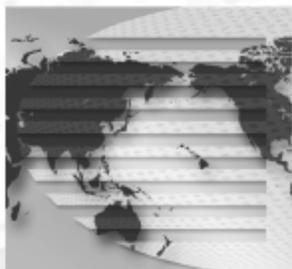




Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies



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The Asia-Pacific and the United States 2004–2005

Dr. Robert G. Wirsing is a Professor with the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. His work focuses mainly on the contemporary politics, international relational, and defense and security issues of South Asia. His recent publications are *Kashmir in the Shadow of War* (M. E. Sharpe, 2003) and (co-editor) *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (APCSS, 2004).

Pakistan and the United States 2004–2005: Deepening the Entente

ROBERT G. WIRSING

KEY FINDINGS

- The year 2004 ended with ties between the United States and Pakistan still showing signs of fragility but with more reasons than before to consider a long-term alliance between them a realistic prospect.
- U.S. government military and economic assistance to Pakistan was beginning to achieve a scale by the end of 2004 commensurate with Pakistan's designation in June as a Major Non NATO Ally (MNNA).
- In return for U.S. aid, Pakistan committed itself to a three-pronged counter-terrorism program consisting of efforts to (1) suppress militant Islamic extremist activity within Pakistan; (2) stabilize the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan; and (3) end infiltration by militant separatists across the Line of Control (LoC) into Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir.
- In spite of deepening collaboration between the United States and Pakistan, substantial differences remained over the war on terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and democratic reform.
- However, the most likely source of severe discord between the United States and Pakistan remained unchanged—differences in each side's strategic assessments of neighboring India.
- For U.S.-Pakistan relations to retain a reasonable prospect of surviving past the immediate task of fighting terrorism, Washington and Islamabad will have to forge a vision of regional security and order that more fully accommodates their respective mutual interests.

UPGRADING OF TIES

The year 2004 ended with ties between the United States and Pakistan still showing signs of fragility but with more reasons than before to consider a long-term alliance between them a realistic prospect. In July of this year, the official *9/11 Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, apart from commending President (General) Pervez Musharraf's government as "the best hope for stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan," made the remarkable recommendation that Washington should not treat Pakistan merely as an "ally of convenience."

If Musharraf stands for enlightened moderation in a fight for his life and for the life of his country, the United States should be willing to make hard choices too, and make the difficult long-term commitment to the future of Pakistan. Sustaining the current scale of aid to Pakistan, the United States should support Pakistan's government in its struggle against extremists with a comprehensive effort that extends from military aid to support for better education, so long as Pakistan's leaders remain willing to make difficult choices of their own.

On 16 June, only a few weeks earlier and as if in anticipation of the 9/11 Commission's thinking, the Bush administration designated Pakistan as a Major Non NATO Ally (MNNA)—a classification that, technically at least, seemed to lift Pakistan into the rarefied ranks of such Washington favorites as the Philippines, Thailand, Israel, Egypt, Japan, Australia, and the Republic of Korea. MNNA status implied that Pakistan would have easier access to military supplies along with enhanced participation in Department of Defense research and development programs—a stunning about-face in U.S. policy when viewed against the total ban on cooperation with Pakistan that had followed invocation of the anti-proliferation Pressler Amendment in 1990.

U.S. government military and economic assistance to Pakistan was beginning to achieve a scale by the end of 2004 commensurate with the MNNA designation. In an updated Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress (K. Alan Kronstadt and Bruce Vaughn, *Terrorism in South Asia*) released in December 2004, the rising curve in U.S. aid was readily visible.

When FY2005 appropriations are included Pakistan will have received \$1.16 billion in direct U.S. security-related assistance since September 2001 ... Pentagon documents indicate that Pakistan received [additional] coalition support funding of \$1.32 billion for the period from January 2003-September 2004, an amount roughly equal to one-third of Pakistan's total defense expenditures during that period.

