

**Testimony of Dr. Aparna Pande, Research Fellow, Hudson Institute on
“Reassessing American Grand Strategy in South Asia”**

Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight
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Any attempt at a certain American Grand strategy will face difficulty in South Asia. If we go back in history, the containment strategy was adopted during the Cold War. However, India adopted the policy of non-alignment and this led to years of estrangement between India and U.S. Additionally, U.S.' policy towards Pakistan was also framed in the context of the Cold War. Instead of a grand strategy it would be better if there were country and region specific strategies.

A stable and effective, civilian democratic Pakistan is the best bulwark against radical Islamism, Al Qaeda and other jihadi groups in South Asia. Not only U.S. but even the region will benefit from a stable Pakistan. A stable Pakistan is necessary for a stable Afghanistan. China and India share the desire for a stable Pakistan since the last thing they want is Pakistan failing or collapsing or radical Islamists becoming stronger in Pakistan and crossing in greater numbers across the border.

U.S.-Pakistan relations and Pakistan’s policy towards terrorism

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been one of differing expectations and that is often why both sides feel let down. Pakistan’s leaders have always feared an existential threat from India and believe that the aim of India’s foreign and security policy is to undo the creation of Pakistan. This has led to a foreign and security policy where Pakistan seeks to build its own resources to stand up to India and also have a friendly state in Afghanistan. Close ties between Afghanistan and India are viewed as antithetical to Pakistan’s interests.

Pakistan has always seen the United States as the ally who would provide assistance to help Pakistan gain parity with India, and ensure its safety and integrity against any Indian attack. In return for supporting some U.S. policies, Pakistan has desired American aid and support against India, especially in the context of Kashmir and Afghanistan.

For the United States, however, Pakistan was just one part of its larger containment strategy during the Cold War era. A close ally against Communism during the Cold War, Pakistan’s geo-strategic location was indispensable during the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad during the 1980s. Post 9/11 Pakistan was invaluable for the war in Afghanistan and against terrorism. For the U.S., the relationship has been tactical and transactional, not strategic and long-term. Further, while desirous of peace in the South Asian subcontinent, the U.S. has never seen India

as an enemy or threat. For decades Pakistan was the only American ally in South Asia. Today, America has three allies in the region: India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pakistan's security establishment has always sought a pro-Pakistan, anti-India, Afghan government. The Pakistani military-intelligence complex has adopted a dichotomous attitude towards the various jihadi groups operating within Pakistan. The Pakistani security establishment views the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as an enemy because the latter focuses its attacks within Pakistan. However, groups like the Haqqani network, Afghan Taliban and their local Pakistani allies, sectarian groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and India-focused groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) are treated as 'assets' or proxies who would be helpful in achieving Pakistan's goals in Afghanistan and India.

U.S. aid to Pakistan

Over the years the U.S. has provided vast amounts of aid to Pakistan. However, most of this aid has been military in nature. It is only in 2009 that through the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill a significant amount of non-military aid was offered to Pakistan. Unfortunately, owing to various factors, as pointed out by the U.S. G.A.O., not enough non-military aid has been disbursed to make a significant impact. There are studies which have shown that American non-military aid has made a significant difference in Pakistan. A study by Pomona college professor Tahir Andrabi and his colleague Jishnu Das, of the areas affected by the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, showed that even five years after the earthquake residents of the region had a positive view of American aid because the non-military aid was localized, targeted and visible.

If the United States withdraws all its assistance – especially non-military aid- and walks away from Pakistan there will be further destabilization of the country and the region. This move will negatively effect American operations in Afghanistan. Without an American presence or assistance Pakistan will be reluctant to act against terror groups operating from its territory. This means that if any future terror attacks in India are traced back to Pakistan without an American stake in the region it will be difficult to dissuade either country from taking military action. There will also be a greater risk of war between India and Pakistan – possibly nuclear in nature - which would cause immense human devastation.

The threat of Nuclear Proliferation to terrorists is another issue that directly threatens U.S. foreign and domestic interests. As long as U.S. remains engaged with Pakistan, military-to-military and intelligence-to-intelligence cooperation – even if limited – will provide U.S. with an opportunity to understand and observe as well as provide incentives to prevent future proliferation.

The economic effect of the withdrawal of American non-military assistance and aid will be devastating for Pakistan and the region. Pakistan's economy is weak,

has yet to recover from the devastating floods of 2010 and the massive refugee crisis, and has a very low tax-to-GDP ratio resulting in not enough revenue generation. Hence, the country depends on outside support, both from U.S. and multi-lateral institutions like the IMF, World Bank and others. The current IMF loan is dependent on support by the American government and American withdrawal would hit the Pakistani economy very hard. This will only further exacerbate the country's problems and will serve to destabilize the civilian democratic government to an extent that has yet to be witnessed.

A stable civilian democratic Pakistan is crucial for South Asia. All of Pakistan's neighbors – Afghanistan, India and China – benefit from a stable Pakistan. Even the United States benefits from a stable civilian democratic Pakistan.

Key Drivers of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

In order to understand the mainsprings of Pakistan's foreign policy we need to understand its underlying paradigm which is rooted in the origins of the Idea of Pakistan. The Idea of Pakistan rested on the two nation theory: Hindus and Muslims are not just two religious communities but two nations, and hence are equal and should have an equal say in policymaking. Even after two independent states emerged the desire of the newly created state of Pakistan for parity with India still remained a key goal along with the other goal of escaping any Indian-ness in Pakistani identity.

An ideology-based Islamic Pakistani identity was constructed to foster an identity separate from the common civilizational identity shared by Hindus and Muslims in the sub-continent as well as to counter the perceived existential threat from India.

