

## Radicalization by Choice: ISI and the Pakistani Army

by Robert B. Oakley with Franz-Stefan Gady

### Key Points

**The Pakistani army and the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate remain essential for the security and stability of Pakistan. Both organizations have deliberately embraced Islamic radicalism as a means to address the conventional military gap between Pakistan and India.**

**Although there are signs of a shift in Pakistan's short-term strategic priorities and recognition that the challenge of homegrown Taliban is not just a U.S. problem, India will remain the focal point of Pakistan's long-term national security. Progress toward reordering Pakistan's strategic priorities and effecting a fundamental change in its strategic culture is bound to be slow and difficult. Furthermore, it cannot be forced by the United States.**

**The history of relations between Pakistan and the United States is complicated and ambiguous, largely due to Pakistani perceptions of past U.S. abandonment. Any new U.S. strategy for Pakistan has to be considered against realistic expectations, which in turn have to take due account of the longstanding, fundamental nature of the factors that have shaped Pakistani strategic priorities and culture.**

Events in Pakistan today resemble a fast-moving kaleidoscope. Although it is impossible to predict the future, Pakistan's very existence as a state undoubtedly is at stake. The danger this poses to the region and to the United States is of the greatest magnitude. For better or worse, the Pakistani army

and its intelligence unit, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), remain the most important elements in determining Pakistan's future. The army establishment is the glue that holds this large multi-ethnic, nuclear-armed Muslim country together. Throughout Pakistan's history, the army has served as "kingmaker" with decisive influence on political leadership, as guarantor of stability within the state, and as protector of the nation against external threats.

Pakistan's armed forces are the eighth largest in the world.<sup>1</sup> The ISI is in turn one of the largest military intelligence services worldwide. Its reputation was enhanced during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, when it played a critical role in mobilizing and supporting the Afghan opposition movement. The ISI is an integral part of the armed forces of Pakistan and has been instrumental in executing many of the country's foreign policy objectives. It also has a history of active intervention in Pakistan's domestic politics.

Civil-military relations have been a major factor in Pakistan's history since founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah's death in 1948. The army in Pakistan has had the reputation—not fully deserved—of professionalism, incorruptibility, and being the savior of the country after partition and the guarantor of its independence. The highest ranking military officer, the chief of army staff, found it to be his solemn duty to intervene in the political

process whenever it threatened to run counter to national interest and security as defined by the army leadership.<sup>2</sup>

This tradition started with General Ayub Khan and the military coup he launched in 1958. The ISI was instrumental in maintaining Ayub's military dictatorship. Subsequently, the army and civilian political leadership took turns running the country, but Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the only civilian to play a truly dominant role in the 60-year history of Pakistani politics. However, even he was overthrown by Chief of Army Staff Zia al Haq in 1977 (with the popular support of Islamist political parties). Despite their electoral victories, subsequent governments led by Benazir Bhutto and the Pakistan People's Party (1988–1990 and 1993–1996) and Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistan Muslim League (1990–1993 and 1997–1999) were not able to exert great influence on the Pakistani army. Democracy as a binding institution has not taken root despite U.S. efforts to strengthen democratic institutions.

The ISI's involvement with Afghan resistance groups, including radical Islamist elements, continued following Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.<sup>3</sup> The ISI remained involved in Afghan internal strife and actively supported the Taliban movement and indirectly al Qaeda. This association raises serious questions in Pakistan and abroad about the radicalization of ISI and Pakistani armed forces in general.

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States pressured the ISI and Pakistani armed forces to sever their ties to the Taliban and actively join the war on terror. Despite U.S. pressure and appeals, Pakistani support has lacked the scope and intensity desired by the United States, and concerns persist about radicalization of the ISI and military, their loyalties in the war on terror, and strategic priorities, raising doubts about the future of Pakistan. Underlying U.S. misgivings about Pakistan's true intentions and strategic priorities have been its long-term rivalry with India and concern that its threat perceptions and priorities have not changed despite numerous pledges of support for the war on terror and vast amounts of U.S. assistance intended to cement a partnership.

