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# Managing Frenemies: What Should the United States Do About Pakistan?

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## Introduction

Today, Pakistan is perhaps the hardest challenge for U.S. foreign policy. By comparison, a foreign policy challenge such as the U.S. relationship with China seems more straightforward. For starters, there is a broad understanding of what U.S. policy towards Beijing should be. While there are differences on the margins, U.S. policy towards China follows a certain course that is easy to appreciate, at least conceptually: it involves a balancing of competing security and economic interests. The United States seeks to preserve the gains arising from economic interdependence with China, while simultaneously deterring China from misusing the growing power arising from its economic ties with the wider world. Toward this end, the United States continues to engage China on one hand, while on the other hand maintaining a robust military capability and a strong network of allies and friends in the Indo-Pacific. Although implementing such a strategy is often challenging in practice, it is aided by the fact that there is a continuing demand for American presence on the part of the Asian states and, furthermore, because there is a certain equilibrium in the U.S.-China relationship. This equilibrium may not survive forever, but at least for the moment, it is on a reasonably even keel.

With Pakistan, in contrast, it is very difficult to understand what the best U.S. policy ought to be, even in a conceptual sense. This difficulty arises for three reasons. The first reason is that Pakistan's problems are very deep-rooted, are quite comprehensive, and are viciously reinforcing. Every problem in Pakistan, unfortunately, is linked to every other problem in Pakistan, so policymakers often do not have the luxury of being able to separate out the problems and deal with each individually. If a policymaker seeks to remedy one problem, it soon becomes clear that there is another tightly linked problem beyond it, and yet another beyond that second problem as well. Consequently, Pakistan's maladies are like Russian nesting dolls, with each apparent problem containing within it all the other problems, thus leading eventually to one enormous overall "problem of Pakistan."

The second reason that Pakistan is such a policy challenge is because it is a state with a dual character. It has a civilian and a military arm, and each of these arms varies dramatically both in its motivations and in its capacity. A crude characterization of the problem might be that the civilian arm in Pakistan is better motivated than the military arm is to do the right things from the perspective of the nation's long-term transformation, but it lacks the capacity to make the most important decisions that matter for Pakistan's long-term interests. The military arm, in contrast, is much stronger than the civilian arm, but it is unfortunately fixated on maintaining a garrison state and a war economy because of its permanent obsession with India. Moreover, it has a history of repeatedly making the wrong decisions where Pakistan's national interests are concerned. And, to this day, it persists in policies that, at least from the point of view of the United States, are counterproductive for Pakistani and American interests alike.

The third reason for the difficulty of dealing with Pakistan is that the United States is intimately involved in Pakistan's political affairs and has been so since the founding of the Pakistani state. To be sure, the United States did not seek such a role, but it was nonetheless entrapped into internal Pakistani politics and the progressive disfigurement of the Pakistani state over time because of the Pakistani military's enthusiasm for an alliance with Washington and Washington's own willingness to integrate Pakistan into the larger alliance system intended to contain the Soviet Union. To complicate matters further, the United States today has a dependence on Pakistan that is matched only by its fears of Pakistan. American dependence arises from its extensive reliance on Pakistan for the success of its military operations in Afghanistan; consequently, it fears not engaging Pakistan because of the dangers that option embodies for the larger American counterterrorism campaign in Southern Asia. Between the two, the United States often ends up in a situation where it gets the worst of both worlds: a Pakistan that ruthlessly manipulates the United States at the strategic level even as Pakistan itself dangerously atrophies further domestically.

For these three reasons, the question of what to do about Pakistan turns out to be more difficult than many of the other foreign policy challenges facing the United States. The analysis that follows proceeds in two parts: first, elucidating U.S. interests in Pakistan along with a brief assessment of the leverage or opportunities the United States has to

shape Pakistani decisions with respect to those interests; and second, examining the strategic options facing the United States in regard to Pakistan after taking into account the realities defining Pakistan's condition.

## U.S. Interests in Pakistan

The U.S. has three broad interests with respect to Pakistan. The first is to ensure the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. The second is to secure Pakistan's cooperation with respect to counterterrorism and to enable coalition success in Afghanistan. And the third interest is to ensure the broader stability of Pakistan as a country and as a state.