In November 2004, Washington announced plans to sell Pakistan eight P-3C maritime reconnaissance aircraft, six Phalanx naval guns, and 2,000 TOW anti-armor missiles—valued at about \$1.2 billion. This announcement was shadowed by persistent reports that the Pentagon was giving serious consideration as well to Pakistan's request for new F-16 fighter aircraft. Inevitably, Washington's spiraling arms aid to Pakistan triggered indignant responses from India.

Pakistan compensated Washington for its ballooning security assistance with a level of cooperation in the fight against terrorism that earned frequent warm praise from top American officials.

COUNTER-TERRORIST COOPERATION

In return for U.S. aid, Pakistan committed itself to a three-pronged counter-terrorist program consisting of efforts to (1) suppress militant Islamic extremist activity within Pakistan; (2) stabilize the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan by sending armed forces into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in search of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters infiltrated from Afghanistan; and (3) end infiltration by militant separatists across the Line of Control (LoC) into Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistani efforts to suppress militant Islamic extremist activity within Pakistan included a range of activities extending from the reform of fundamentalist religious schools (*madrasahs*) to the seizure of terrorists' financial assets, the banning of militant organizations, the round-up of illicit arms, and the arrest and incarceration of militants. According to an official U.S. count, by the end of 2004 Islamabad had rounded up 550 alleged terrorists and their supporters and had turned over more than 400 of them to U.S. custody. Among those were a number of top al-Qaeda figures, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington.

By August 2004, Islamabad had deployed about 75,000 troops to its western provinces, the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan, in a bid to stabilize the western border and to eliminate sanctuaries within Pakistan for militants fleeing coalition forces on the Afghanistan side of the border. Thousands of Pakistani troops took part in a pitched battle with Islamic militants at Wana in South Waziristan in March 2004. Reportedly, 46 Pakistani soldiers were killed in the fighting.

On Pakistan's northeastern border with India, the first anniversary of the cease-fire on the LoC in Kashmir passed in late November 2004 without a single major incident having disturbed it. A brief episode involving mortar firing in mid-January 2005 was not expected to precipitate a breakdown in the ceasefire. As for insurgent and counter-insurgent activity within Indian-controlled Kashmir, these showed only modest diminution. There was a noticeable change, however, in the pattern of cross-border infiltration. India's Chief of Army Staff General N. C. Vij reportedly acknowledged in mid-December 2004 that the level of infiltration of militants across the LoC in Kashmir was 90 percent lower in the previous two months in comparison with the same period last year. His figures tallied with earlier estimates indicating a major drop in infiltration coinciding with the launching of the India-Pakistan peace dialogue in January 2004. General Vij claimed that the reduction in infiltration was due exclusively to India's own initiatives to improve policing of the LoC (installation of fencing and electronic sensing devices, in addition to stepped-up patrolling). Islamabad, however, had persuasive grounds for the claim that its pledge to curb infiltration had been kept.

DISCORDANT ISSUES

In spite of the deepening collaboration between the United States and Pakistan in 2004, there remained a number of contentious issues yet to be resolved between them.

Support for terrorism

American critics of the Bush administration's increasingly close ties with Pakistan were unrelenting in their insistence that Pakistan's counter-terrorist actions were half-hearted,

at best, and that “Pakistan today,” as Ashley J. Tellis put it in the Winter 2004-05 issue of *The Washington Quarterly*, “is clearly both part of the problem and the solution to the threat of terrorism facing the United States.”

Pakistan today deliberately remains reluctant to pursue the Taliban along its northwestern frontier and continues to support various terrorist groups operating in Kashmir. The many welcome changes in Pakistan’s strategic direction under Musharraf since September 11 have therefore not extended to completely renouncing terrorism as an instrument of national policy. Islamabad continues to support terrorist groups in pursuit of geopolitical interests it perceives as critical, such as securing a friendly, even pliant regime in Afghanistan and wresting the state of Jammu and Kashmir away from India.

