

# Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the effects of U.S. policy in Afghanistan on the stability and political evolution of Pakistan.

It seems useful to begin with an assessment of where U.S. interests in Pakistan are located. The success of Pakistan – that is, its emergence as a stable, modernizing, prosperous, pluralistic country, at peace with its neighbors and within its borders, and integrated economically in South and Central Asia – is important, even vital, not only to the United States but to the broader international community. The nuclear danger in South Asia alone argues for risk-taking investments in Pakistan's success. In addition, any durable American "exit strategy" from Afghanistan will depend upon the emergence of a stable Pakistan that is moving toward normalization with India and the reduction of extremism within its borders.

For nearly four decades, Pakistan's struggle to achieve its constitutional and founding ideals of democracy, pluralism, and a culture rooted in a modernizing Islam have been impeded in part by the spillover effects of continual warfare in Afghanistan. These spillover effects have influenced the militarization of Pakistanis politics, encouraged the development of a "paranoid style" in Pakistani security doctrines, and more recently, helped to radicalize sections of the country's population.

The United States today is a catalyzing power in this same, continual Afghan warfare. U.S. actions in Afghanistan since 2001 have amplified the debilitating spillover effects of the Afghan war on Pakistan. To name a few examples: The lightly resourced, complacent U.S. approach to Afghanistan following the ouster of the Taliban in late 2001 effectively chased Islamist insurgents into Pakistan, contributing to its destabilization. Dormant, often directionless U.S. diplomacy in the region failed to bridge the deepening mistrust among the Kabul, Islamabad, and New Delhi governments after 2001, or to challenge successfully the Pakistani military's tolerance of Islamist extremist groups, including the Afghan Taliban. In Pakistan itself, the U.S. relied for too long and too exclusively on former President Pervez Musharraf and failed to challenge his marginalization of political opponents or his coddling of Islamist extremists. During these years, narrowly conceived, transparently self-interested U.S. policies caused many Pakistanis to conclude, to some extent correctly, that the American presence in their region was narrowly conceived, self-interested, and ultimately unreliable.

A recent poll of Pakistani public opinion carried out by the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that only sixteen percent of Pakistanis have a favorable view of the United States.<sup>/1</sup> That discouraging number has been more or less consistent since 2001; the only time it spiked, to just above twenty-five percent, was in 2006, after the United States pledged \$500 million in aid to Pakistan and after it played a visible and significant role in an earthquake relief effort in Pakistani-held Kashmir. The Senate's recent unanimous passage of the Kerry-Lugar bill, providing \$1.5 billion in aid to Pakistan for each of the next five years, offers a foothold to begin shifting U.S. policy in a more rewarding direction. However, it would be a mistake to underestimate the depth of the resentments and sources of instability in Pakistan that now confront the United States. A poll carried out by Gallup and Al Jazeera in July asked a sample of Pakistanis what constituted the biggest threat to Pakistan's security. Fifty-nine percent answered that it was the United States, followed by eighteen percent who named India and only eleven percent who named the Taliban.<sup>/2</sup>

The measure of American policy in Pakistan, of course, is not American popularity but Pakistan's own durable stability and peaceful evolution. However, the dismal view of the United States held across so many constituencies in Pakistan today – particularly the widespread view that U.S. policy in Afghanistan and along the Pakistan-Afghan border constitutes a grave threat to Pakistan – is a sign that U.S. policymakers must think much more deeply, as this Committee is doing, about how the U.S.-led campaign against Al Qaeda and the Taliban will reverberate in Pakistan during the next five to ten years.

There is no unitary, homogenized Pakistan for the United States to effect by its actions in Afghanistan. Instead, there are distinct Pakistani constituencies, some in competition with each other, which will be impacted in different ways by the choices the United States now makes in Afghanistan. These include the Pakistani military and security services; the country's civilian political leadership; its business communities and civil society; and the Pakistani public.

Broadly, the purpose of U.S. policy in the region, including in Afghanistan, should be to strengthen Pakistani constitutional politics and pluralism; to invest in the Pakistani people and civil society; to enable the Pakistani military to secure the country while preserving and enhancing civilian rule; and most critically of all, to persuade the Pakistani military and intelligence services that it is in Pakistan's national interest to pursue normalization and economic integration with India and to abandon its support for proxy Islamist groups such as the Afghan Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and others.

This is the strategic prism through which U.S. policy choices in Afghanistan today should be evaluated.

One obstacle to the achievement of these goals is the deeply held view within the Pakistani security services that the United States will abandon the region once it has defeated or disabled Al Qaeda. Pakistani generals correctly fear that a precipitous American withdrawal from Afghanistan would be destabilizing, and that it would

strengthen Islamist radical networks, including but not limited to the Taliban, who are today destabilizing Pakistan as well as the wider region.

Alternatively or concurrently, sections of the Pakistani military and civilian elite also fear that the United States may collaborate with India, naively or deliberately, to weaken Pakistan, by supporting governments in Kabul that at best are hostile to Pakistani interests or at worst facilitate Indian efforts to destabilize, disarm or even destroy the Pakistani state.

The presence and depth of these fears among the Pakistani elites implies that the United States should avoid taking actions in Afghanistan that reinforce this debilitating, self-defeating belief system within the Pakistani security services. It implies that Washington should, on the other hand, embrace those policies that are most likely to ameliorate or subdue such policies within Pakistan over time.

Pakistan's historical, self-defeating support for the Taliban and similar groups is rooted in the belief that Pakistan requires unconventional forces, as well as a nuclear deterrent, to offset India's conventional military and industrial might. This logic of existential insecurity has informed Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan because Pakistani generals have seen an Indian hand in Kabul since the days of the Soviet invasion. They interpret India's goals in Afghanistan as a strategy of encirclement of Pakistan, punctuated by the tactic of promoting instability among Pakistan's restive, independence-minded Pashtun, Baluch and Sindhi populations.