### *Security of Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal*

Most American policymakers would agree that, however else Pakistan affects the United States, securing Pakistan's nuclear capabilities are America's first and foremost priority. This objective is pivotal because nuclear weapons are capable of inflicting catastrophic damage were they ever to be employed; as a result, any misuse of Pakistan's nuclear weapons can damage American interests in ways that go far beyond anything that Pakistan does outside the nuclear realm.

Therefore, making certain that Pakistan's nuclear weapons are secure remains the first objective of American policy. This objective implicates two variables in turn: the character of the Pakistani army and the character of the Pakistani state.

The Pakistani army has an autonomous interest in protecting its own nuclear weapons, which are the crown jewels of its capability. Were the Army to lose control of its nuclear weapons, it would have to confront an infuriated international community that could coerce Pakistan in very embarrassing ways. And so from the point of view of Pakistan's survival as well as from the point of view of the Pakistani army's own institutional interests, the Army has as great an interest in protecting its nuclear weapons as outsiders do. It is reasonable to presume, therefore, that the first-order challenge of protecting the Pakistani nuclear arsenal is, in a sense, met, because the Pakistani army has strong incentives to protect its nuclear weaponry irrespective of what the United States and the international community do.

Today, American assistance to Pakistan with respect to protecting the country's nuclear arsenal, although important for all the obvious reasons, is also quite modest because the most critical elements of assistance that the United States can offer have already been conveyed since the first term of the Bush administration. The Pakistani army at that time was quite eager to accept U.S. assistance because, particularly after the A.Q. Khan problem became public, Pakistan recognized that it needed to better protect both its weapons and its nuclear estate. Dramatic American assistance of the kind that would make huge qualitative differences to Pakistani nuclear security has now tapered, because assistance that goes beyond what has already been accepted would be highly intrusive, and it is certain that Pakistan would decline such forms of aid both to protect

the opacity of its nuclear program and on grounds of sovereignty. So as far as the United States is concerned, therefore, Washington has come close to the limits of what it can do with respect to offering assistance to Pakistan in regards to nuclear security: it will continue to provide modest assistance of the kind that the Pakistan Army is comfortable with, but the high-end technological solutions to nuclear security that are employed by the United States to protect its own nuclear weaponry, for example, cannot be transferred to Pakistan for legal reasons at the U.S. end and political reasons in Pakistan.

On closer consideration, it is likely that the Pakistani state and its long-term evolution represent the biggest challenge to the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons in peacetime. As long as the Pakistani state remains stable and is dominated in the main by moderate political forces, the threats to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal are limited. If the character of the Pakistani state, however, changes – that is, the state becomes less and less capable over time and it begins to lose control over its own territories – and the character of Pakistan's political culture becomes more and more radical – with the result that extremist forces become pervasive in the government, the armed forces, and other institutions of state – then the risks to the security of Pakistan's nuclear capabilities increase.

Unfortunately, the long-term trends in Pakistan are not particularly positive where this challenge is concerned. But this problem is akin to a cancer: it is not a danger that is going to manifest itself suddenly or overnight. It is a danger that will become visible slowly and over a long period of time, meaning that there is a significant risk that outsiders or even Pakistanis themselves will be unable to detect the thresholds when marginal changes begin to become problematic.

Pakistan's potential for deterioration is captured by the metaphor of the slowly boiling frog – it will occur imperceptibly, it will occur in small and discrete changes, and before anyone perceives it, the world could be confronted by a very different kind of Pakistan. This is something that the United States pays close attention to, but Washington too is handicapped by the challenge of understanding when the structural deterioration in Pakistan, which has been underway for a long time now, is going to pass over the mark of becoming really consequential because of all the changes now taking place in plain sight.