Pakistani critics of their government’s support for Washington’s war on terrorism were no less outspoken. Typically, they clung to a version of events diametrically opposite that of their American counterparts. As they saw things, Musharraf was Washington’s puppet and Pakistan Washington’s pawn in a high-stakes strategic contest for control of Middle Eastern energy resources. The so-called Global War on Terrorism was, in the view of many, an elaborate disguise for a war on Islam—or, at least, a war on Islamic militants refusing to bow to continued Western global hegemony. Seen from this perspective, Pakistan’s cooperation with Washington’s counter-terrorist operations in the region deserved to be faulted for its excessive servility, not for being half-hearted.

The truth of the matter was to be found somewhere in between these two perspectives. Having been Taliban-ruled Afghanistan’s principal ally up until October 2001, Islamabad was bound, of course, to have serious misgivings about the impact that unalloyed collaboration with Washington in post-Taliban Afghanistan would have on the long-term security of its western borders. Just as clear, however, was the fact that for Pakistan there was no turning back from the course it had chosen. The path of cooperation in the war on terrorism was certain to be bumpy, in other words, but there was very little prospect that Pakistan would stray very far from it.

Educational reform

One of the most popular targets of Pakistan’s American critics during the year was what they called Pakistan’s failure at educational reform—its failure, in other words, to take seriously the backward conditions characterizing both the public schools and the mosque-associated private religious schools or *madrassahs*. In the critics’ judgment, the combination of badly neglected public schools and intolerance-nurturing *madrassahs* was a nearly perfect nursery for extremist ideology and terrorism. One of a tiny handful of countries in the world spending less than two percent of its GNP on education, Pakistan found the correction of glaring deficiencies in both its public and religious schools occupying a surprisingly high position on the list of U.S. aid priorities. The 9/11 Commission report, for instance, urged Washington to include in the “comprehensive support” of Pakistan recommended by the Commission major attention to the improvement of education. This call was repeated in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act passed by Congress in December 2004. In addition, Congress mandated in separate legislation that the Secretary of State regularly report to Congress on Pakistan’s

educational reforms and on the U.S. government's plans to assist them. Adding to the alarm felt in regard to Pakistan's schools was a steady stream of detailed and widely circulated reports by prestigious non-governmental bodies, such as the International Crisis Group (ICG), highlighting Islamabad's alleged persistent inaction. In *Unfulfilled Promises: Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism*, published in January 2004, the ICG concluded, "Bent on appeasing the mullahs, the military continues to stall on measures to contain Islamist extremism, including *madrasah* reform."

That progress in educational reform would be slow in coming was hardly surprising. Restructuring a nation's schools, as any American educator can attest, is never swift or easy; and when the restructuring lends itself, as is clearly the case in regard to the *madrasahs*, to the charge that its object is in large part to secularize the curriculum and thus potentially to marginalize the teaching of Islam, then at least some of Islamabad's foot-dragging is understandable.

Nuclear proliferation

Easily the most delicate outstanding issue between Washington and Islamabad during the year was that of nuclear proliferation. In 1990, this issue had precipitated a rupture in U.S.-Pakistan relations that included Washington's imposition on Pakistan of a nearly total regime of economic and military sanctions that were fully lifted only in the wake of 9/11. The proliferation issue's more recent surfacing came in the form of startling revelations about the activities of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and a national hero.

On 4 February 2004, Khan admitted in a sensational confession aired on state-run PTV that many of the disclosures about the "alleged proliferation activities by certain Pakistanis and foreigners over the last two decades" were true, that an elaborate international network for the illicit peddling of secret nuclear technologies did exist, and that he had played a crucial role in the network's activities. Khan, offering his "unqualified apologies" to his countrymen, assured them, in the face of the enormous skepticism of foreign observers, "that there was never ever any kind of authorization for these activities by any government official." Musharraf's formal pardon of Khan quickly followed.