The United States reportedly sent nearly \$11 billion in economic and military assistance to Pakistan between 2002 and 2008, mostly for military and security related programs, in an effort to strengthen Pakistan's role in the war on terror,<sup>4</sup> demonstrate U.S. commitment to the country, and encourage it to reevaluate its strategic priorities and shift the focus from its rivalry with India to the problem of domestic radicalization and the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan. The Barack Obama administration has come up with further packages of military and economic assistance for Pakistan and Afghanistan. The President has expressed his support for the bill cosponsored by Senators John Kerry (D-MA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) that authorizes \$1.5 billion in support for Pakistan every year over the next 5 years, funds that are intended to build schools, roads, and hospitals; create new energy infrastructure; and shore up the foundations of a secular democratic state and counter the influence of Islamic militants.<sup>5</sup>

There are signs of a shift in Pakistan's strategic priorities and recognition that the challenge of home-grown Taliban is not just a U.S. problem. Recent military operations in the Swat, Dir, and Buner districts are indicators

of changing attitudes on the part of Pakistan's army and government. However, progress toward reordering of the country's strategic priorities and effecting a fundamental change in its strategic culture is bound to be slow and difficult for several reasons: Pakistan's strategic culture and priorities, which are a product of deliberate choices made by the country's leaders decades ago; a complicated and ambiguous history of relations with the United States

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as Pakistan's principal external partner; and a legacy of war with India that is rooted in the origins of the Pakistani state itself. Not only do these factors amount to a difficult legacy for Pakistan, but also they are likely to define the limits of Pakistan's strategic reorientation, and thus represent realistic constraints on, as well as guidelines for, U.S. policy.

The powerful political rule of Pakistan's army—and the growth of Islamic radicalism—followed the sudden death in 1948 of Pakistan's founding father, the charismatic, secular, politically astute Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The absence of strong national political institutions in the new country left the army as the only force able to hold together the disparate peoples (including the fiercely independent Pashtun in the northeast and the Baluch in the southwest) and provinces (such as poor rural Sindh in the south, largely dominated by feudal landlords, and the relatively more prosperous Punjab in the east composed of farmers and small businessmen) thrown together as a result of the British partition in 1947. The vast port city of Karachi is a chaotic conglomerate of all these ethnic groups. In

addition, Pakistan is divided along religious lines—with a Sunni majority and a sizeable Shia minority—and suffers from major socioeconomic disparities.

## **Influences on Strategic Culture**

Five issues have decisively shaped Pakistan's strategic culture:

- the conflict with India, finding its most vivid expression in the struggle over Kashmir
- the dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq, who altered the face of the army through a program of Islamization
- the war in Afghanistan during the 1980s, which increased the power of the ISI substantially
- the perceived U.S. abandonment of Pakistan in the 1990s (for example, the sanctions imposed by the Pressler Amendment), which undermined U.S. influence in Pakistan and reinforced Pakistani fears that their country is a "disposable ally" of the United States
- the U.S. war on terror and the decision of the Pervez Musharraf regime to side with the United States and its allies after 9/11.

**Conflict with India.** Kashmir—or the State of Jammu and Kashmir, as it is officially known—was ruled by a Hindu dynasty at the time of the partition of British India into India and Pakistan. The population of the state was predominantly Muslim. The ruler of Kashmir, having first declared independence and facing a Muslim rebellion and infiltration of irregulars from Pakistan, reversed course and decided to accede to India, allowing Indian troops to enter the state. The conflict, which came to be known as the Indo-Pakistani war of 1947, ended inconclusively with a ceasefire at the end of 1948, and resulted in the establishment of the Line of Control, or the de facto border along the line of ceasefire.

In August 1965, the second war over Kashmir broke out between India and Pakistan. The latter infiltrated forces into Kashmir to try to overthrow the state government

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**Robert B. Oakley is a Distinguished Senior Fellow in the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) at the National Defense University and former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan. Comments may be directed to oakleyr@ndu.edu. Franz-Stefan Gady was a Research Assistant in INSS and an Analyst for the Project on National Security Reform.**

and set up a successor regime, which would call for accession to Pakistan. India responded forcefully, and a series of attacks and counterattacks followed without producing a conclusive victory for either side. Several weeks of fighting were followed by a ceasefire in September 1965, and the two sides agreed to return to the ceasefire line that had existed prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

