

Pakistan

The Intersection of Nuclear Weapons and Terrorism

As I left government, the one piece of intelligence I heard that most frightened me was that al Qaeda was rebuilding a safe haven in the FATA.

—A former senior counterterrorism official

Pakistan is an ally, but there is a grave danger it could also be an unwitting source of a terrorist attack on the United States—possibly using weapons of mass destruction. The Commission urges the next administration and Congress to pay particular attention to Pakistan, as it is the geographic crossroads for terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, the border provinces of Pakistan today are a safe haven, if not the safe haven, for al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda's Afghan safe haven was critical to its ability to plan and implement its attacks of September 11, 2001. Even then, Pakistan had a role as a transit country for some of the hijackers. But now it has become a key safe haven for al Qaeda, according to the most senior U.S. intelligence official. In February 2008, Mike McConnell, the Director of National Intelligence, testified to the House Intelligence Committee: "The FATA [Federally Administered Tribal Areas] serves as a staging area for al Qaeda's attacks in support of the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as a location for training new terrorist operatives for attacks in Pakistan, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the United States." A year previously, his office had published a National Intelligence Estimate asserting that al Qaeda "has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including: a safe haven in the Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)." The National Intelligence Estimate added that "al Qaeda will continue to try to acquire and employ chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear



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material in attacks and would not hesitate to use them if it develops what it deems is sufficient capability.” Another senior intelligence official responsible for dealing with terrorism recently affirmed that al Qaeda has strengthened its ties with Pakistani militants in the past year, replenished its mid-level lieutenants, enjoys in the FATA many of the benefits it enjoyed in Afghanistan before September 11, and remains the most serious terrorist threat to the United States.

Indeed, a 2007 *Foreign Policy Magazine* poll of 117 nongovernmental terrorism experts found that 74 percent consider Pakistan the country most likely to transfer nuclear technology to terrorists in the next three to five years. Pakistan is a nuclear-weapon country; it gained this status through the illicit work of a nationalist Islamic scientist, A. Q. Khan. He was the father of Pakistan’s “Islamic bomb” and the purveyor of sensitive nuclear technology across the Middle East and Asia—to Libya, North Korea, and perhaps other countries. His network of business associates spanned the globe and is only now being fully brought to justice. There may be other Pakistani scientists who have been, or would be, willing to work with other countries or with terrorists to help them acquire nuclear weapons.

According to open source estimates, today Pakistan has about 85 nuclear weapons, which are under the complete control of the Pakistani military. Though most U.S. and Pakistani officials assert that these weapons and their components are safe from inside or outside theft, the risk that radical Islamists—al Qaeda or Taliban—may gain access to nuclear material is real. Should the Pakistani government become weaker, and the Pakistani nuclear arsenal grow, that risk will increase. With each new facility, military or civilian, comes added security concerns.

The reality is that Pakistan is steadily adding to its nuclear weapons stockpile, which remains its chief deterrent against Indian attack. In October 2008, on the heels of the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement, China agreed to build two nuclear power plants in Pakistan. This deal—especially if it does not contain mechanisms to prevent nuclear material from being transferred from the new civilian plants to military facilities—signals a nascent nuclear arms race in Asia.

The risk of a WMD attack being planned and executed from Pak-

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istan's northwest frontier area is growing, as that area continues to function as a safe haven for al Qaeda.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The next President and Congress should implement a comprehensive policy toward Pakistan that works with Pakistan and other countries to (1) eliminate terrorist safe havens through military, economic, and diplomatic means; (2) secure nuclear and biological materials in Pakistan; (3) counter and defeat extremist ideology; and (4) constrain a nascent nuclear arms race in Asia.

The President and Congress should develop and implement a comprehensive policy involving all elements of national power—military, economic, and diplomatic—to eliminate terrorist safe havens in Pakistan. This policy should also be implemented with regard to Afghanistan, India, China, and Russia.

