

The United States and Pakistan A High-Risk Relationship

By Anatol Lieven

Abstract: The American strategy towards Pakistan has favored goals linked to operations in Afghanistan without necessarily taking Islamabad's interests into account. The army and the Pakistani opinion are therefore more and more sensitive to American intrusions in the country. A possible agreement with the Taliban in which Pakistan would play a decisive role could restore national Pakistani interests to a place of importance. Pakistan's most pressing interests remain concerned with the growing power of India in the region.

The Tensions between US Afghan and Pakistani Strategy

In its policies towards Pakistan, the United States has to deal with an acute tension between the short-term needs of the US-led war in Afghanistan, and the considerably more important long-term needs of US and international security in the struggle against Islamist extremism and terrorism. US officials have tried to square this circle by arguing that the US presence in Afghanistan is necessary in order to protect Pakistan from the Taliban. The problem is that this is almost the diametrical opposite of the truth.

Present US strategy in the war against the Afghan Taliban requires the US to put great pressure on Pakistan to deny them shelter, and for the US to launch drone attacks against Taliban targets within Pakistan. This makes sense from a narrowly military perspective since the Afghan Taliban's bases in Pakistan are in fact of critical importance to their campaign (just as the Vietminh benefited immensely from bases

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in China after the Communist victory there, and the FLN from bases in Morocco and Tunisia after the French withdrawal from those territories).

The long-term terrorist threat by contrast requires the US to build up the Pakistani state to resist Islamist revolution within Pakistan, while putting pressure on Islamabad to take action against Al Qaeda and other international terrorist groups on Pakistan's soil. How the US manages to balance these priorities in the years to come will be of immense importance not just to Afghanistan and Pakistan but to global security as a whole.

The real US objective in Afghanistan has become to a considerable extent not victory but the avoidance of defeat, as a senior US general said to me in private in 2009. That is to say, to prevent the severe blow to US military prestige and morale that would result from evident defeat in Afghanistan, along the lines of the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975. This is of course not in itself a mistaken or unimportant objective, because by the same token the clear defeat of the US in Afghanistan would have an emboldening effect on Islamist and other anti-American forces around the world. The question is whether this goal is contributing to mental confusion when it comes to real Western interests in Afghanistan, and also whether it is sufficiently important to justify damage to other, more important Western and global interests in the region.

To say that the survival of the existing Pakistani state is the greatest of those interests is a matter not of sentiment but of mathematics. With around 170 million people Pakistan has nearly six times the population of Afghanistan - or Iraq - twice the population of Iran, and almost two thirds the population of the entire Arab world put together. Pakistan has a large diaspora in Britain (and therefore in the EU), some of whom have joined the Islamist extremists and carried out terrorist attacks against Britain. Possessing British passports and free to travel within the EU and to North America, the Pakistani community in Britain provides the greatest single potential base for Islamist terrorism within the West.

Pakistan possesses nuclear weapons, and one of the most powerful armies in Asia. International anxiety concerning the possible collapse of the Pakistani state has focused on the apocalyptic threat of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists; but it should be recognized that even a limited but substantial fraying of the Pakistani military's conventional forces would vastly increase the international terrorist threat, because of the number of antiaircraft missiles, other munitions and trained engineers who would become available for terrorist recruitment.

To contribute to the destruction of Pakistan would therefore be an act of insanity on the part of Washington; yet in many ways that is what the needs of the war in Afghanistan demand. The US has sought to square this circle by two means, the first practical, the other rhetorical. Practically, the US has sought to reconcile the Pakistan to US strategy through aid, especially to the Pakistani military. Since 9/11, on average

around one quarter of Pakistan's military budget has been paid for by the US.¹

Pakistan and Terrorism

Many Americans have always felt that the US has got very little in return for this aid, and this feeling has grown enormously in recent months due to the location of Osama bin Laden not just on Pakistani soil, but very close to a Pakistani military academy. The likelihood is that while the Al Qaeda leader was probably not sheltered by the high command of the Pakistani military, sympathetic elements in Pakistani intelligence knew of his whereabouts. Coming on top of Pakistan's shelter to the Afghan Taliban, this has led to very strong hostility to Pakistan in the US. If God forbid a terrorist attack should occur in the US with links to Pakistani groups, then some form of US attack on Pakistan would be very likely.²

