

How to Exercise U.S. Leverage Over Pakistan

The United States has more leverage over Pakistan than is widely appreciated, and it is time for American policymakers to use it. Since 2001, two successive administrations have tried to persuade Pakistan to end its support for militants—including the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network—exclusively through aid, diplomacy, and persuasion with few sanctions or conditions: an approach of all carrots and no sticks. They did so in the belief that Pakistan’s fundamental problem was a lack of capacity, not will. They were wrong.

According to a wide and consistent body of reporting, elements of the Pakistani state are willfully complicit in actions directly harmful to U.S. interests in South Asia. Pakistan is able to aid militants with impunity because it pays no cost in American support or aid. The solution therefore is not to give Pakistan more aid or improve public diplomacy, but to use a mix of aid, conditions, and sanctions to change Pakistani officials’ cost-benefit calculus about its support for militants. Washington must make cooperation with militants more costly than cooperation with the United States.

Is it Worth the Risk? The Kerry–Lugar Trial

Recent history illustrates how difficult it is to calibrate a tougher approach with Pakistan. In 2009, the Obama administration made a small move in this

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The Washington Quarterly • 35:4 pp. 37–52
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2012.725022>

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direction when it tried to shift the emphasis in the bilateral relationship from primarily military affairs to a broader range of issues—including democracy, civilian rule and trade, in addition to stability—but it simultaneously built more explicit conditions into the relationship. The cornerstone of this new approach, the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act (also known as the Kerry–Lugar Bill), offered to triple

economic assistance to Pakistan from 2009 through 2014 so long as Pakistan made progress toward a series of benchmarks on governance and security.

For example, the full amount of aid under Kerry–Lugar (\$1.5 billion per year) is only available if the U.S. Secretary of State certifies annually that U.S. aid to Pakistan is contributing to the “consolidation of democratic institutions,” supporting the “expansion of the rule of law” as well as “respect for internationally-recognized human rights,” and promoting “economic freedom and sustainable economic development.”¹ Similarly, in order to continue providing military aid to Pakistan, the Secretary of State must certify that Pakistan “has demonstrated a sustained commitment to and is making significant efforts towards combating terrorist groups,” specifically by “ceasing support, including by any elements within the Pakistan military or its intelligence agency, to extremist and terrorist groups,” and preventing them “from operating in the territory of Pakistan.”² Military aid is also strictly conditional on the continuance of civilian rule in Pakistan.

Pakistani military and civilian officials expressed outrage at the conditions placed on the new economic assistance. They felt the conditions were condescending and tantamount to an infringement on their sovereignty;³ the Pakistani Army issued a rare statement expressing “serious concern” about the bill and reiterating that “Pakistan is a sovereign state.”⁴ Eventually, the public uproar died down, Secretary Clinton approved all the necessary certifications, and the new aid money has been delivered as promised; however, because of how Kerry–Lugar was perceived in Pakistan, it has not had its intended effect. The Obama administration’s attempt to improve U.S.–Pakistan relations, bolster the civilian government, and nudge Pakistan towards more responsible behavior appeared to have backfired.

The Obama administration’s error may have been in its hesitance to risk a complete falling out with Pakistan. Placing conditions while professing continuing friendship served neither to bolster ties nor pressure Pakistan; it only succeeded in angering Pakistani politicians without compelling different behavior from them. What the United States should attempt is a single-minded

focus on changing Pakistan's behavior, whether that involves unfriendly relations and coercion or not.

A tougher approach will, of course, risk losing the few benefits the United States derives from its partnership with Islamabad, most notably in intelligence cooperation. However, a harder line is unlikely to lead to a collapse of the Pakistani state, the failure of civilian government, or its takeover by jihadists. The dangers to Pakistan and the importance of U.S. aid have been exaggerated here. The state is not in danger of immediate collapse; U.S. aid is not crucial to its survival; and the Pakistani Taliban has no prospects of defeating the Pakistani Army.