Accumulating intelligence had begun to cast suspicion on Khan in the late 1990s; and by early 2000 his position at the apex of a covert global network engaged in the sale and acquisition of nuclear technology was more and more apparent. In March 2001, American pressure on the Musharraf government apparently helped trigger Khan's abrupt dismissal from his post as director of the Dr. A. Q. Khan Research Laboratories. Stunning disclosures in late 2003 by both the Libyan and Iranian governments that their uranium enrichment programs had been given Pakistani assistance added to the Musharraf government's increasing embarrassment. Islamabad insisted that the nuclear sales had ended once Musharraf took power in 1999, and that, in any case, they were motivated entirely by the "personal ambition and greed" of a few nuclear scientists; but mounting evidence that the nuclear sales network had significantly enhanced the nuclear weapons programs of Libya, Iran, and North Korea—all three listed as supporters of terrorism by the U.S. Department of State—and that its operations had not ended in 1999 considerably strengthened Pakistan's critics.

An unclassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report to Congress posted on its Web site on 23 November 2004 identified "the A. Q. Khan network" repeatedly as a

principal player in the international nuclear black market; but it discreetly avoided implicating Pakistan's leadership directly. That was most unlikely, however, to prevent further assaults on Pakistan's reputation for nuclear responsibility; and it was equally unlikely to shield Islamabad against continuing pressure from Washington to share the information gained from the government's interrogations of Khan and others.

Democratic reform

Musharraf's televised announcement to the nation on 30 December 2004 that he had decided to stay on as Chief of Army Staff broke a public pledge he had made a year earlier to give up the post by year's end. His decision came as no surprise. In November, the pro-military ruling faction of the Pakistan Muslim League had pushed a bill through the National Assembly that sanctioned Musharraf's retention of both the civil and military portfolios until 2007, when new national elections are due. The action had been justified at the time as needed "to bring stability and ensure a smooth continuation of democracy." In his address, Musharraf also claimed that his retention of both offices was needed to fight extremism and to continue the dialogue with India over Kashmir. His critics, in turn, were almost universally agreed that his decision confirmed that he had never been serious about democratic reform.

Musharraf's government has undoubtedly taken some deliberate steps in the direction of democratic reform. Among the more important such steps were the implementation of the Devolution of Power Plan announced in August 2000, and the holding of provincial and national assembly elections in October 2002. Critics called the elections rigged and corrupt; and they ripped into the devolution scheme as a plan ostensibly aimed at the expansion of local control and accountability but whose impact would almost certainly be the increased centralization of power. In March 2004, three years after the plan's inception, the International Crisis Group argued in *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?*,

In practice [the devolution] plan has undercut established political parties and drained power away from the provinces while doing little to minimize corruption or establish clear accountability at a local level. The reforms, far from enhancing democracy, have strengthened military rule and may actually raise the risks of internal conflict.

Musharraf appeared in no immediate risk of falling out of favor with Washington over Pakistan's somewhat tattered democratic credentials. In his second inaugural, President Bush committed the United States to support the spread of democratic movements and institutions throughout the world "with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world," yet Musharraf's decision to stay on as Army chief came and went with scarcely any comment by Washington. Richard N. Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations and erstwhile director of policy planning for the State Department, seemed to voice the dominant view in Washington when he said in a *Washington Post* op-ed piece in late January 2005 that "the United States simply cannot afford to allow promoting democracy to trump cooperation on what is truly essential." Many Pakistanis, meanwhile, seemed convinced that Musharraf's decision to retain command of the military had, in fact, been taken only after having been discreetly blessed by Washington.

INDIA AND KASHMIR: THE 'DE-COUPLING' DILEMMA

When all is said and done, however, the most likely source of severe discord between the United States and Pakistan over the next five years or so remains the same: differences in the strategic assessment each side makes of neighboring India. The thinking of Pakistani leaders continues to be dominated by a view of India as hegemonic in its aspirations, threatening militarily, and uncompromising in its pursuit of its national interests. Accordingly, while Pakistanis fully accepted the need for bilateral confidence-building measures and engaged willingly in a sustained peace dialogue with India, they did so with markedly modest expectations. The Bush administration, even more than the Clinton administration, acknowledged India's rise as a great Asian power and made strenuous efforts to build a cooperative strategic partnership with it. By 2005, military-to-military cooperation between Washington and New Delhi had achieved dimensions utterly unthinkable only a decade ago.

