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“Reassessing American Grand Strategy in South Asia”

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The views expressed in this testimony are of the author alone and do not necessarily express those of the American Enterprise Institute.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the Committee on reassessing American grand strategy in South Asia. I am Sadanand Dhume, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Washington, DC. My comments today are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of AEI.

Against the backdrop of the successful operation against Osama bin Laden in the Pakistani garrison town of Abbottabad, and the suspension of \$800 million of US military assistance to Pakistan, the question of whether US grand strategy in South Asia requires reassessment has acquired new salience. In particular, the effectiveness of US aid to Pakistan—upward of \$20 billion since September 11, 2001—has been called into question.

I would like to take this opportunity to present the outline of a strategy that advances US interests and fosters peace and prosperity in the region. In a nutshell, this involves continuing the bipartisan consensus on deepening ties with India while devising a new, more robust approach toward Pakistan that presses it to combat radical Islamist militancy more effectively.

Key recommendations:

*Strengthen democracy in Pakistan by encouraging improved governance capacity and greater civilian control over the military.

*Recognize that the Pakistani military will likely embrace reform only if it feels its own interests—particularly its respected place in society—are threatened, and devise policies accordingly.

*In the absence of meaningful Pakistani action against anti-US groups such as the Haqqani network, accelerate the successful drone campaign in Pakistan's border regions with Afghanistan.

*Target military aid to encourage the creation of a pro-democracy culture in the Pakistani army.

*Encourage freedom of the press and freedom of expression to counter disinformation and intimidation by the army and its spy agency, the ISI. Leverage India's growing soft power in the region to encourage liberal voices in Pakistan.

Background:

The first seven months of this year have been tumultuous both for Pakistan and for US-Pakistan relations. In January, a bodyguard assassinated Salmaan Taseer, governor of Punjab province, for speaking up for an illiterate Christian woman on death row under Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws.

Two months later, Taliban militants murdered Shahbaz Bhatti, federal minister for minority affairs, and the only Christian in the overwhelmingly Muslim nation's cabinet. In May came the dramatic US raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in the garrison town of Abbottabad, near Islamabad. Since then Islamist militants have assaulted a naval base in Karachi, and killed 40 people in separate bombings of a market and a police station in Peshawar.

Over the same period, US-Pakistan relations—challenging at the best of times—have struck a new low. The most recent downturn began in January after Pakistani authorities arrested an alleged Raymond Davis, a CIA operative posted at the US embassy, for shooting two motorcycle borne men in what was most likely a botched robbery. Despite his diplomatic immunity, Pakistan imprisoned Davis for nearly two months before releasing him in return for a reported blood money payout to the dead men's relatives.

The Abbottabad raid raises troubling questions about Pakistan's possible complicity in hiding the world's most wanted terrorist. But even before it US officials had stepped up criticism of Islamabad for not doing enough to combat terrorism, or to eradicate safe havens used to target NATO troops in Afghanistan. According to a Fox News poll, post-Abbottabad three out of four Americans would like the US to cut off aid.

Despite substantial economic, diplomatic and military assistance over the past decade, Pakistan has responded to US concerns with belligerence rather than contrition. Parliament passed a resolution condemning the US for violating Pakistan's sovereignty in Abbottabad, and demanding an end to drone strikes. Pakistani officials have allegedly leaked the name of the CIA station chief in Islamabad to local newspapers. The army's spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, has arrested locals who (unknowingly) helped the US track bin Laden rather than those who gave him shelter. US approval ratings among Pakistan's public remain abysmal. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, only 12% of Pakistanis hold a favorable opinion of America, the second lowest in the world after Turkey.

Most recently, the denial of visas to US trainers has contributed to the reported suspension of about \$800 million in US military assistance to Pakistan. The public invitation to China by Pakistan's defense minister to run the Chinese-built Gwadar port in Balochistan and build a naval base there as well, and press reports that suggest that Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani urged Afghan President Hamid Karzai to abandon the US and throw in his lot with China have also contributed to a broad souring of ties between Washington and Islamabad.

