

Pakistan in America's War against Terrorism Strategic Ally or Unreliable Client?

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Executive Summary

The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington and the ensuing U.S.-led war on terrorism have given Pakistan's military dictator, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, an opportunity to improve the relationship between Washington and Islamabad. That relationship had experienced a steep decline in the 1990s, as the end of both the Cold War and the common struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan eroded the perception of shared strategic interests. Moreover, while it was losing its strategic significance to the United States, Pakistan was coming under the control of an assertive military-religious nexus that promoted anti-American radical Islamic forces at home and abroad.

Since September 11, General Musharraf, whose regime had been the main source of diplomatic and military support for the terrorist Taliban ruling neighboring Afghanistan, has portrayed his regime as an ally of Washington in its counterterrorism campaign. Musharraf, though, headed a military clique that brought an end to his nation's short democratic experience, assisted radical Islamic terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir, pressed for a war with India, advanced Pakistan's nuclear weapons program,

and presided over a corrupt and mismanaged economy. Despite that record, he is being hailed by the Bush administration as a "courageous" and "visionary" leader who is ready to reorient his country toward a pro-American position and adopt major political and economic reforms. In exchange for his belated support, Musharraf has been rewarded with U.S. diplomatic backing and substantial economic aid.

Musharraf's decision to join the U.S. war on terrorism didn't reflect a structural transformation in Pakistan's policy. It was a result of tactical considerations aimed at limiting the losses that Islamabad would suffer because of the collapse of the friendly Taliban regime in Kabul. Rejecting cooperation with Washington would have provoked American wrath and placed at risk Pakistan's strategic and economic interests in South Asia.

Some cooperation between the United States and Pakistan is necessary to wage the war against terrorism, but that cooperation must not evolve into a new long-term strategic alliance. Washington should view Pakistan, with its dictatorship, failed economy, and insecure nuclear arsenal, as a reluctant supporter of U.S. goals at best and as a potential long-term problem at worst.

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Introduction: Allies Again?

Two months after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, President Bush praised Pakistan’s president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, for showing “ever greater courage, vision and leadership” in supporting the U.S. war against terrorism, including the military campaign to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and capture the leaders of al-Qaeda. Musharraf’s “efforts against terror are benefiting the entire world,” Bush said at a November 10 press conference with Musharraf at his side.¹ His comment echoed a statement made by British prime minister Tony Blair on October 5, during a visit to Islamabad, in which he thanked the Pakistani leader for his “courage and leadership” in committing his country to support the war on terrorism.² In a joint U.S.-Pakistani statement issued during the Pakistani leader’s visit to the United States, Bush and Musharraf “reaffirmed the benefits of 50 years of friendship and close cooperation between Pakistan and the United States” and “welcomed the revival of this longstanding partnership” as a “vital element” in the construction of regional and global stability and peace.³

The statements by Bush and other U.S. officials that followed the start of the U.S.-led anti-terrorism campaign and the indications that Pakistan was willing to join it marked a sharp shift in the relationship between Washington and Islamabad, which had experienced a steep decline during the last years of the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. The Cold War and the common struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan no longer cemented U.S.-Pakistani ties in the 1990s, leading a veteran analyst to conclude that, in the absence of other “significant shared national interests,” tensions between the two nations were becoming all too apparent.⁴

In fact, the growing consensus among American policymakers and lawmakers was that Pakistan was not only losing its strategic importance to the United States; it was also

becoming an unreliable “failed state.” There were signs of the country’s “Talibanization,” that is, the growing strength of radical Islam. Pakistan also seemed to be a source of instability in South Asia and to pose a challenge to America’s nuclear nonproliferation policy. Worst of all, Islamabad seemed to be emerging as a promoter of terrorism, not unlike such “rogue states” as Iran and North Korea.⁵

That perception was partly transformed after September 11, when Pakistan became a critical theater in the U.S. effort to take the fight to the terrorists. Musharraf did an effective job of realigning Pakistan with Washington’s policy. On the eve of the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, Islamabad offered intelligence, air space, and ground facilities for the U.S.-led operation to dislodge Afghanistan’s Taliban regime and capture Osama bin Laden and his associates.

Pakistan not only allowed U.S. troops to be based in key airfields near the Afghan border; it agreed to freeze the bank accounts of four Islamist organizations with ties to al-Qaeda.⁶ Those moves were followed by the firing of Ahmed Mahmoud, director-general of the military-run Inter-Services Intelligence; Muzaffer Usmani, deputy chief of the army staff; and other senior generals who had been key players in Musharraf’s 1999 coup but who were known to have radical Islamic views and were reputed to be staunch supporters of the Taliban regime. They were replaced by military officers whose thinking was more in line with Musharraf’s new policy toward Kabul. “The Taliban’s days are numbered,” declared Musharraf.⁷

Indeed, in various statements, Musharraf accentuated Pakistan’s role as an ally of the United States and pledged to Washington his nation’s “fullest cooperation in the fight against terrorism.” In an official statement issued on September 13, Musharraf condemned the terrorist attacks, saying that the “carnage in New York and Washington has raised this struggle to a new level.” And in a meeting with U.S. Ambassador Wendy Chamberlain, the self-appointed president (in June 2001 Musharraf added the presiden-

cy to the list of military and civilian positions he held) committed his government to support the American-led antiterrorism campaign.⁸ In the October 10 press conference with Bush, Musharraf stressed that his government had taken a decision “to be a part of the coalition, to be with the United States, to fight terrorism in all its forms wherever it exists.” He expressed his confidence about the “dawn of a new era of a relationship between Pakistan and the United States.”⁹

Helping to advance the Musharraf-is-a courageous-leader and Pakistan-is-our-ally theses perpetuated by Islamabad and Washington was the domestic backdrop against which Musharraf adopted the new policy and made the statements advocating cooperation with the United States. The conventional wisdom in Washington was that Pakistan’s current government could find itself struggling for survival if it were seen domestically as a lapdog of American infidels.¹⁰ Indeed, a Gallup poll of Pakistanis published in October indicated that 83 percent of them sympathized with the Taliban rather than the United States, while 82 percent considered bin Laden a holy warrior, not a terrorist.¹¹

The Pakistani press was saturated with conspiracy theories that suggested that Israel was behind the September 11 attacks, while thousands of Pakistanis demonstrated against the United States in Islamabad, Karachi, and other major cities. U.S. media coverage during the first few days of the campaign against al-Qaeda depicted “rabid anti-Americanism in daily protests in Pakistan,” contributing to the perception that Musharraf’s pro-American tilt might cost him his power if not his life.¹²

Washington Rewards Pakistan

It was not surprising therefore that Musharraf’s statements and actions were rewarded not only by Washington’s official praise but, more important, by concrete steps

to demonstrate strengthening U.S. ties with Islamabad, including pledges of military and economic assistance. The Bush administration and Congress moved to lift the sanctions that had been imposed after Pakistan (following in India’s footsteps) detonated nuclear devices in 1998 and after Musharraf’s 1999 coup suspended democracy. Washington also agreed to reschedule Pakistan’s outstanding debt to the United States of about \$400 million and to support loan rescheduling by various financial institutions, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank, thus helping to alleviate Pakistan’s \$38 billion foreign debt.