The bottom line is this: Pakistan's nuclear weapons are relatively secure in peacetime. There are undoubtedly specific technical or procedural vulnerabilities but the biggest challenges that the Pakistan Army faces in regards to nuclear security on a day-to-day basis are insider threats. Even these, however, can be managed by the counter-intelligence and the security components of the Pakistani state so long as the threats are restricted to lone individuals and not organized military formations. The long-term security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, on the other hand, is a serious issue of concern because of the changes that are taking place within Pakistani society and within the Pakistani state in the face of a rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal. The weakening of state institutions, coupled with the growing radicalization in parts of Pakistani society

(for example, the Punjab), open the door to increased dangers arising from a nexus of organized insider and outsider threats, a challenge that may overwhelm the currently effective oversight mechanisms in place. Finally, the challenges of nuclear security in wartime remain an entirely different matter altogether: these are too complicated for outsiders to assess because the posture and routines of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal in wartime change very dramatically in comparison to the peacetime disposition. The details of those changes though are not apparent from the perspective of an external observer.

On balance, therefore, there is reason for at least some measure of concern about Pakistani nuclear security, and accordingly, U.S. policy is focused on it. Unfortunately, however, the United States has only modest leverage in inducing Pakistan to make the fundamental changes required to better protect its nuclear arsenal. Limiting the production of fissile materials and warheads, eschewing a shift to tactical nuclear weapons, and deepening the firebreak between conventional wars and nuclear use are all initiatives that would increase nuclear security in Pakistan. But Washington's ability to engineer these changes in Pakistan is nonexistent. Pakistan will pursue the initiatives that it believes are in its national interest. It will accept the nuclear security assistance that it sees as useful but not intrusive. But it is unlikely to fundamentally change its nuclear policies, including its current emphasis on rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal, for anything that the United States can put on the table in regards to nuclear security. In other words, the Pakistan Army sees its nuclear weapons as being so fundamentally important to itself and to its vision of itself that there is very little that the United States or any outside actor can do to change its policies on this question.

## *Pakistani Cooperation on Counterterrorism and Afghanistan*

The second American interest in Pakistan is securing Pakistani cooperation with respect to counterterrorism and the transition in Afghanistan. It is useful to think about Pakistan and counterterrorism by thinking of three areas where counterterrorism assistance matters. The first is Pakistani counterterrorism operations against Pakistan's own enemies: here, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the most important group, followed by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Mohmand (TTM), the Tehrik-e-Nefaz-e-Shari'at-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), and the Lashkar-e-Islami (LI), and lastly by al-Qaida, at least in the settled areas. The second category is Pakistani counterterrorism cooperation against American enemies, which include al-Qaida at large, including al-Qaida in the tribal areas; the (Afghan) Taliban, in particular the Quetta Shura and the three regional shuras that exist along the western border of Pakistan; and groups like the Haqqani Network. And the third category of targets would be jihadist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and other Deobandi jihadi groups that attack Afghanistan, India, the United States, and other international coalition partners more generally.

In differentiating Pakistani counterterrorism operations according to these three categories, there is a very interesting and marked difference in how Pakistan has approached counterterrorism depending on which category the target finds itself in.

Pakistan deeply values American assistance in counterterrorism, but mostly for counterterrorism directed against the first category – that is, against threats to the Pakistani state itself. Pakistan seeks from the United States all manner of technical assistance with respect to targeting groups like the TTP and al-Qaida, especially in the settled areas. But it appears that the United States does not really have very much leverage with respect to inducing strong Pakistani counterterrorism efforts against groups in the second and the third categories.

In other words, Pakistan is happy to cooperate with the United States with respect to confronting terrorist groups that threaten itself. It is less than enthusiastic about confronting terrorist groups that confront the United States or terrorist groups that target Afghanistan and India. The reasons for this are linked to Pakistan's conception of what its national interests are. Pakistan still believes that the various jihadi groups that it has spawned and supported over the last two decades do serve certain critical interests – either vis-à-vis its neighbors like Afghanistan or India, or vis-à-vis the wider world in which Pakistan finds itself.

Although Pakistan claims, rhetorically, that it is a coalition partner in the war against terrorism, it has been very selective in how it has targeted terrorist groups operating within its borders. This has been true since 2001, and it is unlikely that there will be dramatic changes in Pakistani policy on this question any time soon. It will be easy to get the Pakistani state to confront its own enemies, but it will be much harder to get the Pakistani state to confront America's enemies or the enemies of Pakistan's neighbors, because Pakistan still sees utility in supporting such groups.

