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policy analysis brief

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US Policy Options Toward Pakistan: A Principled and Realistic Approach

February 2008

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Suggestions for Moving Forward

- Think long term. With so many crises, of which the assassination of Benazir Bhutto is just the latest, there is a risk that the urgent will crowd out the important. The country's problems are so deep-seated that only long-term policies will help bring Pakistan out of its current cycle of authoritarian rule, instability, and underdevelopment. The type of extremism represented by the murder of the former prime minister can only be rooted out by the establishment of the rule of law in Pakistan and the more successful development of the country's economy. Everyone agrees the United States will be fighting its war on terror for 20 to 30 years. Policies could be formulated with this time frame, and not that of the electoral cycle, in mind.
- Taking a long-term view might affect the way US commanders calculate the costs and benefits of air strikes on Al Qaeda and Taliban targets in Waziristan. It is tempting to think that, since a majority of Pakistanis are moderates who oppose extremist interpretations of Islam, they will welcome operations such as air strikes conducted in the name of the US war on terror. In fact, polls show that Pakistanis react with anger to the breaches to their sovereignty and to the loss of innocent lives during such military actions.
- The most important single determinant of Pakistan's future remains the minds of its people. Although the most obvious explanation for Ms. Bhutto's death is that the Taliban or Al Qaeda killed her, most Pakistanis do not believe this but blame General Musharraf. It's just one indication of the huge gap in operations

between East and West. Similarly, many Pakistanis consider the military campaign in the tribal areas to be not only ill-conceived but also unjust. They point out that the tribesmen were once asked by the United States to liberate Afghanistan from foreign (Soviet) occupation. Now, because they are undertaking a similar effort to expel foreign (NATO) troops, they are considered terrorists. Finally, most Pakistanis do not support the US war on terror because they do not think the threat posed by Islamic extremism is all that grave. In terms of their own lives it is a perfectly reasonable conclusion: even though there are frequent Islamist attacks in Pakistan, most Pakistanis are much more likely to suffer a premature death as a result of poverty or nonexistent medical services as they are from an Islamist attack.

- Compared to some aid programs to different countries, Pakistan has been given a relatively free hand in spending the massive amounts of US aid it has been receiving. It could be encouraged, for example, to spend more of the aid funds on education.
- While it is unlikely that Islamists will get their hands on a fully functional nuclear device and overload its safety and security features (in part because the parts for warheads are dispersed across several locations), there is a risk that they might access some of Pakistan's radioactive material for a "dirty bomb." The chief threat of theft and diversion of fissile materials comes from established nuclear industry personnel who become radicalized in middle age.

- The outcome of the current power struggle in Islamabad should be decided by Pakistanis. Attempts by outside powers to choose leaders for Pakistan will sometimes fail and always create resentment. So, too, does the use of bullying language in public when outsiders call on Pakistan to take certain decisions. Both encourage anti-Americanism and will lead to defeat in the battle for hearts and minds in Pakistan. Outsiders seeking to influence developments in Pakistan need to consider the limits to their power and ask whether it is realistic for them, for example, to try to create a flourishing, pluralistic democracy in Pakistan.

Introduction

From the moment he tried to sack the chief justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry, in March 2007, General Pervez Musharraf's power has been diminishing. When Chaudhry refused to go quietly, but instead organized a campaign of civil agitation, Musharraf was forced to reinstate him. The general consequently faced a hostile supreme court at a time when he needed favorable decisions to secure a third term as president.

Musharraf has also had to deal with a political challenge. Sensing the general's weakness, two former prime ministers, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, prepared to make their political comebacks. Prior to her assassination, the contest between the three remained unresolved. Now that Ms. Bhutto is gone, her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is likely to benefit from a substantial sympathy vote in the forthcoming election. In the longer term, however, the party is unlikely to flourish under the leadership of her widower Asif Zardari and her young son Bilawal. The greatest political beneficiary of her death is her long-time rival Nawaz Sharif. If he plays his cards right (by no means a certainty), his wing of the Pakistan Muslim League could become the only national party in the whole of Pakistani politics.

The main loser from the assassination is General Musharraf. Most Pakistanis blame him for her death. They believe either that his intelligence agencies organized the killing or that he failed to provide Ms. Bhutto with enough protection. Even his close supporters are now saying he cannot survive another year in office. If, as many expect, he organizes his political allies to have a parliamentary majority after the next election, so few Pakistanis will believe the result that

there will be a high risk of prolonged and violent street agitation.

Washington has been left with some difficult choices. It needs a reliable ally in Pakistan, but the domestic political scene seems set to produce instability and uncertainty. Given the scale of the US investment in Pakistan since 9/11, it is a highly disappointing outcome for many in Washington.