Finally, Washington offered Musharraf an aid package of nearly \$1 billion for border control, refugee assistance, and poverty alleviation. (Pakistan claimed that the war in Afghanistan was costing it more than \$2.5 billion in lost trade, commerce, and tourism.) By the end of 2001, the IMF and the Paris Club of sovereign creditors pronounced themselves pleased with Pakistan’s “economic progress,” rescheduled much of the country’s debt, and extended fresh credits.¹³

To be sure, there were limits to U.S. concessions. The Bush administration rejected Pakistan’s request for delivery of 28 F-16s paid for in the 1980s but never delivered because of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program. Islamabad’s nuclear program caused successive U.S. administrations to apply the Pressler Amendment (which required an annual certification by the White House that Pakistan did not possess nuclear weapons)¹⁴ and impose sanctions against Islamabad. And, facing pressure from U.S. textile and apparel manufacturers, the administration was reluctant to support the request by Pakistan, which exported \$1.9 billion in textile products to the United States in the year ending July 2001, to temporarily suspend textile and apparel tariffs and quotas. Nevertheless, as one journalist noted, “Pakistan has become the biggest beneficiary of economic aid in return for its support of the U.S. antiterrorism campaign in Afghanistan.”¹⁵

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A More Nuanced and Cynical Perspective from Islamabad

While American officials were going out of their way to applaud the new, improved friendship with Pakistan and portray Musharraf as Pakistan's version of Charles de Gaulle, taking major risks in joining the West and standing up to radical forces threatening to overrun his country and region, Musharraf adopted a more nuanced view. The Pakistani leader took a more ambiguous and restrained approach toward Islamabad's ties with Washington and expressed only a qualified backing for the U.S. position.

He did that in a lengthy televised address to the Pakistani people on September 19, following consultations with many of the country's opinion leaders. Musharraf referred to the dilemma Pakistan was facing as it had to choose between "two adversities"—confrontation or cooperation with the United States (and the West). He concluded that in such a case Islamic law requires that one choose the lesser adversity (in this instance, cooperation with Washington). He compared his move to the temporary cease-fires that Muslim leaders had signed with nonbelievers in the early stages of Muslim history to provide the Muslims with an opportunity to gain strength and expand their influence. After a needed respite, those agreements were repealed. The conclusion of such an agreement with the United States would likewise ensure that the interests of Islam would be protected, explained Musharraf.

Although it is possible that his comments were a cynical rationale purely for domestic consumption, it is more likely that Musharraf was applying the lessons of Muslim history and teachings to make an argument in favor of a short-term accommodation with the powerful nonbelievers of the day, the Americans. The implication of his remarks was that such an accord could be abrogated in the future when the balance of power would shift in favor of Pakistan and the Muslim community. Noting

that, as a result of the no-war pacts, Islam was "strengthened," he emphasized that later on "when people saw enemies getting together, they made a new war pact."¹⁶

What Musharraf was describing was not the basis for the new strategic alliance with Washington, based on long-term interests and shared values, that American officials and pundits seemed to be demanding of him. Instead, he was proposing merely a tactical accord with the United States, a nation whose interests and values were on many levels contrary to those espoused by Pakistan as a state and as a representative of Islamic aspirations. Such an agreement between Islamabad and Washington would help advance Pakistan's short-term strategic interests, or at least not harm them.

Conversely, rejecting cooperation with Washington would provoke American wrath and place at risk Pakistan's aid-dependent economy, the country's ability to stand up to India, and perhaps its nuclear installations. A breach with the United States might allow India to exploit the situation to isolate and hurt Pakistan and could lead to the installation of an anti-Pakistan regime in Kabul. "Bad results," Musharraf stressed in his address, "could put in danger our territorial integrity and our solidarity."

Cooperation with Washington would provide Pakistan with breathing space until it was ready to secure its core national interests, which included, as Musharraf pointed out, developing its nuclear weapons capability and defending the "Kashmir cause." While American leaders and commentators were hailing a metamorphosis in Pakistani policies, Musharraf was expressing his hope that working with Washington would enable Islamabad to maintain the status quo, albeit modified, in Kabul by helping to put in place a friendly Islamic government. Much as the Taliban regime had done during the 1990s, such a successor would help secure Pakistan's twin policies: maintaining influence in Central Asia and exerting pressure on India to settle the dispute over Kashmir, a Muslim-majority state divided between the two countries.

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Pakistani cooperation with Washington could also lead to an adjustment in what was seen as the tilt toward India by the Bush administration. "It could even be, the wily General Musharraf may be dreaming, a reprise of Cold-War days, when an indulgent United States backed Pakistan for the sake of defeating a common enemy in Afghanistan," speculated *The Economist*. In any case, if it proved impossible to prevent the fall of the Taliban, Pakistan was expecting to have a large say in whatever order succeeded that regime, and perhaps even a less hostile U.S. attitude toward Islamabad's efforts to develop a nuclear weapons capability.¹⁷ One Pakistani official argued that the Americans were now "aware of their past mistakes" of maginalizing Pakistan. Pakistan, a "front line state" in the war against terrorism, was telling the Americans that "you need us again" and was expecting that Washington would be willing to take into consideration Pakistan's interests, including the need to "engage" the Taliban regime in negotiations before taking military action against it.¹⁸

Pakistan's Flirtation with Radical Islam

Although Musharraf hoped to extract as much as he could from Washington in exchange for his support in the war against terrorism, he was bargaining with a very weak hand because his government was internationally isolated and the Pakistani economy was bankrupt. In fact, in the months before the September 11 attacks, Pakistan was the most important diplomatic and political ally, not of the United States, but of the Taliban regime that harbored the al-Qaeda terrorists.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were the only governments that maintained formal diplomatic relationship with the radical Islamic leaders in Kabul. (Saudi Arabia, another supposed "ally" of Washington, was the most important channel of funds for the Taliban). Leading Pakistani political, military, and religious figures and radical Islamic groups were providing direct support in the form of finan-

cial resources and military assistance and training, as well as thousands of volunteers to the forces of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. At the same time, such radical forces were the domestic political and ideological backbone of Musharraf's military dictatorship, which was also committed to the development of the country's nuclear military power.

Musharraf, as head of Pakistan's military, used his alliance with radical Muslim clerics to provide legitimacy to his dictatorship, forming a powerful and destructive "military-mosque" nexus. With Musharraf as its head, that political nexus helped transform Pakistan into a magnet for radical Islamic terrorists in the region and around the world. It was also the driving force behind the support for Islamic insurgents, many of whom had ties with Afghanistan-based guerrillas, who penetrated the Indian-controlled Kargil region of Kashmir in May 1999, a move that was a major blow to the budding détente between Islamabad and New Delhi.¹⁹

That crisis, in turn, brought about Indian military retaliation and U.S. diplomatic pressure that resulted in the withdrawal of Pakistani forces from Kargil, weakening the power of the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and creating the conditions for his overthrow by Musharraf's military coup in October 1999.²⁰

The proverbial man from Mars viewing U.S. foreign policy after September 11 would probably be astonished at the inconsistency of the U.S. record. Washington attached the labels "anti-American" and "war criminal" to the former president of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, a civilian politician elected in at least quasi-democratic elections and whose military had been at war in Kosovo and Bosnia with Muslim forces that had links to Islamic radical movements.²¹ Yet Washington praised General Musharraf as "courageous" and a "visionary leader" even though he was a military dictator in control of weapons of mass destruction, was backed by radical anti-American forces, and was an ally of a regime that helped inflict the worst terrorist attack ever on the American territory and people.