It would still however be a mistake. For to understand the relationship of the Pakistani security establishment to militant groups, it is necessary to understand that this is not a two-faced approach (as it is often called in the US) but a four-faced approach. One face is turned towards the Pakistani Taliban and other militants who are in revolt against the Pakistani state; a second face towards the Afghan Taliban and their allies who are fighting against the US and the Karzai administration within Afghanistan; a third face towards international terrorists based in Pakistan; and a fourth towards Pakistani militants who have targeted India.

As far as the Afghan Taliban are concerned, their leadership have enjoyed shelter from the Pakistani military establishment just as the Taliban as a whole have enjoyed shelter from the population of Pakistan's tribal areas. With rare exceptions, however, what the Pakistani army has given has been shelter and not active support – at least to judge by the fact that Taliban explosives technology is still considerably below that of the insurgents in Iraq.

The reason for this shelter by the Pakistani high command is strategic and not ideological. The Pakistani generals are convinced – and with good reason – that the US is going to fail in Afghanistan, that US withdrawal will be followed by civil war, and that in that civil war India will give backing to bitterly antiPakistani forces among the Panjshiri Tajiks and others. It is therefore essential for Pakistan to

¹ See Direct Overt U.S. Aid and Military Reimbursements to Pakistan, FY2002-FY2012, US Congressional Research Service, 5th June 2011, at <<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/163139.pdf>>. It should be noted that there has also been substantial covert US support to the Pakistani military, the exact sum of which is unclear.

² See for example Bob Woodward, "Obama's Wars: The Inside Story" Simon and Schuster, London 2011), pp.47, 85, 364-366.

retain allies in Afghanistan, and the only available ones are the Afghan Taliban and their allies in the Haqqani network and the Hezbe-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

The second face of the Pakistani state has been turned on the Pakistani Taliban, who for several years now have been pursuing Islamist revolution in Pakistan, using to that end first insurgency in the Pashtun areas, and more recently terrorist attacks throughout the country. For several years both the political parties and the Army were very hesitant in their response to this threat, in part because of the strong opposition of most ordinary Pakistanis (and rank and file soldiers) to a campaign against people who were widely seen as good (if misguided) Muslims trying to help their Afghan brothers fight the Americans.

Since the Spring of 2009 however the military, with the backing of the main government parties in Islamabad and Peshawar, have been pursuing a tough campaign against the Pakistani Taliban. This has led to the militants being driven from a number of areas including their former stronghold in the district of Swat, which I visited again in March 2011. The military campaign there has been a very successful one, and no major terrorist attack has occurred in Swat since the middle of 2010. The Pakistani military have also been ruthless, though not indiscriminately so. As Human Rights Watch have reported and as I can confirm from my own interviews, the campaign in Swat has been accompanied by quite numerous extra-judicial executions. This has also been the case in parts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). However, the military campaign has tended to come to an end whenever it is on the verge of areas where the Afghan Taliban are based.

The third face of the Pakistani state has been turned towards international terrorists based in Pakistan. Here, the Pakistani state has generally been helpful to the West – though by no means completely so, as Bin Laden's stay in Abbottabad demonstrates. Numerous Al Qaeda leaders have been arrested in Pakistan with the help of Pakistani intelligence. In Abbottabad itself, in January the Pakistanis arrested an Indonesian terrorist with links to Al Qaeda, Umar Patek (allegedly one of those responsible for the Bali bombings) and handed him to the Indonesian authorities.