A similar divergence in American and Pakistani objectives obtains in Afghanistan. There is an ongoing security transition in Afghanistan where by 2014, the international coalition will transfer security responsibilities to the government of Afghanistan. The international community, it is expected, will continue to support the government of Afghanistan through economic assistance, possibly through continued military support and training, and hopefully through continued financing of the Afghan national security forces. According to the plan, though, primary responsibility for security operations inside Afghanistan will devolve entirely to Afghan security forces by 2014.

The Obama administration is strongly convinced that the transition's success hinges greatly on reaching a political settlement with the armed insurgency before 2014, because if a settlement is reached – this is often called "reconciliation" in the American debate – the transition will enjoy a higher probability of success. Ideally, the opposition would lay down its arms to facilitate an effective and successful transition.

However, this logic confronts significant problems. For starters, it is unclear whether the Quetta Shura seeks reconciliation on the terms laid out by the United States and the government of Afghanistan. Furthermore, reconciliation is made even more complicated by the fact that the principal leaders of the insurgency are not in Afghanistan but in Pakistan, and are sheltered by the Pakistani state because the Shura is perceived by

Pakistan as its principal leverage in controlling the kind of Afghanistan that the United States leaves behind.

Finally, the American vision of a transition and the Pakistani vision of a transition are at substantial odds with one another. The United States envisions a transition that leaves behind in Kabul a minimally capable Afghan state, which can protect itself internally and find a certain modicum of independence with respect to its national direction. The Pakistani vision of transition, on the other hand, is entirely different. Pakistan seeks a deferential, if not a completely dependent, Afghanistan in order to soothe Islamabad's recurring nightmare of encirclement. Pakistan believes that if Afghanistan is genuinely independent, it will become either antagonistic to Pakistan or, worse still, antagonistic towards Pakistan in collaboration with India. From a Pakistani point of view, then, an independent Afghanistan is undesirable. But for the United States, an independent and capable Afghanistan is essentially what the definition of a successful transition is all about.

Accordingly, there is a fundamental clash of interests between the United States and Pakistan, and there is absolutely no assurance that the United States will be able to make this transition work, given that the United States' ability to change Pakistan's calculus with respect to Afghanistan will diminish as time goes by. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that the 2014 security transition will be as successful as the administration desires.

How can the United States change Pakistan's calculus on this issue? There were only two ways in principle in which Pakistan's calculus could have been changed in regards to Afghanistan. The first way consisted of the United States winning the war. If U.S. military operations and its political strategy in Afghanistan had focused on procuring success, then in effect, Pakistan's strategy of supporting the Taliban would have been defeated. And if Pakistan's strategy were defeated, then presumably Pakistan would have had to come around to a new strategy that would involve, among other things, giving up on the Shura. Unfortunately, ten years after the start of the war, the United States is far from procuring victory and the Obama administration has all but abandoned that quest.

The second game-changing move would have been if the United States had been willing to endure in order to implement its long-term vision for Afghanistan. If the United States had been willing to endure in Afghanistan, then in effect it would have confronted Pakistan with the prospect of an open-ended struggle with the United States. It would be reasonable to believe that if Pakistan were confronted with such an American commitment to Afghanistan, then at some point, the Pakistan Army would have drawn the right conclusion and decided that this was not a fight that Pakistan could sustain without destroying itself in the process. Unfortunately, this alternative has also become evanescent because President Obama's decision to essentially force a security transition in Afghanistan irrespective of the conditions obtaining on the ground – on a timetable that commits the United States to withdraw by 2014 – has gifted Pakistan with the prospect of wresting success for its strategy.

As a result, the two levers that the United States had to change Pakistan's calculus in Afghanistan have both essentially disappeared.

The final reality where Afghanistan is concerned is that Pakistan appears to believe that it is playing for far greater stakes than the United States is because Afghanistan is Pakistan's neighbor. Consequently, it will likely stay the course with respect to its policies for far longer than the United States.