Bruce Riedel, a veteran Pakistan expert who spent 30 years studying the region with the Central Intelligence Agency and developing U.S. policy towards Pakistan on the National Security Council staff, calls a jihadist Pakistan the "nightmare scenario" and goes so far as to sketch scenarios of how it might come about. He nonetheless admits the prospect "is neither imminent nor inevitable."⁵ Similarly, scholar Anatol Lieven judges that there is "not remotely enough" support for Islamist extremism "to revolutionize Pakistan as a whole,"⁶ a judgment shared by other Pakistan experts like Stephen P. Cohen, who argues that the view of Pakistan as "a center of Islamic revolutionary activity . . . is not accurate."⁷

While the peaceful Islamist parties have never performed well in Pakistani elections and were most recently voted out of office in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in 2008, their militant counterparts are no stronger. The Pakistani Taliban have virtually no prospect of overrunning the Pakistani Army, one of the largest in the world, or seizing Islamabad by force. They can only make progress in the time-honored fashion of insurgents everywhere, by offering a more compelling vision of governance than the state offers. This is something that the Taliban on both sides of the border have markedly failed to do year after year. Meanwhile, the Pakistani Army has made notable strides in its counterinsurgency efforts since 2008, and violence in the tribal areas has declined over the past year.⁸ The Pakistani Army does not lack the will, motivation, or capacity in its fight against the Pakistani Taliban, which means the presence or absence of American aid, alliance, and support is not important enough to determine the outcome of that conflict.

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Options to Get Tough

There are at least six major options to get tough with Pakistan.

America has real and vital national security interests at stake in South Asia, most of which are endangered by Pakistan's decades-long policy of supporting and tolerating militant groups. If indeed it is time to get tough with Pakistan, what would that look like? There are at least six major options: reduce aid; cut trade ties; rescind Pakistan's status as a Major Non-NATO Ally; end intelligence cooperation; designate individuals, organizations, or the Pakistani state as a sponsor of terrorism; and initiate or expand unilateral U.S. operations in Pakistan. Each option has advantages and disadvantages, but the time has come to consider each more seriously as a pressure mechanism. The United States could impose them as a series of punitive measures, escalating until Pakistan shows a demonstrable commitment to ending support for militants.

Aid Conditionality

The first step Washington could take is to reduce economic or military assistance to Pakistan. Pakistan is the tenth largest recipient of aid in U.S. history, having received more than \$52 billion since 1950.⁹ Indeed, compared to the other top recipients of U.S. aid, Pakistan has received aid more consistently over the last six decades than any other country. (The other top recipients typically received aid in concentrated pockets of time, such as the large sums Britain and France received after World War II, or that South Korea and South Vietnam received during the U.S. wars there.) Contrary to the Pakistani narrative that Washington is a fickle ally, the United States has been a remarkably consistent funnel of money, a trend interrupted only in 1965 after the Indo-Pakistani war (because Washington claimed Pakistan's involvement in the war violated the terms of their defense cooperation agreements) and in 1990 when the United States imposed nonproliferation sanctions on Islamabad. Since the terrorist attacks of 2001, the United States has provided \$7.4 billion in civilian assistance to Pakistan, and that number is set to double over the next several years under the Kerry–Lugar Bill. Similarly, the United States provided \$14.6 billion in military aid to Pakistan from 2002–2011.¹⁰

It is still too early to pass definitive judgment on Pakistan's progress against the Kerry–Lugar metrics, but the trend lines are not encouraging. Pakistan ranked 134th on Transparency International's "Corruption Perceptions Index" in 2011, down from 79th in 2001. Rampant networks of corruption and nepotism do not undermine the Pakistani state; they *are* the state. Anatol Lieven

wrote last year that the current rule of law in Pakistan “calls into question the whole project of creating a unified modern state.”¹¹ As for Pakistan’s support to militants, Admiral Michael Mullen, the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Congress in public testimony last September that “the Haqqani network acts as a veritable arm of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency.”¹² Few doubt

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that several major militant groups, including the Afghan Taliban, continue to “operate in the territory of Pakistan,” in violation of the language of the Kerry–Lugar Bill. Even civilian rule looks questionable—despite Asif Zardari’s election as a civilian Prime Minister in 2008, his actual control over Pakistan’s foreign and defense policy remains uncertain.

Unfortunately, the goals of the Kerry–Lugar Bill may simply be too ambitious. It is not within U.S. power to re-engineer Pakistan’s political culture, build its economy, or implant the rule of law. At a time when many observers are beginning to doubt the ability of the United States to effect meaningful change in Afghanistan—a much smaller, poorer country to which the United States has given vastly larger sums of money—it seems unreasonable to expect that the much smaller amount of aid given to Pakistan will make a substantial difference there. U.S. aid is unlikely to be the deciding factor in Pakistan’s future.