Pakistan has countered this perceived Indian strategy by developing Islamist militias such as the predominantly Pashtun Taliban as proxies for Pakistan and as a means to destabilize India. As for the U.S. role, Pakistani generals see it as inconstant and unreliable, based on the pattern of here-and-gone U.S. engagement in the past, and they also tend to believe that the U.S. is today lashing itself, deliberately or naively, to Indian strategy in the region.

This paranoid style in Pakistani security doctrine has been reinforced in several ways by U.S. actions in the region since 2001. As noted above, U.S. diplomacy has made an insufficient priority, until recently, of attempting to build constructive links between Kabul and Islamabad and to take pragmatic steps to persuade the Pakistani military that it has a stake in a stable Afghanistan free from the threat of Taliban rule. U.S. policy in Afghanistan has failed to develop a robust strategy of political negotiation, reconciliation, and national reintegration that would provide a platform for Pakistan's genuine security concerns. Then, too, the failure of the U.S. to invest deeply and broadly in Pakistani society, but to concentrate its aid in a narrowly based military government during the Musharraf period, only reinforced the assumption that the United States had once again hired out Pakistan as a regional "sheriff" and intended to disengage from South and Central Asia as soon as its mission against Al Qaeda was complete – just as the United States has done at comparable intersections in the past, including after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

What does this analysis suggest about the specific policy choices facing the Obama Administration in Afghanistan today?

If the United States signals to Pakistan's military command that it intends to abandon efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, or that it has set a short clock running on the project of pursuing Afghan stability, or that it intends to undertake its regional policy primarily through a strategic partnership with India, then it will only reinforce the beliefs of those in the Pakistani security establishment who argue that nursing the Taliban is in the country's national interests.

To the extent that U.S. actions in Afghanistan reinforce this view within the Pakistani security services, it will contribute to instability in Pakistan and weaken the hand of Pakistani political parties and civil society in their long, unfinished struggle to build a more successful, more durable constitutional system, modeled on the power-sharing systems, formal and informal, that prevail today in previously coup-riddled or unstable countries such as Turkey, Indonesia, the Philippines, Argentina and Brazil.

If the United States undertakes a heavily militarized, increasingly unilateral policy in Afghanistan, whether in the name of "counterinsurgency," "counterterrorism," or some other abstract Western doctrine, without also adopting an aggressive political, reconciliation and diplomatic strategy that more effectively incorporates Pakistan into efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, then it will also reinforce the beliefs of those in the Pakistani security establishment that they need the Taliban as a hedge against the U.S. and India.

If the United States adopts a "counterterrorism-only" policy in Afghanistan and substantially withdraws from Afghanistan, it will risk deepening instability along the Pakistan-Afghan border, and it will reinforce the narrative of its failed, self-interested policies in Pakistan during the Musharraf period and in earlier periods, undermining the prospects for a Pakistan that evolves gradually toward internal stability and a constructive regional role.

On the other hand, if the United States signals to Pakistan's military command that it intends to pursue very long-term policies designed to promote stability and prosperity in South Asia and Central Asia, and that it sees a responsible Pakistan as a decades-long strategic ally comparable to Turkey and Egypt, then it will have a reasonable if uncertain chance to persuade the Pakistani security establishment over time that the costs of succoring the Taliban and like groups outweigh the benefits.

Between withdrawal signals and blind militarization there is a more sustainable strategy, one that I hope the Obama Administration is in the process of defining. It would make clear that the Taliban will never be permitted to take power in Kabul or major cities. It would seek and enforce stability in Afghan population centers but emphasize politics over combat, urban stability over rural patrolling, Afghan solutions over Western ones, and it would incorporate Pakistan more directly into creative and persistent diplomatic efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and the region.

That is the only plausible path to a modernizing, prosperous South Asia. It is a future within reach and it is a model for evolutionary political-military success already established in other regions of the world that recently suffered deep instability rooted in extremism, identity politics, and fractured civil-military relations, such as Southeast Asia and Latin America.

The Obama Administration needs to make an even greater effort than it already has to communicate publicly about its commitment to Pakistan and to the broader long-term goal of regional stability and economic integration. There is an emerging, bipartisan consensus within the Congress on Pakistan policy, as evidenced by the Senate's unanimous endorsement of the critically important Kerry-Lugar legislation. At the Pentagon and within civilian U.S. policymaking circles there is a much deeper understanding than previously about the centrality of Pakistan to U.S. interests and regional strategy, and about the need to engage with Pakistan consistently over the long run, nurturing that country's economic growth, healthy civil-military relations, civil society, pluralism, constitutionalism, and normalization with India. On Pakistan policy, Washington is perhaps on the verge of proving Churchill's quip that the United States always does the right thing after first trying everything else.

And yet Kerry-Lugar should be seen as only a beginning. It is essential that the U.S. national security bureaucracy find ways to act with a greater sense of urgency, creativity and unity on Pakistan policy. In Iraq and Afghanistan, because we are formally at war, American policy is often animated, appropriately, by a sense of urgency. Too often, this is not the case when it comes to Pakistan, even though Pakistan's stability and success is a central reason that the United States continues to invest blood and treasure in Afghanistan. As the Obama Administration and Congress refashion and reinvest in Afghan policy over the next weeks, there will be an important opportunity to address this imbalance, in the way that policy is conceived, funded and communicated.

Thank you.

2/ "Pakistan: State of the Nation," Al Jazeera, August 13, 2009.  
<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2009/08/2009888238994769.html>