ACTION: The United States should continue to support Pakistan's efforts to eliminate al Qaeda's safe haven in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), through increased joint military and intelligence operations. The United States should also support Pakistan's efforts to work with tribal leaders and to strengthen the Frontier Corps and local police.

The United States should continue to provide Pakistan direct military support in the hunt to capture or kill al Qaeda and Taliban terrorist leaders. The United States, with other countries, should also provide funding and training to the Pakistani military, as well as to the Frontier Corps and other local and provincial security forces. Where possible, any operations should be executed by Pakistani forces; the U.S. military footprint in Pakistan should remain minimal.

Allowing the Pakistani armed forces to lead the fight, supported by the United States, other North Atlantic Treaty Organization members, and other friendly countries, avoids further arousing Pakistani nationalism and anti-Americanism. Minimizing direct U.S. involvement lessens the opportunity for nationalist outcry and may allow a more rational assessment of the situation. The Pakistani government, military, and

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people need to understand that their interests are also at stake—an unfortunate reality driven home by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and by the September 2008 attack against the Islamabad Marriott. Al Qaeda and radical militants pose a threat to Pakistan’s democratic government, institutions, and people. Ultimately, the only way for a democratic Pakistan to truly take on al Qaeda and other terrorists is for all elements of the society to recognize them as a threat not just to the United States or Europe but also to Pakistan itself.

ACTION: The new U.S. policy toward Pakistan should include economic assistance that helps Pakistan improve the services it provides to its people and create greater opportunities for education and commerce, especially in the FATA.

The focus of U.S. policy should be to help Pakistan achieve political and economic stability. Current U.S. assistance to Pakistan reflects the decision to make tactical, near-term military and security concerns a priority over long-term efforts to bolster Pakistan’s democracy and its prospects for economic development. Over the past six years, the United States supported Pakistan with a mix of military, security, economic, and social aid, totaling \$12 billion. Of that total, \$8.9 billion (74 percent) was devoted to security and military assistance, and only \$3.1 billion (26 percent) went to social and economic programs.

Yet festering economic and social ills in Pakistan have created a hospitable environment for radicalization, and the trends indicate that the challenge is growing. Pakistan’s population is projected to double to nearly 300 million people by 2050, making it the world’s fifth most populous country. Over the next decade, food, water, and energy are likely to become scarcer. The UN Development Program’s Human Development Report of 2005 gave Pakistan the lowest score for its education index of any country outside of Africa. Pakistan’s overall literacy rate hovers between 40 and 50 percent. For women, the literacy rate is below 30 percent—and for women in the FATA, it is only 3 percent. Because teachers are poorly trained, Pakistanis are turning away from public education to attend private schools and madrassas, most of which offer religious instruction rather than preparing youth to enter professions or trades.

The Commission supports the type of assistance proposed in legislation sponsored by Senators Joseph Biden and Richard Lugar in July

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2008—S. 3263, the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2008. This bill was envisioned as a “democratic dividend” to the democratically elected post-Musharraf government, and if passed it will provide a down payment on democracy and security. In a statement accompanying the legislation, the lawmakers asserted: “The purpose and intent of this legislation is to help transform the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan from a transactional, tactically-driven set of short-term exercises in crisis-management, into a deeper, broader, long-term strategic engagement.” The bill authorizes \$1.5 billion annually for five years for nonmilitary assistance to Pakistan—more than triple the current funding.

Any U.S. assistance should be designed to reach local leaders and entities as directly as possible, in order to strengthen civil society. Emphasis should be placed on developing infrastructure in border provinces: hospitals, roads, power plants, and schools (with teachers who are well trained). Such investments in physical infrastructure are easy to measure and monitor. They also provide opportunities to enhance cross-border trade, promote tourist corridors, and encourage specific businesses, such as selling electricity.

Such opportunities result in both economic development and confidence building between Pakistan and its neighbors. In addition, they symbolically demonstrate the commitment of the United States to the people of Pakistan. The cumulative effect of this new strategy for U.S. development and economic assistance would be to help the Pakistani people, foster their government’s ability to provide services and effective governance at all levels and in all parts of the country, and, ultimately, provide the antidote to terrorist safe havens and a bulwark against radicalization.

