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Pakistan's Terrorism Dilemma

For more than a decade, Pakistan has been accused of supporting terrorism, primarily due to its support for militants opposing Indian rule in the disputed Himalayan territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Until September 11, 2001, Islamabad was also the principal backer of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Although Pakistan has now become a key U.S. ally in the war against terrorism, it is still seen both as a target and staging ground for terrorism.

General Pervez Musharraf's military regime abandoned its alliance with the Taliban immediately after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. U.S. forces were allowed the use of Pakistani air bases for operations in Afghanistan. Pakistani intelligence services provided, and continue to provide, valuable information in hunting down Taliban and al-Qaeda escapees. The Pakistani military is currently working with U.S. law enforcement officials in tracking down terrorists in the lawless tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

In a major policy speech on January 12, 2002, Musharraf announced measures to limit the influence of Islamic militants at home, including those previously described by him as "Kashmiri freedom fighters." "No organizations will be able to carry out terrorism

on the pretext of Kashmir," he declared. "Whoever is involved with such acts in the future will be dealt with strongly whether they come from inside or outside the country."¹

Musharraf's supporters declared his speech as revolutionary.² He echoed the sentiment of most Pakistanis when he said, "violence and terrorism have been going on for years and we are weary and sick of this Kalashnikov culture ... The day of reckoning has come."

After the speech, the Musharraf regime clamped down on domestic terrorist groups responsible for sectarian killings.³ But there is still considerable ambivalence in Pakistan's attitude toward the Kashmiri militants. Officially, Pakistan denies that it provides military support or training for terrorists. But in an interview published in the *Washington Post* on June 23, 2002, Musharraf repeated the argument for making a distinction between terrorists and freedom fighters, leaving the possibility open for supporting the latter.⁴

General Musharraf's switch of support from the Taliban and Islamic militants to the United States has infuriated the Islamists. They are now threatening his life as well as targets in Pakistan with increasing ferocity. There has been at least one major terrorist act in Pakistan almost every month since the beginning of 2002.

The kidnapping of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in January was followed by his murder the following month. A suicide bombing at an Islamabad church in March killed two U.S. citizens. A car bomb killed eleven French naval engineers in Karachi in May, followed by the June car bombing outside the U.S. consulate in the same city resulting in the deaths of twelve Pakistani passersby.

Terrorist attacks in Indian-controlled Kashmir have also continued unabated. An attack on the Indian parliament last December brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war, as did the May 14 massacre of Indian soldiers' families at a military camp. It is apparent that the

1. English Rendering of President General Pervez Musharraf's "Address to the Nation" (January 12, 2002), http://www.pak.gov.pk/President_Addresses/presidential_addresses_index.htm.

2. See, for instance, "President's Steps, Views Have Full Support: Gov. Sindh," *Business Recorder*, 14 January 2002. The address even caused a rally on the Pakistani stock market. ("Pakistani Stocks Rise 2.4% on Musharraf's Speech," *Agence France-Press*, 14 January 2002.)

3. For a few examples of the extensive coverage of this crackdown, see "Offices of Banned Groups Sealed: Over 100 Militants Held in Crackdown," *Dawn*, 14 January 2002; "State Bank to Freeze Assets of Militant Organizations," *Dawn*, 15 January 2002.

4. "Musharraf: Here's What I'll Do," *Washington Post*, B-11, 23 June 2002.

terrorist groups are defying General Musharraf's new policy of cooperating with the West against terrorism and may even be trying to provoke war between India and Pakistan. The government, on the other hand, is engaged in a balancing act between fighting terror and keeping Kashmiri resistance alive.⁵

The complex relationship between the state and the Islamists in Pakistan makes it difficult for the government to fulfill its promise of eliminating terrorism even if it had the will to stop all groups. India, in particular, argues that General Musharraf is willing to fight anti-U.S. terrorists affiliated with al-Qaeda only to the extent of securing U.S. assistance. From New Delhi's point of view, Pakistan is still unwilling to clamp down on jihadi groups that it sees as allies in its long-standing conflict with India.⁶

Pakistan became a center for Islamic militants when it served as the staging ground for the West's war against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan beginning in 1979.

