

# Stiffening Pakistan's Resolve Against Terrorism

## A Memo to President-elect Obama

Lisa Curtis and Walter Lohman

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*But we also have to help make the case that the biggest threat to Pakistan right now is not India. It's actually militants within their own borders. And, if we can get them to refocus on that, then that's going to be critical to our success, not just in stabilizing Pakistan, but also in finishing the job in Afghanistan.*

—Barack Obama, CNN,  
October 31, 2008<sup>1</sup>

**PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA**, developing an effective policy toward Pakistan will be one of the most immediate challenges facing your Administration. During the campaign, you rightly pledged to support Pakistan's nascent democratic government and to convince the military establishment to shift its focus away from India and toward militants within Pakistan's own borders that threaten to destabilize the country.

However, your recent assertion that the U.S. should try to help resolve the Kashmir dispute so that Pakistan can focus on reining in militancy on its Afghan border is misguided. Promoting the idea of direct U.S. mediation of the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir could backfire by raising unrealistic expectations for a favorable settlement among Pakistanis, thereby fueling Islamabad's support for Kashmiri militants in hopes of pushing a hard-line agenda that it now believed was within reach.

The United States cannot afford to see Pakistan fail, nor can it ignore the extremists operating in Pakistan's tribal border areas. Afghanistan cannot succeed without success in Pakistan, and vice versa, but turning the tide in Pakistan will not be easy. Your Administration will have to convince skeptical Pakistanis that fighting terrorism is in their own country's national security interest, increase cooperation with Pakistani security forces, and develop a more integrated regional diplomatic

strategy that addresses long-standing inter-state tensions that fuel support for extremist ideologies.

To secure U.S. interests vis-à-vis Pakistan, your Administration should:

- **Pursue closer U.S.–Pakistan military cooperation along the Afghanistan border and convince the Pakistani military leadership to sever all links to violent extremist groups, whether they operate in Afghanistan or India.** U.S. commanders in Afghanistan have recently reported increased “tactical cooperation” between Pakistani soldiers fighting in the Bajaur Agency of the tribal border areas and coalition forces in Afghanistan, although they acknowledge that Pakistan has a long way to go before it severs all of its military and intelligence ties with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The U.S. was shortsighted in not convincing Pakistan to break all ties to the Taliban and other Kashmir-focused terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (responsible for the late November multiple terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India) immediately following 9/11.

The lack of a consistent and systematic Pakistani policy to rein in extremists has contributed to the development of the dangerous terrorist safe haven in the Tribal Areas as well as the current Indo–Pakistani crisis that has brought two nuclear-armed nations to the brink of conflict. Pakistan’s failure to sever all of its links to deadly terrorist networks in the region was also highlighted this summer when well-sourced media reports revealed Pakistani intelligence links to the July 7 bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul.

Your Administration must convince the Pakistani military leadership that Pakistan’s national security interests are no longer served by supporting extremists, whether they operate in Afghanistan or in India. This should be done through a calibrated carrot-and-stick policy that targets the military’s interests and through stepped up regional diplomacy that increases Pakistan’s confidence in its regional security position. U.S. officials should acknowledge the legitimacy of Pakistan’s regional

security concerns while also making clear that these interests do not justify reliance on violent proxies.

Your Administration may need to continue to rely on unilateral military action in the Tribal Areas, both to protect U.S. troops fighting across the border in Afghanistan and to prevent a future catastrophic international terrorist attack, but the U.S. must carefully calibrate its military action, recognizing that each unilateral strike—especially if it involves civilian casualties—undermines the broader U.S. goals of winning cooperation from Pakistan’s leaders and preventing the strengthening of radical forces within Pakistani society. The U.S. has a right to self-defense, but it should also be guided by overarching policies that acknowledge that the global war on terrorism will be won by gaining the support of local populations and maintaining close cooperation and coordination with governments that are also threatened by the terrorist scourge.

Tackling the Taliban/al-Qaeda threat in Pakistan’s Tribal Areas will require a multi-faceted strategy that includes economic assistance; a comprehensive effort to undermine the extremist ideologies that drive the various groups; a new political dispensation for the region that incorporates it into Pakistan proper; and, at times, precision military strikes that target the terrorist leadership.

- **Elevate and broaden the agenda of the “Friends of Pakistan” group to include convincing Pakistan to stiffen its resolve against terrorism and extremism.** The U.S. should focus on coordinating strategy toward Pakistan with other countries that have friendly ties to Pakistan, both to strengthen Pakistani resolve against terrorism and extremism and to help stabilize the country and prevent it from state collapse. By working more closely with countries like China, Japan, and Saudi Arabia, the United States can encourage Pakistan to move in a more positive direction without risking greater anti-U.S. animus.

It is critical that Pakistan understand that the international community—not just the U.S.—has a stake in seeing terrorism uprooted from its tribal border areas. The “Friends of Pakistan” group, which includes the

1. CNN, “Interview with Barack Obama,” *The Situation Room*, October 31, 2008, at <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0810/31/sitroom.01.html>.

U.S., the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Canada, Japan, Australia, Turkey, Italy, and China, met for the first time in late September to coordinate a response to Pakistan's economic crisis. This is a step in the right direction, but the group's work should be expanded to focus also on coordinating political messages to Pakistan.

