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# Pakistani-U.S. Relations after 9/11: A Pakistani Perspective

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Zamir Akram

The terrorist attacks of September 11 on the United States have qualitatively transformed Pakistani-U.S. relations. Pakistan has moved from the margins of U.S. foreign policy to center stage and has become a key player in the war on terrorism. This is a reflection both of Pakistan's pivotal geostrategic position in the region and the Islamic world, and of the key decision made by Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf to join the international coalition against terrorism.

The evolving partnership between the United States and Pakistan has the potential to mature into an enduring alliance that can contribute to peace, security, and prosperity in the entire region of South Asia. To reach the full potential of their relationship, the two countries will need to ensure a broad-based and sustained engagement in the future. Forty years of cooperation during the Cold War suggest that such a sustained engagement is possible; however, there are some challenges in the relationship that will need to be overcome.

This article analyzes the diverse factors that will determine the contours of future Pakistani-U.S. relations: Pakistan's domestic dynamics, the Pakistani-U.S. bilateral experience, the war on terrorism, the future of Afghanistan and its implications for Central Asia, the triangular Pakistani-Indian-U.S. relationship, and the impact of the regional nuclear equation.

**Zamir Akram** is  
Minister and Deputy  
Chief of Mission at the  
Pakistan Embassy in  
Washington, D.C.

The conclusion proposes a roadmap for overcoming the challenges and benefiting from the opportunities of a closer Pakistani-U.S. relationship.

**Domestic Dynamics.** President Musharraf's decision to support the war on terrorism was not only dictated by immediate national interest, but is also

to abuses of power and the promotion of religious extremism. Despite this, the majority of Pakistanis have remained committed to democracy and to moderation in their faith. Religious forces have never obtained more than 8 percent of the electoral vote in any election, including the most recent local bodies elections of 2001.<sup>3</sup>

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in keeping with the president's vision for a tolerant, progressive, and democratic Pakistan—a vision articulated by Pakistan's founding father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and shared by an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis. In February 1948, Jinnah declared, "Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality, justice and fair play... Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State .... We have many non-Muslims, but they are all Pakistanis [and] enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizen."<sup>1</sup> Earlier, speaking to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947, he said to the Pakistani people, "You are free; you are free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has got nothing to do with the business of the State."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, subsequent Pakistani leaders lost sight of this vision, especially since the 1970s, undermining not just democracy in the country, but the true spirit of Islam. Religion became a tool of political manipulation, which gave rise

President Musharraf's aim is to revive the original vision of a democratic and religiously moderate Pakistan. In his address to the nation on October 17, 1999, he said, "Islam teaches tolerance not hatred, universal brotherhood and not enmity, peace and not violence, progress and not bigotry."<sup>4</sup> Referring to democracy in the same speech he argued, "What Pakistan has experienced in the recent years has been merely a label of democracy not the essence of it. Our people were never emancipated from the yoke of despotism. I shall not allow the people to be taken back to the era of sham democracy, but to a true one."<sup>5</sup>

Compelled to assume power in October 1999 by the worsening national crisis, President Musharraf has embarked on a path of reformation in the country. He is attempting to check corruption, provide good governance, ensure rule of law, and rebuild national institutions. Another central area of focus is ensuring genuine grassroots democracy. Elections to local bodies were completed in August 2001, and elections for national and provincial assemblies will take place by October 2002, along with a transfer of

power to the elected representatives, as mandated by the Supreme Court.

Another critical objective for Pakistan is to promote human development, especially through education. Reforming the antiquated *madrassa* system would provide modern education along with religious instruction, thereby ensuring that these institutions are never again used as breeding grounds for militancy and terrorism. This would ensure the strengthening of moderate and tolerant forces in the country.

However, the president's ability to realize his vision will depend essentially upon the success of efforts to revive the economy. Pakistan will have to break out of the debt trap and lower its defense expenditure, the two items that account for more than 60 percent of the national budget. To ensure this, Pakistan seeks economic growth and the reduction of regional tensions. The United States can play a critical role in both spheres to help Pakistan.

**The Bilateral Experience.** After gaining its independence in 1947, Pakistan was an ally of the United States in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The high point of this relationship was the collaboration to support resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Once this objective was achieved in 1989, however, a number of factors caused the two countries to drift apart.

The United States started pursuing relations with Pakistan through the single prism of nuclear nonproliferation, as signified by the imposition of the Symington and Pressler sanctions in October 1990. These sanctions not only denied Pakistan economic and military assistance, but also placed embargos upon military equipment,

like F-16 aircrafts, for which Pakistan had already paid.

