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The Future of the U.S.-Pakistan Relationship

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POLICY OPTIONS PAPER

From AfPak to PakAf

A Response to the New U.S. Strategy for South Asia

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April 2009

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Introduction

President Barack Obama publicly unveiled his administration's so-called AfPak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) strategy on March 27, 2009. Over the subsequent weeks, the White House has also briefed relevant congressional leaders and committees, the media, NATO allies, and other regional and international partners. The U.S. House of Representatives has moved ahead with its own legislative debate (the PEACE bill)¹, and the administration recently submitted a 2009 supplemental budget request consistent with its new strategy.

While the broad contours are in place, clearly Washington's approach to South Asia remains a work in progress. The strategy's authors insist that it is intended to provide a framework, not a strait-jacket, for U.S. policy. Questions remain about the correct prioritization of U.S. objectives; the level of and manner in which U.S. diplomatic, military, intelligence, and economic resources should be deployed; and the appropriate sequencing and duration of U.S. efforts.

CONTEXT

Over the past two years, the security environment in Afghanistan and Pakistan has taken a significant turn for the worse. The spread of militancy, whether by terrorists connected with al-Qaeda, the Taliban of Mullah Omar or Baitullah Mehsud, criminal gangs, narco-traffickers, or sectarian extremists, among others, has destabilized the Pashtun belt in southern and eastern Afghanistan as well as western Pakistan. At the same time, a range of other violent actors—from Punjabi anti-Indian extremists to Central Asian warlords—operates in the non-Pashtun areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pakistan and Afghanistan offer these groups an unusually hospitable environment, one that complicates and magnifies the danger. Well-worn smuggling routes link the region's notoriously remote and difficult terrain to globally interconnected megacities, creating nearly ideal conditions for al-Qaeda operatives and their sympathizers. The geographic proximity of Pakistan's nuclear program to these sophisticated terrorists and the recent history of illicit transfers of material and know-how also pose a unique threat.

Fragile state institutions, weak leadership, and inadequate resources limit the ability of Islamabad and Kabul to fight militancy in the near term or to foster moderation over the long run. Finally, a trust deficit burdens the United States; anti-Americanism is widespread, and many of Washington's closest partners in the region express deep skepticism about U.S. intentions and commitment.

Many of Washington's challenges in Pakistan and Afghanistan are linked, and so it is correct—and overdue—that the United States should formulate a strategy to address the region as a whole. But the specific threats and policy options across and within these two states range widely. Moreover, the diplomatic, military, and development tools available to the United States vary from one side of the border to the other.

The Obama Strategy

President Obama's remarks on March 27, 2009, and an administration white paper released the same day outline the basic elements of the administration's approach.² Rooted in an assessment of persistent terrorist threat, the new AfPak strategy attempts to walk a middle path between a narrow counterterror mission and a much more ambitious nation-building agenda.

According to the White House, the fundamental objective for U.S. policy in Pakistan and Afghanistan should be to turn the tide against regional militants who offer safe haven to global terrorists, and to build indigenous security structures capable of prosecuting effective counterterror and counterinsurgency missions. A timely and generous injection of U.S. resources should be used to demonstrate the fundamental weakness of the Taliban, thereby offering breathing space to governments in Islamabad and Kabul.

As a U.S. senator and presidential candidate, President Obama stressed that the deterioration of security conditions in the region should be attributed to inadequate U.S. resources and attention since 2003. Al-Qaeda leaders eluded capture and the Taliban regrouped in Pakistan and Afghanistan while much of America's military, intelligence, and foreign policy machinery was dedicated to the war in Iraq. The sympathy and credibility the United States enjoyed in the region shortly after 9/11 have since evaporated, but the Taliban and al-Qaeda are by no means invincible. The ongoing draw-down in Iraq will—belatedly—offer significant new military and intelligence tools to commanders in the Pakistan-Afghanistan theater.

The basic counterinsurgency lessons from Iraq also appear to inform U.S. plans for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Washington will begin with a rapid expansion of military force to confront decisively the Afghan Taliban's offensive during the spring and summer fighting seasons. At the same time, the United States appears to be accelerating the use of Predator (unmanned aerial drone) strikes against Taliban leadership in Pakistan, while encouraging the Pakistani military to pursue offensive operations against militants based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the Afghan border.