The reasons for Pakistan's help against international terrorism based in Pakistan are twofold. In the first place, it has been made abundantly clear by US officials that in the event of a terrorist attack on the US based in Pakistan the consequences for Pakistan would be grave and possibly disastrous. If the attack were serious enough, then force of public opinion might even lead a US administration into actions that would destroy Pakistan as a state. Perhaps equally important however is the fact that Pakistani generals and officials see no Pakistani interest in terrorist attacks on the West – in contrast to support for the Afghan Taliban, which is believed to have a clear strategic rationale.

Most complicated of all both for Pakistan and the US is the fourth face of Pakistani policy, that turned towards the militant groups targeting India. For here, what the Pakistani high command has seen as a strategy rooted in Pakistani interests runs head on into the international community's (and not just the West's) categorical opposition to terrorism as a strategy. Moreover, in this case as much as in Afghanistan, the Pakistani military have fostered allies who have become potentially independent Frankenstein's monsters, capable of getting their creators into terrible trouble.

Since 2002 and Musharraf's decision – under heavy US and Indian pressure - to rein in the groups attacking India, Pakistan-based terrorism and guerrilla warfare in Indian-controlled Kashmir have greatly diminished. However, 2008 saw one of the biggest ever terrorist attacks on India, that in Mumbai. This attack was carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a group very close to the Pakistani military. From the testimony both of the surviving terrorist and of the captured American militant David Headley, it is clear that Pakistani military intelligence were closely involved in planning the Mumbai attacks, though it is not certain that the actual order to attack came from them.³

At the same time, contrary to some Western reporting, LeT is not simply the tool of the Pakistani military. Unfortunately, the popularity of the Kashmir jihad (once again, seen in Pakistani society as a war of resistance, or “defensive jihad” against infidel occupation of Muslim territory) means that this and other militant groups enjoy great support in Pakistan, and especially in the province of Punjab which has almost 60% of Pakistan's population and from which the great majority of soldiers are drawn. This sympathy is shown in the behavior of Punjabi courts, which have refused to convict LeT leaders and have overturned the ban on the group's public organization, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) imposed after the Mumbai attacks. There is real fear in the Pakistani establishment that a harsh crackdown on the group, as demanded by the West and India, would lead to them joining the Pakistani Taliban and spreading revolt to the heart of Punjab.

With regard to LeT and other anti-Indian groups therefore the Pakistani state has sought the following deal. It has insisted of course that they not fight against Pakistan, and also that they not attack the US or Europe directly. With regard to India, the Pakistani military appears to have promised that one day the campaign will be resumed, but that US pressure means that for the moment it must be suspended. On the other hand, it has allowed or even encouraged militants from these groups to go to Afghanistan to fight for the Taliban there.

³ See Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Columbia University Press, New York 2010).

Islamism and Nationalism

This strategy reflects not only calculations by the Pakistani military establishment, but the feelings of most ordinary Pakistanis towards the war in Afghanistan. On the basis of my own extensive interviews in Pakistan in recent years, as well as of public surveys, I can state firmly that more than any other cause, it is the US and western military presence in Afghanistan which is driving radicalization in Pakistan, especially among the Pashtuns. As the son of a senior politician in the antiTaliban Awami National Party (the moderate Pashtun nationalist party in Pakistan) said to me, “one main reason for sympathy for the Taliban is that every Pashtun has been taught from the cradle that to resist foreign domination is part of what it is to do *Pashto*” – in other words, to follow the Pathan Way.⁴

This feeling is obviously especially strong among the Pashtuns of Pakistan, with their close ethnic links to the Pashtuns of Afghanistan, who form the backbone of Afghan Taliban support; and it is strongest of all among the Pashtun tribes of the Tribal Areas of Pakistan, whose tribal identities and loyalties straddle the border with Afghanistan (thus it is somewhat difficult to say whether the Haqqani group in northern Afghanistan is “Afghan” or “Pakistani”).

However, to a lesser extent this feeling extends throughout Pakistani society. The view of the Afghan Taliban among most Pakistanis is very close to their view of the Afghan Mujahedin who fought the Soviets in the 1980s: a legitimate resistance force against an alien occupation of their country. Or, in the Muslim discourse, a force engaged in “defensive jihad” against infidel aggression.