The third Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 and the subsequent Pakistani defeat was a pivotal event in Pakistan's history. Tensions in East Pakistan rose after the military government refused to accommodate demands for autonomy there and did not accept the results of national elections won by the leftist Awami Party, whose victory in East Pakistan was overwhelming. Efforts by the Pakistani army to restore control over East Pakistan, including use of force against the local resistance movement, resulted in numerous casualties and refugees. India's active support for the resistance movement led to a series of Pakistani airstrikes against Indian targets in early December 1971. India counterattacked, and within 2 weeks the Pakistani military in East Pakistan was defeated by the combined Indian and local resistance forces. East Pakistan won its independence and became the independent state of Bangladesh. This was a traumatic event for Pakistan. It lost half its population and territory and left 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war in Indian hands. The loss of East Pakistan was a bitter pill to swallow for the army in particular and the public in general.<sup>6</sup> It undermined the army's key claim to legitimacy based on its reputation as protector of the territorial integrity of the Pakistani state and showed the army once and for all that it was unable to defeat India conventionally. The capability and resource gaps were just too big. Despite this military setback, however, the army remained the most important force in the country due to its dominance in all branches of the government and the economy.

As a direct result of the defeat in East Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was installed as president by General Yahya Khan in a peaceful transition of power in December 1971. After consolidating his power, Bhutto set his own agenda. Most important, he increased

the influence of Islam in order to keep the Pakistani military in check.<sup>7</sup> Dismayed at the lack of U.S. support in the 1971 war, he sought a long-term relationship with China. He also initiated a program to develop nuclear weapons. In 1974, Bhutto sent the army to fight an insurgency in Baluchistan without proper training and equipment for a counterinsurgency—a mistake that was to be repeated decades later under President Musharraf. Despite being essentially secular, Bhutto also gave in to the Islamists and banned alcohol, until then a common sight in the officers' messes that still upheld the traditions of the British imperial Indian army.

After its defeat in 1971, the army was gradually transformed from a postcolonial conservative force to a more politicized and radical instrument. It strongly supported Bhutto's efforts to develop nuclear weapons as a way to compensate for its shortcomings in conventional warfare. The army also pushed for an increase in funding and training for insurgent activity in the Kashmir region, which it saw as a useful instrument for executing its policy of "strategic diversion" against New Delhi.<sup>8</sup>

#### ***Zia ul-Haq and Islamization.***

General Zia's accession to power in a coup in July 1977 left indelible marks on Pakistan.<sup>9</sup>

### **optimists describe Pakistan as a transitional democracy; pessimists call it a fragmented state**

A representative of the new postcolonial officer class, he was deeply religious and from a humble middle-class urban background. His major legacy was further Islamization of the army and society. He changed the motto of the army from "Unity, Faith, and Discipline" to "Faith, Obedience of God, and struggle in the path of Allah" and tried to rally the nation under the state ideology of Islam in order to foster a Pakistani identity.<sup>10</sup> Zia began to change the culture of the Pakistani officer corps and introduced mandatory religious learning as a requirement for advancement. He also turned to Saudi Arabia for

support in building up Islamist political parties at home (for example, Jamaat-e-Islami) and in organizing groups in Afghanistan to conduct an insurgency against the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. Pakistan had covert assistance from the United States in creating these Afghan resistance organizations.

While Zia provided a major push toward Islamic radicalism, he did not start the movement. Islamic radicalism in Pakistan has fluctuated over the decades. It grows from the ethnic and socioeconomic weaknesses of the nation that are reflected in its institutional failures. Popular discontent has found cyclical expression through street protests, terrorist attacks, and military coups. Over the last three decades, the people's frustration with the corruption and failings of both civilian- and military-led governments has been reinforced by radical teachings. As in other Muslim nations, the Islamists' appearance of incorruptibility and their role as the "voice of the oppressed" has attracted many of the disaffected.

Today, optimists describe Pakistan as a transitional democracy; pessimists call it a fragmented state. In this dangerous situation, the Pakistani army and the military intelligence services have a de facto monopoly over nuclear policy as well as tight control over weapons and equipment procurement, the national budget, and the country's policies toward Afghanistan and Kashmir.