With these offensive operations underway, the United States plans to start a major expansion of the Afghan National Security Forces. The United States has already achieved significant success in building the Afghan National Army, while existing programs—such as Focused District Development, which takes entire district police forces off-site for an eight-week training course, then returns them with embedded trainers—appear to have the potential to improve the capacity of the Afghan police. In Pakistan, the Pentagon has already allocated roughly \$400 million to train and equip the paramilitary Pakistani Frontier Corps and recently proposed a Pakistani Counterinsurgency Capability Fund, which would allocate \$3 billion over the next five years to train and equip Pakistan's army and paramilitary forces for a counterinsurgency mission. All of these efforts are likely to be accelerated and expanded within several years, provided Washington can supply more trainers, build new training facilities, and work closely with Pakistani and Afghan counterparts.

In addition, aid to Pakistan's army will be carefully tailored to improving its counterinsurgency capacity (rather than boosting defenses against India) and conditioned upon effective action against

militants along the border with Afghanistan. When possible, the United States and its partners (Afghanistan, Pakistan, NATO, and others) will seek to translate battlefield successes into political settlements with local populations, negotiating from a position of strength to win support against the most extreme militants and to eliminate sanctuaries available to global terrorists. Intelligence leads from newly pacified areas will, in time, help U.S. forces find and destroy al-Qaeda's senior leadership.

Quick-hitting economic assistance is also to be used to support counterinsurgency efforts on both sides of the border. U.S. forces will have access to flexible emergency funds so they can rush humanitarian, development, and reconstruction programs into areas immediately after offensive operations. This rapid-response programming is designed to win compliance from local populations and avoid swelling the ranks of the insurgency. Vastly expanded nonmilitary assistance to Pakistan, along the lines of the Senate's soon-to-be-introduced Kerry-Lugar legislation (an updated version of the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2008, which was introduced by Senator Joe Biden and Senator Richard Lugar in July 2008 but did not pass before the end of the session) and the House's PEACE Act of 2009, will help to build the state's capacity to deliver basic services and to improve law and order. Nonmilitary assistance will also provide a tangible, popular demonstration of the benefits of a U.S.-Pakistan partnership.

The Obama administration is prepared to foot a hefty bill for maintaining indigenous security forces in Afghanistan over at least the next decade or so. But compared to U.S. and NATO operations, the cost to U.S. taxpayers will be greatly reduced. By helping to stifle the Taliban-led insurgency and root out al-Qaeda's leaders while building and maintaining more effective indigenous security institutions, the White House hopes to reduce the footprint of American (and NATO) operations within several years and still achieve its vital security interests in the region.

AN EMERGING DEBATE

As a political statement, the AfPak strategy has been well received, perhaps in part because it leaves unresolved a number of contentious policy questions. In the public debates that will accompany congressional decisions on AfPak funding, as well as the Obama administration's internal debates on policy implementation, a middle-path strategy will face challenges from at least two competing alternatives.

Some critics will argue that the strategy correctly diagnoses the urgent threat posed by al-Qaeda and global jihadists, but that the administration's policy prescriptions are too costly and wide-ranging to meet that narrowly defined challenge. Others will argue that the administration has astutely situated the problem of global terrorism within a regional political-economic context, but that important elements of the strategy are still too narrowly conceived or inadequate toward the enormous task of achieving U.S. national security interests in Afghanistan, and even more so, in Pakistan.

These two alternative strategies are explored at greater length in the following sections.

Alternative 1: Focus Goals and Limit Costs

One alternative to the Obama administration's approach would be to limit U.S. costs by strictly focusing on the counterterror mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan, rather than getting bogged down in a messy quagmire of state capacity building and long-term development issues. From this perspective, the Obama administration is correct in its understanding that the fundamental objective for U.S.

policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan should be the reduction of the threat to U.S. national security posed by al-Qaeda. But a clear and sustained focus on al-Qaeda will protect U.S. interests best by limiting financial and human costs and by avoiding a wide range of exceedingly complicated challenges that Washington appears ill-equipped to manage.

