakistani establishment whip up fears of an imminent military strike by India, allowed the public to rally behind the army preparations for what was viewed as an imminent war. The operation in Swat to flush the Taliban militants presented an image to the people of a military that was sincere in maintaining the security of the homeland in a purely professional manner.

The Pakistani military and the civilian government have conveyed an impression that they are united in viewing the Taliban as the real threat to Pakistan and that it is important to mend relations with India. Yet President Zardari's earlier ideas about more trade, less Kashmir, and no first use of nuclear weapons failed to get any traction. The Pakistani discourse on engagement with India now seeks to balance New Delhi's demand for action against the Mumbai terror attack perpetrators with the reciprocal demand that India must stop, as charged, funding and arming terrorists operating in Pakistan.

Public opinion wants the Pakistan government to act against extremism and militancy, but these twin menaces have come to be only and completely identified with the Taliban. Despite acknowledging at the very highest levels that militants and extremists were deliberately created and nurtured by the Pakistani security establishment for short-term tactical gains, there is little appetite for action against the jihadi groups that target India or Kashmir, even though these have radicalized entire towns and villages in the Punjab province.[21] In such a context, it is unlikely that India will be able to have a positive view of domestic developments in Pakistan, and so any movement in India-Pakistan dialogue will remain tentative. India cannot be expected to make peace with a security establishment in Pakistan that continues to raise the bogey of the "Indian threat" to justify retaining its predominance over the Pakistani polity.

There are many in the West who support the hypothesis that the only way to stabilize Afghanistan and reduce the threat of terrorism to the West is by persuading India to resolve the Kashmir issue and reduce its profile in Afghanistan. This is a fundamentally flawed and dangerous argument, for it implicitly condones Pakistan's use of cross-border terrorism as an instrument of state policy. The security establishment in Pakistan will continue to support the various jihadi groups in order to attack and intimidate India and get what it wants in Afghanistan—a client state.

A RETHINK IN THE WEST

Despite the public pronouncements of the U.S. government in support of Pakistan, the sharply rising Western casualty rates in Afghanistan have been generating skepticism in the West about Pakistan's efforts to rein in the Taliban, encouraging a rethink about Pakistan's relationship with the West and its role in the global war on terror.[22] Under pressure from the United States, alarmed by the growing hold of radicals in Pakistan, the Pakistani military was forced to undertake a major operation in the Swat Valley and claimed success in retaking the region from the Taliban insurgents who were extending their reach toward the heartland of the country with great speed. The Taliban mostly melted away without a major fight, only to return when the military withdrew.

Yet the reassertion of control over Swat at least temporarily denied the militants a haven they coveted inside Pakistan. The tentative results in Swat did not bode well for the military's push in South Waziristan, the stronghold of Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban. The military failed to kill or even capture even a single top Taliban commander and the plans to provide basic services became mired in conflict and mutual suspicion between the military and the civilian government, raising serious doubts about the ability of the authorities to keep control over Swat and other areas over a long period of time. [23] The army has been forced to come back and counter militants in several areas like South Waziristan and the Swat Valley, where it had already declared victory long before. The counterinsurgency warfare is a tough business and an army that is largely configured to fighting Indian military has found the going difficult in its tribal areas where the Taliban fighters are getting dispersed.

Pakistan's security establishment has relished the double game it is playing in Afghanistan. Pakistani support for the Taliban in Afghanistan continues to be sanctioned at the highest levels of Pakistan's government with the ISI even represented on the Quetta Shura—the Taliban's war council—so as to retain influence over the Taliban's leadership. The ISI does not merely provide financial, military, and logistical support to the insurgency but continues to retain strong strategic and operational control over the Taliban campaign in Afghanistan.[24]

Washington's frustration at its inability to persuade the Pakistani army and intelligence apparatus to cease supporting the Afghan Taliban and other militants is also palpable. It is clear from the leaked WikiLeaks documents that Washington is convinced Pakistan will never cooperate fully in fighting the whole range of extremist groups. It is also well understood in the United States that Pakistan is preparing for the eventual U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, viewing the militant groups as an insurance and as a means of exerting influence inside Afghanistan and against India.

