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Recommendation: Shift from AfPak to PakAf.

The Obama administration should recalibrate its strategy to emphasize the priority of the mission in Pakistan and to prepare domestic and international audiences for expanded, sustained U.S. engagement in South Asia. The present approach—professing narrow counter terror goals while seeking expanded state-building resources in Afghanistan and Pakistan—may be a politically astute means to garner early support, but runs the risk of confusing the American public (as well as U.S. allies and adversaries) down the road about Washington's true intentions. That confusion is likely to make a costly commitment to the region harder to justify and sustain over the long run.

A wide array of global and domestic considerations undoubtedly influenced the Obama administration's AfPak strategy. The costs—political, economic, and military—of a lengthy commitment to South Asia will invariably require real compromises on other issues and in other regions. At a time of severe economic distress, U.S. foreign assistance programming must contend with urgent domestic expenditures. And any strategy of long-term investment requires some confidence that resources and attention will manage to survive subsequent budget battles and future elections.

That said, if the United States takes seriously the enormity and complexity of the threat posed by extremism in South and Central Asia, only a comprehensive, Pakistan-centred strategy will serve U.S. security requirements today and into the future. Narrowing America's ambition to attacking al-Qaeda and its close associates may placate some budget hawks at home, but it will do little to address the serious, entrenched threats posed by instability and weak state capacity in Pakistan.

Turning strategy into policy

Much of the Obama team's strategy is already fairly consistent with a long-term, Pakistan-centred approach to the region. In order to be more specific about how a PakAf approach should be implemented over time, and where it would deviate from the administration's apparent plans, the following section offers policy guidelines as well as a limited number of detailed recommendations. It is intended to suggest the way ahead, not to serve as an all-inclusive policy agenda.

**Near Term (Six Months): A Military, Political, Economic, and Diplomatic Surge**

Over the next six months, the United States should surge resources into South Asia and work to eliminate the greatest immediate stumbling blocks to better cooperation with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

President Obama assumed power at a time of morale-sapping turmoil within both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Strong and cooperative political partners are in short supply, and security conditions have deteriorated to the point that U.S. civilian personnel face risky operating environments throughout the region. The Obama administration's efforts have been calibrated to begin to address this situation. By devoting sufficient military resources to stem Taliban offensives in Afghanistan, Washington can help to secure greater geographic and political space for national elections and development programs. In Pakistan, the United States should continue with efforts to navigate ongoing partisan power struggles, capitalize on the opportunity presented by the restoration of the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and advance multilateral efforts to shore up Pakistan's economic situation, all while building closer working relationships with military and intelligence officials.

To enhance security across the region, the United States should take the following steps over the next six months, consistent with the administration's new strategy:

- ◆ Increase the mass of military power available to U.S. and NATO commanders in Afghanistan, starting—but not ending—with 17,000 additional U.S. troops;
- ◆ Practice a "population-centred" counterinsurgency approach in Afghanistan, with an emphasis on improving Afghan public confidence in U.S./NATO

operations, in part by reducing civilian casualties through a more selective use of coalition airpower;

- ◆ Expand the frequency and intensity of senior-level U.S.-Pakistan dialogue and, where appropriate, intelligence-sharing and focused discussions about militant networks in Pakistan, including the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

At the same time, recognizing the centrality of its emerging partnership with Pakistan to achieving success in the region, the Obama administration should shift its approach in the following ways:

- ◆ Restrict attacks by unmanned aerial vehicles (such as Predators and Reapers) in Pakistan to counter terror targets (such as al-Qaeda leadership) to limit collateral damage and reduce an unpopular irritant in relations with Pakistan's political and military leadership;
- ◆ Follow through on existing assistance commitments to the Pakistani military, including the F-16 program, as a means to retain the confidence of officers who have bought into partnership with the United States;
- ◆ Work with the U.S. Congress to avoid new legislation that includes inflexible and potentially punitive "conditionality" on military assistance to Pakistan.

To strengthen the foundations for political partnership in Afghanistan and Pakistan, over the next six months the United States should also take the following diplomatic steps, consistent with the administration's new strategy:

- ◆ Apply diplomatic pressure on the Karzai government and provide security and technical assistance to enhance the likelihood that Afghanistan's presidential election is perceived as legitimate both by the Afghan public and international observers;
- ◆ In Pakistan, retain flexibility in the midst of intense partisan political competition by engaging in regular, active dialogue with leaders and second-tier officials from the full range of political parties.

Over the same time frame, the Obama administration should undertake the following overtures in order to clarify or shift Washington's political intentions:

- ◆ Refrain from official U.S. involvement in negotiations with the Afghan Taliban to avoid undercutting the legitimacy conferred by Afghanistan's electoral process or appearing too eager for an easy exit from the region;
- ◆ Delineate redlines with respect to future Pakistani negotiations with the Taliban to clarify that terrorist safe havens and the shrinking writ of the Pakistani state, not the implementation of traditional, or sharia, laws, are Washington's primary reasons for concern;
- ◆ Engage Pakistan's political leadership in discussions about the security and logistical procedures planned for Afghanistan's election as a means to encourage Islamabad's support for the process and acceptance of the outcome;
- ◆ Work with groups, including Pakistani and international nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and the legal community, to depoliticize Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's reinstatement and turn it into an opportunity for meaningful judicial reform in Pakistan.