Building moderate, stable, and more effective governments in Islamabad and Kabul and tackling long-standing regional tensions may be admirable causes, but they will require expensive, long-term U.S. investments that pay—at best—limited, uncertain dividends. The United States has relatively few essential interests in this region; even a stable and economically viable Pakistan and Afghanistan would remain distant and poor, and would play virtually no positive role in Washington's long-term political, military, or economic considerations.

Realistically, even a narrow focus on the threat posed by al-Qaeda will require a far more extensive U.S. presence in the region than existed prior to 9/11. But that presence should not primarily take the form of U.S. armed forces, diplomats, or U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officials. The expansion of these personnel in Afghanistan, as advocated by the White House, is therefore ill-advised. An effective counterterror strategy should instead demand sustained investments in surveillance and human intelligence capabilities as well as the means to strike individuals engaged in the training, planning, and managing of terror attacks against the United States or its interests.

High-tech platforms, from next-generation unmanned aerial vehicles to satellites, will help the United States manage counterterror operations without a heavy ground presence in Pakistan or Afghanistan. The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan should be phased out over the next several years, providing just enough time and security for U.S. intelligence operatives and Special Operations Forces to cultivate a sustainable network of local partners engaged in human intelligence collection.

The focus of U.S. partnerships with Afghan and Pakistani intelligence services (as well as with other intelligence actors in the region) should narrow and intensify on terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, that have global aspirations. In Pakistan, the United States should transfer technologies and other assistance that will help to protect Islamabad's nuclear warheads, facilities, and scientists from attack or infiltration by al-Qaeda or its sympathizers. U.S. assistance to Pakistani and Afghan security forces should continue, but it should be employed primarily as a means for inducing cooperation against al-Qaeda. The United States should avoid investments in regional security forces—such as the massive expansion of the Afghan National Army or the transformation of Pakistan's Frontier Corps—that are unlikely to be sustained by Kabul and Islamabad without permanent external assistance. Washington should instead encourage Pakistan and Afghanistan to seek alternative funding streams or redirect existing national resources in order to build those security institutions considered most vital to state stability.

The United States should also recognize that its own extensive presence in Afghanistan since 2002 has altered regional calculations—and not for the better. An open-ended U.S. commitment has created incentives for “free riding,” encouraged the pursuit of parochial interests, and raised fears that the United States has ulterior motives for maintaining its presence in the region. U.S. diplomats should therefore clarify Washington's intention to rededicate itself to the fight against al-Qaeda, to find common cause with all actors who support that effort, and to accept regionally generated solutions as long as they do not directly undermine counterterror goals. In addition to existing partners, the United States should reach out to China, Iran, and Russia.

In sum, the United States should focus and intensify its efforts to finish the fight that al-Qaeda started and avoid conflating that specific threat with a much more diffuse set of regional challenges.

A dire economic crisis at home and a world full of urgent and looming dangers require Washington to pick its battles carefully in order to win them. In its history, the United States has rarely demonstrated a capacity to rebuild broken states like Afghanistan or to transform enormous developing nations like Pakistan. In a region where American involvement is already unpopular, the Obama administration must understand that expanding U.S. engagement and investment is at least as likely to prove counterproductive as it is to yield the types of gains sought by the White House.

Alternative 2: Expand U.S. Effort, Focus on Pakistan

A second alternative to the Obama administration's approach would emphasize publicly just how long, difficult, and costly Washington's effort is likely to be and would focus on the hardest and most critical problem of the region—Pakistan—where relatively few resources have been spent compared to Afghanistan. U.S. policy tools are all too limited, and mutual distrust between Washington and Islamabad often proves debilitating.

