

# WebMemo



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## Shifting Gears with Pakistan on Afghanistan

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The Obama Administration has been banking on Pakistani cooperation with its strategy to start a political reconciliation process inside Afghanistan as it withdraws U.S. troops from the battlefield and shifts responsibility for security operations to the Afghan forces. Pakistani leaders have demonstrated little interest in assisting the U.S. with such efforts, however, and it is time for U.S. policymakers to consider alternative policy options.

**U.S. Strategy Thus Far.** The U.S. has focused most of its diplomatic efforts with Pakistan in recent years on trying to find common ground on Afghanistan and encouraging better ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan on one hand and India and Pakistan on the other. The U.S. has also sought to enhance its civilian assistance programs to Pakistan, mainly through the Kerry–Lugar–Berman legislation passed in 2009 that called for \$7.5 billion in economic aid over a five-year period.

At the same time, the U.S. has intensified drone missile attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas, removing key al-Qaeda leaders from the battlefield and disrupting the group's ability to plot, plan, and train for international terrorist operations. The U.S. has also enhanced its unilateral intelligence operations inside Pakistan, which ultimately resulted in the successful operation to eliminate Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in May.

While the elimination of bin Laden marked a major step forward for the U.S. in its fight against global terrorism, Pakistani military leaders reacted angrily to the fact that the U.S. acted alone without

informing Pakistan, exposing a major disconnect in the relationship. Instead of seeking to explain how the world's most wanted terrorist could have lived under the nose of the Pakistani military for so many years, Pakistani leaders have reacted defensively and continue to portray the operation as a grievance that Pakistan holds against the U.S.

**Pakistan: Intransigence on Afghanistan and Internal Chaos.** There are several signs that Pakistan is increasingly reluctant to play a positive role in establishing peace in Afghanistan. In fact, Pakistan appears more inclined to pursue an independent strategy that involves retaining support for the Afghan Taliban leadership, headquartered in Quetta, and its allied Haqqani network of militants that operate out of the tribal border areas of Pakistan. For several years, the U.S. sought to prevail on the Pakistani military to take on Haqqani's sanctuary in North Waziristan. It is now clear that the Pakistani military has no intention of doing so even as the Haqqanis become more audacious in their attacks against U.S. interests in Afghanistan, including the U.S. embassy in September.

Pakistan is reportedly engaging in peace talks with militants, including the ruthless Tehrik-e-Tali-

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ban Pakistan (TTP), which is responsible for scores of attacks on Pakistani civilians and security personnel, a suicide bombing that killed several CIA officers in Afghanistan in December 2009, and the Times Square bombing attempt in May 2010. In mid-October, an All Parties Conference led by Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani passed a resolution endorsing talks with Pakistani Taliban groups. A week ago, the deputy chief of the TTP, Faqir Muhammad, declared that the terrorist group was in talks with the Pakistani government and that these talks were “going very well so far.”

If these reports are true, it would seem that the Pakistani government has learned little from its past mistakes of trying to strike peace deals with terrorists intent on undermining the Pakistani state. In early 2009, the Pakistan military (with backing from the central government) pursued a peace deal with the pro-Taliban militant group, the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM—Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law). In April of that same year, the pro-Taliban militants moved from the Swat Valley into neighboring districts, revealing their intentions of expanding influence throughout the country. The Pakistani army finally deployed paramilitary troops to the region to retake the territory in bloody military operations that temporarily displaced more than 2 million Pakistanis. A prominent Pakistani daily ran an editorial this week declaring that talking to the militants is a “profoundly unwise idea” and noting that, in the past, the Taliban have used them as a “ruse to regroup and then return to action as soon as they have regained a position of strength.”

At the same time that the military is apparently conducting negotiations with the TTP, it is also allowing tensions with the U.S. to escalate, possibly beyond the point of repair. Following an accidental strike that tragically killed 24 Pakistani troops along the Afghan border on November 26, senior Pakistani military officials claimed the attack was deliberate and immediately closed down NATO supply lines running through Pakistan and forced the U.S. to vacate an air base in Baluchistan. While Pakistan’s frustration over the attack is understandable, the insistence that it was deliberate is not. The military situation along the Afghanistan–Pakistan

border lacks clarity, and it is often difficult to determine where enemy fire originates. Afghan insurgents on the Pakistan side are known to fire from within close range of Pakistani army posts.