Grand objectives for US policy in South Asia

Developments in the US-Pakistan relationship must be viewed against the backdrop of policy toward the region more broadly. Over the past decade, a broad bipartisan consensus toward US policy in South Asia—encapsulated by visits to the region by presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama—has emerged. Its main pillars:

*Working to diminish the odds of war between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, curtailing both authoritarian Chinese influence and radical Islam in the region, and encouraging India to deepen economic reforms in order to build a platform for peace and prosperity that will benefit the region, the US and the world.

*A rapidly growing economy, a pluralistic democracy, a prosperous Indian-American community, and a population that dwarfs all other South Asian countries combined make India the natural fulcrum of US policy in the region. Over the coming decade, the US will likely continue to deepen ties with India spurred by people-to-people relations and stepped up trade and investment.

*The overarching US objectives toward Pakistan include encouraging democracy, and reorienting the country toward improving the lives of its citizens rather than exporting terrorism and pan-Islamism to its neighbors and beyond.

Rethinking US policy toward Pakistan

Against the backdrop of troubled ties between the US and Pakistan, it's fair to ask if the US needs to radically rethink its policy toward Islamabad and toward South Asia more broadly. The short answer: the overarching US goals in the region listed above remain unchanged, but the methods used to achieve them require refinement.

To begin with, this means accepting that 10 years of generous assistance to Pakistan have not produced the desired results.

Pakistani elites, particularly the army, continue to balk at cracking down on the Haqqani network and other elements of the Afghan Taliban who use sanctuaries in Pakistan to attack NATO forces and hurt international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. Pakistan has also shown little resolve in bringing to justice the perpetrators of the horrific 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai in which six US citizens were killed. Pakistan's acceleration of its rogue nuclear weapons program, the fastest growing in the world, and its failure to crack down on the rump al Qaeda leadership in the country, or on home grown terrorist groups with global ambitions such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, raise serious doubts about where Islamabad's sympathies lie.

At the same time, however, it would be wrong to suggest that Washington's record in Pakistan has not also included modest gains. Ten years ago, the country was ruled by a general who had seized power in a coup, housed a largely tame and ill-informed media, and had spent the previous two decades welcoming jihadists from across the globe. Indeed, pre-9/11 Pakistan more or less openly backed terrorism as an instrument of policy, and helped create arguably the world's most brutal Islamist regime in history under the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Today things are less black and white. The army still wields far too much influence, but at least it has handed over the formal reins of power to elected politicians. And though Pakistan's intelligence agencies are widely believed not to have severed their links with jihadist proxies,

they have also helped capture hundreds of al Qaeda leaders—including the 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, his co-conspirator Ramzi bin Al-Shibh and al Qaeda number three, Abu Faraj al-Libi. In the long run, Pakistan must be encouraged to persevere with elections, next due in 2013. In a best case scenario, over time civilian politicians will assert control as they have in Bangladesh, Indonesia and most of Latin America.

In short, the answer to the Pakistan problem lies not in walking away, but in continued engagement that works toward strengthening democracy, turning the Pakistani military away from its historic support for radical groups in Afghanistan, India and beyond, and ensuring that neither a nuclear weapon nor fissile material fall into their hands.

Key policy recommendations to achieve US goals in Pakistan and South Asia:

**Strengthen Pakistani democracy.* Both of Pakistan's major political parties, Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N), leave much to be desired in terms of their capacity for governance, their record on corruption, and their ability to take enlightened steps to reverse the continued rise of radical Islamic sentiment in Pakistani society. Some smaller parties such as former cricketer Imran Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf and the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami base their popularity in part on rabid anti-Americanism.

Nonetheless, in the long run, inept democrats are better for Pakistan, the US and the region than the most competent generals. As in India and Bangladesh, democratically elected politicians—including those of a mildly anti-American hue—are more likely to focus on jobs, education and roads than the army with its record of seeking to subjugate Afghanistan and its historic ties with terrorist groups such as L-e-T. Only democratic control over the military, including the budget, top officer promotions and control of the ISI, will help Pakistan become a country that focuses more on its own citizens' welfare and less on destabilizing its neighbors.