With respect to the second American objective in Pakistan, the prospects of substantially changing Pakistan's calculus on both counterterrorism broadly and on Afghanistan are once again bleak. The United States has only modest leverage to change Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy, and it has only modest leverage to change Pakistan's Afghanistan policy.

## *The Stability of the Pakistani State*

The third objective of the United States is the broader stabilization of Pakistan as a state. In practice, this means strengthening the institutions of civilian rule, strengthening the prospects for democracy taking root in Pakistan, and making Pakistan into a developmental state. This is broadly how the United States defines the stabilization of Pakistan.

Although all American policymakers pay lip service to this objective, it is a very precarious objective in practice. There are some who believe that the United States ought to pursue the stabilization of Pakistan for sound substantive reasons – that is, it is sensible to have Pakistan as a democracy and as a developmental state for its own sake. There are others who believe that this objective should only be pursued if it can be achieved at a reasonable cost, and since the chances of being successful at reorienting Pakistan in this way are bleak, the United States ought not to invest too much in bringing it about.

Ultimately, Pakistan needs to be a stable democratic entity, as much for Pakistan's own sake as from the perspective of American national interests. If Pakistan is not a durable democracy, then the military will continue to drive Pakistan's national direction, leading to certain predictable consequences. Military domination will result in the continued sustenance of a garrison state and a war economy in Pakistan, along with all the destabilizing policies that Pakistan has followed for the last 60 years. In practical terms, then, it is important for the United States to pursue democratic consolidation because it is fundamentally in the American interest. To have a democratic Pakistan would make a tremendous difference in terms of the policies that it follows.

On the other hand, the United States should not overestimate its capacity to do this. In fact, the odds of the United States succeeding in this objective are perhaps even bleaker than on the other two objectives, for three reasons. First, Pakistan's problems are not merely problems of "superstructure" in the Marxian sense, and they are not

problems that can be attacked piecemeal and changed overnight. The seed of these problems was planted during the founding of the Pakistani state, and these problems have since grown deep roots. Second, Pakistan's civilian leadership so far has been weak and uninspiring, and there is no prospective hope that there is a more robust generation of civilian leaders on its way. As a result, expectations must be low. Third, it is very hard for the United States to help democratic stabilization when it is engaged in a major war in Southern Asia, which necessitates relying on the very forces that are creating problems for Pakistan, namely the Pakistan Army. As long as there is a war in Afghanistan, the American dependence on the Pakistani military implies that the United States' leverage over it remains modest to nonexistent.

In a net assessment of where the United States stands, it is very difficult to imagine that it will be able to advance the goal of stabilizing Pakistan as a democratic state anytime soon, because the odds of success were never very high to begin with, and with every passing day, they look even slimmer.

# The United States' Strategic Choices

## *Pakistan's Political Realities*

American policymakers need to recognize some realities about Pakistan that are important when considering the worth of various policy options.

The first reality is that the strategy that the United States has pursued for at least the last ten years – a strategy of bribing Pakistan in the hope that it will make fundamental changes in its national direction – has failed. That policy began during the Bush administration in the days after September 11th. It was premised on the belief that General Musharraf, who was then President of Pakistan, represented a voice of moderation and modernization, and that if the Musharraf regime was sufficiently supported, he would take Pakistan in the right direction. On that assumption, the United States began a very generous program of supporting General Musharraf. This policy did not necessarily aid Pakistan as a country, but it did aid General Musharraf and the Pakistani military.

Today, some ten years later, it is quite obvious that the policy has failed, and that the strategy of bribing Pakistan has not resulted in any fundamental change in Pakistan's broad counterterrorism policies. Moreover, it has not resulted in any fundamental transformation with respect to Pakistan's support for jihadi organizations, nor has it resulted in any fundamental changes with respect to Pakistan's trajectory as a state.

