US-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Common and Clashing Interests

Shehzad H. Qazi

The last calendar year was by far the most tumultuous in a decade of tense and mistrustful relations between Pakistan and the United States. It began with CIA contractor Raymond Davis shooting and killing two Pakistanis in broad daylight in Lahore, then only worsened in May when Osama bin Laden was found and killed in a US raid at a compound near the Pakistan Military Academy in Abbottabad (an episode that severely angered Pakistanis and embarrassed the Army, which was domestically seen as unable to secure the homeland against foreign intrusion and internationally suspected of providing refuge to America's worst enemy). Tensions escalated further as the US began pressuring Pakistan to attack the Haqqani Network (HN), a Taliban group with safe havens in North Waziristan. Pakistan refused, and crisis hit when the HN launched a twenty-two hour assault on the US Embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul. An infuriated Admiral Mike Mullen, outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, lashed out against Pakistan, saying the HN was a "veritable arm" of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. Weeks of diplomatic efforts finally thawed relations, but just as the situation stabilized, a NATO attack on a Pakistani checkpoint in Salala in late November threw the relationship into a tailspin. Twenty-four Pakistani soldiers died in the two-hour assault. Pakistan was

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furious, immediately suspending NATO supply lines and boycotting the Bonn conference on Afghanistan held in early December.

The crises of 2011 prompted debates in both countries over how to move forward. In Washington, several administration officials and members of Congress have argued for sidelining Pakistan and giving India a larger stake in Afghanistan. Others insist that it is important to tread carefully and that Pakistan cannot just be dumped. In Pakistan, many are arguing for complete disengagement while others are pushing for new rules of engagement.

There are two fundamental problems undergirding US-Pakistan troubles. First, instead of a broad partnership that includes trade and cultural linkages, the two countries have a one-dimensional transactional relationship centered along security concerns, i.e., the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. In a way, General Jehangir Karamat, Pakistan's retired Army chief and ambassador to the US, underscored this point, saying that, in his assessment, "US-Pakistan relations were at their worst because relations between the Pentagon and the Pakistan Army were unstable." US-Pakistan relations are further complicated because of clashing security interests, especially vis-à-vis the Afghan Taliban.

These two problems will not yield to quick diplomatic fixes. Barring a fundamental re-thinking, Washington and Islamabad should get used to making the best of an ambiguous alliance, and one that, going forward, will be limited, transactional, and security-centered, featuring competition over the endgame in Afghanistan, cooperation in the fight against al-Qaeda, and a trimmed-down and conditional aid structure.

The main source of US-Pakistan tensions has been the war in Afghanistan, and recent scuffles are linked to the shifting American strategy there. In 2009, the Obama administration set a goal of reversing the momentum of the Taliban by carrying out counterinsurgency operations in southern Afghanistan. The main objective was not to defeat the Taliban, but to create a situation that could allow for a face-saving withdrawal. The 2009 troop surge was aimed at gaining control in major cities and roadways and imposing costs on the Taliban that would force them to the negotiating table. These objectives would be bolstered by the parallel Afghan-led national reconciliation program announced in January 2010, two months

after the November surge. The US publicly supported the process and even established a special fund of $1.5 billion to provide monetary incentives to Taliban fighters.

However, Pakistan's role was crucial in the success of this program. While NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) targeted the Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan was supposed to launch an operation against the group's bases in North Waziristan. It was to then follow this with political pressure that would force the Taliban to negotiate with the US and the Karzai government. Pakistan, whose security establishment has continued to provide refuge to the Afghan Taliban over the past decade, refused to comply. Leaders of all three major Taliban factions live in Pakistan, with a large part of the leadership of Mullah Omar's Quetta Shura having relocated to Karachi. According to a study published by the London School of Economics, ISI representatives sit in on the meetings and decisionmaking of the Taliban's major councils. Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid has written that members of the Taliban even travel abroad on Pakistani passports.

That Pakistan would support a Taliban insurgency should be hardly surprising. First, Pakistan sees the Taliban as the group in Afghanistan that is the least averse to its interests and most capable of blocking increased influence by India, which Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment fears might pick up the pieces in Kabul following a US withdrawal. It is this strategic calculation, more than anything else, that has prevented Pakistan from cutting the Taliban loose, and it was disastrously naive for US policymakers to think that they could buy off such a deeply held security obsession for temporary offerings of $1.3 billion a year in aid.

It is also true that deviousness in this situation has not been a Pakistani monopoly. While it has been insisting that Islamabad press on with attacks against the Taliban over the past year, the US has held secret meetings with Taliban representatives in Germany and Doha, Qatar—and kept Pakistan out of those talks. This only increased Pakistani insecurity and reinforced the idea that Washington will ignore its interests in the Afghan endgame.