The assessment of a former U.S. Ambassador is blunt: "There is no chance that Pakistan will view enhanced assistance levels in any field as sufficient compensation for abandoning support for these groups, which it sees as an important part of its national security apparatus against India." Underlining her concerns about burgeoning U.S.-India ties, she said "feeds Pakistani establishment paranoia and pushes them closer to both Afghan and Kashmir focused terrorist groups." [25] The U.S. Secretary of State has also been unequivocal in her assertion that despite public disavowals, "some officials of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) continue to maintain ties with a wide array of extremist organizations," in particular the Taliban and the LeT. [26] After receiving nearly \$20 billion in direct aid from the United States over the last decade, the Pakistani army is not shy of playing hardball with the United States, convinced in their belief that it is America that needs Pakistan, not the other way round.

The Pakistani Army has refused to make any move against the Quetta Shura, the operational nerve center in Pakistan of Taliban leader Mullah Omar. Groups like LeT and Sipah-e-Sihaba Pakistan continue

to operate openly, despite being nominally banned. CIA drone strikes have been largely limited to Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas, as the Pakistani government has not allowed any strikes in Baluchistan where senior Taliban leadership is believed to be hiding. The international community wants the Pakistani military to act against Mullah Omar, the spiritual leader of the Afghan Taliban; the allied militant network of Sirajuddin Haqqani; and the LeT, the group responsible for Mumbai attacks in 2008. Yet these groups are viewed as long-standing assets of the Pakistani army and intelligence. The LeT is now a potent threat to the West. Its leader, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, who is wanted for his role in Mumbai attacks, openly proclaimed that bin Ladin "was a great person who awakened the Muslim world." [27]

The assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, Afghanistan's former President and principal negotiator for talks with the Taliban, as well as terrorist assaults targeting U.S. Embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul in September 2011, further aggravated tensions between the two allies. The United States blamed the Haqqani network for coordinated attacks against the American Embassy and NATO headquarters. Despite being pressed by the United States, the Pakistani security establishment remains reluctant to take on the Haqqani network in North Waziristan. The Haqqani group is an important player in the emerging security dynamic in Afghanistan, and the Pakistani military views it as an important asset in countering Indian influence in Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, Kayani even offered to help broker a deal between the Haqqani group and the Afghan government.

Pakistan remains adamant in underlining its centrality in the unfolding endgame in Afghanistan, making it clear time and again that only Islamabad and Rawalpindi can bring the Afghan Taliban into the political mainstream. It captured Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a senior Taliban leader, to sabotage the United Nations' direct back-channel negotiations with Baradar's faction of the Taliban. The Pakistani Army wants to retain its central role in mediation efforts at all costs. It matters little if in the process the very foundation of the Pakistani state has ended up becoming eroded.

A NUCLEAR NIGHTMARE

One of the ways in which Pakistan has been able to blackmail the international community is by underlining the grave implications of a failed nuclear state. Growing radicalization of the security forces is a potent challenge, raising questions about the safety of Pakistan's nuclear installations. Pakistan's military is no longer credible as the custodian of nation's nuclear arsenal. The present turmoil in Pakistan has raised concerns about the safety, security, command, and control of its nuclear stockpile. Pakistan's government continues to dismiss media reports that its nuclear weapons were in danger of falling into the wrong hands as "inspired." It has further stressed that Pakistan has provided the highest level of institutionalized protection to its strategic assets. Nonetheless, the credibility of such claims remains open to question. Instituted in 2000, Pakistan's nuclear command and control arrangements are centered on the National Command Authority, which comprises the Employment Control Committee, the Development Control Committee, and the Strategic Plans Division. Only a small group of military officials apparently have access to the country's nuclear assets.

It is instructive to note that of all the major nuclear states in world, Pakistan is the only country where the nuclear button is in the hands of the military. Moreover, senior civilian and military officials responsible for

these weapons have a problematic track-record in maintaining close control over them. AQ Khan was the head of the Pakistani nuclear program (and a veritable national hero) but was instrumental in making Pakistan the center of the biggest nuclear proliferation network by leaking technology to states far and wide, including Iran, North Korea, and Libya. Pakistani nuclear scientists have even traveled to Afghanistan at the behest of Usama bin Ladin.