During the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance, militants from all over the Muslim world passed through Pakistan to participate in the Afghan Jihad.⁷ They were, at the time, supported by the intelligence services of the West as well as Islamic nations. Some of them created covert networks within Pakistan, taking advantage of poor law enforcement and the state's sympathetic attitude toward pan-Islamic militancy.

Now that al-Qaeda and the Taliban have been uprooted from Afghanistan, they are using their former transit station as a temporary staging ground for terrorist operations.⁸ Domestic terrorist groups remain active, and at least some of them have developed tactical or strategic alliances with each other as well as with foreign groups.⁹

Pakistan has paid a price for not confronting the terrorists in the past. They brought their battles to Pakistan, while holding out the promise of helping in Pakistan's conflict with India. Even before the current wave of attacks, al-Qaeda's ally, Egyptian Jihad, bombed and

5. Sumit Ganguly, "Back to Brinkmanship," *American Prospect* 13, no. 12 (1 July 2002): 18–19.

6. Celia W. Dugger, "A Nuclear Question Mark: India and Pakistan Face New Pressures for War, and Peace," *New York Times*, 21 October 2001, 4-3; "Do We Have a Deal?" *Economist*, 15 June 2002, 39.

7. On Pakistan's relation to the jihadi phenomenon, see Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

8. Husain Haqqani, "Al-Qaeda's New Enemy," *Financial Times*, 8 July 2002, 19.

9. Douglas Jehl, "Groups Banned by Musharraf Join Forces for Attacks, Officials Say," *New York Times*, A-12, 1 March 2002.

destroyed the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad on November 19, 1995. A few months earlier, on March 8, 1995, two employees of the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, Gary Durell and Jacqueline Van Landingham, were killed in a terrorist attack on a consulate van.

On April 22, 1996 explosive devices were hurled on the U.S. Information Service building in Lahore. Four Americans and two Pakistanis working with the Union Texas Oil Company were killed on November 12, 1997, again in Karachi. On November 12, 1999 rocket attacks targeted offices of the United States government as well as the United Nations in Islamabad.

AT THE HEART of Pakistan's past support for Islamists is its conflict with India arising out of the dispute over Kashmir. Pakistan seeks implementation of UN resolutions for an internationally supervised plebiscite to determine the future of Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir, which India claims as its integral part. India and Pakistan have fought twice over the territory since their independence in 1947.¹⁰

Even while announcing what was billed as a break from the past, Musharraf's January 12 speech highlighted Pakistan's pre-occupation with Kashmir. "Kashmir runs in our blood," Musharraf said. "No Pakistani can afford to sever links with Kashmir.... We will continue to extend our moral, political and diplomatic support to Kashmiris. We will never budge from our principled stand on Kashmir."¹¹

By 1989, protests over a rigged state election in 1987 in Indian-controlled Kashmir had transformed into an insurgency. By all accounts, the insurrection was indigenous in its initial phase and represented Kashmiri frustration with Indian rule.¹² India has also been held responsible for massive violations of human rights in Kashmir, which Pakistan sees as the instigating factor in the continued militancy.¹³

10. For a thorough history of the conflict over Kashmir, see Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990* (Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire: Roxford Books, 1991).

11. Musharraf's "Address to the Nation."

12. Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in the Crossfire* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 231-34.

13. For several recent examples of this complaint, see Shaikh Azizur Rahman, "Officials Admit Army Killed Kashmir Civilians; Report Cites Efforts to Cover Up Attacks," *Washington Times*, A-13, 2 August 2002; "Pakistan Accuses India over Muslim Bloodshed in Kashmir," *Agence France-Presse*, 2 September 2002; Praveena Sharma, "Indian Police Kill Alleged Militant, Family Claims Execution," *Agence France-Presse*, 22 October 2002.

International media and human rights groups have been denied access to the disputed region by New Delhi, which limits the potential for agitating Kashmiri rights through political means. India's refusal to discuss Kashmir's future with Pakistan has been accompanied by international indifference over the issue. This in turn has led to the belief in Islamabad that militancy and violence may be the only means of internationalizing the core issue in the India-Pakistan dispute.

Soon after the beginning of the uprising, Pakistan started applying the experience gained during the orchestration of anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan to the Kashmir insurgency. In addition to Kashmiri refugees, training was provided to Pakistani and international volunteers who sympathized with their Muslim brethren.¹⁴ Thus, Kashmir's indigenous struggle for self-determination became linked with the global jihad of the Islamists.