Pakistanis viewed this policy as inequitable and discriminatory, as it sought to prevent Pakistan from developing a nuclear deterrent in response to India's acquisition of nuclear weapons capability in 1974. Even worse, U.S. nonproliferation policy did little to contain the Indian nuclear weapons program. The Indian nuclear tests of 1998 underscored this failure and forced Pakistan to follow suit to demonstrate its own nuclear capability.

Bilateral relations also deteriorated as the United States disengaged from Afghanistan and the region, leaving the war-torn country to sink further into the chaos of civil war, with multiple negative effects on Pakistan. The Pakistani people felt betrayed.

However, the history of bilateral engagement between the two countries over four decades cushioned the impact of these differences. Relations were not damaged irreparably, and cooperation continued in key areas. One such area of cooperation was peacekeeping, and troops from the two countries fought shoulder to shoulder in Somalia, and served together in Haiti and Bosnia, as well as in other countries. Cooperation with regard to narcotics control and counterterrorism also continued without disruption.

With the election of George W. Bush as president of the United States, a review of U.S. policy toward South Asia and of sanctions policy was initiated in 2001, as a result of which efforts were made to revive relations with Pakistan. Numerous high-level exchanges took place during the year, and the decision to waive nuclear sanctions against Pakistan (and India) was taken even before the tragedy of September 11.

**The War on Terrorism.** There is a widely held but erroneous belief in the United States that after September 11 Pakistan had to be coerced to join the war on terrorism. In fact, counterterrorism cooperation between the two countries had already been underway for more than a decade. Tangible results of this cooperation were the apprehension of terrorists including Ramzi Yousuf, Amil Kanshi, Siddique Odeh, and some of those responsible for the 1998 attacks against the U.S. embassies in East Africa. After September 11, President Musharraf not only condemned the terrorist attacks immediately, but also offered Pakistan's "unstinted cooperation in the fight against terrorism."<sup>6</sup> Thus, when the Bush administration asked for Pakistan's help in the war on terrorism, its request was certain to be granted.

In Operation Enduring Freedom, Pakistan has shared intelligence with the United States, permitted the use of its air space, and provided logistical support including the use of three air bases. President Bush emphasized the critical role played by Pakistan in his remarks to the media on February 13, 2002, saying that "President Musharraf is a leader with great courage and his nation is a key partner in the global coalition against terror."<sup>7</sup>

Within Pakistan, President Musharraf has acted decisively against indigenous and foreign terrorist elements, cracking down on seven groups that have been involved in terrorist activities. Over 2,000 activists from these groups, including their leaders, have been arrested, their offices have been sealed, and their funds have been frozen. There has been a backlash from these groups, which included the kidnapping and murder of *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Daniel Pearl, but the government remains

steadfast in its commitment to root out terrorism and "treat it with an iron hand."<sup>8</sup> Pakistan has also deployed troops along the Afghan border to apprehend and bring to justice over 100 al Qaeda members. At the same time, stringent measures have been taken to strengthen banking and financial procedures to freeze terrorist funds and to prevent their future use.

However, while the United States has the full support of many countries in its war against terrorism, if it is to keep tensions within the coalition to a minimum it must be mindful of several potential areas of disagreement.

First, the United States must recognize that ultimate success against terrorism cannot be achieved without addressing its root causes. In his November 2001 statement to the UN General Assembly, President Musharraf emphasized that the war on terrorism cannot be limited only to cutting off the branches of this tree, but also needs to deal with its roots.<sup>9</sup>

Second, a clear distinction must be drawn between terrorism and the legitimate struggle of peoples under foreign occupation for their democratic right of self-determination. Certain countries have used the label of terrorism to malign legitimate struggles, such as those of the Kashmiri and Palestinian peoples for self-determination, which are sanctioned by UN resolutions. It is certainly true that acts of terrorism have been committed in Palestine and Kashmir for which both combatant parties are responsible, but Pakistan, which has itself been a target of terrorism, has consistently condemned those on both sides in Kashmir who have committed such terrorist acts, as have the Kashmiri people themselves. Branding all Kashmiris as terrorists, when many of them are fight-

ing for their freedom using legitimate means, is one-sided. Similarly, describing terrorists with the adjective "Islamic" must also be avoided. Terrorism cannot be linked exclusively to any one religion, and it is not sanctioned by any faith. The tendency to label terrorists according to their Islamic background is counterproductive, as it breeds hatred and suspicion between different religious groups within societies and reinforces the impulses that have led to terrorism in the first place.