The core of a new, coalition-based approach to Pakistan should include:

1. **Recognition** that events in Pakistan present a threat to global security. The international community wants to assist Pakistan in its battle with extremism and help it achieve political and economic stability.
  2. **Support** for the newly elected civilian government with the understanding that the democratic transition is an important part of the fight against extremism and terrorism in Pakistan over the long term.
  3. **Commitment** to bringing stable democracy to Afghanistan, which includes preventing the retrenchment of warlords, scaling back poppy production, and avoiding a return to the Taliban's repressive, extremist policies in any part of the country.
- **Appoint a U.S. presidential South Asia envoy dedicated to the task of promoting better relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and between Pakistan and India.** Appointing a senior South Asia envoy would demonstrate that the U.S. is stepping up its regional diplomatic efforts to supplement its military operations in an effort to bring stability and security to Afghanistan. This diplomatic effort should seek to bring together Pakistani and Afghan leaders in joint initiatives that reduce conflict and build economic bridges between them.

Initiatives such as the establishment of Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) in the border regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan can also help to defuse regional tensions. The ROZ legislation now before the U.S. Congress would create industrial zones in the Pakistani and Afghan border areas to produce and export textiles and other items to the U.S. duty-free, drawing the Afghan and Pakistani economies closer together and increasing their cooperation and integration. Implemen-

tation of this initiative, in the event it is enacted, should be a priority for your Administration.

The envoy should also seek to reduce tensions between Pakistan and India, whose historical rivalry is increasingly being played out in Afghanistan. The U.S. can encourage initiatives that help these three countries develop a vested interest in each other's stability and security. The recent opening of a road that crosses the Line of Control that divides Indian and Pakistani Kashmir is one example of the kind of confidence-building measures that are so badly needed in the region.

- **Avoid falling into the trap of trying to "resolve" Kashmir.** Your recent assertion that "We should try to resolve the Kashmir crisis so that [Pakistan] can stay focused—not on India, but on the situation with those militants," is misguided.<sup>2</sup> Raising the specter of an international role in the dispute could encourage unrealistic expectations for a favorable settlement among Pakistanis, thereby fueling support for Kashmiri militants. Former President Pervez Musharraf initiated the Kargil incursion into Indian-administered Kashmir in 1999 precisely to raise the profile of the Kashmir issue and encourage international mediation.

The U.S. can play a more productive role in easing Indo-Pakistani tensions by pursuing a quiet diplomatic role that encourages the two sides to continue confidence-building measures like the recent opening of a road between Indian and Pakistani Kashmir. The Indians would be unreceptive to a more direct U.S. role on the issue, and any such move in this direction would raise suspicions in New Delhi that Washington is reverting to policies that view India only through the South Asia lens rather than as the emerging global power it has become.

- **Strengthen Pakistan's civilian democratic institutions.** You have already stated your interest in supporting Pakistan's democratically elected leaders through economic aid. A major problem with U.S.

2. Mark Sappenfield and Shahan Mufti, "Is Kashmir Key to Afghan Peace?" *Christian Science Monitor*, November 21, 2008, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1121/p01s01-wosc.html>.

assistance to Pakistan over the past seven years has been the focus on military aid rather than programs that directly benefit the Pakistani people. The Biden–Lugar legislation that would send more non-military aid to Pakistan for development purposes would, if enacted, help to assure the Pakistani people that the U.S. is committed to their well-being and to win support for uprooting terrorism and extremism.

As part of the effort to strengthen the civilian government, Washington should also encourage greater civilian oversight of the military and the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which was implicated in the car-bomb attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul in July. Pakistan's ambiguous policy on support for militancy is less likely to change as long as the military maintains an inordinate say in foreign and domestic policies and remains beyond the scrutiny of elected leaders. Before her assassination, Benazir Bhutto told an interviewer that unless the Pakistani security apparatus is reformed, it would be difficult to dismantle the terrorist networks that now threaten the unity of the Pakistani state.

- **Exercise extreme caution in considering talks with the Taliban.** In a recent interview with *Time* magazine, you suggested that you were open to talks with more moderate Taliban leaders and others, as happened in Iraq with the al-Anbar Awakening movement.<sup>3</sup> Political reconciliation is indeed necessary to stabilize Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal border areas, but your Administration should be aware of the public perceptions

of such dialogue and avoid making statements that could embolden the Taliban leadership and dishearten the Afghan people, most of whom do not support the Taliban's policies but are intimidated by its violent tactics.

While the idea of peeling off lower-level Taliban who are not ideologically committed to the cause may be worthwhile, your Administration should not overestimate the willingness of senior Taliban leaders to break ranks with their al-Qaeda allies. In fact, Pakistani government peace deals with militants in the tribal border areas last spring strengthened the hand of the extremists and led to an upsurge of attacks against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

## Conclusion

Moving the U.S.–Pakistan relationship away from its current turbulent track and setting it on a more even keel will be a tremendous challenge. Your Administration must be willing to exercise patience with the new democratic government and expend more resources on public diplomacy to convince the Pakistani people that fighting terrorism is in their own national security interest. At the same time, your Administration must convince the Pakistani military leadership that Pakistan's national security interests are no longer served by supporting extremists, whether they operate in Afghanistan or India.

Convincing Pakistan to make fundamental shifts in its security perceptions of the region will be difficult. But over the long run, the U.S. will be more successful in defeating the international terrorist threat emanating from Pakistan if it works in cooperation with the Pakistani leadership and engages in respectful dialogue that acknowledges Pakistan's regional security concerns.

3. Sue Fleming, "Obama Faces Big Challenges in Afghanistan," Reuters, November 13, 2008, at <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N12275106.htm>.

**Lisa Curtis** is Senior Research Fellow for South Asia in, and **Walter Lohman** is Director of, the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.

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