The Obama strategy clearly recognizes that a fractured or incapacitated Pakistan would threaten core U.S. interests, not least because its nuclear weapons would be vulnerable to al-Qaeda or similar terrorist groups. Today, al-Qaeda's top leadership is most likely based in Pakistan, along with top Taliban leaders, both Afghan and Pakistani. In addition, the "Talibanization" of Pakistan's Pashtun belt is gradually moving eastward into settled districts, creating new terrorist safe havens in once-tranquil locales such as the Swat valley. Pakistan's non-Pashtun extremist and sectarian groups, some of which were historically nurtured by the state as a means to project influence into India and Afghanistan, also have the potential to prove deeply destabilizing. Organizations like the banned Jaish-e-Mohammed or Jamaat-ud-Dawa are well resourced and globally interconnected. Some appear to retain significant influence within state institutions and enjoy public sympathy, in certain cases because of the social services they provide. If present trends persist, the next generation of the world's most sophisticated terrorists will be born, indoctrinated, and trained in a nuclear-armed Pakistan.

But the Obama administration's strategy does not establish that securing Islamabad's political stability and partnership should be Washington's primary regional objective. The White House's intensified focus on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and the Pakistani tribal belt is not misplaced, but it will prove entirely insufficient to overcoming these deeper challenges. The United States should therefore make broad and ample investments beyond the Pashtun tribal belt and in Pakistan's civilian and military institutions as a means to improve their capacity and to create incentives for sustainable bilateral cooperation in the fight against extremism and militancy over the long run.

In some ways, the Obama AfPak strategy makes a good start along precisely these lines, but critical gaps remain. While the president's remarks prioritized Pakistan as a U.S. national security concern, U.S. resources and attention are far more heavily engaged in Afghanistan. Since 9/11, the United States has spent (or requested for fiscal year 2009) roughly \$170 billion on Operation Enduring Freedom and just over \$15 billion in assistance and reimbursements to Pakistan.³ Of course, achieving greater stability in Afghanistan would mitigate some of the political and military pressures now faced by the Pakistani state. A comprehensive strategy for Pakistan should therefore include major counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. But it must also be recognized that a victory against the Taliban in Afghanistan will be hollow and illusory if it yields a destabilized or adversarial regime in Pakistan. Tactics that flush militants out from Afghanistan and into Pakistan will

prove counterproductive unless Pakistan's own security forces are ready to mount an adequate response. Today they are not. Similarly, the use of drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal belt must be weighed against the political costs they impose on U.S.-Pakistan cooperation, not least the role they play in amplifying popular anti-Americanism in parts of Pakistan well beyond the areas bordering Afghanistan.

The United States has relatively few direct policy tools for fighting extremism and improving state capacity inside Pakistan. Widespread anti-Americanism, official distrust, and poor security conditions now impose severe limits on U.S. military, intelligence, and even economic development efforts. The centerpiece of U.S. efforts should therefore be to win trust among partners within Pakistan's military, intelligence, and civilian institutions and to empower these partners to undertake the daunting task of fighting terrorism and militancy. A policy of inducement—through financial, technical, and diplomatic assistance—is the best means to shift the strategic calculations of influential Pakistanis and bolster moderates who share basic U.S. interests. Fortunately, although Pakistan's extremists are all-too-numerous and vocal, the overwhelming majority of the country's population abhors terrorist tactics and has no desire to live in a Taliban-like state.

Still, winning influential partners will not be easy. Pakistan's army and intelligence services have been frustrating and internally conflicted allies since 9/11. Many within their ranks doubt that close partnership with Washington will serve Pakistan's security interests; they prefer to hedge their bets by retaining ties to militant groups with violent anti-Indian and anti-Western agendas. But these security institutions are complicated, many-layered bureaucracies, not unitary actors. Washington should work to influence internal debates and transform mindsets among the rising classes of Pakistani officers.

As President Obama has stated, Washington should not be in the business of writing blank checks to Islamabad, whether for civilian or military purposes. That said, the United States should also resist the temptation to impose inflexible conditions on its military assistance as a means of ensuring Pakistan's cooperation. U.S. threats of this sort may be cathartic, but they are also counterproductive; they offer easy ammunition to America's skeptics in Pakistan while discouraging real and potential allies. Instead, Washington should maintain a baseline of generous defense assistance while seeking every opportunity to enhance COIN and CT training, bilateral engagement, and joint operations with Pakistani security and intelligence forces.

To help stem the tide of extremism and militancy within Pakistani civil society, the United States should implement vastly expanded assistance programs to improve state governance capacity (especially law and order), meet basic humanitarian needs, influence public opinion, and promote long-term development. The United States should set clear measures of success. But initial failures to achieve these benchmarks should prompt new implementation strategies, not threats to reduce or revoke resources.