This feeling in Pakistan was immensely strengthened by the US invasion of Iraq, which seemed to give credence to every local belief that the US and its allies are engaged in a campaign to dominate the Muslim world. Most unfortunately, the Iraq War also increased belief that 9/11 was not in fact the work of Al Qaeda but a US and/or Israeli plot to give the US the excuse to invade and conquer Afghanistan as the first step in this new campaign of domination. It goes without saying that this idea is poisonous rubbish – but it is believed by the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis I know, educated as well as uneducated.

This feeling does not by any means lead automatically to support for Islamist extremism and more than it did in the case of sympathy for the Afghan Mujahedin in the 1980s – indeed, the majority of those Pakistanis who sympathize with the Afghan Taliban as a resistance force within Afghanistan would hate to see them or their like ruling Pakistan. However, it certainly creates a much greater willingness in Pakistani society to shelter the Afghan Taliban. Much

⁴ Interview in Peshawar, 17th August 2008

more menacingly, it allows extremist groups within Pakistan – and in the Pakistani diaspora in the West – to demand support from the Muslim community as a whole because they are allies of the groups resisting US aggression.

This brings out a point of immense significance not only for US relations with Pakistan but for the entire struggle with Islamist extremism: that from Chechnya to the Philippines, the Islamist radicals have very often been able to root themselves in local society by appealing to religiously-inflected local nationalism, which is or sees itself under attack from outside forces. In Pakistan, Pakistani nationalism which feels itself to be under pressure from the US provides this opportunity for the militants to gain sympathy in quarters where they could not possibly otherwise hope to do so.

This is something that has (usefully enough) been pointed out for us by Aiman Al Zawahiri, who in June 2011 succeeded the late Osama bin Laden as leader of Al Qaeda.

“The Muslim masses [...] do not rally except against an outside occupying enemy, especially if the enemy is firstly Jewish, and secondly American. Therefore the Mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve... You and your brothers must strive to have around you circles of support, assistance and co-operation, and through them, to advance until you achieve a consensus, entity, organization or association that represents all the honorable people of Iraq [...] I say to you that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place on the battlefield of the media.”⁵

To destroy the existing Pakistani state, the militants in Pakistan will therefore have to be able to turn Pakistani nationalism to their advantage. This means above all appealing to the feelings of ordinary Pakistani soldiers. The militants’ ideological appeal alone is not nearly strong enough for them to succeed. It is important not to be misled in this regard by the spread of terrorism in Pakistan in 2009-2010. In many ways, terrorism by the Pakistani Taliban is a sign not of strength but of weakness.

If you want to overthrow and capture a state, you need either a mass movement on city streets that seizes institutions, or a guerrilla movement in the countryside that seizes territory, or a revolt of the junior ranks of the military, or some combination of all three. No movement relying chiefly on terrorism has ever overthrown a state. The Pakistani Taliban looked truly menacing when took over most of the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), followed by the districts of Swat and Buner. When it blows up ordinary people in bazaars and mosques, it merely looks foul.

⁵ Zawahiri’s letter quoted in Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda’s Leader* (Free Press 2006), pp.365-367.

The Threat of US Attacks on Pakistan

Pakistan is therefore still far from the situation of Iran in the late 1970s or Russia in 1917. Apart from anything else, the Army is a united and disciplined institution, and as long as that remains the case, it will be strong enough to defeat open revolt – as it proved by defeating the Taliban in Swat and South Waziristan in 2009. Unlike in Africa and elsewhere, military coups in Pakistan have always been carried out by the Army as a whole, on the orders of its chief of staff and commanding generals – never by junior officers. There are very deep reasons for this in terms of material advantage as well as military culture.

The only thing that can destroy this discipline and unity is if enough Pakistani soldiers are faced with moral and emotional pressures powerful enough to crack their discipline, and that would mean very powerful pressures indeed. In fact, they would have to be put in a position where their duty to defend Pakistan and their conscience and honor as Muslims clashed directly with their obedience to their commanders.