The United States has been alarmed by Pakistan's involvement with the Kashmir insurgency since its earliest days. In May 1992, the Bush Senior administration threatened to designate Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism. The focus of U.S. concerns was the activities of Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID), which had been the CIA's counterpart in providing weapons and training to the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance.

U.S. Ambassador to Islamabad Nicholas Platt delivered a letter from Secretary of State James Baker to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif saying, "we have information indicating that ISID and others intend to continue to provide material support to groups that have engaged in terrorism."¹⁵

Ambassador Platt added verbally, "we are very confident of our information that your intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, and elements of the Army, are supporting Kashmiri and Sikh militants who carry out acts of terrorism."

"This support takes the form of providing weapons, training, and assistance in infiltration ... We're talking about direct, covert Government of Pakistan support. There is no doubt in our mind about this ... Our information is certain. It does not come from the

14. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 186–87.

15. This paragraph, and the five that follow, are based on the correspondence viewed by the author during his years in the Pakistani government.

Indian government. Please consider the serious consequences to our relationship if this support continues.”

Prime Minister Sharif responded to the U.S. demarche with assurances that any covert support to militants fighting India would be discontinued. But he also listed Pakistan's grievances with India over Kashmir and asked for an active U.S. role in resolving that dispute. The United States did not carry out its threat, though Pakistan was subjected to numerous sanctions over its nuclear program and, after Musharraf's coup in 1999, for its lack of democracy.

Ten years later, little has changed in Pakistan's basic stance. The government denies direct involvement in supporting the militants, emphasizes the indigenous character of the Kashmiri resistance and holds private citizens and groups responsible for any support mobilized in Pakistan for the Kashmiris. Like Sharif in 1992, Musharraf, too, links the end of militancy to the resolution of the Kashmir question even after the changed circumstances since September 11.¹⁶

Over the years, the connection with Kashmir has provided social respectability to the jihadi movement, which has ambitions beyond Kashmir and Pakistan. The state apparatus, particularly the Pakistani military, looked upon the jihadis as low-cost foot soldiers who could tie down large numbers of Indian troops in Kashmir. In the process, the jihadis managed to lay the foundations of a vast infrastructure that includes newspapers and magazines, Islamic charitable trusts, and religious schools (madrassas). Tolerance and covert support of extremist groups have allowed them to spread their tentacles throughout Pakistani society and to mobilize large sums of money for their operations.¹⁷

Ideologically motivated religious extremists have also developed links with organized crime, especially in the city of Karachi.¹⁸ At times, this underworld alliance appears to command greater means than those of the country's police or intelligence services.

16. "Musharraf, Here's What I'll Do."

17. For a treatment of this phenomenon since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, see Rashid, *Taliban*, 88–91. On the continuing tolerance of extremism after September 11, see John F. Burns, "America Inspires Both Longing and Loathing in Muslim World," *New York Times*, 16 September 2001, 1–4; Douglas Frantz, "Sentiment in Pakistani Town Is Ardently Pro-Taliban," *New York Times*, B-1, 27 September 2001.

18. On the Karachi criminal underground, see Ghulam Hasnain, "Karachi's Gang Wars," *Newsline*, September 2001.

It is also difficult for some members of the law enforcement machinery to look upon Islamists as enemies of the state, after almost two decades of treating them as national heroes. One of the accused in the kidnapping and murder of Daniel Pearl was an employee of the Special Branch of Karachi police. A member of the paramilitary Rangers has been charged with plotting to murder Musharraf in concert with the group responsible for the car bomb attack at the U.S. Consulate in Karachi.

Pakistan has looked upon militant Islam as a strategic option for at least three decades, going back to the Bangladesh war with India in 1971. The anti-Soviet Afghan resistance fortified the relations between Islamists and the Pakistan military, which had already been formed.

During the 1971 war against India and the people of Pakistan's then eastern wing, Pakistan's military rulers had helped create volunteer militias of Bengali Islamists to fight the pro-Bangladesh militia and Indian troops. India had backed Bangladeshi fighters, though the trouble in then East Pakistan had started with Pakistani leaders' refusal to accept the prospect of Bengalis leading a united Pakistan after the general election of 1970. Instead of accepting political negotiations with Bengali politicians who secured a majority in that election, the West Pakistan-led military chose to define the issue as a religious war between Islamic Pakistan and Hindu-backed Bangladesh.