According to U.S. intelligence estimates, Pakistan has doubled its nuclear stockpile over the last few years, with the nation's arsenal now totaling more than 100 deployed weapons. Pakistan is now ahead of India in the production of uranium and plutonium for bombs and development of delivery weapons. It is now producing nuclear weapons at a faster rate than any other country in the world. Pakistan will soon be world's fourth largest nuclear weapon state ahead of France and Britain and behind only the United States, Russia, and China.[28] Pakistan has tried to reassure the world that its arsenal is safe and secure, and a 2008 U.S. Congressional report noted that the weapons were stored in secure underground facilities, unassembled, and separate from their launchers.[29]

Documents released by WikiLeaks underscore the problem of the radicalization. The Pakistani Air Force reportedly admitted to radicalization in its ranks when it detailed acts of sabotage against its F-16 aircraft to prevent their deployment in support of operations against Taliban militants in FATA.[30] Some have even suggested that Washington has made a tacit trade off with Islamabad according to which the United States would leave Pakistan's nuclear program alone for cooperation on Afghanistan.[31] Washington has pushed Pakistan since 2007 to accept help in moving highly enriched uranium out of an aging Pakistani nuclear reactor, fearing it could be diverted for illicit purposes.

In May 2009, then U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Anne Patterson reported that Pakistan was refusing to allow American experts to visit the site and cited concern expressed by a Pakistani official that "if the local media got word of the fuel removal, they certainly would portray it as the United States taking Pakistan's nuclear weapons." [32] The U.S. ambassador wrote in a separate document that "our major concern is not having an Islamic militant steal an entire weapon but rather the chance someone working in GOP [government of Pakistan] facilities could gradually smuggle enough material out to eventually make a weapon." [33] It is this fear that Pakistan has been effectively able to leverage in its ties with the West and the United States in particular.

CONCLUSION

The Afghan endeavor will fail if the United States does not find a way to eliminate the de facto sanctuary that Taliban fighters have established in Pakistan. This is now well recognized by American officials in Afghanistan.[34] In a major departure from the long-standing U.S. policy of publicly playing down Pakistan's official support for insurgents operating from havens within Pakistan, Admiral Mike Mullen, former chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and a strong supporter of close ties with Pakistani military, described the Haqqani network as a "veritable arm" of Pakistan's ISI.[35] This was a signal from Washington that it would no longer tolerate continuing use of terrorist groups, aided and abetted by the ISI, to kill Americans and their allies in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's sponsorship of the Haqqani network has long been an open secret, as has been the reality that Haqqanis have been responsible for some of the most murderous assaults on Indian and Western presence in Afghanistan. In response to America's increasingly vocal protests, Islamabad has been quick to signal publicly that it is prepared to lean away from Washington. Yet major powers with interest in Central Asia, including China, do not have much sympathy for Pakistan's desire to strengthen radical Sunni groups. China is as interested, as the United States and India, in effective Pakistani action against the terror sanctuaries in North Waziristan.

The transactional relationship that the United States has constructed with Pakistan over the last several decades is likely to continue in the near future, despite growing strategic divergences between the two. America needs Pakistan in order to get precious supplies to Afghanistan, mainly via the Pakistani port of Karachi, and the U.S. policymakers remain wary of isolating a country with one of the fastest-growing nuclear arsenals. At the same time, the Pakistani military has continued to offer just enough cooperation to keep the billions of dollars of American aid flowing.

Yet American and Pakistani interests are likely to diverge much more radically as the U.S. exit from Afghanistan draws closer. Regional instability will continue to be the norm in South Asia, unless Pakistan's double dealing is exposed fully and strong regional pressure against its meddling in Afghan politics is built. Pakistan is at war with itself as well as with the rest of the world. Unless Pakistan's military-jihadi complex is completely dismantled, it will continue to pose a threat to the world. The biggest challenge comes from the rapid ascendancy of the Pakistani military in the nation's power structure and as a corollary in shaping Pakistan's strategic agenda. Instead of helping the civilian government to get traction, Washington itself has pulled the rug from under its doddering feet. By relying on the Pakistani military to secure its short-term ends in Afghanistan, the United States has made sure that the fundamental malaise afflicting Pakistan—the militarization of the Pakistani state—will continue to afflict Pakistan and South Asia with grave implications for sustainable long-term peace in the subcontinent.

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