In order to have any chance of effectively formulating, implementing, and monitoring these new and improved assistance programs, Washington must also invest in its own institutions. USAID and the Department of State will need expanded personnel and security to operate throughout Pakistan and to enable improved cooperation with public and private organizations.

The United States should also coordinate with regional and global partners in its effort to build and transform Pakistani institutions and to deal effectively with the full spectrum of Pakistan's political leaders and parties. China and Saudi Arabia have particular influence over Pakistan's military and

political leaders, and other major donors including Japan and the UK offer valuable resources, leverage, and experience.

A comprehensive approach to countering extremism in Pakistan will demand expensive and intense U.S. engagement over at least a decade, possibly much longer. But because smart, sustained investments ultimately represent the most cost-effective way for the United States to avoid a far more dangerous future, the Obama administration would be well advised not to narrow its ambitions from the outset or to understate the enormity of the challenge.

Recommendation: Shift from AfPak to PakAf

The Obama administration should recalibrate its strategy to emphasize the priority of the mission in Pakistan and to prepare domestic and international audiences for expanded, sustained U.S. engagement in South Asia. The present approach—professing narrow counterterrorism goals while seeking expanded state-building resources in Afghanistan and Pakistan—may be a politically astute means to garner early support, but runs the risk of confusing the American public (as well as U.S. allies and adversaries) down the road about Washington’s true intentions. That confusion is likely to make a costly commitment to the region harder to justify and sustain over the long run.

A wide array of global and domestic considerations undoubtedly influenced the Obama administration’s AfPak strategy. The costs—political, economic, and military—of a lengthy commitment to South Asia will invariably require real compromises on other issues and in other regions. At a time of severe economic distress, U.S. foreign assistance programming must contend with urgent domestic expenditures. And any strategy of long-term investment requires some confidence that resources and attention will manage to survive subsequent budget battles and future elections.

That said, if the United States takes seriously the enormity and complexity of the threat posed by extremism in South and Central Asia, only a comprehensive, Pakistan-centered strategy will serve U.S. security requirements today and into the future. Narrowing America’s ambition to attacking al-Qaeda and its close associates may placate some budget hawks at home, but it will do little to address the serious, entrenched threats posed by instability and weak state capacity in Pakistan.

TURNING STRATEGY INTO POLICY

Much of the Obama team’s strategy is already fairly consistent with a long-term, Pakistan-centered approach to the region. In order to be more specific about how a PakAf approach should be implemented over time, and where it would deviate from the administration’s apparent plans, the following section offers policy guidelines as well as a limited number of detailed recommendations. It is intended to suggest the way ahead, not to serve as an all-inclusive policy agenda.

Near Term (Six Months): A Military, Political, Economic, and Diplomatic Surge

Over the next six months, the United States should surge resources into South Asia and work to eliminate the greatest immediate stumbling blocks to better cooperation with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

President Obama assumed power at a time of morale-sapping turmoil within both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Strong and cooperative political partners are in short supply, and security conditions have deteriorated to the point that U.S. civilian personnel face risky operating environments throughout the region. The Obama administration’s efforts have been calibrated to begin to address

this situation. By devoting sufficient military resources to stem Taliban offensives in Afghanistan, Washington can help to secure greater geographic and political space for national elections and development programs. In Pakistan, the United States should continue with efforts to navigate ongoing partisan power struggles, capitalize on the opportunity presented by the restoration of the chief justice of the supreme court, and advance multilateral efforts to shore up Pakistan's economic situation, all while building closer working relationships with military and intelligence officials.