Given these realities, the United States could easily invoke the conditions in the Kerry–Lugar Bill to reduce or eliminate economic and military assistance to Pakistan to signal its displeasure for Pakistan’s continuing support for militants. The Obama administration has already taken half-hearted steps in this direction, suspending \$800 million in Coalition Support Funds last year after Pakistan expelled U.S. trainers in retaliation for the raid on Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad.¹³ The U.S. Congress also threatened to cut \$33 million in aid after Pakistan jailed the doctor who allegedly helped locate bin Laden.¹⁴ The Secretary of State is empowered to issue a national security waiver for most of the Kerry–Lugar conditions, but why would any American administration want to do so? Unless or until Pakistan verifiably ceases support to militant groups hostile to American interests (not just those who attack the Pakistani state) and makes demonstrable progress against them, the United States should have no discernible interest in providing it aid.

U.S.–Pakistan Trade Ties

Similarly, the United States could reduce or close off the growing economic ties between itself and Pakistan. While not related to the Kerry–Lugar legislation directly, U.S.–Pakistan trade ties have been growing quickly over the past

decade, and in economic terms at least, Pakistan needs the United States as a trading partner far more than the United States needs Pakistan. Helped by a U.S.–Pakistan Trade and Investment Agreement signed in 2003, bilateral trade more than doubled from \$2.8 billion in 2001 to \$5.8 billion in 2011. While insignificant to the gigantic American market, the trade relationship represents a meaningful portion of Pakistan’s \$200 billion economy—the United States was Pakistan’s top destination for exports in 2010. (By comparison, Pakistan is only the United States’ 57th largest trading partner). Additionally, Pakistani workers in the United States likely contribute a sizeable portion of the \$8.7 billion in remittances to Pakistan from abroad. In turn, U.S. businesses account for \$517 million of foreign direct investment in Pakistan, almost one-quarter of the total.¹⁵

The United States has the power to slow or reverse these growing trade ties. It can pull out of the 2003 agreement, find a complaint to file against Pakistani trade practices, or impose import duties to offset Pakistan’s relatively more lax environmental and labor practices. This coercive economic diplomacy would not likely hurt the relatively small U.S. economic interests at stake in Pakistan, but would disproportionately affect Pakistani business interests which are closely tied to Pakistan’s elite, patronage-driven political system.

Critics may complain that cutting off economic assistance would undermine the very groups within Pakistan that the United States should do the most to support—civilians, businessmen, and entrepreneurs, as opposed to the military and Islamist factions. This criticism is unpersuasive on three counts. First, it exaggerates the importance of civilians and moderates in Pakistan’s political system, who while in power during the 1990s and since 2008, failed to reduce Pakistan’s support for militants. Secondly, it presumes the United States has the ability to manipulate the balance of power among Pakistan’s factions to its advantage; nothing in recent history suggests the U.S. foreign policy apparatus possesses that ability. Thirdly, this view also exaggerates the distinction between civilian moderates and military autocrats. In fact, the military prospers through its partnership with big industrial interests, with whom it is deeply enmeshed. This is why economic coercion against Pakistani trade interests may hit the Pakistani Army in the pocketbook, where it hurts the most.

Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) Status

Another step the United States could take against Pakistan is to formally dissolve the U.S.–Pakistan “alliance.” The origin of this alliance is often said to be a pair of treaties signed in 1954 and 1955—the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)—both of which tied the signatories together in a NATO-like mutual defense pact. Pakistani officials themselves often invoke this history to remind American

counterparts that Pakistan has been the United States' "most allied ally" in the world. Such assertions are false: Pakistan withdrew from SEATO in 1972 and CENTO in 1979. The United States bears no formal treaty obligation towards Pakistan, and has borne none in more than 30 years.