The second reality is that changing Pakistan's policies is going to be extremely difficult because they are fundamentally linked to the character of the Pakistani state itself. Changing the character of any state from the outside is extraordinarily difficult, even for an extraordinarily powerful nation such as the United States. A state like Pakistan can be changed in fundamental ways only through three avenues: first, a dramatic and

violent military defeat that essentially destroys the coercive arms of the state; second, a comprehensive social revolution similar to the French Revolution where Pakistan's *ancien régime* is essentially put to the functional equivalent of the guillotine; or third, a real collapse of state authority arising from the complete atrophy of governing institutions and a loss of the monopoly on the use of force.

With regards to the first possibility, Pakistan has already seen dramatic military defeats with no change in the core structures of the regime. In fact, the Pakistan Army has the somewhat dubious honor of having lost every major war it has initiated and fought, and yet has survived in political power despite those defeats. As a first in modern political history, it suggests that this possibility – even if it comes to pass once again – will not effect the change that the United States hopes for.

Second, a comprehensive social revolution similar to the Arab Awakening is most likely not in the cards for Pakistan either. Paradoxically, for all its disadvantages and all its problems, Pakistan still has some facsimile of democratic rule. Unfortunately, this democratic rule is strong enough to prevent revolutions from occurring, but is too weak to effect thorough social change. The façade of democratic rule thus serves as a sufficiently robust escape valve to prevent the one possibility that could force the transformation of Pakistan.

Third, the prospect of state collapse is unlikely as well because the Pakistani state is, in many respects, not a weak state but an overly strong state relative to its own society. The Pakistani military, in fact, is so strong that it actually drains the oxygen that Pakistani society needs to survive. And although there are pockets of decaying state power, for example in the frontier territories and in parts of the southern Punjab, it is not obvious that this erosion of authority will become pervasive enough to cause a loss of control over Pakistan's national territory as a whole.

Since each of the three possibilities that could transform Pakistan is unlikely to occur, the idea of forcing fundamental change in Pakistan from the outside is rather dubious. What reinforces this predicament is the fact that, at least in the near term, the United States and Pakistan share a codependency that neither side can walk out on. Right now, American dependency is driven by its need to access the ground and air lines of communication that run through Pakistan into Afghanistan. There will come a point when American dependence on these lines of communication will diminish. But what will likely not change are American fears about Pakistan and the consequences of what a Pakistani "collapse" might mean for the United States – and as long as these America's fears about Pakistan drive its policies, it is unlikely that the United States will make the tough decisions that need to be made in regard to Pakistan.

In short, American fears about Pakistan act as a brake on its ability to force real and meaningful change. And herein lies a paradox: although the United States hopes fervently for a change in Pakistan's national direction – because of the benefits that would bring for both Pakistan and the international community – Washington's fears about doing anything that even risks cutting Pakistan adrift end up reinforcing the very

pernicious state structures in Islamabad that make a catastrophic failure in Pakistan more likely.

## *Assessing the Alternatives*

So what are the strategic choices facing the United States? In theory, there are three strategic choices. The first is to treat Pakistan as a friend, the second is to treat it as an enemy, and the third is to treat it as a "frenemy": a state that is simultaneously both a friend and an enemy.

Today, in 2012, more than a decade after the events of 9/11, it is very hard to treat Pakistan simply as a friend. On the other hand, treating Pakistan as an enemy is both extremely complicated and extremely dangerous, and gives American policymakers real pause. The United States is discomforted by the idea of treating a state of some 170 million people, with a large and rapidly growing nuclear arsenal and a history of reckless behavior with respect to that arsenal, as an enemy. It is not impossible to deal with such a state on an antagonistic basis, but it would be a challenge of considerable proportions. So for most American policymakers, the prospect of treating Pakistan as an enemy is such a frightening and horrifying possibility that they would rather avoid it at any cost than confront it with any seriousness. That leaves only the option of treating Pakistan as a "frenemy."

As the United States now thinks about Pakistan in this way, one that is likely to persist in the near future, it is confronted by three alternative policies.