### **Afghanistan and Central Asia.**

The United States needs to signal its commitment to sustained engagement in Afghanistan. With a hostile India to the east, Pakistan has consistently sought a stable and friendly Afghanistan to the west to avoid having enemies on two fronts. Pakistan's Afghan policy has also been guided by the need to ensure the safe repatriation of 3 million Afghan refugees and end the inflow of terrorists, arms, and drugs into Pakistan. With this

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Third, criticism of terrorism should not be restricted to individuals, groups, or non-state actors, but ought also to include governments that use terror as an instrument of policy. Terrorism must be condemned in all its forms and manifestations. As President Bush rightly pointed out, the use of terrorist tactics by governments as an instrument of policy is just as worthy of condemnation as is its use by non-state actors.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the United States should not perceive diverse international issues through the single prism of terrorism. Such an approach would be self-defeating, and would undermine the international coalition against terrorism. The war against terrorism is currently the overriding concern of U.S. foreign policy, guiding its relations with the global community. However, there are issues on the international agenda, such as the continuing conflict in the Middle East and in Kashmir, that need to be addressed on their own merits, keeping in view their root causes.

achieved, steps could be taken towards opening trade linkages with Central Asia through Afghanistan.

U.S. policy in the wake of September II has provided Pakistan with an opportunity to bring peace and stability to its western border. Accordingly, Islamabad has supported the UN-brokered Bonn Process that is consistent with its own desire to ensure the territorial integrity of Afghanistan, end the internecine Afghan conflict, promote a broad-based multiethnic Afghan government, and see Afghanistan establish friendly relations with Pakistan and other neighboring states.

However, the interim Afghan government of Hamid Karzai faces daunting challenges from competitors within his own government, rival warlords, and continuing ethnic and tribal divisions. To help ensure successful implementation of the Bonn Accord, the international community needs not only to provide funding for the functioning of the Afghan government and for Afghanistan's reconstruc-

tion and rehabilitation, but also to ensure the security and effectiveness of this fledgling administration. In particular, the woefully inadequate size of the International Security Assistance Force, which currently consists of approximately 4,500 troops, needs to be increased immediately, and the force must be deployed in all the problem areas of Afghanistan, not just around Kabul. Measures for ensuring security around the country cannot wait for the creation of an Afghan army and police force.

The United States has its own obligations. It must not withdraw from the country once its counterterrorism objectives have been accomplished. If it does, the gains in Afghanistan will quickly unravel. Even worse, Afghanistan would lapse back into chaos, undermining regional security and enabling terrorism to rear its head once again. However, if the United States maintains its support for Afghan reconstruction, Pakistan and Afghanistan could become a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia and serve as a corridor for oil and gas pipelines from the energy-rich areas of Central Asia to the energy-deficient countries of South Asia and beyond. Since they control the shortest route to the sea for landlocked Central Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan can also greatly enhance trade linkages with this region. Such linkages could offer the United States multiple benefits, particularly in the opening up of alternative energy sources to the international community.

**The South Asian Triangle.** Continuing tensions between Pakistan and India, both nuclear powers, make South Asia the most dangerous place in the world and the most likely theater for a nuclear conflict. The ongoing military

standoff between them is the latest manifestation of these tensions, and the dispute over Kashmir lies at the heart of the problem. So far, all bilateral efforts have failed to resolve the Kashmir issue.

The United States has a direct interest in a durable settlement of the Kashmir issue that would pave the way for peace and security in South Asia. Such a settlement would lessen the danger of a South Asian nuclear conflict with global ramifications and open up the vast regional market for trade and investment. Moreover, the United States should not ignore the Kashmiris' democratic right of self-determination or the massive violations of their human rights.

As a result of its improving relations with both Pakistan and India, the United States, as the preeminent world power, is uniquely positioned to facilitate a resolution of the differences between Pakistan and India. While India is uneasy about stronger Pakistani-U.S. relations, Islamabad accepts Washington's position that its relationship with the two countries "is not a zero-sum game."<sup>11</sup> Pakistan's only stipulation is that Indo-U.S. relations should not be advanced at Pakistan's expense. Indeed, Pakistan would welcome a more assertive role by the United States in helping to build peace in the region. Such a U.S. role would have far-reaching positive consequences for both bilateral relations with Pakistan and for American interests in South Asia.

**The Nuclear Equation.** The Bush administration's waiving of nuclear sanctions against Pakistan (and India) in September 2001 has addressed Islamabad's concerns about discriminatory nonproliferation policies, especially the Pakistan-specific Pressler Amendment. The lifting of nuclear sanctions, the de facto

acceptance of Pakistan's (and India's) nuclear capability, and the abandonment of the nonproliferation prism as the means of determining bilateral relations will all continue to have a positive impact on future ties.

Moreover, having achieved a credible nuclear deterrent capability, Pakistan concurs with the U.S. approach advocating nuclear restraint. It has unilaterally committed not to conduct a nuclear test unless India does so and has proposed a strategic restraint regime in South Asia, envisaging non-weaponization and non-deployment of nuclear weapons.