As far as I can see, the only thing that could bring that about as far as the Army as a whole is concerned (rather than just some of its Pathan elements) is if the US were to invade part of Pakistan, and the Army command failed to give orders to resist this.

The most dangerous moment in my visits to Pakistan since 9/11 came in August-September 2008, when on two occasions US forces entered Pakistan's Tribal Areas on the ground in order to raid suspected Taliban and Al Qaeda bases. On the second occasion, Pakistani soldiers fired in the air to turn the Americans back. On 19 September 2008 the Chief of the Army Staff, General Kayani, flew to meet the US Chief of the Joint Staffs, Admiral Mike Mullen, on the US Aircraft Carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, and in the words of a senior Pakistani general "gave him the toughest possible warning about what would happen if this were repeated".⁶

Pakistani officers from Captain to Lt General have told me that the entry of US ground forces into Pakistan in pursuit of the Taliban and Al Qaeda is by far the most dangerous scenario as far as both Pakistani-US relations and the unity of the Army is concerned. As one retired general explained, drone attacks on Pakistani territory, though the ordinary officers and soldiers find them humiliating, are not a critical issue because they cannot do anything about them.

"US ground forces inside Pakistan are a different matter, because the soldiers can do something about them. They can fight. And if they don't fight, they will feel utterly humiliated, before their wives, mothers, children. It would

⁶ Interview with a Pakistani general, Rawalpindi, 29/12/2008

be a matter of honor, which as you know is a tremendous thing in our society. These men have sworn an oath to defend Pakistani soil. So they would fight. And if the generals told them not to fight, many of them would mutiny, starting with the Frontier Corps.”⁷

At this point, not just Islamist radicals but every malcontent in the country would join the mutineers, and the disintegration of Pakistan would come a giant leap closer.

Already, the perceived subservience of the Pakistani state to Washington’s demands has caused severe problems of morale in the armed forces. I have been told by soldiers of all ranks that faced with open incursions on the ground by US troops, parts of the Pakistani army would mutiny in order to fight the invaders. With the Army splintered and radicalized, Islamist upheaval and the collapse of the state would indeed be all too likely – but even then, the result would be rebellions leading to civil war, not as in Iran, a national revolution that would be successful in taking over the whole country.

This is a scenario that the US needs to avoid at almost any cost. No conceivable short-term gains in the Western campaign in Afghanistan or the “war on terror” could compensate for the vastly increased threats to the region and the world that would stem from Pakistan’s collapse, and for the disasters that would result for Pakistan’s own peoples. Though many Indians may not see it this way, the collapse of Pakistan would also be disastrous for India, generating chaos that would destabilize the entire region. Western and Indian strategy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan should therefore be formulated with this fact kept firmly in mind.

This also implies that the US should observe restraint in its pressure on Pakistan. Drone attacks on Pakistan’s tribal areas have killed many Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders, but they have not visibly impaired the Afghan Taliban’s ability to go on fighting effectively, while causing outrage among Pakistanis – especially because of the very large numbers of women and children who have also been killed by the attacks. The US ambassador to Pakistan, Anne Patterson, discussed the risks of the drone strategy in a cable to the State Department in 2009, revealed by WikiLeaks. She acknowledged that drones had killed 10 out of 20 known top Al Qaeda leaders in the region, but stated that they could not entirely eliminate the Al Qaeda leadership and in the meantime:

“Increased unilateral operations in these areas risk destabilizing the Pakistani state, alienating both the civilian government and military leadership, and provoking a broader governance crisis within Pakistan

⁷ Interview in Lahore, 23rd August 2009.