The *al-Badr* and *al-Shams* Islamist militias could not help Pakistan retain control of Bangladesh. The Pakistani military saw the bifurcation of Pakistan as the result of collaboration between secular nationalists and India. This led to the belief that Islamists were the most dependable political allies of the Pakistani state, especially in resisting Indian ascendancy in South Asia. This belief was strengthened during the anti-Soviet phase of the Afghan resistance. It also manifested itself in the form of Pakistan's support for the Taliban as well as the Kashmiri militants.¹⁹

Pakistan's involvement with the jihadi groups and its tolerance of armed extremist religious groups have contributed to generally ineffective law enforcement in the country. Musharraf himself has

19. On the East Pakistan crisis, see G. W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), especially chapters 6–8. On anti-Soviet resistance in South Asia, see Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers: Politics of a Divided Subcontinent* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

acknowledged that “Pakistan has become a soft state where law means little, if anything.”²⁰ Sectarian and ethnic murders as well as unexplained bombings have been a common occurrence for the last several years. At least five million small arms are in private hands in Pakistan.²¹ The most notable of these is the Kalashnikov assault rifle that served as the weapon of choice during the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance.

Even if General Musharraf decides finally to root out Islamic militancy, it will be years before the terrorist networks are completely eliminated. Resources of the police and intelligence-gathering agencies are over-stretched as the military government uses them to stay in power and not just to keep crime and terrorism in check. The terrorists know that and take advantage of the state’s weakness.

General Musharraf has clamped down on groups directly linked with al-Qaeda, and his government has helped the United States in apprehending foreign fighters, including high-ranking al-Qaeda figures.²² But Pakistan will have to completely abandon using Islamic militants as an instrument of policy if terrorism is to be rolled back effectively.

India mistrusts Pakistani intentions, while Pakistan demands guarantees of dialogue over Kashmir before completely closing the chapter on Kashmiri militancy. India’s refusal to withdraw the threat of military force, initiated after the terrorist attack on parliament last December, was cited in Pakistan as an argument against reversal of policy. Supporters of the insurgents within Islamabad’s policy-making circles said that Islamic militants would serve as an important fifth column for Pakistani soldiers, sabotaging the much larger and better-equipped Indian army, in case of war.²³

More than two thousand members of Islamic militias were detained after General Musharraf announced the ban on five militant groups

20. Musharraf’s “Address to the Nation.”

21. Tara Kartha, “Pakistan and the Taliban: Flux in an Old Relationship?” *Strategic Analysis* 24, no. 7 (October 2000); International Centre for Peace Initiatives, *The Future of Pakistan* (Mumbai, 2002), 63.

22. See, for example, Karl Vick and Kamran Khan, “Raid Netted Top Operative of Al Qaeda,” *Washington Post*, A-1, 2 April 2002; Susan Schmidt and Dan Eggen, “Suspected Planner of 9/11 Attacks Captured in Pakistan after Gunfight; Two Other Al Qaeda Members Killed, Several More Arrested,” *Washington Post*, A-1, 14 September 2002.

23. Vick and Khan, “Pakistani Ambivalence Frustrates Hope for Kashmir Peace,” *Washington Post*, A-18, 29 June 2002.

in his January 12 speech. Of these, 1,800 were released after signing pledges of good conduct. The government announced another crack-down in May, though it is likely that the four hundred militants detained this time around were part of the batch that had earlier been released.²⁴

The government has arrested some leading militants, and several sectarian terrorists have been killed in police encounters.²⁵ But Pakistan remains far from the stage of a complete break with its past covert support for Islamic militants.

The halfway approach to tackling terrorism has left Pakistan vulnerable to pressure from both the Islamists and the international community. General Musharraf's continuing war against domestic political rivals and the ongoing confrontation with India give the terrorists an advantage. They have nothing to protect, only targets to destroy. Musharraf, by contrast, must safeguard Pakistan's interests in addition to keeping himself, and the military, in power.