The contemporary U.S.–Pakistan alliance is of much more recent vintage. In 2004, President George W. Bush designated Pakistan a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA). The MNNA designation was created by Congress in 1989 as a way of identifying America's major strategic partners without the burdensome requirements of a formal treaty. It confers a range of benefits, including participation in U.S. Defense Department research and development projects, preferential access to U.S. military surplus supplies, the use of U.S. loans to finance weapons purchases, and expedited applications for space technology exports.¹⁶ More importantly, the designation has a powerful symbolic value: it is a public affirmation of a country's affiliation with the United States, a global badge of American approval. Although the designation does not technically carry a security guarantee or legally obligate the United States to come to the defense of a designee, the label of "ally" implies as much. Only fifteen states and Taiwan have been given the MNNA status. Pakistan was the most recent, along with Morocco and Kuwait, in 2004, until President Obama designated Afghanistan this year.

The designation is a public symbol of the United States' continuing belief in Pakistan's fidelity as an ally. The alliance has paid some benefits for the United States; as Pakistani officials are the first to point out, Pakistan has been a generally reliable and helpful ally in the hunt for members of al-Qaida. With the exception of the raid against Osama bin Laden, Pakistani security forces have been a part of operations against many of the senior al-Qaida leadership found in Pakistan, including Khaled Sheikh Mohammad.¹⁷ The Pakistani government is also reported to have privately allowed the United States to carry out the rumored drone strikes against militants in Pakistan, despite its public denunciation of them.¹⁸ And thousands of Pakistani soldiers have been killed fighting against the Pakistani Taliban.

Of course, Pakistan's cooperation against al-Qaida and the Pakistani Taliban is in its own interest, as both groups have targeted the Pakistani state. The true worth of an ally comes in its willingness to cooperate in matters of peripheral concern, or even to change its definition of "interest" for the sake of its ally. The war in Afghanistan admittedly put Pakistan in a difficult position, forcing it to choose between the United States and the Taliban clients it had fostered and encouraged since 1994.¹⁹ Many Pakistani officials understandably believe they have an interest in maintaining both relationships. Just because their predicament is understandable, however, does not mean the United States should tolerate it. If American policymakers conclude, reasonably, that Pakistan has

failed to behave as an ally in the war against the Afghan Taliban or the Haqqani Network, who are the groups most directly responsible for the ongoing fighting in Afghanistan, the United States should rescind the MNNA designation and dissolve the U.S.–Pakistan alliance. So long as Pakistan prioritizes the Taliban over the United States, the United States has little reason to treat the former as an ally while fighting a war against the latter.

The move would trigger some diplomatic consequences. Stripping Pakistan of its status as an MNNA would be a highly visible and public way of signaling that the United States no longer considers Pakistan an ally, and ending what Pakistanis consider to be a nearly 70-year-old alliance would compel Islamabad to rethink its grand strategy. Pakistan may look for partners elsewhere, like in China, echoing the Pakistanis' turn to China after their first falling out with the United States in 1965 (although it is unlikely Beijing will be able to offer the same level of aid or the same quality of training and equipment that the United States gives to Pakistan). It may also seek to bolster ties with other states in the Islamic world, among whom it has long sought to posture itself as a leader, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt—whose own ties to the United States have been strained by their response to the Arab Spring. If so, the United States may face the least favorable environment in the greater Middle East in generations.

In the end, however, dissolving the U.S.–Pakistan alliance is unlikely to threaten Pakistan's continued operations against al-Qaida. Al-Qaida has already given Pakistan ample reason to go after the group because of its role supporting and sponsoring domestic terrorism against Islamabad itself.

Intelligence Cooperation

A fourth option available to U.S. policymakers is to draw down or end the United States' long-standing intelligence cooperation with Pakistan. Washington and Islamabad have had a long intelligence relationship which goes back to the early days of the Cold War. According to Riedel, the CIA veteran, Pakistan allowed the United States to use its territory for intelligence collection in the 1960s, including an air base for aerial reconnaissance of the Soviet Union and technical facilities to intercept communications.²⁰ The U.S. Air Force U2 reconnaissance aircraft that was shot down over the Soviet Union in May 1960 actually took off from an air strip in Pakistan. The cooperative relationship between the two states' intelligence agencies was initially part of what Pakistani officials understood to be their duty as members of CENTO and SEATO in exchange for America's security guarantee. U.S.–Pakistani intelligence cooperation, like all aspects of the U.S.–Pakistan relationship, cooled following the 1965 war with India but revived in the 1980s during the Soviet–Afghan War. The United States and Pakistan, including their respective intelligence assets, cooperated closely with others to fund and arm the Afghan

mujahideen in their war against the Soviet Union. Following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the imposition of sanctions on Pakistan in 1990 for its nuclear-weapons development, such close ties cooled again.