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Musharraf's Self-Serving Switch

It is hyperbole to portray Musharraf's decision to cooperate with the United States after September 11 as a courageous, de Gaulle-like gesture. Instead, Musharraf can be compared to another military dictator, Hungary's Adm. Nikolaus Horthy de Nagybanya, a backer of Nazi Germany who had come to power with support from a military-fascist nexus. In 1944, sensing that the balance of power was shifting against the Axis powers, Horthy attempted to defect from his alliance with Adolf Hitler and switch his support to the Allies. Like Admiral Horthy in 1944, General Musharraf in 2001 recognized that his fanatical ally was doomed and attempted to realign his country with the victorious West. Horthy failed in his gamble, whereas Musharraf has been successful (so far). But that success should not diminish the significance of the historical analogy. Horthy and Musharraf were simply switching to the winning side, well aware that the alternative would bring about their own political destruction.²²

There was no conversion to Western values in either case. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman invoked Samuel Johnson's quip, "There is nothing like the prospect of being hanged in the morning to concentrate the mind," to provide an explanation of Musharraf's decision to abandon his alliance with the Taliban and support U.S. policy. Friedman suggested that Musharraf's moves were motivated by realpolitik considerations, the diplomatic and economic pressure from Washington, and the lurking military threat of India. Because of the September 11 attacks, and the subsequent attack on the Indian parliament by pro-Pakistan Kashmiri terrorists, the United States and India "made clear that Pakistan's foreign policy had to change—or America would destroy it economically and India [would do so] militarily."²³ Thus, Musharraf found himself in the position of

having no choice but to abruptly end Pakistan's support of both the Taliban and the militants seeking to "liberate" Kashmir.

Pakistan and America: The History of a Turbulent Relationship

Most of Musharraf's predecessors were aware that Islamabad's ties with Washington were dictated by specific political-military interests and lacked any deep historical and ideological roots. As is Musharraf, those leaders were always more candid than the Americans in evaluating their country's ties with Washington in realpolitik terms that stressed the limitations of the relationship.

Indeed, even at the height of the Cold War—when U.S. officials, lawmakers, and commentators were hailing (and some conservatives were even romanticizing) U.S.-Pakistani cooperation in providing support to the Muslim "freedom fighters" in Afghanistan (including one named Osama bin Laden) and Pakistan was the recipient of the third largest amount U.S. aid (after Israel and Egypt)—Pakistani leaders seemed to have no illusions about their relationship with Washington. They recognized that the U.S.-Pakistani partnership in Afghanistan was a marriage of convenience, if not a diplomatic and military one-night stand, and that the two governments would eventually have to deal with the reality of their diverging core national interests and values.

Almost two decades before Musharraf, U.S. leaders embraced another Pakistani military dictator, Gen. Mohammed Zia ul-Haq. The general played a pivotal role, putting in place the policies of relying on the support of radical Islamic groups at home. In late 1982 he came to Washington to help coordinate support for the anti-Soviet efforts in Afghanistan. The difference between the way the leaders of Pakistan and the United States have tended to depict their relationship was evident during a December 6, 1982, meeting in Washington between General Zia and Secretary of State George Shultz.

After Shultz, reflecting the spin that dominated Washington at that time, expressed his hope that Washington and Islamabad would build a bilateral relationship that “grows over time and is strong enough to survive disagreements and problems which inevitably occur,” Zia replied that the two countries were a “union of unequals” and “incompatible” in terms of culture, geography, and national power, even though they had strong common interests.²⁴

The cautionary remarks Zia made probably still apply to the current Islamabad-Washington relationship. On one level Zia was raising the first dilemma in the relationship, the fact that the United States is a global superpower and Pakistan is what political scientists refer to as a “client state.” The inequality of the relationship is highlighted by the disparities in economic power, military capabilities, and diplomatic influence. That reality is often glossed over when Washington and such client states as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan celebrate their “alliances” or “partnerships.” Such talk creates the misperception that those relationships are products of “interdependence” (meaning that each side is dependent on the other for its survival). In reality, while American interests might be adversely affected by the destruction of one or all of those three states (and other client states), the United States would nevertheless continue to survive as a leading world power. On the other hand, a decision by Washington to withdraw support from such client states would devastate their core national interests and might threaten their long-term survival.

A client state such as Pakistan, dependent as it is for diplomatic, economic, and military support on a global superpower, can help secure the support of its benefactor and increase its leverage over that benefactor by accentuating common strategic interests. The client state also tries to secure the backing of American interest groups and friends in the bureaucracy and Congress. Pakistan, which gained independence in the same year, 1947, that the Cold War started, was able to advance

its position as a member of the U.S.-led anti-communist bloc in the strategic region of South Asia and also as part of a “northern tier” of states helping to secure Western interests in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region.

With India taking the road toward socialism in domestic policy and neutralism in foreign policy during the Cold War, Pakistan could play for the United States a role similar to the one that India once played in defending imperial Britain’s interests against czarist Russia. The fact that the members of Pakistan’s political and military elite were Westernized and British educated helped to strengthen its ties with American political leaders and military officials as well as opinion makers. But the continuing political instability and economic problems that led to the weakening of its fragile democratic system, which was accelerated by (American-induced) military spending, tarnished Pakistan’s image in Washington and the American media as a member of the Westernized pro-American club and contributed to the volatility of the relationship between the two countries.²⁵

Conflicting U.S. and Pakistani Interests

On another level, Zia’s comments also highlight the fact that, when it came to their respective core national interests, the United States and Pakistan were to discover that, Cold War rhetoric aside, they not only lacked common historical and cultural ties, they were not operating on the same strategic wavelength. For Pakistan, containing communism was a secondary national interest. Its core national security interest centered on containing the perceived threat of India and India’s predominance of military strength and political influence, especially as it affected their dispute over the control of divided Kashmir.

Washington never regarded India as a strategic threat to its interests and, if anything, was interested in getting India, the world’s largest democracy, into the anti-communist camp. The United States has also always backed a peaceful resolution to the Kashmir

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conflict. The contrasting considerations of U.S. and Pakistani national interests were clearly demonstrated in the growing ties between Islamabad and communist China in the 1960s and by the disastrous decision by Pakistan to launch a war against India over Kashmir in 1965, which led to Pakistan's military defeat when the administration of Lyndon Johnson refused to bail out Islamabad from the mess it had created.

The tensions between Pakistan and the United States were reflected in another development. Beginning in the 1970s Pakistan moved to develop a nuclear weapons capability to offset India's advantage in conventional military power and as a response to India's detonation of a nuclear device in 1974. The Pakistani nuclear program was also a form of diplomatic blackmail in Islamabad's relationship with Washington. Pakistani officials insisted that only a sufficient supply of American conventional arms would prevent Pakistan from going nuclear. But Pakistan's effort to become a nuclear power ran contrary to another core U.S. national security interest: working to block the proliferation of nuclear weapons and creating a stable international nuclear arms control regime (both during and after the Cold War). The divergent goals of the two countries on the nuclear issue led to numerous diplomatic showdowns (especially under pressure from Congress).

When one analyzes the relationship between Washington and Pakistan before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, what emerges is the normal pattern of relationship between a great power and a client state. Each side refrained from abandoning its commitments to its respective core national interests, but Pakistan was eventually forced to back down from its aggressive pursuit of those interests. Indeed, the limits of U.S. support led to the partition of Pakistan and the establishment of Bangladesh following India's military victory in its 1971 war with Pakistan.

In those and other cases, Washington was not willing to provide Pakistan with the military and diplomatic support needed to change in any dramatic way the balance of

power in South Asia in which India remained the leading military player. In fact, during the first three years of the Carter administration, the process of détente with the Soviet Union, as well as the focus on human rights and nuclear proliferation by the White House and Congress, meant that differences in national interests and values significantly weakened U.S.-Pakistani ties. Evidence that Pakistan was accelerating the development of its nuclear program, and Zia's military coup that ousted the elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, brought relations to a nadir.