US Aid Programs

It is a remarkable fact that in all probability no one knows how much aid the United States is giving to Pakistan. The sheer number of programs, many of them classified, means it is virtually impossible to have an accurate overview. The international press generally states that US aid to Pakistan since 9/11 has amounted to \$10 billion. That figure is made up of four funding streams for which there are published accounts: Coalition Support Funds, Budget Support, Security Assistance, and Development Aid. For once, however, the press is guilty of understatement: the true figure is far higher. The most detailed and comprehensive study of US aid programs to Pakistan since 9/11 found that the \$10 billion figure "has likely been matched, if not exceeded, by classified funds that have gone toward intelligence and covert military action." The sort of programs in the covert funding streams include support to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), training Pakistani officers in nuclear safety, and cash payments to tribal leaders hired to fight Al Qaeda elements in their areas.¹ The real figure for US aid to Pakistan since 9/11 is closer to \$20 billion than \$10 billion.²

Of the four declared funding streams, the Coalition Support Funds are the most significant and have totaled approximately \$6 billion since 9/11. This money has reimbursed Pakistan for operational and logistical costs incurred in counterterrorism operations. The United States, to put it another way, has been paying for the conflict in Waziristan. American officials responsible for disbursing these funds say it is extremely difficult for the United States to avoid being overcharged for items such as food, fuel, clothing, ammunition, and the medical expenses of Pakistan soldiers.³ The sums are huge: Coalition Support Funds equal more than a quarter of Pakistan's total military expenditure.⁴ Sadly for the US funders, the conflict in Waziristan, despite its exorbitant expense, has resulted in a clear victory for the militants.

While the Coalition Support Funds cover ongoing military costs, a separate category of aid, Security Assistance (\$1.6 billion since 9/11), pays for capital military expenditure. The money has been spent on items such as maritime patrol aircraft, cobra attack helicopters, roads in the tribal areas, and night vision equipment.⁵ Critics complain that many of the arms purchased by Pakistan are not suited to fighting militants in the tribal areas but have been acquired to protect the country from its traditional enemy, India.

The remaining funds, approximately \$2.5 billion, are split into two categories. The larger proportion (\$1.6 billion) has gone into budgetary support to Pakistan. The idea is that these funds can be used to pay off foreign debts, thus freeing up money to be spent on social security. The relatively free hand that Pakistan has in disbursing these funds, however, means that much of the money is likely to have ended up in military-related expenditure. The remaining money (\$0.9 billion) is earmarked for social spending projects such as the relief effort for the Kashmir earthquake of 2005. A study of the effectiveness of the civilian sector aid programs found that money had gone into combating particular problems such as drug smuggling, illegal migration, and corruption. The programs, however, tended not to address wider objectives pertaining to justice, democracy, and bureaucratic accountability.⁶

Although most analysts believe that winning the war on terror in Pakistan will require both military and social programs, it is important to recognize that the two can be in conflict. One bomb dropped from a drone in the tribal areas can undermine millions of dollars worth of pro-American attitudes purchased by civilian aid programs.⁷ As in Afghanistan and Iraq, the difficult judgments about when it is appropriate to use force (especially air strikes) are left to military commanders, and it is far from clear that they fully understand the political implications of their actions. While killing senior Al Qaeda and Taliban commanders may have security benefits to the United States, killing civilians in the process imposes costs that are not currently being taken into account.

Growing Militancy

While the United States has been spending these very substantial sums, militancy in Pakistan has been growing at an alarming rate. The murder of

Benazir Bhutto follows attempts on the lives of General Musharraf, the interior minister, the chief justice, the religious affairs minister, and many others. Ten or fifteen years ago most of the militant activity in Pakistan was sponsored by state officials in the military or the ISI. Now ISI personnel are a target. The jihadis fighting in Kashmir, the Talibs fighting in Afghanistan, the extremists who carried out assassinations within Pakistan, and even those responsible for sectarian violence had protectors within the establishment. The reality in contemporary Pakistan is different. Extremist organizations can now mount suicide bomb attacks without help from anybody. They can rely on a network of mosques and madrasas to provide volunteers and can easily raise the small sums needed to mount an attack. The suicide bombers now often target buildings and personnel from the institutions that once sponsored them.

The militants' increasing potency prompts the question of whether they will be able to take over in Pakistan. Indeed, the incompetence and corruption displayed by successive civilian and military governments has led to fears that the Pakistani people might decide that the religious parties should at least be given a chance to see if they can make a better job of governing the country. Millions of Pakistanis, after all, are deeply frustrated; many have difficulties feeding their families, and most can get neither justice in the courts nor a decent education for their children. The magnitude of the failure of Pakistan state institutions has been astonishing: less than 2 percent of the population, for example, pays income tax.