To stabilize regional economic conditions, set a new tone for development assistance, and jumpstart more constructive international engagement in the region, over the next six months the United States should do the following, all consistent with, if not necessarily dictated by, the administration's new strategy:

- ◆ Mount a review of USAID's Afghanistan mission to identify programming and personnel gaps, and, in particular, to craft new mechanisms for community-oriented aid disbursement and reduced dependence on non-Afghan implementing partners;
- ◆ Coordinate closely with the International Monetary Fund and major donors to Pakistan (through the Friends of Pakistan forum or an alternative grouping) to stabilize and boost economic growth;
- ◆ Announce U.S. plans for major new non-military assistance expenditures in Pakistan (\$1.5 billion a year, consistent with the imminent Kerry-Lugar legislation) and begin discussions with

Pakistan's government, business leaders, and civil society to identify creative new mechanisms to oversee and manage a significant portion of these funds through demand-driven block grants, a trust fund, or other widely accepted means;

- ◆ Mobilize USAID to assist in whatever forms acceptable the Pakistani army and Frontier Corps in delivering reconstruction assistance to post conflict zones of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, especially the devastated civilian communities of Bajaur Agency;
- ◆ Raise Pakistan and Afghanistan to the top of Washington's diplomatic agenda with regional and global partners, including China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union, and others;
- ◆ Regularize Pakistan-Afghanistan-U. S. trilateral summits;
- ◆ Quietly encourage India's new government (shortly after its own national elections in April and May) to reinvigorate dialogue with Pakistan. Facilitate early interactions if necessary.

Medium Term (One to Four Years): Identify and Empower Partners

Over President Obama's first term in office, success in Pakistan and Afghanistan should not be measured solely by whether top al-Qaeda terrorists are eliminated or the Taliban is dealt a military setback in Afghanistan. Washington must also identify a range of partners among Afghan and Pakistani civilian and military institutions and empower them to assume moderating and stabilizing roles over the long haul.

By the end of this four-year period, Afghanistan's national security forces should be ready to assume a primary role in counterinsurgency operations. Over the same time frame, Washington should aim to develop far closer cooperation with the Pakistani military and intelligence services, including more extensive training and, where mutually acceptable, regular joint operations and extensive intelligence sharing. The United States should create the conditions for effective, long-term regional development programming and political outreach by investing in new U.S. personnel and facilities.

To shift Afghan counterinsurgency operations to an indigenous lead, and to enable intense, regular cooperation with the Pakistani security and intelligence services, over the next four years the United States should undertake the following steps, most of which are consistent with, if not dictated by, the Obama AfPak strategy:

- ◆ Accelerate and expand the training and equipping of Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to create a force capable of bearing the bulk of national combat and policing duties;
- ◆ Revamp mechanisms for U.S. military assistance to Pakistan to improve transparency and to eliminate regular points of mutual irritation, such as the Coalition Support Funds program, while maintaining a U.S. commitment to generous budgetary support as a means to build trust;
- ◆ Expand educational opportunities for Pakistani officers in U.S.-based programs, especially those geared toward counterinsurgency and counterterrorism;
- ◆ Build on existing "train the trainer" programs for the Pakistani Frontier Corps;
- ◆ Seek opportunities for joint U.S.-Pakistan military and intelligence training missions outside Pakistan as a means to improve specialized counter terror skills and win trust (and with an eye toward joint operations down the road);
- ◆ Offer training and assistance to Pakistan's provincial police forces, starting with major urban centres, to promote reforms, reduce corruption, and improve law and order;
- ◆ Engage in a quiet, high-level nuclear dialogue with Pakistan to build bilateral trust and seek new ways to safeguard its nuclear program.

To enable better cooperation with civilian political leaders in the region, over the next four years the United States should also undertake the following steps:

- ◆ Use the occasion of Afghanistan's post-presidential election transition and subsequent parliamentary elections in 2010 to encourage political reforms that delegate greater authority to cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, and provincial officials relative to the presidency as one means of in-creasing

the number and quality of potential U.S. partners throughout the Afghan state;

- ◆ Create additional civil-military units in Afghanistan similar to Provincial Reconstruction Teams to facilitate community and tribal outreach efforts (as part of a national reconciliation effort) and to improve the quality of sub national governance, especially the judiciary;
- ◆ Increase diplomatic staffing levels in Pakistan and establish new sub-consular offices (and requisite security procedures) to facilitate political outreach within and beyond Pakistan's major cities;
- ◆ Launch a cooperative initiative with Pakistan's military and civilian leadership to improve Islamabad's national security decision-making process, starting with a dedicated exchange program and training curriculum for a small group of rising mid-career Pakistani army, intelligence, and foreign policy officers.