Pakistan's Reemergence as a Useful Client State in the 1980s

Even before Zia arrived in Washington in 1982, however, there were indications that not only was Pakistan reasserting its position as a useful client state for Washington but that the normal pattern of relations between the global power, the United States, and the client state, Pakistan, which had been evident during most of the Cold War, was beginning to change in favor of the latter. The principal reason for that change was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the decision, first by the Carter administration and then by President Ronald Reagan and his advisers, to use Pakistan as a base to support the mujahideen in Afghanistan as part of a strategy to oust the Soviets from that country.

That Pakistan was able to strengthen its leverage over Washington was a result of global and regional developments. One development was increasing anti-Soviet cooperation between the United States and China. Pakistan could be integrated into that cooperation since it was a friend of both countries. Another development was the expansion of ties between Pakistan and the Arab countries, led by oil-rich Saudi Arabia and bolstered by the rising global economic power of the oil cartel, OPEC, that was exerting enormous pressure on U.S. foreign policy. Many of the Arab states regarded Pakistan not only as a strategic ally (containing Soviet expansionism toward the Middle East) but also as a religious and cultural associate com-

mitted to the spread of Islam in its more traditionally strict forms.

Indeed, at the same time that the United States was strengthening its ties with Pakistan, Zia was trying to enhance his political legitimacy in the Muslim world through a policy of Islamization at home, including the substitution of traditional Islamic punishments for Western legal rules and the promotion of religious schools (*madrassas*). Those changes, however, also gave rise to anti-American forces and sentiments as demonstrated in the burning of the U.S. embassy in Islamabad in November 1979.²⁶

Afghanistan: The Pakistani Tail Wags the U.S. Dog

It was in the context of transforming domestic (the rise of the military-mosque nexus), regional (the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan), and global circumstances (the emergence of OPEC and the changing triangular Washington-Moscow-Beijing relationship) that the ties between Pakistan and the United States (between a client state and its benefactor) seemed to evolve into what commentators began describing as a full-fledged “strategic alliance.”²⁷ As Pakistani journalist Rashid Ahmed said in his book, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, the United States used Zia’s Pakistan as a conduit for close to \$3 billion worth of covert aid to the mujahideen fighting to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan.²⁸

There is no doubt that the two countries shared common interests in dealing with the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, especially a concern that the invasion of Afghanistan reflected a major change in Soviet conduct and was part of a Soviet grand strategy to take advantage of instability in Iran (following the collapse of the pro-American shah), gain access to the Arabian Sea, and control the oil resources of the Middle East. That concern explained the Carter administration’s decision to cooperate in a limited fashion with the Pakistanis in Afghanistan, including covert

cooperation between the CIA and Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence.²⁹

Pakistan’s Agenda in Supporting the Afghan Mujahideen

Beyond those common interests, Islamabad had its own separate reason for supporting the anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan: Pakistan’s traditional national interest in maintaining a supportive regime in Kabul to provide Pakistan with strategic depth in its conflict with India. That interest was buttressed by the resentment of Zia’s Islamic supporters at home and in other Muslim countries (led by the Saudis) at the fact that the atheist Soviets had seized control of a neighboring Muslim state. Even under the Reagan Doctrine, which aimed at reversing Soviet gains around the world, the United States didn’t share those long-term Pakistani goals. However, Washington lacked a coherent approach of its own to a post-Soviet Afghanistan.

The result was that Pakistan, led by Zia’s military-mosque nexus, with the ISI as one of its manifestations, was able to advance its parochial interests through cooperation with the United States, a power that was promoting a broader and somewhat blurry global agenda. While the two players could find a common strategic and ideological basis for cooperation in Afghanistan, Washington found itself falling into the trap of permitting the Pakistani “tail” to wag the American “dog.” (That scenario has occurred in other client state–superpower relationships, such as the ones between the United States and Israel and the Soviet Union and Cuba. The dangerous 1962 and 1973 showdowns between Washington and Moscow occurred as a result.)³⁰

In the case of the Pakistani-U.S. relationship, however, there was a long interval between the peak of U.S.-Pakistani cooperation and the manifestation of the dangerous outcome of the tail-wags-the-dog scenario. The latter transpired on September 11, 2001, 12 years after the Soviets had withdrawn from Afghanistan and at a time when the relationship between Washington and Islamabad had

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already waned. The outcome was not really a “blowback,” to use the term pundits frequently use to describe unintended consequences of certain policies. The United States intentionally groomed Pakistan, despite being aware of its client's increasing radical Islamic orientation, as the leading regional power in Afghanistan. It was a myopic policy.

The same militant anti-Western and anti-modern environment, nourished by the Saudi-backed military-mosque nexus in Islamabad and its satellites in Afghanistan and elsewhere, was responsible for such barbaric acts as forcing religious minorities to wear distinctive badges and smashing ancient Buddhist monuments. It had already promoted terrorism against American citizens around the world. U.S. leaders should have taken that record into consideration.

The Reagan Doctrine, which relied on local military powers to counter the Soviets, made it possible for the Pakistanis to become the dominant force in the anti-Soviet Islamic insurgency in Afghanistan and allowed them to support their favorite guerrilla groups through the ISI. The ISI also coordinated the flow of other foreign aid, including the recruitment of foreign Muslim volunteers and graduates of the local *madrassas*.³¹ All of that, of course, was instrumental in achieving the American goal of bogging down the Soviets in Afghanistan. But it also helped to strengthen the power of the ISI and the other elements of the destructive military-mosque nexus in Pakistan.

One can argue that the “tail” started to wag the “dog” sometime in 1986 when there were clear indications that the Soviets wanted a face-saving formula for withdrawal from Afghanistan. It was then that Zia, whose original stated goal was to reduce the threat of Soviet expansionism, started advancing a more ambitious agenda. “Victory by the resistance, he believed, could produce for the first time an Afghan regime genuinely friendly to Pakistan, which in turn could enable Pakistan to gain ‘strategic depth’ against India, long a goal of Pakistani Islamic planners,” according to Dennis Kux, a former U.S.

diplomat who served in Pakistan. Zia also hoped that a new government in Kabul would “reflect his own Islamic leanings far more than any previous regime had, and far more than the Pakistani president had been able to impose on his own country.”³²

The pressure to advance that ambitious agenda in Afghanistan, as well as to develop Pakistan's nuclear military program, continued after Zia's death and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The ISI and the military took the lead, aided by support from radical Muslim groups. That trend persisted despite frequent U.S. objections and some resistance from the civilian governments of prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Islamabad's efforts led, first, to the temporary control of Kabul by the Islamic radical leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and then to the 1994 victory of the Taliban, dominated by Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, whose members also control a large area across the border in Pakistan. The Taliban defeated a coalition of Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara opponents (the Northern Alliance), which had ties to outside players, including Russia and Iran (and, to some extent, India and China). Alongside bin Laden, Pakistan was the main sponsor of the Taliban as it marched to Kabul.³³