If the United States does not change the emphasis of its assistance, Senators Biden and Lugar said in their joint statement, “there is little likelihood of drying up popular tolerance for anti-U.S. terrorist groups, or persuading any Pakistani regime to devote the political capital necessary to deny such groups sanctuary and covert material support.”

ACTION: The new U.S. strategy toward Pakistan should involve the use of all elements of national power—including those of so-called soft power, such as public diplomacy, strategic communications, and development assistance—to counter violent extremist anti-Americanism, create a universal culture

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of revulsion against the use of WMD, and lower the demand for WMD by terrorists.

The U.S. objective should be not only to address the underlying social, economic, and educational conditions that give rise to violent extremism and terrorism but also to use all means to counter the messages of terrorists. By addressing the basic needs of the Pakistani people and letting them know that the United States is not solely interested in supporting Pakistan's military, this new approach will demonstrate U.S. commitment to the people of Pakistan. If accompanied by effective public diplomacy, it can help foster a climate in which the democratic Pakistani government will be able to work with the United States in a stronger partnership, one based on mutual concern for the Pakistani people. The potential benefits of U.S. assistance were illustrated recently, albeit briefly, in the aftermath of the October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, when the United States provided over half a billion dollars in relief. The terrorists tried to compete, but the U.S. assistance was so large-scale and visible that Pakistanis began giving out small toy Chinook helicopters—the main purveyors of the food, blankets, and medicine. In return, the United States received a great deal of Pakistani goodwill.

Shifting the U.S. message and support from emphasizing the military to stressing development assistance and support to the institutions of Pakistani government will demonstrate that the U.S.-Pakistan relationship is founded on more than the war on terror. If U.S. public diplomacy succeeds in countering radical Islamist anti-American ideas in the mosques and coffee shops in Pakistan, then there is a chance that the United States can erode tacit or explicit support for terrorists who espouse mass violence, including the use of weapons of mass destruction.

We emphasize that it is not enough for leaders at the highest levels to understand the importance of tools of soft power and decide to use them. They must also develop the organic capability to deploy those tools where and when needed around the world—including, in the first instance, in Pakistan. In the section below titled "Government Organization and Culture," we outline what such an organic capability entails and recommend the steps necessary to reorganize the civilian foreign policy agencies in much the same way as the military and the intelligence communities have been restructured.

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ACTION: The President must make securing biological and nuclear materials and weapons in Pakistan a priority. Congress should ensure that sufficient funding is authorized and appropriated for this purpose, and other countries such as Russia and China should be enlisted to contribute to this effort.

Providing assistance to Pakistan to ensure that its nuclear facilities are secure from theft or any diversion of materials, weapons, or expertise is a vital security interest for the United States and for the international community. Therefore, the new U.S. strategy for Pakistan must emphasize working with the Pakistani military and with Pakistani and other foreign intelligence services to make certain that all threats to Pakistan's facilities can be minimized, anticipated, and countered.

Moreover, Pakistan has biological research laboratories that possess stocks of dangerous pathogens, some of which may not be adequately secured. The United States is currently funding efforts to improve physical security and access control at such facilities. This support should continue until Pakistan has sufficiently reduced the potential danger of theft or accidents.

Several Russian officials with whom the Commission met in Moscow in September 2008 indicated that they supported working with the United States to help the Pakistani government maintain and improve the security of its nuclear arsenal. The executive director of a Russian nongovernmental organization focused on nonproliferation asserted that the most urgent need for bilateral cooperation directed at other countries concerned Pakistan, not Iran. This expert added that working with Pakistan "could be the leading subject of nonproliferation cooperation" between the United States and Russia.

Such an international effort could have the added benefit of supporting the creation of a consensus among countries that do not now recognize the risks posed by WMD proliferation and terrorism. It could focus their attention on biological and nuclear security, proliferation networks, and international terrorism.