Given how dreadfully Pakistan has been governed, it is perhaps surprising how little support the religious-based political parties have received. They have never won more than 14 percent of the national vote in any election. Some feared that their 2002 victories in North West Frontier Province and Balochistan would provide a platform on which they could build further electoral gains. But these predictions, it now seems, were wrong. The provincial administrations led by the MMA (the religious parties' alliance) have turned out to be just as corrupt and incompetent as their more secular predecessors. Far from adding to their credibility, winning provincial power has, if anything, undermined the respect people had for the religious-based parties.

Pakistani Opinion and Collateral Damage From US Air Strikes

It is tempting to think that, since a majority of Pakistanis are moderates who oppose extremist interpretations of Islam, they will welcome operations conducted in the name of the US war on terror such as air strikes against Al Qaeda leaders. In fact, Pakistanis react with anger to the breaches to their sovereignty and to the loss of innocent lives during such military actions. Seventy-two percent of Pakistanis believe suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilians are never justifiable. But this does not mean Pakistanis support the war on terror. Indeed, 59 percent oppose it, and 75 percent think the United States should withdraw from Afghanistan.⁸ To many Western eyes such views may seem contradictory, but to most Pakistanis they are entirely logical: they believe the way the US war on terror is being fought—in particular the military action in Afghanistan and Waziristan—is playing into the hands of radical Islam. The Pakistani army has already lost around 1,000 men fighting in Waziristan, and most Pakistanis expect the casualty rate to climb. The tribesmen have never succumbed to outside encroachment, and there is no reason to believe that they will do so now.

Many Pakistanis consider the military campaign in the tribal areas to be not only ill-conceived but also unjust. They point out that the tribesmen were once asked by the United States to liberate Afghanistan from foreign (Soviet) occupation. Now, because they are undertaking a similar effort to expel foreign (NATO) troops, they are considered terrorists. Finally, most Pakistanis do not support the US war on terror because they do not think the threat posed by Islamic extremism is all that grave. In terms of their own lives it is a perfectly reasonable conclusion: even though there are frequent Islamist attacks in Pakistan, most Pakistanis are much more likely to suffer a premature death as a result of poverty or nonexistent medical services as they are from an Islamist attack.

Tribal Politics

When Pakistan deployed troops in Waziristan in 2004, under strong US pressure, it did so with some reluctance. Many senior Pakistani officers and experienced civil servants feared the campaign would backfire. Their pessimism was

entirely justified. By 2007 the 80,000 Pakistani troops in Waziristan had been utterly humiliated. In August the militants captured over 200 soldiers and held them hostage for over two months. Despite such an unprecedented challenge to its prestige and honor, the army was too weak to respond; eventually the men were released in exchange for the release of 28 captured militants. In the course of the kidnapping, three of the soldiers had been killed, but the militants responsible went unpunished.⁹

For the first time in the tribal areas, the army had been exposed as too weak to respond to a provocation. In the past the tribesmen feared that, should the army ever decide to act, it could deliver a crushing blow. That fear no longer exists. These developments in Waziristan only served to confirm the assessment reached in July 2007 by the US National Intelligence Estimate, which concluded that Al Qaeda had a safe haven in the tribal areas.¹⁰

Some US-based analysts believe the Pakistan army's failure in the tribal areas is a result of Islamabad's lack of determination. General Musharraf has repeatedly been asked to "do more" in Waziristan. His critics complain that, from time to time, he has held talks or jirgas involving tribal leaders, religious militants, and government representatives, which have sometimes resulted in cease-fires or truces. These talks, it is true, have achieved little. Indeed, it is likely that the militants have used the breaks in fighting to gather their strength.

It is important, however, to understand the Pakistani government's motivation for entering such talks. Senior military and civilian officials in Pakistan believe there can be no military solution in the tribal areas. Most senior Pakistanis believe the only way to defeat the religious militants is to persuade or pay those tribal elders who retain authority to confront the militants themselves at the local levels.

For some years now there has been a struggle within the tribal areas (echoing what happened in Afghanistan when the Taliban rose to power there) between traditional tribal elders and, often younger, militant elements. Radical Islam in the tribal areas is, in one sense, a revolutionary movement seeking to overthrow an entrenched and stifling tribal power structure. Ever since the creation of Pakistan, the federal government has governed

the tribal areas with techniques first devised by the British, including cash payments handed out by federal officials to pliant tribal elders.