However, nuclear restraint in South Asia is likely to be severely tested by the Indian implementation of their draft nuclear doctrine, which calls for increases in fissile material stockpiles for nuclear warheads, the development of a triad of delivery capabilities including submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and the attainment of a missile defense capability.<sup>12</sup> Indian pursuit of these objectives could spark off a strategic arms race in the region, involving Pakistan and perhaps China.

The Bush administration's own missile defense plans are also considered to have the potential to act as a possible catalyst for a regional arms race. China may respond by increasing its missiles and warheads, which would prompt a reaction from India and Pakistan.

Pakistan has developed an indigenous missile technology, partly in response to Indian missile developments, and partly because the degradation of Pakistani air power, owing to earlier U.S. sanctions, has compelled its reliance on missiles. Nonetheless, Pakistan is willing to enter into a regional arrangement that would avoid a missile race with India. Meanwhile, Pakistan and the United States

remain engaged in their dialogue on nuclear and security issues that can strengthen stability in the region.

### **Conclusion: The Way Forward.**

The September 11 tragedy has acted as a catalyst to revitalize Pakistani-U.S. relations. Thus far, their counterterrorism cooperation has achieved major successes. The critical decision made by President Musharraf to join the international coalition against terrorism and the pursuit of his vision for Pakistan have added to Pakistan's significance as a pivotal country, both at the crossroads of South and Central Asia and within the Muslim world. A convergence of interests has emerged between Islamabad and Washington. Both aim to promote moderation and tolerance among religious and ethnic groups; defeat terrorism; ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan; provide access to the energy resources of Central Asia; promote the resolution of differences between Pakistan and India, especially a settlement of the Kashmir dispute; and encourage nuclear and missile restraint in South Asia.

This present convergence of interests between Pakistan and the United States was underscored in President Musharraf's meeting with President Bush during his visit to Washington from February 12-14, 2002, a follow-up on their meeting in New York on November 10, 2001. The two countries have now drawn up a road map for future relations, outlined in the Joint Statement of November 10, 2001 and the Fact Sheet of January 13, 2002.<sup>13</sup> Taken together, these documents form the structure for, and indicate the direction of, future engagement between the two countries. Apart from U.S. assistance for Pakistan's economic recovery,

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debt relief, and market access, Washington has pledged to support President Musharraf's plans for education reforms and democracy building. The two countries have also agreed to institutionalize their relations in various spheres by setting up a Joint Economic Forum, a Defense Consultative Group, and a Joint Working Group on Law Enforcement to cover counterterrorism and counternarcotics cooperation. Furthermore, they have identified science and technology collaboration and space cooperation as new areas of engagement.

On regional and global issues, the two states agree that peace and stability in Afghanistan can be achieved through the formation of a broad-based, multiethnic, representative government established through consensus among Afghans and under the auspices of the United Nations. They have called for dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve the Kashmir issue in mutually acceptable ways, taking into account the wishes of the people of Kashmir. As a consequence of their shared concern over the global threat posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, they have agreed on enhanced nonproliferation measures at the global and regional levels.

The evolution of bilateral relations along these lines marks a significant shift from the one-dimensional approach that had characterized Pakistani-U.S. relations in the past. The two sides have expressed their determination to pursue relations that are not a function of a

third issue or country, but important in and of themselves.

However, intentions and commitments have to be translated into actions. For its part, Pakistan will need to stay the course and adhere to President Musharraf's vision for the political, economic, and social reformation of the country, especially by containing religious extremists opposed to moderation and modernization. Externally, the president must continue to pursue peace, stability, and progress, especially with neighbors Afghanistan and India, but he needs responsive interlocutors. For the United States, the most essential requirement is that it remains engaged and maintains its partnership with Pakistan, helping Pakistan in its reform agenda and assisting in building bridges in the region.

The experience of the 1990s raises doubts in the minds of many Pakistanis as to whether or not the United States will remain engaged with Pakistan after its war on terrorism is over, or if it will instead repeat the mistakes of the past and walk away from the region. A related concern is whether the United States will sustain its policy of helping the government of President Musharraf, especially with his policies for economic reform and revival, on which the very success of his vision for Pakistan depends.

The success of Pakistani-U.S. cooperation, and especially the extent of the U.S. role, will also determine the prospects for peace and security in South Asia, which in turn would provide Pakistan and the rest of the countries in the



region the political space for development and progress. Specifically, the United States must commit itself to the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan so as to enable reconstruction and rehabilitation.

With regard to Pakistani-Indian relations, the prospects for peace will depend as much on the responsibility and restraint demonstrated by Pakistan and India as on any commitment by the United States to help the two neighbors

resolve their differences, in particular over Kashmir. Watching from the sidelines will not help; the United States must assume a pro-active role. The United States must look beyond its war on terrorism to its larger long-term interests in the entire region of South and Central Asia.

**Author's Note:** The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Pakistani government.

#### NOTES

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