The Bush administration echoed the Clinton administration's optimistic endorsement of the "de-hyphenating" or "de-coupling" of America's relations with India and Pakistan, asserting that it could deal with each country on terms independent of the other. A completely de-linked policy seemed wholly impractical, however, given not only the persistent territorial dispute between them over Kashmir but also the enormity and complexity of the nuclear and conventional weapons rivalry between them. "Relations with these two bitter rivals cannot truly be decoupled in practice until the major source of security competition between them is resolved—that is, the disposition of Kashmir," Christine Fair aptly observed in a recent RAND publication (*The Counterterrorism Coalitions: Cooperation with Pakistan and India*, 2004).

India and Pakistan have made impressive headway in regard to their bilateral relations since the peace initiative got underway in earnest following the SAARC summit in Islamabad in January 2004. Agreement on substantive matters, however, has proven elusive. To New Delhi's great annoyance, Islamabad has been notably reluctant, for instance, to shut down entirely the militant Islamist networks that it has employed for years in pursuit of its strategic objectives in both Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir. Its reluctance clearly derives in no small measure from its suspicions about Washington's long-term objectives in the region. As the Naval Postgraduate School's South Asia expert Vali Nasr commented in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July 2004, the

Pakistan military continues to view United States' security considerations with suspicion, believing that in the absence of greater guarantees regarding Pakistan's long run security interests it is dangerous to more forcefully confront Islamic forces and to remove the threat of extremism to Kabul and Delhi. Eradicating extremism would be tantamount to dismantling a weapons system without countervailing concessions from India or Afghanistan. The United States must address Pakistan's strategic concerns as a part of the war on terror.

One thing is plain: It will take much more than mere exhortation to get India and Pakistan over the hump of their longstanding rivalry; and Washington will have to abandon the rhetoric of de-coupling if it is going to help them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR 2005: TOWARDS A PERMANENT ALLIANCE?

In its efforts to forge a durable strategic partnership with Islamabad in the post-9/11 period, Washington has run up against a number of major obstacles. One of these, as has been pointed out, is powerful and increasingly important India's noticeable chagrin whenever "strategic partnership" begins to translate into the transfer to Pakistan of major weapons systems, naturally (and, often, justifiably) viewed by Indians as intended for use mainly against them. Another obstacle is the character of Pakistan itself—a country whose present circumstances lend themselves to exaggerated depictions of it as perpetually teetering on the brink of political collapse, economic ruin, nuclear catastrophe, or religious extremism.

There is a third obstacle, however, and it may be the toughest to overcome. Its essence was captured in *Mapping the Global Future*, the report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project, published in December 2004. Based on consultations with non-governmental experts in many countries, the report includes a summary of how foreigners view the role of the United States as a driver of regional and global developments. Asian participants, the report says,

felt that US preoccupation with the war on terrorism is largely irrelevant to the security concerns of most Asians. The key question that the United States needs to ask itself is whether it can offer Asian states an appealing vision of regional security and order that will rival and perhaps exceed that offered by China.

Washington, in other words, is strategically focused on fighting terrorism in a part of the world where terrorism simply does not rank very high on the public's list of priorities. With respect to Pakistan, the result is that the U.S.-Pakistan strategic partnership is at risk of seeming irrelevant when it comes to increasing Pakistan's chances of maturing into a stable, moderate, and modern Islamic state—an objective to which most Pakistanis would surely commit themselves enthusiastically. Killing and capturing terrorists is not perceived by Pakistanis as the best way to ensure themselves a better future. Neither is introducing reforms into Pakistan's thousands of *madrassahs*.

For U.S.-Pakistan relations to retain a reasonable prospect of lasting beyond the immediate task of fighting terrorism, Washington and Islamabad will have to forge a vision of regional security and order that more fully accommodates their respective mutual interests.