Even though the tribal system in many respects has helped the federal authorities, it has also posed a dilemma. While tribal elders helped the government keep control, they also hindered social development for fear that better educated tribesmen would not respect their authority.

There is a conflict between General Musharraf's short-term and long-term objectives in the tribal areas. His immediate goal is to get the tribal elders to win back power from the militants. Looking further ahead, though, the Pakistani state needs to integrate the tribal areas into mainstream society, a process that will inevitably involve dismantling tribal structures.

Given that the battles in Waziristan have already been lost, there is a strong case for concentrating now on the longer-term objectives. In fact, there are signs that the United States is already doing so: the Bush administration has already secured approval for a \$750-million program for social development in the tribal areas. Caught in the same dilemma as Pakistani leaders, though, the United States is simultaneously succumbing to the temptation of bolstering the tribal leaders and working with them. Having had some success working with Sunni tribal leaders in Iraq in 2006, the administration is now planning a \$350-million program to recruit some Waziri tribes or clans to fight the militants.¹¹

The Red Mosque Incident

While many policymakers and officials in Washington have been dismayed by the Pakistan army's losses in Waziristan, they were encouraged in July 2007 when General Musharraf decided to attack militants who had occupied the Red Mosque in Islamabad. The events of the siege and the storming are well known. For months militants inside the mosque had been defying the government by kidnapping and detaining police officers and prostitutes, fighting security forces, and sending out raiding parties to destroy nearby video shops. Internationally General Musharraf was under pressure to act in a stand-off that, because of its location right in the heart of the capital, attracted worldwide media coverage. In fact, the general waited far longer than many in the West would have liked, but in doing so, he

may have helped win over Pakistani public opinion to the idea that the authorities gave the militants every chance to negotiate a settlement. More than 100 people were killed in the storming of the mosque, and while many Pakistanis thought it wrong to kill people in a religious building—especially women—there were no significant popular protests.

Many Western officials hoped that the storming of the Red Mosque was a turning point after which General Musharraf would show greater enthusiasm for confronting radical Islam. Subsequent events, however, show that the more striking result of the siege was the increased determination of the militants, who have subsequently launched a devastating suicide bombing campaign. Since July 2007 there has been a wave of Islamist violence in Pakistan, killing more than 800 people, over half of them in suicide attacks.¹² In this sense, Benazir Bhutto's assassination via an extremist suicide attack was but one more instance of a growing trend of Islamist violence in the country.

The Swat Region: Trends of Concern

Throughout 2007, Pakistan's military has also faced a very serious challenge in the Swat Valley just a few hours' drive from Islamabad. Known as a tourist resort and home to Pakistan's only ski slope, Swat is well within the settled areas of Pakistan.

Problems had been brewing in Swat for many months. A pro-Taliban cleric, Maulana Fazlullah, who leads the banned Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws (TNSM), used an illegal FM radio station to propagate his hard-line views. The army, despite its ability to shut down national news channels at a moment's notice, proved unable to jam the signal. Over the course of 2007, militants responding to the maulana's calls gathered in Swat where they bombed girls' schools, prevented children from getting polio vaccines (considered a Western plot to sterilize young Muslims), and blew up video and CD shops. In an echo of one of the last acts of the Afghan Taliban, they destroyed a 1300-year-old, 20-foot-tall statue of Buddha.

At first the Pakistan military failed to respond to these provocations. Eventually in July 2007, Musharraf did deploy 2,000 soldiers to regain control of the area. When they failed to make much headway, another 2,500 reinforcements

were sent in October. They were met by a suicide bomber who killed 17. Another six soldiers were beheaded and their remains dragged through a village. Stung by the losses, the army deployed another 10,000 troops and used helicopter gunships to attack militants who had dug into positions on the hillsides.¹³

The militants, though, continued to advance. By late November 2007, they had control of 9 of the 12 districts in Swat. Many local residents did not support the Taliban forces, but they did not dare oppose them. Relatively small groups of militants managed to set up roadblocks and take over police stations with ease. The events in Swat demonstrated the potency of the radicals' message. Many of the residents had been receiving Pakistan state TV and a whole array of independent satellite channels for years. Yet one maulana, with a tiny FM transmitter, was able to mobilize enough support to take on 15,000 Pakistani troops. Maulana Fazlullah could be forgiven for concluding that, when it came to the battle for hearts and minds in Swat, he was clearly winning.