***The Afghanistan War and Radicalization.*** The year 1979 brought a series of events that fundamentally altered the strategic landscape of Southwest Asia. In Iran, the shah was overthrown by radical Shi'ite leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. He was determined to export his version of Shia Islam to the entire Muslim world, threatening both Saudi security and religious supremacy and the West's main source of oil. The shah for years had very close relations with Pakistan (a majority Sunni state), which also felt threatened by revolutionary Iran. The same year, Pakistan's army relied on popular discontent in Kashmir to introduce Pakistani-trained Islamist forces. The culminating event in 1979 was the Red Army invasion of Afghanistan to keep the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul from being ousted.

These events not only changed the strategic landscape, but they also were pivotal in radicalizing both the Pakistani army and the ISI. With the outbreak of the Afghanistan war and the U.S. decision to support the mujahideen, the ISI found itself as a major element of U.S. global strategy against the Soviet Union. Since Pakistan was needed as the main base of U.S. operations for support of the mujahideen, the United States provided hundreds of millions of dollars in military and economic assistance. At the same time, the United States covertly provided hundreds of millions of dollars to support the Afghan resistance. As a condition for allowing the United States to use Pakistan as a base of operations, President Zia insisted that all support for the Afghans be channeled via the ISI. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan agreed.<sup>11</sup> The ISI took on the principal role in the execution of the covert war in Afghanistan, pushing the ISI from the background into the forefront of U.S. strategy.

During this period, the ISI both gathered intelligence and handled several billion dollars' worth of weapons and financial assistance, which were subject to little control or accountability.<sup>12</sup> The majority of aid went to Afghan Sunni fundamentalists—most of them from Pashtun ethnic groups.<sup>13</sup> The Afghani mujahideen also received direct cash infusions from Saudi Arabia (which provided the United States with annual funds matching its contribution).<sup>14</sup> Saudi Arabia established bilateral programs in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region and the Afghan refugee camps aimed at spreading its Wahhabi version of Islam. It built and staffed hundreds of mosques and madrassas, working with Pakistani political-religious parties and the ISI to do so. Saudi Arabia also took the lead in recruiting thousands of Muslims from countries as far away as Indonesia and Morocco to join the jihad against the atheist Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The United States considered the role of Islam to be a powerful global political weapon against the Soviets, as well as a mobilizing factor for the Afghan resistance. The war in Afghanistan also provided the ISI with valuable experience in supplying and train-

ing insurgent groups, which it later applied to operations in Kashmir and India.

The Afghanistan war was the pivotal event in radicalizing the Pakistani army and the ISI. In sum, it illustrated the power of combining jihad, nationalism, and guerrilla warfare.

**Pakistan-U.S. Relations.** Ever since Pakistan's creation, the United States had enjoyed a close relationship with that country. Following Jinnah's death in 1948, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan sought to ensure that international negotiations on Kashmir did not undo whatever gains had been made toward making it a part of the new state of Pakistan. In doing so, he relied heavily on Britain and the United States. The prime minister also looked to the Soviet Union, but when push came to shove he opted for the Western alliance.<sup>15</sup>

For its part, the United States found Pakistan a useful ally in the developing Cold War due to its strategic location. India chose to seek closer ties with the Soviet Union (and the Non-Aligned Movement), leaving the United States with little choice but to side with Pakistan. In return for its support against the Soviet Union, Pakistan expected U.S. help in its confrontation with India. Pakistan started to receive U.S. military aid in 1954 under the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement after Army Chief of Staff (later President) Ayub Khan convinced Washington of the usefulness of Pakistan against the Soviet Union. By the 1960s, Pakistan was a member of South East Asia Treaty Organization and Central Treaty Organization, both U.S.-led anti-Soviet alliances.

Even with these mutual commitments, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship was an uneasy one over the next few decades, with the United States suspending military and economic aid during the wars of 1965 and 1971. And despite its commitments to Pakistan, on a number of occasions the United States supplied India with military hardware. The perceived fickleness of the U.S. commitment to Pakistan remains a big issue with Pakistanis to the present day.