Pakistan Backs the Taliban

Some experts and journalists have suggested that the Taliban and the terrorism that arose in Afghanistan occurred because the United States “neglected” and “turned its back” on Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War, which supposedly led to the chaos in that country. The fact is that the United States did make an effort to cobble together a united front following the Soviet withdrawal and did consider helping with economic reconstruction. But that effort failed largely because of deliberate interference on the part of the Pakistani intelligence establishment. There was a “Pakistani-instigated chaos, but the U.S. contribution to it was not central,” argues Afghanistan watcher Robert Kaplan. Out of the Pakistani-instigated chaos came

the Taliban. "The problem has not been U.S. neglect but Pakistani interference, under both democratic and military regimes." Why did the Pakistanis interfere in Afghanistan? "Because they require an Afghan puppet state to supply them with strategic depth for their conflict against India," explains Kaplan.³⁴

In retrospect, one can raise serious questions about aspects of the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, especially the willingness to permit the Pakistani military and the ISI to control the assistance to the insurgents and the decision, under the pressure of cold warriors and a pro-mujahideen Congress, to continue funneling arms to the mujahideen even after the Soviet withdrawal. The American support through Islamabad tipped the balance of power in the Afghan civil war in favor of Pakistan and its allies among the Pashtuns, while weakening the military and political influence of other ethnic groups allied mostly with Iran, Russia, and some Muslim republics in Central Asia. But lack of support in Washington and abroad would have made it impossible for U.S. policymakers to work out a compromise solution with Russia and Iran and their allies in Afghanistan, and with Pakistan, to form perhaps a decentralized political structure with spheres of influence for each outside power. The only other alternatives would have been direct military intervention by the United States or permitting the Pakistanis to establish control over most of the country. The latter alternative, a Pax Pakistana in Afghanistan, became the policy by default.³⁵

Despite denials by Musharraf and his aides, Pakistan's ISI continued to provide military and financial assistance to the Taliban in Afghanistan even after September 11, 2001.³⁶ Islamabad still regarded Afghanistan as a strategic ally and ideological associate. Afghan training camps and Afghan recruits helped to prepare the next Pakistani-instigated insurgency against the Indians in Kashmir and to spread radical Islamic ideas and institutions around the world, through "jihad-international" brigades, some of which were tied to the al-Qaeda network.

It is doubtful that the Taliban's control of

Afghanistan and its policy of turning the country into the center of international terrorism could have occurred without the support of Pakistan. "We are fighting a jihad and this is the first Islamic international brigade in the modern era," bragged Gen. Hamid Gul, the former head of the ISI, to a journalist in 1999. "The communists have their international brigades, the West has NATO, why can't the Muslims unite and form a common cause?"³⁷ Two years later, members of that Pakistani-backed jihad international hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing thousands of Americans and others. On December 13 other members of those brigades attacked India's parliament in a plot to kill its leadership.

Musharraf Pursues "Talibanization" with a Human Face

In a January 12, 2002, televised address to the Pakistani people, a confident Musharraf seemed to be taking more dramatic steps in the direction of once again aligning his country with the United States and the West, rejecting terrorism and theocracy, and criticizing those who "pervert" Islam to advance their interests. He announced the banning of five of the most radical Islamic groups and ordered hundreds of their members rounded up. Many of the *madrassas* were to be closed down or brought under government control, and other religious institutions, including mosques, would be monitored and warned not to promote terrorism. "The day of reckoning has come," he announced. "Do we want Pakistan to become a theocratic state? Do we believe that religious education is enough for governance? Or do we want Pakistan to emerge as a progressive and dynamic Islamic state?" He added that radical Islamists "did nothing but contribute to bloodshed in Afghanistan," leading to "disruption and sowing seeds of hatred." And he asked, "Does Islam preach this?"³⁸

This much-analyzed address was hailed by officials and commentators as an indication that, after reorienting his foreign policy

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toward the United States, Musharraf was now going to take dramatic steps to Westernize and secularize Pakistan à la Turkey. Indeed, several analysts went so far as to compare Musharraf to modern Turkey's founder, Kemal Ataturk,³⁹ and to argue that his address "set a new course for the Muslim world."⁴⁰

But Musharraf is no Ataturk dedicated to demolishing the religious and expansionist foundations of the ancient regime and establishing a new nationalist and secular identity for his country. If anything, one can compare Musharraf to some of Turkey's last Ottoman rulers, who tried to accommodate domestic and outside forces that aimed either to change the status quo or to secure the ambitious intertwining of the nationalist and religious goals of the empire. Indeed, Musharraf's rise to power marked what can be regarded as the most recent attempt by members of the military-mosque nexus to preserve the achievements of Zia and his successors: veto power of the military, ideological supremacy of the radical Islamic groups, control of Afghanistan through the Taliban, mounting pressure on India in Kashmir, and development of a nuclear weapons capability.

In that context, Musharraf can be described as a new and improved Zia adapting an ambitious agenda to changing circumstances. Starting in the early 1990s, there were indications that changes in the regional and global balance of power were threatening the achievements gained by the military-mosque nexus. The power of OPEC had been eroded, weakening the economic and diplomatic status of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's benefactor and its top lobbyist in Washington. Worsening relations between Beijing and Washington made it difficult for Islamabad to accentuate Pakistan-China ties in bargaining with the United States. The strengthening of the human rights lobby in Congress produced growing criticism in Washington of the rising influence of anti-democratic and radical Islamic forces in Pakistan and, of course, its fundamentalist ally in Kabul.

The preoccupation of the Clinton administration and Congress with enhancing the

nuclear nonproliferation regime spurred new moves to punish Pakistan for developing nuclear weapons (as well as purchasing related technology from China). Pakistan's support for the Muslim insurgents that attacked the town of Kargil in Kashmir in May 1999; Islamabad's backing of the despicable Taliban regime, which Washington accused even then of harboring bin Laden's terrorist network;⁴¹ and Islamabad's decision to detonate a nuclear bomb in May 1998 led to enormous U.S. pressure (in form of diplomatic and economic sanctions) on Pakistan. That, in turn, led to a reaction by Pakistan's military-mosque nexus.

The October 1999 military coup by Musharraf brought an end to the fragile democracy in Pakistan and strengthened the hands of the Taliban's allies in Islamabad, including the ISI, the radical religious groups, and forces pushing for the expansion of ties with the jihad international, the "liberation" of Kashmir, and the acceleration of the nation's nuclear program. The latter goal was the development of an "Islamic bomb" that would not only enhance Pakistan's position vis-à-vis India and the United States but would also provide the Muslim world with an answer to the Western, Hindu, and Jewish (Israeli) bombs.⁴² According to U.S. sources, one of the major reasons Musharraf and the military decided to oust Sharif was "the fear that he might buckle to American policy and reverse Pakistan's policy toward the Taliban."⁴³

Musharraf and his allies were not calling for the "Talibanization" of Pakistan, but the policies they were advancing (either directly or through the use of political and military subsidiaries and "rogue" operations) were based on using the Taliban's Afghanistan as both a strategic and an Islamic backyard, where training camps and arms depots could be used to promote the Pakistani-Islamic cause in Kashmir and around the world. According to recent news reports, that effort included cooperation between Pakistani nuclear scientists and the al-Qaeda network—although it is not certain whether Musharraf knew personally of that collaboration.⁴⁴

There were no signs that Musharraf's policy was strengthening Pakistan's position in Washington in the months preceding September 11. President Clinton gave Musharraf's regime a diplomatic cold shoulder; during a South Asia tour, Clinton spent five days in India and only five hours in Pakistan.⁴⁵ The new Bush administration continued the process of marginalizing Pakistan and establishing more solid ties with India, as part of a strategy to contain China and expand ties with India's huge democracy and emerging market. All this occurred against the backdrop of growing U.S. tensions with radical Islam and Washington's strengthening of ties with Israel and secular Turkey, which only helped to highlight Pakistan's pariah status. There was no indication—strategic considerations, economic ties, ideological commitment, cultural bonds—that Washington needed to continue to maintain Pakistan as a client state. Conversely, Pakistan seemed to be losing its leverage over U.S. policy, a clear reversal of what occurred during Zia's years. The relationship between America and Pakistan was being normalized. The dog was in control. In fact, the dog was discovering that it had no need to regularly wag that particular tail.