This first alternative might be labeled "giving hope a chance," and is predicated on continuing to treat Pakistan as a friend in the belief that its strategic policies might yet change. In other words, despite ten years of belied expectations, the first policy persistently hopes that Pakistan might still "see the light." In practice, this policy would represent some variation on the broad pattern of lavish assistance that has characterized the U.S. relationship with Pakistan since 2001. The United States will have to indulge Pakistan in its continued misbehaviors, and it occasionally may chastise Pakistan when it crosses certain red lines, but the United States would ultimately continue to encourage Pakistan in the hope that it might one day see the error of its ways and reform.

The second alternative is a subtle variation on the first. The United States can conclude that change in Pakistan's troublesome behaviors is unlikely, but that current American policy towards Pakistan should nonetheless be maintained because there are no obvious alternatives. In a sense, this approach would represent a continuation of the traditional post-2001 U.S. policy towards Pakistan, but without any illusions.

Finally, there is a third alternative, which represents a substantial shift away from the current policy. The United States can draw the conclusion that Pakistan will not change, and therefore American policy has to move in a novel direction.

When it comes to actually making a decision about future American policy, the first and second approaches amount to the same thing – both are more or less a continuation of the course defined in the post-9/11 period. The first alternative continues current policy because the United States hopes that Pakistan will change. The second alternative continues current policy, not because the United States hopes that Pakistan will change, but because there are no other prospects in sight. In terms of results, both come down to essentially continuing current policy. The third alternative, on the other hand, represents a real change because it implements a new set of policies towards Pakistan.

If either the first or second policy is sustained, the outcome will be the long-term deterioration of Pakistan with very modest short-term benefits accruing to the United States. In other words, if the United States continues to implement the same policies that it has had towards Pakistan, either because it hopes for change or because it believes it has no alternative, then the net effect will be to accelerate Pakistan's secular decline. Current American policies will continue to entrench the dominance of the Pakistani military within the state while keeping civilian institutions weak and even weakening them further. They will deepen the chokehold that the garrison state and war economy have over the whole country. In exchange, the United States will reap some counterterrorism benefits, but they will be just as modest as they have been for the last decade if not more so. The complaints that the United States has towards Pakistan will also remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.

Therefore, the strongest argument for a new policy towards Pakistan is that a continuation of the status quo results in modest gains in the near term with substantial long-term risks. The Congress of the United States has adopted the same view. It feels strongly about the need for a new policy, because it believes that after ten years of cutting generous checks for Pakistan, the kind of cooperation that was expected has not been forthcoming.

## *A New Policy of Transactionalism*

However, even for those who believe that a radically new policy is needed, it is very hard to figure out how to construct a policy that gives hope for progress without making things worse in the short term.

This challenge is accentuated because the United States is juggling two time frames. On the one hand, the United States needs Pakistani cooperation in the short term with respect to counterterrorism, nuclear weapons, and Afghanistan, among other things. On the other hand, the United States concerns itself with the prospect of how it can prevent the long-term deterioration of the Pakistani state so that the country is not plunged into abject decay and possible chaos.

The only alternative available to the United States today is to make the relationship with Pakistan a straightforward and focused transaction. Any other policy will be a lie. The

United States cannot pretend to have an open-ended “strategic partnership” with Pakistan any more. At the same time, it is afraid of treating Pakistan as an outright enemy, and for good reason. The remaining middle ground is one where the relationship becomes explicitly transactional. Both sides need to develop a clear understanding of what these lowered expectations are and what they require: what is it that the United States is prepared to do, and what is it that Pakistan is expected to provide in return?

A policy of transactionalism would traverse diverse issues. First, it must involve direct and more transparent support for the civilian government. This support will not immediately benefit the United States, but it is important to give Pakistani civilians the hope that, one day, they will truly be in charge of their own country, even if that turns out to be a very long-term prospect. The United States should start backing the civilian government by reducing the attention and the status recognition that it gives to the Pakistani military. American leaders, like the Secretaries of State and Defense, cannot continue rushing off to meet the Chief of Army Staff in Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan is the only country in the world where American civilian leaders regularly meet with military leaders, and this habit, which continuously undermines the elected government of Pakistan, must be stopped.