Spearheaded by the ISI, which had set up a division for the clandestine procurement of military technology from abroad in the 1970s, Pakistan was pursuing its nuclear ambitions,

disregarding repeated warnings from the U.S. Government. Congress passed a number of resolutions intended to deter Pakistan from acquiring nuclear weapons by requiring the termination of economic assistance and military transfers if Pakistan tested a nuclear device. The Pressler Amendment, which initially increased the amount of U.S. assistance, also called for termination of government-to-government military sales and new economic assistance unless the President certified annually that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear device. While the United States was engaged in Afghanistan, the Reagan administration was willing to give Pakistan the benefit of the doubt when intelligence was uncertain.<sup>16</sup>

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With the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan in 1989, the United States lost its strategic incentive to remain engaged in Afghanistan. In October 1990, the United States decided to impose sanctions against Pakistan for pursuit of its nuclear enrichment program. A total of \$600 million of U.S. aid was halted. Notwithstanding the administration's efforts to persuade Congress to delay sanctions until after the establishment of Nawaz Sharif's new government in Pakistan, U.S. lawmakers were not prepared to compromise.<sup>17</sup> Pakistan and Afghanistan were left to cope with the immense problems caused by a decade of war, including 4 million to 5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This development contributed significantly to strong anti-American attitudes within the ISI and Pakistani army. The Pakistani public's and political leaders' reaction was outrage. They felt that the United States had willfully cut off assistance once the Soviets had been defeated and that

the United States no longer needed Pakistan. Only a handful of very senior Pakistani government officials had been aware of the nuclear problem in U.S.-Pakistani relations. A comment by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan in May 1990 (prior to sanctions being imposed) to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Deputy Director Robert Gates reveals the Pakistani opinion on the matter: "The truth is that the U.S. too often used its aid as a lever. We did not succumb in the past and we will not give up our principles for the sake of American aid or fear of war."<sup>18</sup>

The Pakistani military felt betrayed. There were to be no more military exchanges with the United States. Intelligence cooperation between the CIA and ISI steadily declined. Important and successful U.S. Agency for International Development projects were shut down. The cancellation of delivery of 58 F-16 fighter jets, judged by the Pakistanis as critical to deterring India, was a particularly bitter pill to swallow. Inadvertently, this made the pursuance of nuclear weapons a more pressing imperative for Pakistan because of its even greater inferiority in conventional forces vis-à-vis India. It also forced Pakistan to turn to ballistic missiles and to develop new, smaller nuclear warheads to put on them. Partly in return for assistance to its own nuclear program, North Korea provided the missiles in a program approved by Prime Minister Bhutto and managed by Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan.

The U.S. "abandonment" in the 1990s opened the door to powerful Islamist, anti-American Pashtun-based forces in Pakistan. The Taliban, springing up largely on their own in Afghanistan, soon received substantial support in the 1990s from the ISI and Pakistani army under the tutelage of the civilian governments of both Benazir Bhutto (during her second term) and Nawaz Sharif.<sup>19</sup> The objective was to reestablish traditional Pashtun control of Afghanistan and eject the Tajiks and Uzbeks. In 1994, Prime Minister Bhutto organized an inter-agency group on Afghanistan. ISI brigadiers urged her to maintain pressure on Ahmad Shah Massoud's government in Afghanistan as it was perceived to be too "pro-Indian."<sup>20</sup> Pakistani support for the

Taliban was driven by the fear of strategic encirclement that was omnipresent in both the ISI and army. Even today, the army fears that it could face both a U.S.-Indian-Afghan alliance and an Iranian-Russian alliance, aimed at checking Pakistani influence or even breaking up the Pakistani state.<sup>21</sup> As Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid stated recently, "Many in Pakistan believe that the United States has deceived Pakistan into conniving with Washington to bring about its own destruction: India and U.S.-supported Afghanistan will form a pincer around Pakistan to dismember the world's only Muslim nuclear power."<sup>22</sup>

***The War on Terror and Musharraf.*** Following 9/11, President Musharraf was forced to either turn away from the Taliban and support the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan or face the consequences of being seen as a supporter of Islamic terrorism. He opted for the former with the objective of both receiving military aid and countering the growing influence of Islamic radicals in Pakistan.<sup>23</sup> The United States, in turn, reengaged vigorously in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Pakistan, it dropped sanctions and rapidly reestablished large-scale military and economic assistance programs, while encouraging other governments to provide sizeable economic support. For the first time in a decade, Pakistani military officers were enrolled in U.S. military schools. New weapons and critical spare parts for old weapons systems flowed from the United States to Pakistan, increasing the army conventional capabilities. In 2006, U.S. arms sales reached \$3.5 billion.<sup>24</sup>