To promote sustainable economic development in Afghanistan and Pakistan, over the next four years the United States should do the following:

- ◆ Build a more substantial USAID presence dedicated to long-term development assistance in Afghanistan, with the capacity and mandate to support and expand local, community-based development projects similar to the National Solidarity Program;
- ◆ Increase USAID staffing and secure facilities in Pakistan to support local development initiatives in coordination with provincial and local authorities throughout the country, including the Frontier Corps and political agents in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas;
- ◆ Follow through on pledges to provide Pakistan with sustained access to non-military assistance, disbursed through mechanisms that are transparent and accountable to the Pakistani public;
- ◆ Identify and implement a major, high-profile infrastructure project in Pakistan to demonstrate to Pakistan's populace the tangible benefits of U.S.-Pakistan partnership.

In its diplomatic efforts within and outside the region, over the next four years the United States should do the following:

- ◆ Institute a regular, senior-level dialogue with China on Pakistan and Afghanistan as a means to leverage collective U.S.-China political, military, and economic influence in the region;
- ◆ Accept a de facto two-tiered NATO involvement in Afghanistan as a means to improve the alliance's efficiency in military operations while encouraging financial and other contributions from member states that cannot sustain military commitments;
- ◆ Reconvene the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) for Afghanistan (or a successor forum) to promote trade opportunities linking Central Asia to South and East Asia, and encourage buy-in by other major regional actors, including Russia and China, as well as the private sector and international organizations such as the World Bank.

**Long Term (Five to Ten Years or More): Build and Sustain Effective Institutions**

Over the long run, the United States should anticipate continued involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but Washington's allocation of resources should also look far different than it does today. The United States will succeed only if more effective Pakistani and Afghan state institutions are built and sustained to counterbalance forces of extremism and militancy. During the next five to ten years, Washington should draw down U.S. combat forces in Afghanistan while continuing to provide military assistance, training, and logistical support along with close political partnership and extensive development programming. Over a similar time frame, the United States should aim to achieve broader and deeper cooperation with Pakistan's defence, security, and intelligence services, enabling extensive and sophisticated counter terror and counterinsurgency training, planning, and, where mutually agreeable, joint operations. In addition, the United States should be fully engaged in political outreach and economic development throughout Pakistan, helping to strengthen the state and civil society.

The Obama administration should move quickly to declare its long-term commitment to the region as a means to shift expectations and strategic calculations

in Kabul, Islamabad, and neighbouring capitals. A new, transparent bilateral agreement for defence and cooperation should be negotiated with Kabul after Afghanistan's national elections. Washington should use this negotiation process to signal that, while it has every intention to end the Taliban-led insurgency, it does not seek any permanent military presence in the region.

In addition, over the five-to-ten-year time horizon, the United States should undertake the following steps:

- ◆ Address the daunting challenge of the narcotics industry in Afghanistan by focusing on lasting solutions (alternative livelihoods, law enforcement and prosecutorial capacity, and the targeting and interdiction of traffickers), all of which must be built upon the foundations of effective state institutions;
- ◆ Approach deep and seemingly intractable challenges to stability in Pakistan such as the imbalance between civilian and military power, the dynastic nature of major political parties, and deep social and economic inequality through serious, sustained U.S. support for a wide variety of educational, social mobilization and reform efforts that will, at best, pay dividends only over a decade or longer;
- ◆ Engage in a dialogue with top Pakistani military and civilian leaders about prospects and avenues for normalizing the nuclear program in ways that are not perceived to threaten Pakistan's security with respect to India;
- ◆ Encourage rapprochement between India and Pakistan through quiet overtures and reiterate Washington's longstanding commitment to support or facilitate when and if necessary.

A Daunting Challenge

In its present formulation, the Obama administration's AfPak strategy is framed flexibly enough to permit a long-term, Pakistan centred commitment to the region. But the White House's approach is now burdened by an Afghanistan-oriented military strategy, a rhetorical nod to tightly focused counter terror objectives, and tough-minded but potentially counterproductive plans for conditioning assistance to Pakistan. To preclude ambiguity and build sustainable domestic support for its agenda, the Obama administration should clarify that it will pursue sustained, comprehensive engagement in South Asia, with a heavy emphasis on improving cooperation with Pakistan through intense interaction and assistance, because this strategy offers the best prospect for long-term American security and regional stability.

Implementing such an ambitious program will be tremendously difficult. It may ultimately overtax Washington's diplomatic, financial, and military resources. Nor can there be any guarantee that even such a costly program will stave off the worst threats it is intended to address. Indeed, many critical dynamics in the region are to a significant degree outside America's capacity to control, no matter how hard it tries. That said, alternative strategies that focus more narrowly on the threats posed by al-Qaeda or by Afghanistan's Taliban insurgency may also fail to achieve their goals. More troubling, they may inspire policies that undermine stability in Pakistan or fail to direct adequate attention to the many sources of Pakistani instability situated outside the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Under these difficult conditions, narrowing Washington's strategic ambition would represent a false economy, saving marginal U.S. resources in the near term but creating even greater long-term threats to U.S. interests as well as to regional and global security. Since 9/11, the United States has lurched from crisis to crisis in South Asia, putting out fires without investing in the future. The time has come to readjust the balance, to recognize that entrenched threats of this sort demand enduring and costly U.S. investments, and to commit forthrightly to meeting the daunting challenge in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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