Recent clashes between Pakistani forces with al-Qaeda fighters in the country's remote tribal areas indicate that there may be no turning back from General Pervez Musharraf's decision to join the international coalition against terrorism. Even if Pakistan wanted to nuance its position on the issue, making distinctions between terrorists targeting the United States and Pakistan and terrorists opposed to India, neither its international friends nor the terrorists would allow such distinctions.

Pakistan must now bravely complete its U-turn and end its reputation as a militant-infested nation. This can be accomplished if three conditions are met:

First, Pakistan's relations with India must move toward normalization. The tactical deployment of Islamic militancy as a means of combating Indian military advantage was the starting point of Pakistan's involvement with the jihadis. In the absence of peaceful relations with India, it is unlikely that Pakistan will be able to completely close the option of calling upon Islamists in case of a confrontation with its traditional rival.

24. Ian Bruce, "Radical Groups Join Forces in Jihad; CIA Claims Consulate Car Bomb Was Work of Terror Alliance," *The Herald* (Glasgow), 17 June 2002, 10.

25. "Wanted Sectarian Activist Killed in Encounter," *Dawn*, 5 April 2002; "Police Make Public Arrest of Sectarian Activists," *Dawn*, 2 July 2002.

From Pakistan's point of view, normalization of ties with India would involve the beginning of a process of dialogue about the future status of Jammu and Kashmir. The international community can encourage such a process, even without an immediate resolution of the dispute.

Second, decision making in Pakistan must revert to elected civilian leaders rather than being vested in the military. Over the last ten years, the intelligence-military complex in Pakistan has retained control of key decision making over matters relating to national security. As a result, conduct of diplomacy by civilians has been hampered by covert operations run by the military. Civilian leaders have often been vilified or undermined for seeking to change the course of the country's Afghan and Kashmir policies.

Since 1999, direct military rule has also subordinated Pakistani decision making to military biases. Given the history of the last thirty years, in particular, it is clear that Pakistan's military looks upon the Islamic militants as its allies against India. Mainstream civilian politicians, on the other hand, are generally secular and less strident about confrontation with India. Political and economic factors have weighed more in the calculations of civilians than have the strategic doctrines propounded by the military.

PAKISTAN'S ISLAMISTS had never been able to do well in electoral politics until the legislative elections of October 10, 2002 when they won a significant number of seats in parliament and control of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) provincial assembly with only 11 percent of the popular vote.²⁶ Their strength in recent years has been the direct result of covert state patronage and the military's decision to assign them a role in its regional strategy. Even their recent election success resulted from the military's efforts to weaken mainstream

26. Although Islamists won only 11 percent of the vote in Pakistan's October 10 parliamentary elections, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) was able to capture 52 of 272 seats in the national parliament and an absolute majority in the North West Frontier Province, thanks to low voter turnout and government interference in the election cycle. Nevertheless, the MMA fared substantially better in 2002 than in 1997, when it captured two national seats. For detailed results from the 2002 parliamentary election, see <http://www.heraldelections.com>. For an analysis of the significance of the 2002 elections, see Ron Moreau and Zahid Hussain, with Michael Hirsh, "A Big Vote for Jihad," *Newsweek*, 21 October 2002, 39.

political parties. In the long run, however, a democratic political process is likely to contain Islamist influence, making it easier to isolate and eliminate extremist groups.

Third, Pakistan must disarm all militias and dismantle the jihadi infrastructure. The international community should use all means at its disposal to ensure this is done with broad national consensus within Pakistan.

So far, the military regime has not sought the cooperation of legitimate Islamic groups or mainstream political parties. Instead, it has antagonized traditional religious and political parties and allowed the war against terrorism to be cast as a U.S. war being fought with Pakistan's help. Domestic political disputes have prevented any scheme of disarming local militias. For terrorism to be defeated, Pakistan would have to make a serious effort in re-orienting its national priorities from military power and militancy toward modernity and development.

Pakistan needs to roll back terrorism to secure its own future. But that objective cannot be attained through half-hearted measures or without a paradigm shift in the Pakistani military's worldview. In the absence of a constitutional democratic government, Pakistan's ruling elite seeks acceptance through Islamic rhetoric and confrontation with India. Until that changes, terrorists will continue to feel emboldened to challenge the inefficient state apparatus that lacks both legitimacy and broad public support.