*without finally achieving the goal [of eliminating the Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership] [...]*⁸

The well-substantiated belief that – despite official denials – the Pakistani high command and government have provided information to the US in return for strikes against Pakistani Taliban leaders has also been confirmed by WikiLeaks. As Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani told US officials in August 2008, “I don’t care if they do it as long as they get the right people. We’ll protest in the National Assembly, then ignore it.”⁹

Pakistani acquiescence in the drone strikes however damaged the prestige of the military in society and the morale of ordinary soldiers, and encouraged the perception of the military as a “force for hire”. There should therefore be no question of extending the attacks to new areas of Balochistan or Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, which would further enrage local society, spread the Pakistani Taliban insurgency to new areas, and reduce existing Pakistani co-operation with the US. It is also a very good thing that following the incident in January 2011 in which a US agent, Raymond Davis, killed two Pakistanis in obscure circumstances in Lahore, the Pakistanis insisted that the number of US operatives in Pakistan be sharply reduced. In effect, whatever their uses as intelligence agents, these people were hostages to fortune and catalysts for anti-American feeling.

The effects of the Raymond Davis case on US attitudes to Pakistan were enormously intensified by the location three months later of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan close to major military installations. This led to intensified calls in the US for a reduction in US aid to Pakistan as a way of increasing pressure on Islamabad to give more help to the US.

The problem here can be summed up in one word: China; for Pakistan is in fact China’s only real ally in the world, and energy land routes through Pakistan are regarded in Beijing as an important insurance against the possibility of U.S. or Indian naval blockade of the sea lanes from the Persian Gulf. Nonetheless, in recent years, Beijing has seemed to take a very cautious approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan, largely (or so I have been told by well-informed Chinese sources) because the Chinese government has genuinely not been sure how to proceed, given the hideous complexity of the issues, fear of antagonizing the U.S., lack of confidence in the Pakistani state and economy, and its own concerns about Islamist militancy.

⁸ “US Embassy Cables: ‘Reviewing our Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy’”, *The Guardian*, 30 November 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/226531>>.

⁹ Declan Walsh, “Wikileaks Cable: US Special Forces Working Inside Pakistan”, *The Guardian*, 30 November 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/30/wikileaks-cables-us-forces-embedded-pakistan>>.

However, Chinese investment in Pakistani infrastructure has been considerable, and Chinese supplies of arms to Pakistan have also been growing steeply. Since the death of Bin Laden, however, Chinese statements have emphasized their support for Pakistan and their appreciation for Pakistan's antiterrorism efforts. This raises the strong possibility that any reduction in U.S. help to Pakistan will simply be matched by an increase in Chinese help. That at least is the hope of the Pakistani establishment, and they may well be right.

That applies with even greater force to another form of pressure widely demanded in the United States, namely a closer U.S. alliance with India openly targeted against Pakistan. This would ensure increased Chinese help to Pakistan, and would absolutely infuriate ordinary Pakistanis. In addition, India is a very dangerous ally in the war on terror. Its main opposition party has structured its whole ideology around hatred of Islam; and with its complicity and that of local Indian police, savage massacres have been carried out against India's Muslim minority. Those in Gujarat in 2002 claimed around ten times as many victims as the Mumbai terrorist attacks.¹⁰

An Afghan Peace Settlement?

A western withdrawal from Afghanistan would not end the extremist threat to Pakistan, which has long since developed a life of its own. Nonetheless, concern for the effects of the US military presence in Afghanistan on the situation in Pakistan is one of the strongest arguments for bringing that presence to an end as soon as this can honorably be achieved; and under no circumstances whatsoever conducting more wars against Muslim states.

A serious attempt at a settlement with the Afghan Taliban would also allow Washington to turn Pakistan from a problem in Afghanistan into an asset – since Pakistani help will be essential both in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table and ensuring that they abide by the terms of any agreement reached. To judge by my interviews with figures close to the Taliban, these terms would have to include the withdrawal of all non-Afghan armed forces from Afghanistan (in other words, Al Qaeda, other international terrorist groups including Chechens and others, and US troops and their allies); Taliban dominance in the pashtun areas of the country; and some form of power-sharing in Kabul.

We might as well try to use Pakistan in this way, since as the US embassy in Islamabad reported gloomily but accurately in September 2010,

¹⁰ See Human Rights Watch's report "Compounding Injustice: The Government's Failure to Redress Massacres in Gujarat, 30/6/2003.