In Afghanistan in 2001, the U.S. campaign resulted in the fall of the Taliban regime. The thousands of Taliban who fled to Pakistan after the lightning U.S. victory were mostly Pashtun, as were many of the personnel working for the ISI (the army remains a Punjabi-dominated force). A smaller number of al Qaeda fighters who fled were mostly from Arab and other Islamic nations. Some individuals sent to Guantanamo Bay reportedly were arrested in Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> Most Taliban Pashtun fighters, however, settled along the border in the Pakistani Federally Administered

Tribal Areas (FATA), the Northwest Frontier Province, and Baluchistan. With the tacit cooperation of the Pakistani army (and the ISI), the Taliban quietly reorganized, rearmed, and reestablished their old connections. They began preparing for a new insurgency against the U.S.-supported Hamid Karzai government in Kabul. The

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Taliban also established close ties with homegrown Afghan Pashtun resistance groups such as those led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani. Despite the improved U.S.-Pakistan relationship, large-scale infiltration from Baluchistan Province and the FATA went unchecked for a long time.<sup>26</sup>

Responding to U.S. pressure, President Musharraf finally in 2005 moved Pakistani army forces into the FATA for the first time since the 1970s, where they were stalemated by the determined attacks of both Taliban and Pashtun tribal warriors. The army experienced a major problem with Pakistani regulars of Pashtun descent who were reluctant to kill fellow Pashtuns.<sup>27</sup> At the end of 2008, over twice as many Pakistani soldiers were involved in the fight against the Taliban (120,000 in FATA) than the total number of U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Afghanistan (55,000). Pakistan suffered more military deaths (over 1,800 in FATA) than the International Security Assistance Force and United States combined in Afghanistan (1,006).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the attacks on Pakistani military personnel by their fellow countrymen have lowered morale, increased desertion and suicide rates, and led to growing discontent with the political leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari, who replaced Musharraf in 2008. These operations were seen by most Pakistanis as yielding to U.S. pressure rather than pursuing Pakistan's own interests.<sup>29</sup>

## Zardari's Election and Beyond

The election of Asif Ali Zardari first as Pakistan's prime minister and subsequently as president in 2008 was to a large degree made possible by the decision of the new Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani to keep the army and ISI out of electoral politics and support the electoral process. Zardari's prospects were also helped by a wave of sympathy following the assassination of his wife, Benazir Bhutto.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the United States applied strong pressure to hold free and fair elections. After a decade of essentially authoritarian rule, something resembling democracy has returned to Pakistan. The Islamist political parties lost almost all their seats in the National Assembly, as well as their majorities in regional legislatures in the key provinces of Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier, which border Afghanistan. However, since the election, the Zardari government has been plagued by allegations of corruption and charges of incompetence and overall poor governance. His government has low popularity ratings.<sup>31</sup>

This situation underscores the military's critical role in Pakistan. It remains essential to the country's domestic stability, efforts to combat homegrown Taliban, and to safeguarding the nuclear arsenal. Thanks to technical assistance from the United States and a complete overhaul of the nuclear command and control system, the U.S. Government reportedly finds the present safeguards adequate.<sup>32</sup> This is particularly important because a number of simulations reportedly conducted by the U.S. military and Intelligence Community have repeatedly cast doubt upon the ability of the United States to recover a weapon if the Pakistani army loses control of it. However, with Pakistan's future domestic stability not to be taken for granted and the obvious risk of further radicalization of the army and ISI, the prospect of radical elements gaining access to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal cannot be ruled out.<sup>33</sup>

The Pakistani army, largely a conventional force designed for traditional warfare, has experienced difficulties in adapting to the requirements of irregular warfare.<sup>34</sup> The

recent offensive in the Swat Valley, using elements of the Frontier Corps, heavy artillery, tanks, and helicopter gunships, has shown signs of progress and inflicted heavy casualties on the Taliban. However, given the likelihood of the Taliban's return as soon as the army pulls back, the sustainability of this offensive and the degree to which the army is reorienting itself toward irregular warfare remains an open question.