A similar arrangement with new facilities (airstrips, listening posts, and the like) almost certainly started again as part of the new alliance after 2001, although details are unavailable or only speculative in unclassified sources. Pakistan has cooperated with the United States against al-Qaida and other militants, principally through its law-enforcement forces and Directorate C of the ISI, its counterterrorism branch.²¹ Pakistan probably shares selected bits of intelligence it gleans about al-Qaida with American military forces and intelligence agencies, and as noted above, it reportedly has given its private consent to the U.S. drone campaign, possibly including air strips inside Pakistan for drone operations.

Pakistan benefits from this relationship. The United States gives Pakistan a substantial amount of military assistance in the form of money, equipment, and training, some of which probably extends to or includes intelligence activities. Additionally, intelligence relationships are typically two-way: the United States probably shares some of its intelligence with Pakistan in exchange for the information Pakistan offers to the United States. Finally, the United States has, on occasion, directly targeted Pakistan's enemies in the course of its drone campaign, including a reportedly successful strike against Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud in August 2009, and an apparently unsuccessful one against his successor, Hakimullah Mehsud, in January 2012.²²

While reducing or eliminating intelligence cooperation with Pakistan would deprive Pakistan of these benefits, it would also hurt the United States' own intelligence operations in the region. However, none of these losses would be irreplaceable. Washington's close relationship with Kabul and its growing ties with New Delhi suggest that the United States has alternatives for sharing intelligence and basing key facilities in South Asia. Afghanistan, for example, would be an equally good location for basing assets to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance of militant networks in South Asia, and a superior one for basing assets oriented toward Russia and Iran. Additionally, since whatever information Pakistan shares with the United States comes at Pakistan's discretion, it is unclear how useful the information actually is. Surely, Pakistani officials share no information they believe could be used to hurt their own interests or, presumably, their militant proxies. In other words, losing the intelligence Pakistan shares with the United States is probably not a great loss. Finally, refocusing the drone campaign exclusively on groups who target the United States, rather than those who target Pakistan, is simply a more economical use of resources. Helping Pakistan fight the Pakistani Taliban might be good diplomacy, but it has not thus far helped win the war against the Afghan Taliban—and it might have the

unintended consequence of breeding complacency in the Pakistani Army about countering their own homegrown militants.

Terrorist Designations

The United States could take a more serious step: it could designate Pakistan, or specific Pakistani actors, as sponsors of terrorism. Such a designation contains several tiers that are all available to U.S. policymakers.

First, the Secretary of Treasury could classify individual Pakistanis as Specially Designated Nationals (SDNs) for complicity in terrorism or drug trafficking, freezing their assets and prohibiting Americans from conducting business with them. For example, Hamid Gul, a retired Pakistani Army officer who headed the ISI from 1987 to 1989 and who was the architect of Pakistan's using militant proxies against India in Kashmir, is almost universally reported to have retained ties to militants, including the Taliban. He is reportedly on the U.S. terrorist watchlist, and American officials submitted his name to the United Nations to be included on the list of international terrorists,²³ but the Treasury Department has not yet sanctioned him. Sanctioning Gul by name, and other retired and active Pakistani Army officers like him, may not have many material consequences unless Gul already has ties to American businesses. But importantly, it would communicate to Pakistani officials that employment by the Pakistani state does not give them immunity for links to terrorists. It would impose a cost on Pakistan for its use of proxies and refuse to grant the thin cover of deniability such proxies supposedly give them.

