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After bin Laden: Bringing Change to Pakistan's Counterterrorism Policies

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The U.S. unilateral operation to track and kill Osama bin Laden deep inside Pakistan has raised several questions about the sustainability of the U.S.–Pakistan partnership in the fight against global terrorism. Relations between Islamabad and Washington were already strained, and the bin Laden operation has deepened the rift. It laid bare the enduring mistrust between the two nations and demonstrated that each side is willing to edge closer to the other's red lines in pursuit of its own goals.

The killing of bin Laden marks not only a watershed in the U.S. global fight against terrorism, but also a turning point in U.S. relations with Pakistan. Americans and Pakistanis alike are asking the crucial question of how bin Laden could have lived in a large, conspicuous compound in a military cantonment town—swarming with security officials—undetected for nearly six years.

After years of denying bin Laden's presence in Pakistan and complaining that Pakistan was unfairly labeled the “epicenter of terrorism,” Pakistani military officials must now accept the reality that the world's most wanted terrorist was found in their backyard. U.S. Director of Central Intelligence Leon Panetta admitted that the U.S. had conducted the operation unilaterally because Washington decided that any effort to work with the Pakistanis could jeopardize its success.

The onus is now on Pakistan to demonstrate that it is willing to work more closely with the U.S. to target other terrorists sheltered within its borders and to cooperate more fully with the U.S. goal of stabilizing Afghanistan. Without a change in per-

spective from Pakistan's security establishment on these crucial issues, the relationship would seem to be poised for failure. Simply maintaining the status quo is no longer feasible.

Aid Programs Hang in the Balance. The large-scale program of U.S. aid to Pakistan represents a major source of leverage for the U.S. The U.S. has provided \$20 billion in assistance to Pakistan since 2002, two-thirds of which has been military aid in the form of equipment transfers and cash reimbursements for Pakistani military operations against insurgents along the Afghanistan border. U.S. lawmakers are currently reviewing whether this aid should be suspended, reduced, or cut off altogether in light of suspicions that Pakistani officials may have played a role in protecting bin Laden.

Some U.S. congressional officials have called for cutting civilian, but not military, aid to Pakistan. This makes little sense, however, since it is the military—not the civilian leadership—that controls Pakistan's policies toward the Afghan Taliban, Haqqani network, and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba terrorist organization, all of which have links to al-Qaeda. Other Members of Congress have noted more credibly that strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions and civilian authorities offers the best

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chance to develop a functional, mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries.

The U.S. should suspend—not cut off—security aid to Pakistan until the Administration develops more information on the support network that protected bin Laden and determines whether any Pakistani officials were complicit in harboring the international terrorist. The information recovered at bin Laden's compound should help answer these crucial questions.

American security assistance to Pakistan is legally tied to its counterterrorism efforts. In March, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton certified to Congress under the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 that Pakistan was, among other things, making progress in “preventing al-Qaeda...from operating in” its territory. Knowing what we know now, could the State Department say that today?

On the other hand, the U.S. should allow the civilian aid to flow, albeit with improved accountability standards and sharpened monitoring mechanisms. The U.S. has provided more than \$6 billion in economic assistance to Pakistan over the past nine years, but Pakistanis complain that there is little to show for it. Continuing civilian aid programs demonstrates that the U.S. is not a fickle partner and is genuinely committed to a prosperous and stable Pakistan, even if the military/intelligence relationship between the two countries is fraying.

The U.S. must avoid abrupt action like stopping all aid, which would come at a steep price to U.S. interests in the region. Pakistan could react by cutting off NATO supply lines that run through Pakistan to coalition troops in Afghanistan. It could also expel U.S. intelligence officials from the country, thus denying the U.S. access to valuable information that helps the CIA track terrorists.

The U.S. also has a broader interest in maintaining steady relations with Pakistan and encouraging stability in the nuclear-armed nation of 180 million that sits at the crossroads of the Middle East and South and Central Asia. If the U.S. were to cut aid to Pakistan and prevail on the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to do the same, the Pakistani economy would teeter on the brink of collapse. The chance of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal falling into terrorist hands, while currently remote, would increase

in the context of a deteriorating political and economic situation.

Press for Overhaul in Pakistan Counterterrorism Policy. U.S. officials should maintain pressure on Pakistan to explain its lapses in tracking Osama bin Laden. The U.S. must remain steadfast in demanding answers from Pakistan's leaders and must not allow them to turn the tables and change the conversation by putting forward their own list of grievances. This is a negotiating tactic that has worked well for the Pakistanis in the past, but the U.S. must be clear that it is unwilling to gloss over the circumstances that allowed bin Laden to shelter in Pakistan for so long.

The U.S. should point out that Pakistan's inconsistent and unsteady policies toward terrorism have brought the country nothing but trouble over the past 10 years. It is time to turn the page on its policy of supporting some terrorists while fighting others. The U.S. will stand by and support Pakistan in making these policy changes and will guarantee that India does not take advantage of the situation to further its own strategic objectives. The U.S. must convince Pakistan that the only way to neutralize the vast terrorist network in Pakistan is for the U.S. and Pakistan to pool their resources, intelligence, technology, and military might in a truly joint effort.

The bin Laden operation demonstrates that the U.S. is willing to take matters into its own hands when it believes Pakistan is either unwilling or unable to target terrorists. This should be a wake-up call to Pakistan's leadership that it must either improve its counterterrorism cooperation with the U.S. or be prepared to face more U.S. unilateral operations.

Pakistan's Decision. Pakistan's decision to side with the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11 was halfhearted. This became clear to the world when bin Laden was killed in a Pakistani garrison city 10 days ago. Pakistan must decide whether it will finally throw its full weight into the fight against global terrorism. The outcome of its decision will determine the future of relations with the U.S. as well as Pakistan's regional strategic position and standing among civilized nations.

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