**Continue and possibly accelerate the successful drone campaign in Pakistan's border regions with Afghanistan.* This program is unpopular among Pakistan's public, in part because elements in Pakistan's establishment encourage the erroneous view that it causes large scale civilian casualties. But the drone program is also essential for two reasons. First, it keeps the Afghan Taliban and its allies off balance. Second, the threat of stepping up drone attacks further may force Pakistan's army to recognize that acting against militant groups such as the Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami is in its own interest. The alternative: loss of legitimacy and face in Pakistani society for the army itself.

**Resist calls to cut military aid. Instead, use it to encourage the creation of a pro-democracy culture in the Pakistani army.* The army has ruled Pakistan directly for 34 of its 64 years of independence, and indirectly for much of the rest. Though it employs barely 600,000 of Pakistan's 170 million citizens, it uses exaggerated fears about India to consume around one-fourth of the national budget each year—more than twice as much as education and health care combined.

The Pakistani army's refusal to turn against its clients in the Afghan Taliban or Lashkar-e-Taiba directly undermines US goals in the region, which include stabilizing Afghanistan and encouraging democratic India to play a greater role in Asia as an alternative to authoritarian China. But though the prospect of cutting off aid to Pakistan's army may be emotionally satisfying, it is also short-sighted. In other parts of Asia—including Muslim-majority Indonesia and Bangladesh—democratic reforms have been pushed by both civilian politicians and reformers within the military. The US ought to encourage a similar process in Pakistan, and use assistance and training programs to further this goal. In short, Pakistan's army needs fewer fighter jets and more classroom time learning about democracy and development.

These efforts should acknowledge that Pakistan has legitimate security concerns and a right to self-defense. But they should also point out that Pakistan's overly militarized state has led to the country falling behind India economically, and has crippled the development of democracy in the country. Indeed, even Bangladesh—long dismissed as a basket case—has managed to build a world class textile industry and a functional democracy, and overtake Pakistan in terms of key development indicators such as women's literacy.

The Pakistani military enjoys subsidized health care, generous land grants and some of the best working conditions in the country. This gives it a powerful incentive to retain its pre-eminent place in Pakistan. Sensitizing the officer corps—presumably patriotic Pakistanis with their own country's best interests at heart—improves the odds of the army agreeing to accept the principle of civilian supremacy as have most other armies around the world.

**Encourage freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Pakistan to counter disinformation and intimidation by the army and its spy agency, the ISI.*

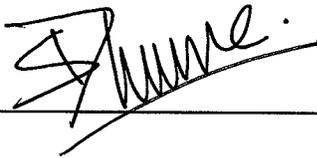
Over the past decade, the two most visible changes in Pakistan have been the rise of an independent judiciary and a vibrant free press. To be sure, many Pakistani journalists, particularly in the Urdu press, peddle conspiracy theories and wild anti-American rumors. But Pakistan's television stations and newspapers also include scores of upstanding journalists who are brave enough to question the direction in which their country is headed. Indeed, it would be fair to say that Pakistanis fighting for pluralism, democracy and women's rights are among the bravest people in South Asia.

While it's important not to exaggerate the influence of Pakistan's liberal voices on its society—the English speaking classes are under siege and wield far less influence than they did at the country's founding—it's also important not to allow their voices to be extinguished. Recent reports of possible ISI complicity in the murder of journalist Saleem Shahzad, a reporter who wrote about radical Islamist infiltration of the Pakistani military, raises fears that the army will snuff out the small but bright flame of press freedom in the country. The US should oppose this in every way it can, including by publicly naming Pakistani officials who intimidate or threaten journalists, by encouraging a more generous visa regime in neighboring India for Pakistani liberals threatened by violence by either Islamist fundamentalists or the army, and by stepped up radio and TV broadcasts to Pakistan that ensure that debate in Pakistan remains open.

**United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs**

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