The other negative trend in Pakistan is the brewing civil–military crisis that will likely make it more difficult for the U.S. to engage productively with Pakistan. In a controversy now referred to as “memogate,” the civilian leadership is under pressure because of allegations made by Pakistani–American businessman Mansoor Ijaz, who claims that former Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S. Husain Haqqani used him to send a memo to U.S. officials asking them to prevent a potential military coup.

Retired Admiral Mike Mullen, formerly Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he dismissed Ijaz’s memo and never took any action based on it. U.S. officials have also contradicted Ijaz’s claim that Pakistani President Zardari knew about the bin Laden raid before it occurred. The other curious aspect of the Ijaz affair is that Ijaz himself has been extremely critical of the Pakistani military and intelligence service in his writings and television interviews and has yet to credibly explain why he is suddenly turning on the civilian government. Despite the many questions surrounding Ijaz and his claims, Pakistan’s Supreme Court has taken up the case, and it is possible that Haqqani could be charged with treason.

**Adapting U.S. Strategy to Realities in Pakistan.** The negative developments inside Pakistan over the past few months do not bode well for U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. The U.S. can no longer sugarcoat Pakistan’s unhelpful policies of supporting the Afghan insurgents who are plunging the region into deeper chaos. In this difficult context, the U.S. should:

- **Shift more of its diplomatic attention to working with NATO partners to develop a strategy that brings more pressure to bear on Pakistan to end its support for Afghan insurgents and to assist international efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan.** The international community must not allow peace efforts in Afghanistan to be held hostage to Pakistani demands. The Pakistani leadership must demonstrate a willingness to squeeze

insurgents on their soil and use leverage to bring them to compromise with Afghan authorities and coalition partners. If Pakistan continues to pursue an independent Afghanistan policy that involves continued support to insurgents, the U.S. and NATO partners must look beyond Pakistan and toward other like-minded partners in the region to help bring peace to the country. This strategy will work only if the U.S. and international partners are willing to continue to support the Afghan authorities with robust financial and diplomatic support after 2014, when U.S. combat forces are due to withdraw from the country.

- **Continue to prioritize development of alternative supply routes to Afghanistan.** Pakistan already shut down the NATO supply routes for an indefinite period following the November 26 NATO strike. The U.S. must continue to build up the Northern Distribution Network and consult closely with the Central Asian states, which are also worried about the potential for the Taliban to regain power in Afghanistan.
- **Slow down the Afghan withdrawal process to allow U.S. and NATO commanders on the ground more time to consolidate gains made in the South and to ensure that Afghan forces are sufficiently ready to take control of the nation's security.** Media reports suggest that U.S. NATO Commander General John Allen would like to see a freeze in U.S. troop withdrawals in 2012. General Allen also reportedly supports a strategy to shift more quickly to an Afghan lead in security operations, which would provide the advantage of allowing U.S. forces to backstop the Afghans for a longer period of time, as opposed to withdrawing U.S. forces too quickly and risk-

ing the gains of the past 18 months. A precipitous U.S. withdrawal could lead to civil war or the Taliban regaining influence, which would strengthen Islamist militant forces throughout the region and could even lead to a revival of al-Qaeda.

- **Stay out of Pakistan's civil-military struggles, but also quell disinformation involving the U.S. government that is being used to discredit Pakistani officials.** The Obama Administration deserves credit for correcting the record on Mansoor Ijaz's claim that President Zardari knew about the bin Laden raid before it took place. Elements in Pakistan appear to be using the perception that Pakistani civilian officials are close to the U.S. to harm their reputations, which is damaging to overall U.S.-Pakistan ties and will make it more difficult to preserve diplomatic relations between the two countries in the future.

#### **Go Around Pakistan If It Will Not Cooperate.**

While it is in America's interest to encourage stability in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of 170 million, it is also vital to U.S. national security that international terrorists be rooted out from both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The U.S. must make clear that political reconciliation in Afghanistan is desirable—but only if it contributes to the ultimate goal of ensuring that Afghanistan can never again serve as a safe haven for international terrorists. Without a shift in Pakistan's policies to encourage a genuine reconciliation process inside Afghanistan, the U.S. must be prepared to pursue a strategy in which it works more closely with Afghanistan's other neighbors.

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