To enhance security across the region, the United States should take the following steps over the next six months, consistent with the administration's new strategy:

- Increase the mass of military power available to U.S. and NATO commanders in Afghanistan, starting—but not ending—with 17,000 additional U.S. troops;
- Practice a “population-centered” counterinsurgency approach in Afghanistan, with an emphasis on improving Afghan public confidence in U.S./NATO operations, in part by reducing civilian casualties through a more selective use of coalition airpower;
- Expand the frequency and intensity of senior-level U.S.-Pakistan dialogue and, where appropriate, intelligence-sharing and focused discussions about militant networks in Pakistan, including the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

At the same time, recognizing the centrality of its emerging partnership with Pakistan to achieving success in the region, the Obama administration should shift its approach in the following ways:

- Restrict attacks by unmanned aerial vehicles (such as Predators and Reapers) in Pakistan to counterterrorism targets (such as al-Qaeda leadership) to limit collateral damage and reduce an unpopular irritant in relations with Pakistan's political and military leadership;
- Follow through on existing assistance commitments to the Pakistani military, including the F-16 program, as a means to retain the confidence of officers who have bought into partnership with the United States;
- Work with the U.S. Congress to avoid new legislation that includes inflexible and potentially punitive “conditionality” on military assistance to Pakistan.

To strengthen the foundations for political partnership in Afghanistan and Pakistan, over the next six months the United States should also take the following diplomatic steps, consistent with the administration's new strategy:

- Apply diplomatic pressure on the Karzai government and provide security and technical assistance to enhance the likelihood that Afghanistan's presidential election is perceived as legitimate both by the Afghan public and international observers;
- In Pakistan, retain flexibility in the midst of intense partisan political competition by engaging in regular, active dialogue with leaders and second-tier officials from the full range of political parties.

Over the same time frame, the Obama administration should undertake the following overtures in order to clarify or shift Washington's political intentions:

- Refrain from official U.S. involvement in negotiations with the Afghan Taliban to avoid undercutting the legitimacy conferred by Afghanistan's electoral process or appearing too eager for an easy exit from the region;

- Delineate redlines with respect to future Pakistani negotiations with the Taliban to clarify that terrorist safe havens and the shrinking writ of the Pakistani state, not the implementation of traditional, or sharia, laws, are Washington's primary reasons for concern;
- Engage Pakistan's political leadership in discussions about the security and logistical procedures planned for Afghanistan's election as a means to encourage Islamabad's support for the process and acceptance of the outcome;
- Work with groups, including Pakistani and international nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and the legal community, to depoliticize Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's reinstatement and turn it into an opportunity for meaningful judicial reform in Pakistan.

To stabilize regional economic conditions, set a new tone for development assistance, and jumpstart more constructive international engagement in the region, over the next six months the United States should do the following, all consistent with, if not necessarily dictated by, the administration's new strategy:

- Mount a review of USAID's Afghanistan mission to identify programming and personnel gaps, and, in particular, to craft new mechanisms for community-oriented aid disbursement and reduced dependence on non-Afghan implementing partners;
- Coordinate closely with the International Monetary Fund and major donors to Pakistan (through the Friends of Pakistan forum or an alternative grouping) to stabilize—where necessary—and boost—where possible—economic growth;
- Announce U.S. plans for major new nonmilitary assistance expenditures in Pakistan (\$1.5 billion a year, consistent with the imminent Kerry-Lugar legislation) and begin discussions with Pakistan's government, business leaders, and civil society to identify creative new mechanisms to oversee and manage a significant portion of these funds through demand-driven block grants, a trust fund, or other widely accepted means;
- Mobilize USAID to assist—in whatever forms acceptable—the Pakistani army and Frontier Corps in delivering reconstruction assistance to postconflict zones of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, especially the devastated civilian communities of Bajaur Agency;
- Raise Pakistan and Afghanistan to the top of Washington's diplomatic agenda with regional and global partners, including China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union, and others;
- Regularize Pakistan-Afghanistan-U. S. trilateral summits;
- Quietly encourage India's new government (shortly after its own national elections in April and May) to reinvigorate dialogue with Pakistan. Facilitate early interactions if necessary.

Medium Term (One to Four Years): Identify and Empower Partners

Over President Obama's first term in office, success in Pakistan and Afghanistan should not be measured solely by whether top al-Qaeda terrorists are eliminated or the Taliban is dealt a military setback in Afghanistan. Washington must also identify a range of partners among Afghan and Pakistani civilian and military institutions and empower them to assume moderating and stabilizing roles over the long haul.