The Pakistani Tail Tries to Wag the American Dog Again

Following September 11 and Washington's pressure on Pakistan to back the United States in the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Musharraf and other Pakistani officials complained that the United States had "abandoned" them after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. "We were left high and dry, and it started to settle on the people that we were ditched," Musharraf told an American group. That was an exaggeration. A clear U.S. realpolitik position, based on an accurate reading of U.S. interests at the time, should have led to adoption of a policy of

"constructively disengaging" from Pakistan, while trying to advance in South Asia a new strategic agenda based on strengthening America's ties with India.

In that context, Pakistan, as a client state, should have been presented with a clear choice: adapt your policy to the goals of your American benefactor or end up paying the costs of your refusal—being truly "ditched" by Washington. Instead, Washington's interests were sabotaged by an uncontrollable client state, ruled by a military dictatorship in the process of establishing a theocracy and mismanaging its corrupt economic system. That client state was spreading terror to Kashmir; strengthening the Taliban, the world's most anti-Western regime; and acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

Such developments pointed to a major dilemma that the United States faces when it has to manage its relationship with a client state in a unipolar international system. During the Cold War, the bipolar system produced systemic pressures on the two superpowers to restrain their respective client states. The United States and the Soviet Union sent signals to each other that helped to set diplomatic and military "red lines," which forced each superpower to place restrictions on its client states. For example, the United States, facing Soviet pressure, stopped Israeli military advances in Egypt in 1973. Similarly, the Soviets, during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, acceded to the pressure of the Kennedy administration.

If the Soviet Union hadn't collapsed in 1991, it is quite conceivable that it would have set similar "red lines" on U.S. support for the Pakistani-backed insurgents in Afghanistan, leading perhaps to the creation of a neutral regime in Kabul or to the division of the country into spheres of influence, which would have given Islamabad no choice but to abandon its grand strategic designs. In short, in a unipolar system, a client state may be able to exert more influence on its global benefactor in the short term and the midterm, as Pakistan did for a while, creating conditions for the Taliban victory in Kabul.

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Musharraf proved to be an opportunistic politician advancing his interests vis-à-vis the Americans as they took the first steps in their war on terrorism.

From this perspective, September 11 should have accelerated a process of marginalizing Pakistan. The Bush administration decided, not only to target Pakistan's strategic and ideological ally in Kabul, but to destroy the entire jihad-international network that Pakistan's military-mosque nexus (in cooperation with its allies in Saudi Arabia) was nourishing. At the same time, the U.S. offensive against terrorism should have strengthened the hands of regional players that opposed Pakistan's strategic goals and religious mission, including the Northern Alliance (fighting the Taliban) and Russia, the Central Asian republics, India, and Iran. Washington's goal turned out to be the ouster of the Pakistan-backed government in Kabul and its replacement by a broad-based government that would be acceptable to those other powers as well as the United States. Ironically, that outcome was more or less what the Soviets had been pushing for after their withdrawal from Afghanistan—and the United States and its “ally,” Pakistan, had resisted. (Bin Laden and his associates would not have found a refuge in such a “neutral” Afghanistan.) After September 11, Pakistan seemed to be the big loser with no other choice but to accept that outcome.

The alternative would have been to irrevocably alienate the United States, thus enabling India to formalize its position as the dominant power in the region and perhaps even provoking the Americans to give New Delhi a green or yellow light to unleash its military power on Pakistan (with only China balancing India). From a systemic perspective, September 11 helped to form a new balance of power, reestablishing the “red lines” that had disappeared after the collapse of the Soviet superpower and impelling Washington to restrain its Pakistani client state.

Pakistan Invokes Frightening Specters

Hence, it is not surprising that Musharraf's policies since September 11 have been aimed at resisting those pressures and at trying to maintain the status quo that had benefited Pakistan. Musharraf didn't

have at his disposal any assets that would help him to strengthen his leverage on U.S. policy, and he certainly had no military power to prevent the United States from attacking Afghanistan and using Pakistan's airspace and territory to do so. His only remaining option was to warn the Americans that their interests could be damaged if they refused to accept his demands.

He demonstrated his ability to advance that strategy by using various signals to threaten the Americans that unless they modified their goals in the war on terrorism, including the attack on Afghanistan, they would have to deal with two nightmare scenarios: (a) a political backlash from the angry “street” in Pakistan (and across the entire Muslim world) that would lead to the collapse of the “moderate” and “pro-Western” Musharraf and his replacement by a radical Islamic regime and (b) a Pakistani version of Israel's “Samson Option,”⁴⁶ in which a Pakistani regime, facing unacceptable pressures from the United States and India that threatened its core national interests and survival, would have no choice but to flex its nuclear military power, even if that led to a nuclear confrontation in South Asia. The latter nightmare scenario also suggested that if Musharraf resisted the pressure to threaten to use nuclear weapons, he would be ousted by in a coup by more radical Islamic elements in the military who would do so, or the country might collapse into a civil war with various competing warlords getting access to the nuclear arsenal. Some of it might even fall into the hands of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.⁴⁷

At a minimum, Musharraf proved to be an opportunistic politician advancing his interests vis-à-vis the Americans as they took the first steps in their war on terrorism. He succeeded in exploiting the unrest in Pakistan and the terrorist acts by anti-Indian Muslim groups. The latter probably had some assistance from elements in the Pakistani military and political establishment (with some level of “deniability,” although the spin advanced by Musharraf and his supporters was that the ISI and some

“cells” in the military were out of control and acting like “rogue” institutions).⁴⁸

Moreover, the nuclear scenario seemed to be an outgrowth of the new Pakistani nuclear doctrine toward India that was adopted by Pakistan’s military-political leadership and based on pressuring Washington to tilt the regional balance of power back in favor of Pakistan. The Pakistanis needed to persuade Washington that any Indian attack, even a limited one, on Pakistan could turn into a major war, a notion that “intends to keep the Indians off balance and to keep the United States worrying that there will be a major war between the two nuclear-armed adversaries in South Asia if Washington does not stay India’s hand.”⁴⁹

The Indians clearly have an advantage over Pakistan in conventional weapons; India has more than 1.3 million active-duty soldiers compared to barely 600,000 in Pakistan, and India also has more than a two-to-one advantage in combat aircraft as well as more tanks, artillery, and ships.⁵⁰ Since India could defeat Pakistan in any conventional war, Pakistan’s threat to use nuclear weapons (again, similar to some extent to the Israeli “Samson Option”) was intended to send the message to the Indians and the Americans that once a conflict starts it is difficult to confine it. Moreover, while the Indians might try to confine the conflict to a conventional war, “it is the other side’s decision about how to respond” that will determine the final outcome.⁵¹

Musharraf Fails to Achieve His Goal

Musharraf’s strategy of resisting the U.S. policy (backed by Russia and India) aimed at bringing an end to the Pakistani-supported power arrangements in Afghanistan seemed to be producing some results in the early stages of the U.S. military effort. The Bush administration initially responded positively to Islamabad’s calls for using diplomatic means to capture bin Laden and his associates. Even after the United States attacked Afghanistan, reports from Washington reflected a willingness to suspend military operations during the holy month of

Ramadan and devise restrictive war aims in Afghanistan based on Pakistan’s insistence on not eliminating the Taliban presence.