The US goal in Afghanistan now is to reach a negotiated settlement that allows it to withdraw most forces, leaving a few thousand behind on bases in the north and west to protect the government in Kabul and carry out limited counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda and other groups that threaten the government or US interests. A *Time* magazine blogger captured the new strategy poignantly, saying, "Counter-insur-

gency is so 2007....All the cool kids are into counter-terrorism now." Moreover, the US and Taliban are also moving toward more serious negotiations. Some initial confidence-building measures such as the opening of a Taliban political office in Doha and the release of Taliban prisoners from Guantánamo are being undertaken.

Prospects of peace, however, cause disunity as much as prospects of war. Pakistan is already suspicious of the Qatar initiative because the US has kept it (and Afghanistan) out of the dialogue. It also won't hesitate to exercise its influence over members of the Taliban leadership in exile. It has jailed several members of the group and is keeping others under house arrest and will undoubtedly seek several preconditions and concessions before it releases them to participate in the reconciliation.

It is also true that while negotiations shimmer, mirage-like, on the horizon, the Taliban has continued to systematically assassinate people in Karzai's government to weaken the regime, and there is no guarantee that they will cease such attacks between now and 2014. Any future Taliban attack threatens to again raise the heat between America and Pakistan.

Finally, the negotiations themselves will prove a tough endeavor. During the bargaining process, the United States' rational goal will be to concede as little as possible in terms of power and control to the Taliban and other Pashtun groups being supported by Pakistan, while Pakistan's goal will be to draw away as much power as possible from the US and its Afghan allies, who are mainly composed of ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras and belong to the group formerly called the Northern Alliance. Moreover, Pakistan, like other countries in the region, would not want a long-term American military presence in Afghanistan and will also make that an issue that will continue to complicate the tug-of-war with the US over ultimate outcomes in Afghanistan.

While the US seeks a political settlement with the Taliban in Afghanistan, its policy against al-Qaeda is to "disrupt, defeat, and dismantle" the organization and prevent its return to Afghanistan or Pakistan. The war against al-Qaeda is an area in which the US and Pakistan have cooperated in the past and will continue to cooperate in the future. Since 2002, Pakistan has been steadily attacking al-Qaeda in the tribal areas and arresting its operatives in Pakistani cities. Several members of al-Qaeda, including

senior member Younis al-Mauritani, were arrested in Pakistan in 2011.

The war against al-Qaeda, however, raises the key issue of drone strikes. Since 2004, the CIA has been conducting a drone campaign inside Pakistan that has eliminated hundreds of al-Qaeda fighters and their local allies. Last year alone, at least three top al-Qaeda operatives, including military chief Ilyas Kashmiri, were killed through drone strikes.

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The drone program has, however, been an issue of contention for two reasons. First, these strikes are unpopular with the Pakistani public because of the civilians who perish in the collateral damage. A 2011 Pew survey found that sixty-one percent of Pakistanis disagreed that missile strikes were necessary and eighty-nine percent said strikes kill too many civilians. A survey carried out within the tribal areas by the New America Foundation found that seventy-six percent opposed US missile strikes and forty-eight percent said they kill civilians rather than militants.

While Pakistan's official policy has been to condemn drone strikes, the military and the civilian government have supported them behind the scenes. In one cable released by WikiLeaks, Prime Minister Yousaf Gilani was quoted as saying, "I don't care if they do it as long as they get the right people. We'll protest in the National Assembly and then ignore it." General Ashfaq Parvez Kiyani, the powerful head of the Pakistani military, was reported to have even requested more drone support in South Waziristan. Moreover, these strikes have occurred with intelligence sharing between the ISI and CIA, with the human intelligence that is required to conduct the strikes coming from Pakistan. Finally, until recently, the drones often flew from Pakistan's Shamsi Airfield.

But a shift in policy has now taken place with the forced vacation of the Shamsi air base and the Pakistani Parliament's recommendation that "no unauthorized incursions into Pakistan's airspace" occur. Based on Pakistan's new policy, drones can no longer fly out of Pakistani bases and Pakistan itself should have an increased role in the decisionmaking over the strikes. According to Zafar Hilali, a retired Pakistani diplomat, "due to

the indiscriminate and hugely counterproductive attacks of recent years, Pakistan wants to limit their number and also be informed of the strikes and the targets prior to their occurrence."

Despite these shifts, however, the drone program will continue to be an area of cooperation between the two countries. This point was clearly illustrated through the two strikes that took place on January 10th and 12th of this year. The strikes killed Aslam Awan, a senior al-Qaeda aide, and also allegedly targeted Hakimullah Mehsud, leader of the Movement of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), an al-Qaeda allied group. Several more strikes have taken place since, and despite tensions over the Salala incident no sustained opposition has been voiced from Pakistani officials, evidencing continued cooperation in the drone program and the fight against al-Qaeda.