By the end of this four-year period, Afghanistan's national security forces should be ready to assume a primary role in counterinsurgency operations. Over the same time frame, Washington should aim to develop far closer cooperation with the Pakistani military and intelligence services, including more extensive training and, where mutually acceptable, regular joint operations and extensive intelligence sharing. The United States should create the conditions for effective, long-term regional development programming and political outreach by investing in new U.S. personnel and facilities.

To shift Afghan counterinsurgency operations to an indigenous lead, and to enable intense, regular cooperation with the Pakistani security and intelligence services, over the next four years the United States should undertake the following steps, most of which are consistent with, if not dictated by, the Obama AfPak strategy:

- Accelerate and expand the training and equipping of Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to create a force capable of bearing the bulk of national combat and policing duties;
- Revamp mechanisms for U.S. military assistance to Pakistan to improve transparency and to eliminate regular points of mutual irritation, such as the Coalition Support Funds program, while maintaining a U.S. commitment to generous budgetary support as a means to build trust;
- Expand educational opportunities for Pakistani officers in U.S.-based programs, especially those geared toward counterinsurgency and counterterrorism;
- Build on existing "train the trainer" programs for the Pakistani Frontier Corps;
- Seek opportunities for joint U.S.-Pakistan military and intelligence training missions outside Pakistan as a means to improve specialized counterterror skills and win trust (and with an eye toward joint operations down the road);
- Offer training and assistance to Pakistan's provincial police forces, starting with major urban centers, to promote reforms, reduce corruption, and improve law and order;
- Engage in a quiet, high-level nuclear dialogue with Pakistan to build bilateral trust and seek new ways to safeguard its nuclear program.

To enable better cooperation with civilian political leaders in the region, over the next four years the United States should also undertake the following steps:

- Use the occasion of Afghanistan's post-presidential election transition and subsequent parliamentary elections in 2010 to encourage political reforms that delegate greater authority to cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, and provincial officials relative to the presidency as one means of increasing the number and quality of potential U.S. partners throughout the Afghan state;
- Create additional civil-military units in Afghanistan similar to Provincial Reconstruction Teams to facilitate community and tribal outreach efforts (as part of a national reconciliation effort) and to improve the quality of subnational governance, especially the judiciary;
- Increase diplomatic staffing levels in Pakistan and establish new sub-consular offices (and requisite security procedures) to facilitate political outreach within and beyond Pakistan's major cities;
- Launch a cooperative initiative with Pakistan's military and civilian leadership to improve Islamabad's national security decision-making process, starting with a dedicated exchange program and training curriculum for a small group of rising mid-career Pakistani army, intelligence, and foreign policy officers.

To promote sustainable economic development in Afghanistan and Pakistan, over the next four years the United States should do the following:

- Build a more substantial USAID presence dedicated to long-term development assistance in Afghanistan, with the capacity and mandate to support and expand local, community-based development projects similar to the National Solidarity Program;
- Increase USAID staffing and secure facilities in Pakistan to support local development initiatives in coordination with provincial and local authorities throughout the country, including the Frontier Corps and political agents in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas;
- Follow through on pledges to provide Pakistan with sustained access to nonmilitary assistance, disbursed through mechanisms that are transparent and accountable to the Pakistani public;
- Identify and implement a major, high-profile infrastructure project in Pakistan to demonstrate to Pakistan's populace the tangible benefits of U.S.-Pakistan partnership.

In its diplomatic efforts within and outside the region, over the next four years the United States should do the following:

- Institute a regular, senior-level dialogue with China on Pakistan and Afghanistan as a means to leverage collective U.S.-China political, military, and economic influence in the region;
- Accept a de facto two-tiered NATO involvement in Afghanistan as a means to improve the alliance's efficiency in military operations while encouraging financial and other contributions from member states that cannot sustain military commitments;
- Reconvene the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) for Afghanistan (or a successor forum) to promote trade opportunities linking Central Asia to South and East Asia, and encourage buy-in by other major regional actors, including Russia and China, as well as the private sector and international organizations such as the World Bank.