ACTION: The United States should work with Pakistan, India, China, Russia, and other countries to constrain the nascent arms race in Asia and to reduce tension and promote

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greater stability in that region. As part of this effort, the United States should encourage cross-border activities, such as people-to-people exchanges, transportation, trade, and economic investment.

The President must engage India and Afghanistan to foster a common understanding that Pakistani stability and progress are in their own interest and in the best interests of South Asia generally. In particular, Pakistan's deeply adversarial relationship with India so consumes strategic thinking in Pakistan that little attention is paid to such concerns as counterterrorism and nonproliferation. Easing tension between the two nations should give Pakistan the space to recognize its stake in addressing these issues.

The United States should work with Russia to engage Pakistan, India, and China in a regional approach to nuclear security and counterproliferation. Priority should be assigned to precluding the use of nuclear weapons during a future crisis, further securing nuclear materials, limiting the expansion and modernization of nuclear forces, continuing the current nuclear testing moratorium, precluding onward proliferation to the Middle East, and limiting the deployment of short-range nuclear delivery systems. At the same time, U.S.-Indian cooperation in the civilian nuclear power industry must not be allowed to become the catalyst of a nuclear arms race in Asia. U.S. policy must seek to counter the destabilizing aspects of Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani nuclear modernization and address the root causes of insecurity that fuel proliferation.

An existential fear of India is the main preoccupation of the Pakistani military. Pakistan's nuclear modernization is driven both by India's conventional modernization and by the prospect of India's nuclear expansion. India's nuclear and conventional modernization, in turn, is driven by fears of China and Pakistan.

Pakistan believes that it is surrounded by security threats—and U.S. cooperation with India in defense and strategic technology sharing has exacerbated this perception. Multiple sources of instability in South Asia dilute the ability of the Pakistani government to focus on any one specific security issue, thereby allowing all of them to worsen. If Pakistani leaders are preoccupied with threats from India's nuclear forces and the insurgency in Kashmir, then their cooperation with the United States on issues of concern to the United States will be limited.

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The United States should build confidence in Pakistan through its Afghanistan policy. That policy should aim to stabilize Afghanistan by ridding it of the Taliban and allied extremists, build stability in border provinces such as Baluchistan, and assure Pakistan that U.S. policy toward Afghanistan will not result in collaboration between India and Afghanistan at Pakistan's expense. Al Qaeda recognizes the value of exploiting Pakistan's concern with both India and Afghanistan.

If the Pakistani government could be reassured about its own external security, it could focus more attention on internal elements such as governance, civic services, and the need to counter radicalization. To achieve this goal, the United States must display greater transparency in its diplomatic exchanges with Pakistan, including its clarification of the U.S.–India civil nuclear deal. And it must also persuade Islamabad that U.S. assistance to India is not a direct threat to Pakistan's strategic security.

Finally, the United States should discreetly encourage a return to a back-channel dialogue between India and Pakistan, supported by confidence-building measures. As discussed in the next section, working with Russia could be an effective way to pursue such measures. This effort should be part of a broader regional strategy to help ensure that disputes and instability in Kashmir and Pakistan–Afghanistan border provinces do not become flashpoints that destabilize regional security.

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It is possible for the situation in Pakistan to take a more positive turn. After the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari declared that the war on terrorism “is our war.” Parliamentarians are being briefed on the terrorist threats and on Pakistani military operations in the border regions. Tribal leaders are organizing against foreign al Qaeda elements in the FATA and NWFP. Suicide bombing has been declared illegitimate by Muslim scholars of all major schools of thought in Pakistan. Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan appear to be improving, and negotiations may help separate the committed terrorists from those who have legitimate grievances against their governments.

Nevertheless, there is no graver threat to U.S. national security than a WMD in the hands of terrorists. Trends in South Asia, if left unchecked, will increase the odds that al Qaeda will successfully

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develop and use a nuclear device or biological weapon against the United States or its allies. The reality behind the 9/11 Commission's comment that "it is hard to overstate the importance of Pakistan in the struggle against Islamist terrorism" is obvious. The difference today is that the situation is urgent.