

WebMemo



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U.S. South Asia Regional— Not Kashmir—Envoy Needed

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Although they may have had multiple objectives, the terrorists that struck Mumbai in late November almost certainly sought to provoke an Indo-Pakistani crisis, much like the 2001–2002 military standoff that nearly brought the two nuclear-armed nations to war. Just as that crisis diverted attention from the war in Afghanistan and forced Pakistan to move troops from its western border to its eastern border, it is plausible the masterminds of the Mumbai attacks hoped for a similar outcome seven years later.

The Mumbai attacks emphasize the extent to which developments and relationships in the region are interwoven, as well as the need to defuse long-standing strategic rivalries in order to contain the terrorist scourge threatening the long-term stability of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Recognizing this reality has resulted in murmurings regarding the need for a U.S. Kashmir envoy. The real need, however, is for a broad-based South Asia regional envoy; the distinction between the two is enormously important.

Take Broad Approach. President-elect Barack Obama's recent assertion that the U.S. should try to help resolve the Kashmir issue so that Pakistan can focus on reining in militancy on its Afghan border is misguided. Raising the specter of international intervention in the dispute could fuel unrealistic expectations in Pakistan for a final settlement in its favor. Such expectations could encourage Islamabad to increase support for Kashmiri militants to push an agenda it believed was within reach. Such a scenario is hardly unprecedented: Former Pakistani

president Pervez Musharraf initiated the Kargil incursion into Indian-administered Kashmir in 1999 precisely to raise the profile of the Kashmir issue and to encourage international mediation.

Instead of narrowly focusing on Kashmir, the incoming Obama Administration should assume a much wider view of the region's challenges. Such a broad approach would recognize that Pakistan's focus on Kashmir is a symptom of broader issues, including the impact of India's emergence as a global power and the Pakistani army's continued domination over the country's national security policies.

The Indians would be unreceptive to direct international mediation on Kashmir. Any such move in this direction would raise suspicions in New Delhi that Washington is reverting back to policies that view India only through the South Asia lens rather than as the rising world power it has become. This perception could hurt the Obama Administration's ability to build on major gains the Bush team made in improving what Vice President-elect Joe Biden has himself called one of the most important bilateral relationships for the U.S. in the 21st century.

A high-profile *regional* envoy can play a productive role in simultaneously easing both Pakistan-

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Afghanistan and Indo-Pakistani tensions by prodding the countries to move forward with confidence-building measures, like the recent opening of a road between Indian-administered and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Initiatives such as the establishment of Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) in the border regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan can also help defuse regional tensions. ROZ legislation now before the U.S. Congress would create industrial zones to produce and export textiles and other items to the U.S. duty-free, helping to integrate the Afghan and Pakistani economies. Initiatives like ROZs will give each country a vested interest in the stability of the other and help defuse conflict that fuels support for radical ideologies and terrorism.

Prioritize Counterterrorism. But perhaps the most important task of this regional envoy would be convincing the Pakistani military to give up its policies of relying on violent extremist groups to achieve its foreign policy objectives in the region. In order to defuse the Indo-Pakistani crisis over the Mumbai attacks, Pakistan must shut down the Kashmir-focused groups it has spawned and that increasingly have links to international terrorism, including most likely the atrocities in Mumbai.

In the past, Washington has been reluctant to pursue Kashmiri terrorist groups with the same zeal it pursues al-Qaeda. This was a mistake. In his meetings with Pakistani officials on December 3,

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen apparently demanded Pakistan take firm action against the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LET) and its leader Hafiz Muhammed Sayeed, indicating Washington is finally getting tough on the issue of pursuing Kashmir-focused terrorist groups.

LET has not only succeeded in bringing two nuclear-armed nations to the brink of war; it ultimately threatens Pakistan's own future—a fact recognized by the country's civilian leaders. Therefore, it is time for the military establishment to recognize the threat these groups pose for Pakistan and act decisively to shut them down. Eradicating groups like LET will not be easy and will likely involve further bloodshed, but last week's attack made it clear there can be no other course of action: The longer Pakistan waits, the stronger these groups become.

President-elect Obama rightly recognizes the need for the U.S. to engage in more robust regional diplomacy to defuse deep-seated animosities and to generate economic and trade initiatives that build support among local populations for uprooting the terrorists among them. But he must avoid falling into the trap of seeking to appoint a Kashmir-specific envoy, which could backfire by fueling unrealistic expectations of those who wish to change the status quo as well as undermine the great potential of the U.S.–India relationship.

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