Secondly, the U.S. Secretary of State could designate Directorate S of the ISI, which is in charge of external operations, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Several U.S. Congressmen and Senators have urged the Secretary for several years to designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force (IRGC-QF) an FTO for its role in training and equipping Hezbollah and militants in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴ Directorate S plays a similar role as the IRGC-QF.²⁵ The ISI was the principal instrument by which Pakistan funded, trained, equipped, and in some cases created the Afghan mujahideen resistance groups in the 1980s, from which it naturally evolved to play the same role for Kashmiri insurgent groups in the 1990s and the Taliban after 1994. All of these would have fallen under the jurisdiction of Directorate S.²⁶ If the Haqqani Network, which was designated an FTO in September, is a "veritable arm of the ISI," as Admiral Mullen claimed, Directorate S is the shoulder. An FTO designation makes providing material support to the group a federal crime, bars members from entering or staying in the United States, and obligates U.S. financial institutions to freeze any of the group's funds it holds. It also stigmatizes and isolates the group in the eyes of the international community.²⁷ This step would end any remaining U.S. ties with Pakistani intelligence.

Labeling Directorate S as an FTO would only be possible if the United States argued that it was a rogue organization outside the control of the Pakistani state. That may or may not be a plausible position to take, but its truth is less relevant than its political implications. U.S. policymakers may feel compelled to argue (or pretend) that Directorate S is rogue, because the next step is to designate Pakistan itself a state sponsor of terrorism.

This final tier of terrorist designation would end all forms of U.S. assistance to Pakistan and trigger a wide range of sanctions and export controls. Currently there are four officially-designated state-sponsors of terrorism—Cuba, Iran, Sudan, and Syria—all of whom are treated as pariahs in the international community (in part because of their links to terrorism, but also due to regular violations of human rights and, in some cases, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). This step would go beyond merely dissolving the U.S.–Pakistan alliance to treating Pakistan as a hostile power.

Unilateral U.S. Operations in Pakistan

Finally, as a last resort, the United States could initiate or accelerate unilateral operations in Pakistan including drone strikes, ground incursions, and operations in Quetta, where the Afghan Taliban senior leadership is widely believed to be headquartered. Details of U.S. operations in Pakistan are hazy and uncorroborated for obvious reasons, but the reporting in public sources has been fairly consistent: the United States flies unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over Pakistan to conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance of terrorists and militants. Some of these drones are armed—since 2004, the drones have launched about 330 attacks on militant targets inside Pakistan, killing between 1,873 and 3,171 people, about 6–8 percent of whom were civilians, according to the most comprehensive publicly-available study done on the drone program to date.²⁸ The targets of the drone attacks were primarily Taliban fighters, but also included al-Qaida, the Haqqani Network, and other militants. The strikes take place exclusively in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), heavily concentrated in North and South Waziristan. In addition to aerial attacks, the United States has launched limited ground attacks by U.S. military personnel inside Pakistan, including a failed raid against militants in Angor Adda in September 2008 and the successful raid in Abbottabad against Osama bin Laden in May 2011.²⁹

Pakistani officials have condemned the ground incursions. Soon, they may demand the end of the drone program, and may have already shut down a base used for drone maintenance and repair last fall.³⁰ But, instead of interpreting these events as a signal to scale down the U.S. drone program, the United States might explore the opposite option. If the drone program is, as President Obama publicly claimed in January 2012, a useful means of launching pinpoint strikes

against America's enemies while minimizing the violation of another country's sovereignty,³¹ then the United States ought to develop a way of expanding the scope and scale of the program without Pakistan's consent or complicity.

Specifically, the United States might expand the geographic range of drone strikes. Several top al-Qaida leaders, including Osama bin Laden and Khaled Sheikh Mohammad, were found hiding in major urban centers well outside the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Similarly, today's Afghan Taliban leaders in Quetta—in Baluchistan Province, about 500 kilometers south of the FATA—are beyond the current drone program's reach. Aside from the Pakistani government's predictable resistance to drone strikes in urban areas, precise targeting would be difficult and risk civilian casualties in a compact urban environment compared to the more wide-open rural environment of the FATA. But the potential payoff should at least prompt U.S. officials to explore the option seriously.

Additionally, as a last resort, the United States could expand the target set at which such operations are aimed. This expansion would include current and former Pakistani military and intelligence officials complicit with militants. Pakistan might interpret such a policy as an act of war, triggering far-reaching and undesirable consequences, including reprisals by Pakistan or its proxies against American targets. The only justification for such a drastic step would be for the U.S. President to find that Pakistan's support for militants has long-since constituted a Pakistani act of war against the United States.

What are Ties with Pakistan Worth?