Indeed, some Pakistani soldiers handed over their weapons to the militants without even fighting. One of them, Wilayat, in a very revealing interview described what had happened when he was sent to Swat: "We were told that non-Muslims had come into Pakistan and were fighting under the name of being Mujahedeen, and were giving Pakistan a bad name and creating lawlessness. But when our tour of duty came, we saw that these people were true Muslims and were fighting for implementing Islamic law and that they were fighting for the sake of Pakistan to stop the Hindus and English coming. So we announced we were with them and would hand ourselves over to them."¹⁴ Such sentiments are, of course, very worrying for senior officers in the Pakistan army. Although there are no official figures, an estimated 25 percent of the army is made up of ethnic Pashtuns who are likely to have sympathies for the kind of people they are now being asked to fight.

War on Terror

The US administration has frequently recognized the support it has received from Pakistan. Echoing the views of President Bush, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, for example, has said, "President Musharraf has been indispensable in the global 'War on Terror,' so indispensable that extremists and radicals have tried

to assassinate him multiple times.... Pakistan's government and security forces have captured or killed hundreds of Al Qaeda operatives and Taliban militants, including some of the most senior terrorists from these groups, since 2001."¹⁵ In addition, Pakistan has provided the United States significant logistical support. As well as letting the United States establish military bases in Pakistan, approximately 75 percent of US supplies in Afghanistan, including 40 percent of the vehicle fuel, passes through or over Pakistan.¹⁶

There can be no doubt that the Pakistan government is in many respects in confrontation with Islamists. In addition to the deployments in Waziristan and Swat and the storming of the Red Mosque, it is clear that General Musharraf has never shared Al Qaeda's obscurantist interpretation of Islam. After 9/11 it was his instinct, as well as his understanding of national interest, that led him to side with the United States. While he has failed to capture Osama bin Laden, few could doubt that he would like to do so.

General Musharraf has also tried to tackle the very difficult issue of Kashmir. There have been well over a dozen assassination attempts against General Musharraf, and many of those who have been arrested in connection with the plots are former Kashmir militants. In other words, the army chief has been attacked by the very same people whom the army used to train.

The reason the former Kashmiri militants are targeting Musharraf is that they believe he has abandoned their cause. They are right. The Pakistan authorities have not only stopped their military support for these fighters but are also distributing small financial grants to former insurgents who agree to settle down in Pakistan. Those who get married, for example, receive a payment of around \$800.

However, while the army has been able to dismantle some of the smaller Kashmiri outfits, it has not yet tackled the big organizations and is unlikely to do so—even after the recent tragedy of Benazir Bhutto's death. Though the army helped create groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohamed, these organizations are now so big and well financed that they can operate independently of the state. They have secure funding from collections in mosques and wealthy individuals both within Pakistan and further afield.

Support for the Taliban?

Yet even if the army's anti-militant credentials seem pretty solid, many believe that in fact it is supporting some Islamist elements and, in particular, the Taliban. It is a highly controversial issue; hard evidence is scarce.

Pakistan has consistently, and at times angrily, defended its record, insisting that it has done everything it can to tackle the militants. Official Pakistani statements, however, are not in themselves convincing. For 20 years, after all, Pakistan denied giving military support to the militants in Kashmir and even denied sending soldiers to fight in the Kargil conflict against India (a fiction maintained even to this day). Given that all these statements have subsequently been exposed as deliberate falsehoods, Pakistani officials today should perhaps not be so surprised that their claims about their policy toward the Taliban and other radicals are not taken at face value.

While Washington has often expressed its faith in General Musharraf, NATO intelligence officials in Afghanistan, and the Karzai government itself, are convinced that the Taliban has been receiving Pakistani support. One of the most distinguished US scholars on South Asia, Professor Stephen Cohen, agrees: "Its [Pakistan's] intelligence services supported the Taliban, while only reluctantly going after the Al Qaeda forces embedded in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). The failure to round up the Taliban leadership was a matter of state policy: the Pakistan army still regards India as its major threat, and the Taliban are used to counterbalance Indian influence in Afghanistan."¹⁷

Another impressive authority agrees with at least part of that assessment. Speaking of the Taliban forces within southern Afghanistan, the former NPR reporter Sarah Chayes who, remarkably, has lived in Kandahar since shortly after 9/11 says, "These Taliban are not homegrown insurgents. These Taliban, I have become convinced by evidence gathered over the last six years, were reconstituted into a force for mischief by the military establishment—in other words, it seems to me, the government—of Pakistan, as a proxy fighting force to advance Pakistan's long-cherished agenda: to control all or part of Afghanistan, directly or indirectly."¹⁸

Different Groups: Different Policies

It is often said that any support being given to the Taliban is coming from unauthorized Islamist elements in the mid-levels of the ISI. In the past, similar claims were made about support for Kashmiri militants. In reality, though, the backing of the Kashmiri militants was never a freelance operation: the ISI was implementing state policy. The organization is led by senior army officers who are rotated in and out for two- or three-year stints. Not only does this prevent the establishment of an institutionalized "ISI view," it also means that General Musharraf has been able to fill the upper echelons of the agency with his loyalists. The idea of the ISI being a rogue organization acting in defiance of government policy is now, and always has been, a myth that has provided convenient cover for the Pakistan establishment. If the ISI is supporting the Taliban, it is because General Musharraf has ordered it to do so.