“There is no chance that Pakistan will view enhanced [US] assistance levels in any field as sufficient compensation for abandoning support to these groups [ie the Afghan Taliban and their allies] which it sees as an important part of its national security apparatus against India. The only way to achieve a cessation of such support is to change the Pakistani government’s perception of its security requirements.”¹¹

The US and other Western countries fighting in Afghanistan should use Pakistan as an intermediary in an effort to begin talks with the Taliban in the hope of eventually reaching a settlement, if as seems highly probable the attempt to defeat the Taliban by force does not succeed. Because of its links with the Taliban, Pakistan will have to play a key role in bringing about such negotiations. By mid-2011 the Obama administration began very preliminary and informal talks with representatives of Mullah Omar, but Washington still seems very far away from a recognition of what such talks would really entail if they are to have any chance of achieving a settlement with the Taliban. In the words of a senior Pakistani diplomat:

“The US needs to be negotiating with the Taliban, those Taliban with no links to al-Qaida. We need a power-sharing agreement in Afghanistan and it will have to be negotiated with all the parties [...] The Afghan government is already talking to all the shareholders, the Taliban, the Haqqani network, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Mullah Omar. The Americans have been setting ridiculous preconditions for talks. You can’t lay down such preconditions when you are losing.”¹²

Such a Western strategy should also stem from a recognition that Pakistan’s goals in Afghanistan are in part legitimate – even if the means by which they have been sought have not been – and need to be recognized as such by the West. The US and EU should work hard to try to reconcile legitimate Pakistani goals in Afghanistan with those of India, and to draw other regional states into a consensus on how to limit the Afghan conflict. China, with its mixture of closeness to Pakistan and fear of Islamist extremism, could be a key player in this regard.

The US needs to continue to limit Indian involvement in Afghanistan if it is to have any hope of a long-term co-operative relationship with Pakistan. Despite all the immense obstacles in both Pakistan and India, the West also needs to seek a peaceful solution

¹¹ Alex Rodriguez, “Cables Reveal US Misgivings about Pakistan”, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 December 2010, <<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/dec/02/world/la-fg-pakistan-warning-20101203>>.

¹² Ewen MacAskill and Simon Tisdall, “White House Shifts Afghanistan Strategy Towards Talks with Taliban”, *The Guardian*, 19 July 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/19/obama-afghanistan-strategy-taliban-negotiate>>.

to the Kashmir dispute. As Ambassador Patterson told her government,

“Most importantly, it is the perception of India as the primary threat to the Pakistani state that colors its perceptions of the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s security needs. The Pakistani establishment fears that a pro-Indian government in Afghanistan would allow India to operate a proxy war against Pakistan from its territory [...] Increased Indian investment in, trade with, and development support to the Afghan government, which the USG [US government] has encouraged, causes Pakistan to embrace Taliban groups as anti-India allies. We need to reassess Indian involvement in Afghanistan and our own policies towards India [...] Resolving the Kashmir dispute would dramatically improve the situation.”¹³

The overall question of the future of US-Indian relations is far too broad to be discussed here. What can be said is that a balance needs to be struck between the economic and security benefits to the West of closer ties to India and the security threats to the West stemming from a growth of Islamist militancy in Pakistan. In the last resort, not even the greatest imaginable benefits of US-Indian friendship could compensate for the actual collapse of Pakistan, with all the frightful dangers this would create not just for the West but for India too.

We should also not dream – as US neo-conservatives are apt to do – that India can somehow be used by the US to control Pakistani behavior. The truth, as outlined by Ambassador Patterson, is exactly the opposite. Only Pakistanis can control Pakistan, and the behavior of the Pakistani security establishment will always be determined by what they see as the vital needs of Pakistan and the Pakistani Army.

¹³ “2009: Kashmir Solution May End Pak Establishment Support to Taliban”, *The Dawn*, 29 May 2011, <<http://www.dawn.com/2011/05/29/2009-kashmir-solution-may-end-pak-establishment-support-to-taliban.html>>.

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