A critic may respond that these policy options make no strategic sense because maintaining friendly ties with Islamabad is more important than defeating militant Islamist groups. Cracking down on Pakistan for the sake of defeating the Afghan Taliban may win the battle of Kabul, but lose the war for South Asia by driving Pakistan into open hostility. According to this view, Pakistan is vastly more important than Afghanistan because of its sheer size, its nuclear weapons, its role in the Muslim world, and its much bigger and more viable economy. Following this logic, the United States should continue to engage Pakistan, give it more economic assistance, and encourage the growth of civilian rule—essentially the Obama administration's strategy. In this view, if the United States has to take a loss in Afghanistan to preserve good ties with Pakistan, that is an acceptable price to pay.

However, what good ties are left to preserve? Pakistan is already in virtual open hostility to the United States. Washington has received precious few benefits for its aid, alliance, and complicity with Islamabad over the past decade. Pakistan is, indeed, more important and powerful than Afghanistan, but that simply means it is all the more important for the United States to have a

coherent and credible policy toward it. It does not mean the United States should seek to never offend Pakistan. China is also a powerful state, but that does not mean the United States is obliged to pretend it is an ally or offer it billions in aid. The United States is paying a high and rising cost for its current strategy towards Pakistan: American soldiers are dying at the hands of militants encouraged by Islamabad; terrorists planning attacks against the United States and its allies operate in Pakistan almost unbothered by the Pakistani government; Pakistan's rivalry with India could trigger nuclear war with global radiological fallout. Pretending Pakistan is an ally and giving it money has prevented none of these developments.

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Nor is the United States likely to succeed in ending Pakistan's support to militants if its policy depends on changing Pakistan's political culture to be more respectful of civilian rule. Whatever civilian allies the United States may have in Islamabad have failed to appreciably alter the direction of Pakistan's foreign policy. Furthermore, as argued above, little in recent history suggests that the U.S. foreign policy apparatus has the ability to change other states' political systems cheaply or quickly. In any case, the fabled civilian moderates either do not exist or they are powerless, in which case they are not allies worth the sacrifice of American lives.

Finally, the outcome of the conflict in Afghanistan is not immaterial to U.S.–Pakistani relations. The United States cannot simply walk away from Kabul as a gesture of goodwill to Islamabad. Losing in Afghanistan would actually hurt U.S. interests in Pakistan: taking a loss there would mean either an Afghan civil war or a Taliban victory, which in turn would empower Pakistani militants, give them a safe haven, and put even more pressure on Islamabad to co-opt or appease them. Winning in Afghanistan, by contrast, would put further pressure on militants in Pakistan and also demonstrate the U.S. commitment to building lasting stability in South Asia—a stability in which militancy has no part.

Turning Options into Strategy

Any one of these policy options carries risks and downsides for the United States. Pakistan is sure to respond in some fashion, but what could Islamabad do that it has not already done? The list of possible reprisals—sponsor terrorism, proliferate weapons of mass destruction, meddle unhelpfully in Afghanistan, threaten India—is simply the recent history of Pakistani foreign policy. Furthermore, some U.S. options, like cutting off aid to Pakistan, would

actually benefit the United States by saving it money in a time of fiscal austerity. Some options may push Pakistan closer to China or reduce a small amount of U.S. trade overseas, but those are minimal consequences compared to the ongoing harm inflicted on the United States by militant groups that Pakistan supports or tolerates. Some policy options, such as cutting off intelligence cooperation or expanding unilateral operations, carry more serious consequences and should be held in reserve in case of a more serious deterioration in the U.S.–Pakistan relationship.

American policymakers should not initiate every one of these policies simultaneously, and hopefully will never need to impose most of them. Rather, the United States should recognize that its current policy toward Pakistan—free

A re-appraisal of how to use U.S. leverage toward Pakistan is long overdue.

cash, a formal alliance, and a blind eye towards Islamabad's failings and betrayals—has simply failed to secure vital U.S. interests in South Asia. Pakistan is actively working to oppose American goals in Afghanistan, it has been one of the greatest proliferators of weapons of mass destruction in recent history, it supports a range of militants and terrorists, and its policy toward India is increasingly of American

concern given the growing U.S.–Indian ties of the past two decades. In light of these enduring features of Pakistani foreign policy, a re-appraisal of how to use U.S. leverage toward Pakistan is long overdue.

Notes

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