And it seems clear that there has been, at the very least, a permissive policy toward the Taliban.¹⁹ Although there is a paucity of incontrovertible evidence, Pakistani press reports and information gathered by Western military and government officials leave little doubt that since 9/11 the Taliban leadership has been able to operate with relative freedom in and around Quetta. General Musharraf, it seems, was not confronting the Taliban as long as it was fighting in Afghanistan.

Western policymakers complain, as Sarah Chayes does above, that Pakistan is seeking to install a friendly government in Afghanistan. In one sense that may be true, but it does not quite capture the way Pakistani policymakers perceive the issue. There is scarcely a single individual in Pakistan who believes that the NATO forces in Afghanistan will prevail. Although US and British officials have tried their utmost to persuade the Pakistanis that the NATO forces will remain in Afghanistan for two decades or more, the Pakistani army command remains unconvinced. And it is probably right. In maintaining cordial relations (and possibly much closer links) with the Taliban, Pakistan believes it is keeping a relationship with a political and social group that will, in the not too distant future, have at least a share of power in Kabul.

If it is true that Pakistan is permitting Taliban attacks in Afghanistan, then the United States is

paying very substantial aid funds to a government that, at the very least, is not doing all it can to prevent attacks on US soldiers. It seems preposterous, and yet there is every reason to believe that the US administration knows full well what is going on. It has, after all, repeatedly called on Pakistan to do more to confront the Taliban.

The United States does this because it believes the alternatives are worse. As things stand, the United States is getting cooperation in many aspects of its war on terror. From time to time it even manages to exert enough pressure on Pakistan to move against the Taliban. The Bush administration seems to have concluded that this is the best result that can be achieved.

Nuclear Weapons

Pakistan is not only home to some of the world's most committed Islamic radicals, it also possesses proven nuclear bombs and has a history of being the world's worst nuclear proliferator. At first sight, it is a startling combination. The most obvious danger is that radical Islamists take power and use their weapons against Western targets.

I have argued above that an Islamist takeover is highly unlikely for the foreseeable future, but there is another disturbing scenario. Militants could manage to get their hands on a small amount of nuclear material that could then be used to make a dirty bomb. General Musharraf has always insisted that Pakistan's command and control arrangements are "the best in the world."²⁰ He is aware, however, that his assurances can hardly be taken at face value. The general has consequently sanctioned contacts between Pakistani officers responsible for nuclear safety and US officials. Indeed, Washington has reportedly spent almost \$100 million in secret programs to train Pakistani officers better to secure their nuclear arsenal.²¹ The Pakistanis have decided that the best method they can use to secure the arsenal is to keep their weapons separate from delivery systems and nuclear cores separate from their detonators.²² The idea is that anyone trying to steal a bomb would have to get material from at least two separate locations rather than one. For all that, US military planners have reportedly drawn up plans to try to capture Pakistani nuclear weapons should the need arise, although it is difficult to see how such an operation could work.²³

The biggest threat to Pakistan's nuclear security probably comes from insiders with radical Islamist sympathies. It would not be the first time. Documents found in Kabul after the fall of the Taliban showed that some Pakistani nuclear scientists had met with Al Qaeda to discuss the possible development of nuclear weapons. One of them is thought to have met bin Laden, who asked for help making a nuclear bomb.²⁴ The meeting did not lead anywhere, but it did reveal the extent to which Pakistani nuclear scientists can have extremist loyalties. Pakistan insists that it now has tough screening measures to prevent Islamists from getting sensitive posts in the nuclear command and control. Much depends on the reliability of that assertion—especially since identifying radical sympathies is like trying to hit a moving target. Many of the most radical Islamists in Pakistan have "got religion" fairly late in life.