Islamabad advocated only weakening the regime and destroying al-Qaeda while leaving in place “moderate” Taliban forces, consisting of “defectors” from the movement, that would play a role in a new postwar government in Kabul.⁵² It seemed as though U.S. officials were once again permitting the Pakistani tail to wag the American dog. Washington flirted with permitting a government that was indirectly responsible for the terrorism inflicted on America to impose a veto power on U.S. decisions, thereby ensuring that Pakistan would not end up with a regime in Kabul dominated by the unfriendly Northern Alliance.

But the Bush administration decided to continue pursuing the war during Ramadan and gave a green light to Northern Alliance forces to move toward Kabul. Musharraf again tried to reduce his losses by demanding that Kabul be “demilitarized” and that the Northern Alliance forces “must not” hold it.⁵³ Moreover, as revealed in reports in the *New York Times* and elsewhere (including Seymour Hersh’s exposé in the *New Yorker*), Islamabad continued to provide help to the Taliban forces fighting against the United States and its allies in Afghanistan.

U.S. officials admitted that “one month after the Pakistan government agreed to end its support of the Taliban, its intelligence agency was still providing safe passage for weapons and ammunition to arm them.”⁵⁴ According to those reports, hundreds of Pakistani military officers and ISI agents provided support to the Taliban forces and helped to evacuate 5,000 Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Many of them were airlifted out of the northern Afghan city of Kunduz just before it fell to the Northern Alliance.⁵⁵ At the same time, contrary to the nightmare scenarios floated by Musharraf, the Pakistani “street” did not erupt following the defeat of the Taliban, and there were no indications that Musharraf’s hold on power was in dan-

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By threatening a nuclear escalation, Islamabad was pressing Washington to veto possible Indian military action against Pakistan.

ger. So much for his implied threats of a potential “radical implosion” of Pakistan.

After failing in that rearguard effort to preserve Pakistan’s dominant influence in Afghanistan and prevent the elimination of Islamabad’s Taliban ally, the Pakistanis next turned to securing their interests vis-à-vis India. Even if one doesn’t accept Indian allegations that some of the al-Qaeda fighters evacuated from Afghanistan by the Pakistanis were infiltrated into Kashmir, or that Pakistani agents assisted the December 13 attack on the Indian parliament, there is no doubt that a lack of response by India to the continued terrorism in Kashmir and the attack in New Delhi would have been perceived as a major blow to Indian national security interests and as a victory for Pakistan. It certainly would have created the impression that U.S. diplomatic pressure, driven by considerations of Pakistani concerns, had made it impossible for the Indians to react to a terrorist attack in New Delhi in the same way that the United States responded to similar attacks in New York and Washington. In short, by threatening a nuclear escalation, Islamabad was pressing Washington to veto possible Indian military action against Pakistan.

Pakistan: A Diminished Client State

But India’s powerful reaction to the terrorist attack in New Delhi, including moving its aircraft and nuclear-capable short-range ballistic missiles toward its border with Pakistan, shifting infantry divisions from the border with China to the western frontier with Pakistan, and activating more than 1,000 tanks and armored vehicles, sent a clear message to the world. India was promising, not bluffing, and calling Pakistan’s bluff on its assumption that the Pakistani nuclear arsenal acts as a strategic “equalizer” that ensured that Islamabad’s support for terrorism against India would not escalate into an all-out war.⁵⁶

But India’s military strategists are confident that their country’s conventional mili-

tary superiority, coupled with the fact that India could survive a nuclear first strike (Pakistan might not survive such an attack) would permit them to fight a limited war with Pakistan while deterring that country from launching a nuclear attack on India.⁵⁷ It was that demonstration of India’s military might, aimed at deterring Pakistan from launching a nuclear strike while India exploited its conventional advantage, not Musharraf’s sudden conversion to an Ataturk-like reformist agenda, that persuaded Pakistan’s military dictator to pledge that his country would not be used as a base for terrorism and to announce a broad ban on militant groups accused of fomenting violence in Indian-held Kashmir.⁵⁸ India’s hard-line position may have also persuaded the Bush administration to toughen its position on Pakistan-based terrorist groups, including those operating against Indian rule in Kashmir.⁵⁹

The Dispute with India and Pakistan’s Decline

The outcome of the Indian-Pakistani standoff, highlighting Islamabad’s precarious position, was the last stage in a process that had been accelerating since September 11, during which time Pakistan had seen its strategic position badly erode. Also, with the Taliban gone, Pakistan has lost a key surrogate in its covert support for Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas in Kashmir. These developments took place against the backdrop of a major U.S. assault against the jihad-international terrorism network, which included many groups with close ties to Pakistan and its financial benefactor, Saudi Arabia.

More generally, the counterterrorism offensive against radical Islamic terrorist groups and the growing hostility toward militant Islam in the United States and the West, coupled with growing cooperation between three leading foes of Pakistan—India, Israel, and Turkey—have been major strategic blows to Pakistan. Add to that the political instability and the economic and social problems that continue to beset Pakistan, and that

country has to be regarded as one of the strategic and economic losers in the international system that has evolved since September 11.

Yet the Bush administration and its Western allies have continued to portray Islamabad as a “friend” and a “partner” of the United States, have hailed Musharraf as a “courageous” leader and a “reformist,” and have provided Islamabad with economic and military assistance on the basis of the promises by Pakistan to back the American anti-terrorism efforts and to take the road toward political reform. “In the 1980s, Pakistan got a blank check from the U.S. to combat the Russians, and spent much of the check in building up the Taliban,” argues journalist Christopher Hitchens. “Now it is getting another check and brand-new interest-free mortgage in order to pretend that the Taliban is its enemy. It doesn’t get any better than this.”⁶⁰

As noted, American policymakers, by assigning the role of strategic ally to Pakistan during the Cold War (and especially during the anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan), provided incentives to Pakistan through military assistance and economic subsidies to abuse its position as a client state of the United States and to adopt policies that ran contrary to core U.S. national interests. With the collapse of the Taliban regime and its terrorist allies, the conflicting national interests of Washington and Islamabad should become more obvious.

Although a full-blown war between India and Pakistan may have been avoided (at least for the moment), Kashmir remains a flash-point. Pakistan argues that Kashmir, with its Muslim majority, should become part of Muslim Pakistan, while India stresses that a Muslim Kashmir can and should remain part of a secular and multiethnic India. Although both countries have supported a negotiated solution to the conflict, the Indian government under Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, resisting opposition from the more nationalist forces in his country and party, initiated efforts to engage Pakistan, first, during talks in Lahore,

Pakistan, in February 1999 and again in Agra, India, last year.

The response from Musharraf’s military-mosque nexus in Pakistan has been hostile and violent. After the Lahore summit, the Pakistanis provided support to the insurgents that crossed the line of control in Kashmir and attacked the Kargil region inside Indian-controlled territory. And last October Pakistani-backed insurgents attacked the Jammu and Kashmir state legislature, an attack that was followed by several more terrorist incidents in Indian-held Kashmir as well as inside India itself. Moreover, Musharraf’s insistence on placing Kashmir at the center of the negotiations between New Delhi and Islamabad led to the collapse of the Agra talks last summer. Hence, while both sides have legitimate interests in Kashmir, it is Pakistan’s military-mosque nexus, in cooperation with radical Islamic groups trained by the Taliban and al-Qaeda, that has been trying to destabilize the status quo and prevent a resolution based on direct negotiations between India and Pakistan.