Second, the United States must provide only targeted counterterrorism assistance in exchange for Pakistan agreeing to meet specific counterterrorism targets. Counterterrorism cannot be, as it has been in the past, an open-ended assistance program. Instead, it must be a straightforward exchange, where the United States identifies what counterterrorism targets matter to it, and then clearly states what assistance it is prepared to provide if Pakistan is willing to go after those counterterrorism targets.

Third, the United States needs to reconfigure Coalition Support Funds (CSF), which today are given to Pakistan under the fiction that the United States is reimbursing Pakistan for expenses in counterterrorism operations. It is essentially a subsidy program, but oftentimes payment is given for counterterrorism activities that simply have never occurred. The United States needs to reexamine the level of assistance involved in the CSF, and transform those funds into a direct payment for access through Pakistani territory.

Generally speaking, there must be a little more honesty in the military aid relationship, and that relationship must be kept as transactional as is required by the demands of honesty. The United States should terminate all assistance with respect to high-end military equipment whose principal utility is for conventional war fighting. If Pakistan wants to buy such military equipment, it is welcome to do so, but this equipment should be provided on commercial terms and with restrictive security conditions because of Pakistan’s past record of transferring U.S-origin military equipment to China—a pattern that continues to this day. In other words, there simply cannot continue to be concessional transfers of conventional warfighting technologies to Pakistan’s military.

Fourth, over time, the United States needs to move towards eliminating all economic aid to Pakistan except for emergency assistance. If the United States wants to give Pakistan economic assistance, it should do so through increased trade access. But aid as has been conventionally provided to Pakistan in the past has created nothing but moral hazard problems. It has distorted the way Pakistan behaves, and it has done nothing to transform the Pakistani economy or help it towards its developmental goals.

A simple fact underscores this point – since 1947, the international community has provided Pakistan with upwards of $100 billion in economic assistance, an amount that is anywhere between two and three times the amount of economic assistance provided to U.S. allies under the Marshall Plan. Looking at the record of the Marshall Plan, anyone would conclude that it was a good investment. Today, though, when looking at Pakistan after sixty years of aid, no one can draw the conclusion that the money given to Pakistan has been well spent. Economic aid in the conventional sense has been deeply distortionary, and Pakistan has become the poster child for unproductive and even counterproductive aid.

Fifth, a transactional relationship will depend on a different American military strategy in Afghanistan. The United States will have to increase unilateral targeting of terrorist groups inside Pakistan, either through increased Predator operations or through increased covert operations. Over time, the United States will also have to invest in upgrading the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to support whatever residual military presence is maintained in Afghanistan. Resources that are currently moving along the ground and air lines of communication in Pakistan should be shifted to the NDN. Depending on the size of the forces that the United States leaves behind in Afghanistan, this shift will be possible. Pakistan is necessary today because the United States has upwards of 100,000 troops; in the future, though, with a much smaller footprint in Afghanistan, the United States military may be able to rely on the NDN alone.

## Conclusion

At least for the near term, the United States needs to move towards a very focused and transactional approach to Pakistan. If this results in changes in Pakistan for the better, then the move to a more broad-based relationship with Islamabad will become possible. But for the foreseeable future, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship will be on probation and must be explicitly treated as such.

The very fact that Pakistan will be on probation means that the United States has to prepare itself for at least one possibility – that despite all its interim efforts at recalibration, the relationship with Pakistan may yet fail in much more dangerous ways, and that Pakistan will move from being a “frenemy” to being an outright adversary. It is a possibility that the United States has to take very seriously.

For all sorts of reasons, it is difficult to discuss openly what this will entail. If the United States has to seriously think of Pakistan as an enemy, however, then all kinds of

possibilities, which today are unthinkable, have to be made thinkable. These discussions have to occur in the hidden recesses of the government. But it is something that the United States has to give serious thought to not because it is desirable – in fact, the prospect of treating Pakistan as an enemy is a frightening one, and the United States should do everything within its capacity to prevent such an outcome from materializing – but because the United States no longer has the luxury of not thinking about that possibility. There is a real chance that even a strategy of focused transactionalism will fail, and if it does, then the United States has to be prepared for a far more dangerous Pakistan than the one it currently encounters.