US Options

A congressional hearing held shortly after General Musharraf declared the state of emergency in November 2007 revealed just how much US policymakers disagree about Pakistan. Gary Ackerman (D-NY) suggested, "We should stop delivery of any further F-16s to Pakistan and cut off all further US assistance until the state of emergency is lifted, the constitution is restored, the fired Supreme Court Justices are reinstated, opposition politicians and civil society activists are released, independent media is allowed to reopen, a caretaker government is appointed to hold free and fair parliamentary elections, and General Musharraf steps down, as promised, as Chief of Army Staff."²⁵ His view received enthusiastic backing from a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Carter Center. The International Crisis Group summed up much of the NGO thinking on this issue: "Musharraf is the problem not the solution. It is only democratic, civilian government that can bring stability and defeat extremism."²⁶

Dan Burton (R-IN), by contrast, proposed almost exactly the opposite policy: "To start putting tremendous pressure on President Musharraf, who has been our friend and ally, who's helped us in the fight against terrorism, could lead to the same thing we saw back when the shah (of Iran) was removed. We force Musharraf out, we beat the hell out of him and see him removed, and what do you think is going to happen?"

Academics and specialists on Pakistan have similar disagreements. One Washington-based policy analyst, Frederic Grare, has come close to recommending that Pakistan be treated as a rogue state.²⁷ He states that the Pakistan military has not only failed to control the militants, it has actively encouraged them so as to attract greater US aid funds. He argues that “the Pakistani state bears responsibility for the worsening security situation in Afghanistan, the resurgence of the Taliban, terrorism in Kashmir, and the growth of jihadi ideology and capabilities internationally.” Grare argues that to achieve democratization in Pakistan, the United States and its allies must use the offer of aid and the threat of sanctions together, including actions such as an arms embargo, denying visas to officers from the rank of colonel up along with their families, a ban on all transactions with military-controlled business, a ban on student exchanges with any people attending universities controlled by the military, and even sanctions on civilian politicians working with the military.²⁸

The problems with such an approach are obvious. The United States’ record in imposing democracy in Islamic countries by either violent or peaceful means is dismal. Sanctions against Pakistan would create great antagonism, and few can doubt that a hostile Pakistani government would have the capacity to inflict real, lasting damage on the West. Treating Pakistan like a rogue state runs the risk that it will behave like one. The vast majority of Pakistanis believe that the United States has already abandoned them once (leaving one of the poorest nations on earth to foot the bill for hosting millions of Afghan refugees). The imposition of sanctions would be taken as the first sign of what most Pakistanis expect: a repeat performance.

While the United States is unlikely to go as far as Grare recommends, there are more moderate options available. First, Washington could cut *some* of the aid. Congressman Ackerman’s suggestion of stopping the sale of F-16s, for example, would certainly signal the depth of US concern while having little direct impact on Islamabad’s capacity to fight extremists in Waziristan or North West Frontier Province. But as the former assistant secretary for South Asian affairs, Karl Inderfurth, has pointed out, previous bans on F-16 sales have made the plane a symbol of US Pakistani relations: “To cut off that [sale] might seem like a logical

place to show our displeasure—until you consider that such a move would do more to jeopardize the broad Pakistani public’s estimation of the United States than to undermine the Pakistani military.”²⁹ The United States, in other words, would have made its point, but it would also have undermined those Pakistanis who believe their country should be helping the United States fight the war on terror.

Another possibility is for the United States to impose tighter conditions on how its aid contributions are spent. Indeed, given the sums involved, it is somewhat surprising that ever since 9/11, the United States has not had tighter control of the money flowing to Pakistan. It is difficult to see any reason not to do this. There is a strong case for the United States saying that some of its aid will be dependent on greater progress on dismantling the Taliban leadership in Pakistan and that, once it arrives in Pakistan, a far greater proportion of the funds should be spent on the big, long-term issues of education and the rule of law.

9/11 Commission

The 9/11 Commission made at least one quite specific recommendation about Pakistan: “The United States should support Pakistan’s government in its struggle against extremists with a comprehensive effort that extends from military aid to support for better education.”³⁰

On the military front, as the figures show, the United States has implemented the commission’s recommendations with vigor. The amount of US aid directed at education, by contrast, has been relatively insignificant. Depending how the figures are calculated, the United States has spent between \$42 million and \$135 million a year on education programs since 9/11, and spending is set to go down in 2008.³¹ In other words, and again depending how one does the sums, of the total US aid spent in Pakistan since 9/11, education has received as little as 1.3 percent of total US aid funds.³²

Decent schools would have a double benefit: not only would children be equipped to find work and become useful, active members of society, but also the numbers attending madrasas would decline. Most parents would far rather send their children to mainstream schools if they were available. Educating a child takes well over a decade. It’s such a long-term process that Western policymakers are

often put off. Yet General Musharraf came into power eight years ago declaring education would be one of his top priorities. Had he fulfilled that pledge, Pakistan would now be far closer to finding real solutions to its problems.