Hence, the key drivers of Pakistan's foreign and security policies are a desire to "escape India" and "seek parity with India." These aims have defined and still define Pakistan's policies vis-à-vis other countries. Pakistan's relations with U.S., China and Muslim countries in the Middle East reflect the desire for allies who would help Pakistan achieve economic and military parity with India as well as support Pakistan in any conflict with India.

Pakistan civilian-military imbalance

Pakistan's foreign and security policies have traditionally been and continue to remain the domain of the military-bureaucratic establishment. Civilian politicians have rarely had any say and have been unwilling or unable to change the direction of these policies.

While the Pakistani security establishment's worldview does not match that of the U.S., boosting the civilian side of the Pakistani state – which shares the American worldview – is critical. Supporting civilian, democratic and liberal forces

in Pakistan would help American goals in South Asia and the greater Middle East. While a stable democratic Pakistan is still some years in the future, timely support to the civilian elements who want to bring that change is vital. Pakistan's economy is fragile and there is need for both American and international non military aid.

Pakistan-China

Pakistan seeks in China what it has always wanted from an ally: a strong ally who will build Pakistan's economic and military resources to help it achieve parity with India, and a country that has an antagonistic relationship with India and hence will support Pakistan in any conflict with India. While China has been a close Pakistani ally since the 1950s, Chinese assistance has been limited to the military-nuclear area, to infrastructure development, and trade related investment. The investment has been targeted in such a way that as would benefit China in the long run e.g. the Karakoram highway, Gwadar port.

Also, since the 1990s, Sino-Indian relations have improved and China has repeatedly requested Pakistan – both in public and private - to peacefully resolve its issues with India. China is one of India's top trading partners and both countries have military-to-military ties as well. Further, China is concerned about the spread of radical Islam within Pakistan and its impact on Chinese Muslims, especially Uyghurs. Yet Pakistan's leaders insist on having a mythical view of the Sino-Pakistani relationship and often try to use it as leverage vis-à-vis the United States.

India – U.S. - China

India and China have been rivals and are likely to be rivals again. Both take pride in being five thousand year old civilizations and in adopting a long-term in their foreign and security policies. They cannot be ignored in any American global strategy or regional level strategy. The trick will lie in how to balance the two and how to maximize US advantage from ties with the two countries.

Just as the second half of the 20th century was characterized by America's Atlantic partnership, the India-U.S. relationship will be the defining feature of the 21st century. For decades Indian policy makers viewed American policy as that of an off-shore balancer to counter so-called Indian hegemony in South Asia. Starting with the Bush administration, there was a change in policy starting with a desire to treat India and Pakistan differently (de-hyphenation). Economic, security and defense ties with India have grown in the last decade. The India-U.S. nuclear deal as well as American support to India's bid for a seat in the Security Council has gone a long way in deepening the trust between the two sides.

Although India has moved away from a strict non-aligned policy and from the 1990s has built deep economic, diplomatic, technological and cultural ties with the United States, the Nehruvian legacy of non-alignment status quoism is still visible. India has the capability and the desire to be a global power and an ally of the United States. However, New Delhi's interests may not always be aligned with Washington's and that is something both sides will have to bear in mind, to agree to often disagree and still remain friends.

India seeks and will continue to have close diplomatic, economic, defense, and cultural ties with U.S. However, India also seeks good relations with all its neighbors, including China. And while India and China have a border dispute, the two countries are top trading partners and often see eye-to-eye on issues like climate change. India is thus unlikely to bandwagon with the U.S. or any other country against China.

Policy recommendations

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been tactical and transactional right from the beginning. The two countries have had differing goals from the relationship. However, at certain times their interests converged. In order to move forward there is a need to place the U.S.-Pakistan relationship on a more realistic basis, one that recognizes diverging strategic goals but also areas where shared interests can be strengthened. Moving ahead the relationship with Pakistan is going to be difficult but it would be beneficial to both parties concerned if one tried to find areas of agreement. As General Petraeus stated recently, ““We know what happens when we walk away from Pakistan and Afghanistan, we’ve literally seen the movie before, it’s called ‘Charlie Wilson’s War’ (about covert US support for anti-Soviet Afghan fighters) and indeed that is not in my view a good option. However difficult the relationship may be it’s one we need to continue to work, it’s one where we need to recognize what our Pakistani partners have done, they’ve sacrificed several thousand soldiers and police and their civilians have suffered substantial levels of violence.”

The argument made in this testimony is not for writing a blank check with respect to aid and assistance to Pakistan. There is good reason to be concerned with effectiveness of the aid already provided as well as legitimate concerns about the lack of transparency. The argument being made here is that the challenges in disbursing non-military aid should not lead to stoppage of aid, but rather to finding ways to do it better. Further, these challenges should not be allowed to override the larger concerns about Pakistan and the region.

In the immediate future U.S. objectives are to reduce the terror threat to itself and its allies and South Asia to a minimum. The best way to achieve this goal would be to wean Pakistan away through incentives, not coercion. Military and non-military aid and assistance provide immense leverage, both of coercion and incentives. While it is right to be more discriminating in providing military aid one

should not forget that this aid could also be used to provide incentives to the military.

In the long run, U.S. policy would benefit by weaning Pakistan away from its fundamental orientation and ideological driven identity and worldview by helping the civilian, secular, and liberal elements in the country. In this context non-military aid that furthers the growth of a modern middle class and civil society is well worth the investment. Non-military aid less thinly spread that is targeted to impact the lives of large numbers of people is also going to have a higher payoff.

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

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