Musharraf, who in a major address to the nation stressed that “Kashmir runs in our blood,” is interested in internationalizing the dispute and getting the United States and other countries, including other Muslim states and China, involved in the negotiations over Kashmir.⁶¹ Indeed, internationalizing the Kashmir conflict is supposed to serve as an “equalizer” for Pakistan, helping to counter India’s enormous diplomatic power.

Pakistani leaders and intellectuals, even moderate ones, regard the future of Kashmir as a core national interest of Pakistan. “For Pakistan, the belief that the province should have been part of Pakistan at the time of partition is as forcefully felt as the Palestinian belief in its rightful ownership of Jerusalem,” explained analyst David Rieff. “From the Pakistani perspective, the Kashmiri fighters are not terrorists, they are freedom fighters (echoes, again, of the Arab-Israeli conflict) whose cause is sacrosanct.”⁶²

Although that is the way many Pakistanis relate to Kashmir, Pakistan’s political, intel-

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lectual, and military leaders should consider the current balance of power in South Asia and the world, including Pakistan's relationship with Washington. They need to realize that continuing support by their country's military-mosque nexus for anti-Indian terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere is going to weaken Pakistan's national security and economy and isolate it internationally and might even result in another military defeat by India. Islamabad would be making a mistake were it to count on its nuclear capability or its ties with Washington to change such calculations. To put it differently, the Pakistanis have to realize that supporting the so-called freedom fighters of Kashmir could threaten their own survival as a nation.

The Right U.S. Response

It is in this context that American policy toward Pakistan can make a difference. Indeed, the post-September 11 efforts by the Bush administration to get Pakistan to abandon its alliance with the Taliban should be regarded as nothing more than a play-it-by-ear damage-control operation aimed at reversing U.S. policies (including support for Pax Pakistana in Afghanistan) adopted during the 1980s and early 1990s. But if those efforts are understood as the beginning of some sort of new, long-term strategic alliance between Washington and Islamabad, Washington is sending the wrong signals to both Pakistan and India. Such a policy would strengthen the hands of the military-mosque nexus in Pakistan by suggesting that Islamabad can count on the United States to tilt the balance of power in its favor in its relationship with India.

The perception that America has embraced Musharraf since September 11 has emboldened Pakistani hawks to step up their pressure in Kashmir, according to a veteran South Asia watcher, Selig Harrison. He suggests that the United States should make it clear now that Washington regards India, some seven times bigger than Pakistan, "as the focus of U.S. interests in South Asia."⁶³ Such a statement of U.S. policy would have

nothing to do with any need to placate India or pander to its domestic lobby in the United States. Nor would it stem from "anti-Pakistani" or "anti-Muslim" sentiments. It would reflect consideration of genuine American national interests at the end of the Cold War and in the aftermath of September 11. The United States has a clear interest in establishing strong ties with India, one of the rising political, economic, and military powers in Asia and a strategic counterbalance to China.⁶⁴ India also happens to be the world's largest democracy as well as an important emerging economy and an expanding market for U.S. goods and investment.

Moreover, secular and Westernized India is a reliable and important partner in the war against terrorism. Pakistan, with its dictatorship, a failed economy, and an insecure nuclear arsenal, is at best a reluctant supporter of U.S. goals and at worst a potential long-term adversary. It remains under the influence of radical Islamic forces hostile to the United States. Although the United States should remain committed to a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Kashmir dispute, and should not take steps that would be construed as support for the more hawkish nationalist Hindu forces in New Delhi, it should recognize that triumph by radical Muslim terrorists in Kashmir would amount to a defeat in the global war against terrorism. Hence, pressing the Indians to not respond to terrorist acts and resisting Indian calls for America to condemn anti-Indian terrorism in Kashmir reflect more than morally dubious "double standards." Such a policy runs contrary to U.S. national interests and is just the latest demonstration of the way the Pakistani tail can wag the American dog.

Conclusion

The United States should take the opportunity offered by the changing international realities and the developments in Asia not only to strengthen its ties with India but also to study the idea of "constructive disengage-

ment” from Pakistan, now that that nation has lost its strategic value to Washington and has become more of a burden than an asset as far as long-term U.S. interests (and values) are concerned. U.S. policymakers should certainly reject any idea of establishing permanent American military bases in the hostile political environment of Pakistan.⁶⁵ Washington should also recognize that any effort to prop up the Pakistani military involves a major long-term risk—that the powerful military machine of Pakistan will fall one day into the hands of a radical Islamic regime bent on going to war with India and exporting its ideology to other parts of the world.

Direct U.S. economic assistance to the government of Pakistan only helps to sustain a corrupt, statist economic system and diverts funds to support the military buildup. That is not to say that the United States should isolate Pakistan. To the contrary, the Bush administration and Congress should stress a commitment to integrating Pakistan into the global economy, including elimination of U.S. tariffs on Pakistani textile exports and encouragement of economic cooperation between India and Pakistan.⁶⁶

Americans and Westerners should applaud a course leading to the modernization of Pakistan and its transformation into a secular and open society, but there isn't much that Washington can do to promote such a change. Americans should not be required to “reward” Pakistan for taking steps that are in its own interest, such as reforming its political and economic system, ending anti-American and anti-Semitic propaganda, arresting terrorists, or reducing tensions with India.⁶⁷ Pakistan's “rewards” for doing all of that would be considerable: growing diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties with the United States; integration into the global economy; and peace and prosperity. American taxpayers certainly should not “reward” a nation that allies itself with regimes and groups that encourage terrorists to kill Americans.

By permitting Islamabad to “wag” Washington and squeeze rewards from it, Washington has helped to prop up one of the

world's most anti-American states. Even worse, Pakistan's status as an unruly client state has fostered anti-American sentiment. Indeed, as Hitchens suggests, the pervasive anti-Americanism that he found in Pakistan “springs exactly from this mendicant's-begging-bowl arrangement. Pakistanis know that they are bought and paid for, and so the way to assert pride is to spit in the face of those who have owned and used them.”⁶⁸ It's time for Americans and Pakistanis to bring a sense of normalcy and dignity into their relationship. That means cutting Pakistan loose from its status as a U.S. client.

Notes

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2. Quoted in Christopher de Bellaigue, “The Perils of Pakistan,” *New York Review of Books*, November 15, 2001, p. 44.
3. U.S. Department of State, “Joint U.S.-Pakistan Statement for President Musharraf's Visit to New York, November 10, 2001,” www.state.gov/p/sa/rt/index.cfm?docid+6060.
4. Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 320.
5. See Douglas Jehl, “Pakistan Is Facing Terrorist Listing,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1993.
6. Richard Beeston, “Pakistan Will Let US Forces Use Border Airbases,” *Times* (London), September 20, 2001.
7. Quoted in “Pakistan and the Taliban: About Turn,” *The Economist*, October 6, 2001.
8. Quoted in “U.S. Relations with Pakistan Revived,” Stratfor Commentary, September 13, 2001, www.startfor.com/home/010912310.htm.
9. U.S. Department of State, “President of Pakistan Reaffirms Commitment to Fight Terrorism,” November 10, 2001, www.gov/p/sa/rt/index.cfm?docid=6056.
10. Michael Cabbage, “Pakistan's Leaders Risk Strife by Backing US,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 4, 2001. See also Pamela Constable, “Attacks on US Drive Pakistan to a Crossroads,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2001.

U.S. policymakers should reject any idea of establishing permanent American military bases in the hostile political environment of Pakistan.

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