Playing Politics

Most of the recent debate in Washington has focused on the aid program. There are, however, other significant issues, not least the attitude Washington should take toward Pakistan's civilian politicians. In most democracies the political system remains the same while the politicians come and go.

Before Benazir Bhutto's death, US strategy was to encourage a power-sharing deal between her and General Musharraf. It would never have worked because the two leaders never trusted each other. The most popular civilian politician is now Nawaz Sharif, and it is all but certain that at some stage the United States will need to work with him again.

On the face of it, the United States has every reason to be suspicious of Nawaz Sharif. Had he not been removed in the 1999 coup, there was a very real possibility that he would have introduced Sharia law in Pakistan. He now says he has abandoned the idea, and it is worth recalling that his motivation for the Sharia bill was not so much ideological as political: he wanted to ensure his total grip on the political system. Although Nawaz Sharif is a religious man, he also has many worldly interests. It is also worth noting that Sharif has some credibility with the religious parties in Pakistan and might be better able to lead them to more moderate positions. Nawaz Sharif has no strong political beliefs, and if the aid flows continued, would in all likelihood be willing to pursue whatever policies Washington favored.

Having said that, Sharif's record indicates that he would make little or no effort to address Pakistan's long-term problems. His two administrations were marked by very high levels of administrative incompetence. He made no serious effort to promote the rule of law (indeed his supporters physically ransacked the supreme court when it ruled against him) or to improve the education system.

When discussing internal Pakistani politics, it is perhaps also worth making the point that the

way the US policies are expressed by senior officials in Washington makes a difference. In the days after the declaration of the state of emergency in November 2007, US policy was quite muted, but the language was tough. Condoleezza Rice said that General Musharraf "needs" to take off his uniform and allow open political activity.³³ White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe declared, "They need to get back on the path to democracy—now."³⁴ And speaking of his telephone call to General Musharraf, Mr. Bush said, "My message was that we believe strongly in elections, and that you ought to have elections soon and you need to take off your uniform."³⁵ The public use of such prescriptive language causes considerable irritation and resentment in Pakistan. Statements that sound bullying always come with a price in terms of heightened anti-Americanism. Nor is there any evidence that Pakistani leaders are more likely to follow US advice when it is given in public: in fact, the opposite may well be the case.

Conclusion

The prospects for Pakistan are bleak. Most observers would agree that General Musharraf is moderate, pro-Western and, in Pakistani terms, relatively secular. After the coup he enjoyed overwhelming public support, and since then he has had largely unchecked power and approximately \$20 billion of US aid. No Pakistani leader could ask for more. Yet, for all that, his time in office has been marked by significant territorial and propaganda gains by the militants.

When considering what to do about Pakistan, many policy analysts resist the indisputable fact that the army will remain a major force in Pakistani politics for the foreseeable future. It is important to distinguish the outcome people desire from the one they can realistically expect. Most Western observers, if not all of them, would prefer that Pakistan was a stable democracy in which the army was subservient to elected officials. But for 60 years it never has been, and there is little sign of the situation changing. There is little reason to believe that external pressure will make a big difference. If Pakistan is to have genuine democratic government, it will be the result of millions of better-educated Pakistanis demanding it.

There are myriad obstacles to democratic development in Pakistan, and not all of them are to do with the military. Illiteracy, the feudal landown-

ers, the lack of rule of law, the dynastic tradition, and many other factors all play a role. The lack of democracy in the country is best seen as a symptom of the problem rather than the problem itself. For as long as millions of Pakistanis remain illiterate, impoverished, and unaware of their rights and responsibilities in society, meaningful democracy will not be achievable. After Benazir Bhutto's death President Musharraf is weaker than ever, and the internal pressure for a genuinely civilian government is increasing. But even if that happened, the army would remain a powerful voice in Pakistani politics.

It is also worth making the point that a genuinely democratic government in Pakistan would not give great priority to the US war on terror. It is not an issue that causes great concern to many Pakistanis, and any genuinely representative government would spend far less time and effort dealing with it than General Musharraf has. No elected politician is likely to put up with the same amount of unpopularity as General Musharraf has faced for the sake of a foreign power. For those who have doubts about the US strategy of relying on force in Waziristan and now Swat, the civilian politicians, despite what they say, may provide the best hope of a change of policy.

In any event, the outcome of the current power struggle is something that should be decided by Pakistanis. The United States should be concentrating on how to use its massive aid program to achieve its objectives. The single most important determinant of Pakistan's future remains the minds of its people. There is only one long-term solution for Pakistan: education.

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Printed on
recycled paper
2/08 6.1K