US aid to Pakistan, a third major issue between the two counties, has become contentious as relations have deteriorated and American policymakers and elected officials have often charged that Pakistan has been given more than $20 billion in recent years in effect to bite the hand that was feeding it. But this is an issue, from Islamabad's point of view anyhow, that is not as simple as it appears. First, in terms of the breakdown of US financial transfers to Pakistan, based on figures compiled by the Congressional Research Service, from 2002 to 2011 Pakistan is supposed to have received approximately $5.7 billion in security aid, $7.47 billion in economic aid, and $8.9 billion in Coalition Support Fund transfers. Thus, out of $22 billion, US aid to Pakistan has totaled approximately $13.2 billion in ten years. The remaining $8.9 billion, or forty percent of the total, has actually been reimbursements to Pakistan for the costs it has incurred in fighting al-Qaeda and its allies, and not aid.

Second, aid disbursement has been chaotic. Many times payments have been delayed, millions have often remained stuck in the pipeline, such as money from the Kerry-Lugar bill, and Pakistan has been owed money from previous fiscal years.

Finally, US aid has not made enough of an impact on Pakistani civilians to provoke any significant gratitude. Most do not see the benefit of civilian aid, much of which goes to foreign contractors, or is distributed by the government to its cronies and supporters. Moreover, some Paki-

stanis see US aid as a way to force Pakistan to fight America's wars. In the absence of tangible benefits and in the face of war wariness, many average Pakistanis are now said to favor the end of American aid so Washington loses the power to compel Pakistan to agree with its objectives.

In the aftermath of the bin Laden raid, and because of congressional desire to cut expenditures, the US-Pakistan aid relationship has changed in the last year. For example, $700 million of military aid was frozen in July 2011, when Pakistan expelled American military trainers. Congress has also made economic and security aid conditional upon Pakistan fighting militants. Although the Obama administration was influential in tripling non-military aid to Pakistan through the Kerry-Lugar bill, experts are predicting a future shrinking of economic assistance as well. Currently there is a bill in the House of Representatives titled the Pakistan Accountability Act, which seeks to cut all aid to Pakistan, except for money for the protection of nuclear weapons. The bill has yet to be voted on, but it foreshadows where the aid relationship is headed. It is quite possible that, over the next few years, US aid to Pakistan will become minimal, except for funds for protection of nuclear weapons.

Pakistan is often described in Washington as "double-dealing" and "duplicitous." Pakistani analysts describe their country's relationship with the US to me as "unequal" and "humiliating." Najam Rafique, a US expert at the Institute of Strategic Studies, in Islamabad, said, "Pakistan has been treated with contempt by the US; it's been mistreated and ordered around." Sadly enough, both characterizations are accurate. After 9/11, the US essentially coerced Pakistan to join the Global War on Terror and, since then, often forced it to act against its own perceived interests. Pakistan, on the other hand, accepted Washington's monetary incentives but undermined the US effort by providing safe havens to its enemies.

The lack of a broad partnership between America and Pakistan prevented the building of mutual trust or the alignment of interests. Instead, the two countries settled for a one-dimensional, transactional relationship centered along security concerns. What was missing was a synchronicity between the two countries' security calculus for the "AfPak" region. Nor is there much evidence that this state of affairs will change, a point painfully obvious to foreign affairs experts in the US and Pakistan alike. Bruce O.

Riedel, a former CIA officer who authored the Obama administration's 2009 policy review for Afghanistan and Pakistan, was recently quoted in the *New York Times Magazine* as saying, "I can see how this gets worse... And I can see how this gets catastrophically worse.... I don't see how it gets a whole lot better." Similarly, Zafar Hilali, a retired Pakistani diplomat, recently said to me, "This relationship is not headed anywhere—our ways part, our paths are divergent."

While disengagement is not an option—the continuation of relations today despite the horrors of 2011 illustrates this point—limited collaboration is the best that can be expected. Even as both countries cooperate to eliminate al-Qaeda, their positions in the Afghan endgame will be competitive. Pakistan will seek concessions before it allows the Afghan Taliban to fully participate in negotiations. Moreover, it will seek greater influence for its allies in a future Afghan government, while the US will push to secure the power of its Afghan allies. Finally, military and economic aid to Pakistan will be conditional and results-oriented.

It is important to point out that although such a relationship can accomplish short-term objectives, it cannot tackle mid-to-long-term challenges. That is why there is a crucial need for Washington to vigorously rethink relations with Pakistan. US regional interests and Pakistan's geopolitical importance warrant a pragmatic, complex, and dynamic Pakistan policy. The US plans to maintain sizable bases and a military presence in Afghanistan beyond 2014. It also has interests in Central Asia because of the region's vast reserves of oil and natural gas. On the other hand, Pakistan is a nuclear-armed state led by corrupt and unaccountable leaders and institutions, with a weak economy, growing population, and a youth bulge. Moreover, it suffers from resource scarcity and mismanagement (especially in water, gas, and electricity) and will need resources to provide postconflict stability in many parts of the country. In the long run, the US can scarcely afford a minimalist relationship with Pakistan. It must engage Pakistan on multiple dimensions and create partnerships to encompass the government, business, and financial sector and civil society. The alternative to such a creative rethinking is not pleasant to contemplate.