Long Term (Five to Ten Years or More): Build and Sustain Effective Institutions

Over the long run, the United States should anticipate continued involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but Washington's allocation of resources should also look far different than it does today. The United States will succeed only if more effective Pakistani and Afghan state institutions are built and sustained to counterbalance forces of extremism and militancy. During the next five to ten years, Washington should draw down U.S. combat forces in Afghanistan while continuing to provide military assistance, training, and logistical support along with close political partnership and extensive development programming. Over a similar time frame, the United States should aim to achieve broader and deeper cooperation with Pakistan's defense, security, and intelligence services, enabling extensive and sophisticated counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training, planning, and, where mutually agreeable, joint operations. In addition, the United States should be fully engaged in political outreach and economic development throughout Pakistan, helping to strengthen the state and civil society.

The Obama administration should move quickly to declare its long-term commitment to the region as a means to shift expectations and strategic calculations in Kabul, Islamabad, and neighboring capitals. A new, transparent bilateral agreement for defense and cooperation should be negotiated with Kabul after Afghanistan's national elections. Washington should use this negotiation process to signal that, while it has every intention to end the Taliban-led insurgency, it does not seek any permanent military presence in the region.

In addition, over the five-to-ten-year time horizon, the United States should undertake the following steps:

- Address the daunting challenge of the narcotics industry in Afghanistan by focusing on lasting solutions (alternative livelihoods, law enforcement and prosecutorial capacity, and the targeting and interdiction of traffickers), all of which must be built upon the foundations of effective state institutions;
- Approach deep and seemingly intractable challenges to stability in Pakistan—such as the imbalance between civilian and military power, the dynastic nature of major political parties, and deep social and economic inequality—through serious, sustained U.S. support for a wide variety of educational, social mobilization and reform efforts that will, at best, pay dividends only over a decade or longer;
- Engage in a dialogue with top Pakistani military and civilian leaders about prospects and avenues for normalizing the nuclear program in ways that are not perceived to threaten Pakistan's security with respect to India;
- Encourage rapprochement between India and Pakistan through quiet overtures and reiterate Washington's longstanding commitment to support or facilitate when and if necessary.

A Daunting Challenge

In its present formulation, the Obama administration's AfPak strategy is framed flexibly enough to permit a long-term, Pakistan-centered commitment to the region. But the White House's approach is now burdened by an Afghanistan-oriented military strategy, a rhetorical nod to tightly focused counterterrorism objectives, and tough-minded but potentially counterproductive plans for conditioning assistance to Pakistan. To preclude ambiguity and build sustainable domestic support for its agenda, the Obama administration should clarify that it will pursue sustained, comprehensive engagement in South Asia, with a heavy emphasis on improving cooperation with Pakistan through intense interaction and assistance, because this strategy offers the best prospect for long-term American security and regional stability.

Implementing such an ambitious program will be tremendously difficult. It may ultimately overtax Washington's diplomatic, financial, and military resources. Nor can there be any guarantee that even such a costly program will stave off the worst threats it is intended to address. Indeed, many critical dynamics in the region are to a significant degree outside America's capacity to control, no matter how hard it tries. That said, alternative strategies that focus more narrowly on the threats posed by al-Qaeda or by Afghanistan's Taliban insurgency may also fail to achieve their goals. More troubling, they may inspire policies that undermine stability in Pakistan or fail to direct adequate attention to the many sources of Pakistani instability situated outside the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Under these difficult conditions, narrowing Washington's strategic ambition would represent a false economy, saving marginal U.S. resources in the near term but creating even greater long-term threats to U.S. interests as well as to regional and global security. Since 9/11, the United States has lurched from crisis to crisis in South Asia, putting out fires without investing in the future. The time has come to readjust the balance, to recognize that entrenched threats of this sort demand enduring and costly U.S. investments, and to commit forthrightly to meeting the daunting challenge in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Endnotes

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1. U.S. House of Representatives, 2009, PEACE Act of 2009, 111th Congress, 1st session, HR 1886.
 2. "White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan," March 27, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan_White_Paper.pdf.
 3. K. Alan Kronstadt, "Direct Overt U.S. Aid and Military Reimbursements to Pakistan, FY2002–2009," Congressional Research Service, April 15, 2009; Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," Congressional Research Service, October 15, 2008, p.6.