The army and the Zardari government must also confront a renewed insurgency by ethnic Baluch tribesmen. For decades, the Baluch have seen the revenues for their province's oil and gas deposits go to the central government. Little has been done to provide education and health care. Jobs created by new construction projects (for example, ports and roads) went to persons from other provinces. Former President Musharraf's attempt to crush the insurgency

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by brute force made matters worse, and the Zardari government has done nothing to follow up on its promises for reform. The Pakistani army also mounted a new offensive in South Waziristan, the main base of the allegedly killed Taliban leader Baitullah Meshud reportedly responsible for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

A national poll conducted in mid-2008 found that 74 percent of Pakistanis oppose direct U.S. military action against Taliban and al Qaeda militants.<sup>35</sup> The same poll shows that most Pakistanis oppose the entire Pakistan-U.S. security relationship. A separate March 2009 poll found that while 69 percent of Pakistanis agreed that having the Taliban and al Qaeda operating in Pakistan was a serious problem, only 24 percent said that they would support American military incursions in the tribal areas.<sup>36</sup> Given such attitudes and the continuing critical role of the Pakistani military, when it comes to the task of confronting Islamic

extremists in Pakistan, there appears to be no alternative to the dual policy of building up the capabilities of the Pakistani army and ISI while working to shore up popular and political support for this critical effort.

## Observations and Recommendations

After a period of uncertainty, Pakistan's military forces appear to be confronting the major security threats. They have surprised most observers by their combined arms operations using F-16s, helicopters, artillery, tanks, and infantry to great effect, demonstrating the value of U.S. training and material assistance. The hard work of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, in developing a close relationship with Pakistani army leadership is also paying off.

This is most decidedly not the time to place restrictions upon U.S. assistance to the Pakistani armed forces. U.S. policymakers must make this very clear to Congress, leaving no doubt of the disastrous consequences that would ensue.

When talking about the radicalization of both the ISI and the army, it is important to understand one crucial fact: the army has embraced that radicalism by *choice*. Over the last 25 years, Pakistanis believe that it has been their most effective weapon in defending the nation against Indian power. Radicalism, therefore, is a rational means to achieve a particular end: the survival of the Pakistan state.

The new Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, has ousted a number of corrupt and incompetent senior officers and has removed some 200 active-duty and retired officers from top-level positions in the civilian administration. He has replaced the top commanders at the ISI in an attempt to cut ties with the Taliban and other Islamic radical groups—particularly after the Indian embassy bombing in Kabul in 2008, which was directly linked to the ISI.<sup>37</sup> But disentangling the ISI from its liaison with radical Islamic groups will prove difficult if not impossible. Despite General Kayani's efforts, he only was able to purge the top leadership of the ISI. In most cases, it is hard

to distinguish between contacts by junior-level ISI operatives acting on their own and their contacts made at the direction of high-level authorities. The longstanding Pakistani policy of maintaining contacts with militant groups and providing them with some assistance—with no precise purpose—is a form of insurance against the possibility of the United States again withdrawing its support and tensions with India increasing.

President Obama presented his new Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy on March 21, 2009. It was the result of three independent reviews conducted by the National Security Council, U.S. Central Command, and Joint Staff, synthesized by another team, and personally approved by President Obama. First, the Obama plan calls for a comprehensive, long-term approach, combining security with political and social development. Given the extreme sensitivity of Pakistan-U.S. relations, the U.S. policy should avoid being perceived as advocating specific changes in Pakistan's political institutions or leadership.

Second, over the long term, the FATA need to be brought into the political mainstream. The present system is one of indirect rule based upon tribal structures with their own separate authorities, most of which were installed by the British. This is a structural weakness that has been exploited by various extremist groups, a source of constant danger for the Pakistani army and the Frontier Corps. Closer integration between the army and the Frontier Corps would be desirable and would help the overall unity of effort.

Third, there is an obvious need for regional diplomacy, starting with an international conference on assistance for Afghanistan and the creation of a permanent "contact group" covering both Afghanistan and Pakistan (which presumably includes Russia, China, India, Iran, and Saudi Arabia), as well as the United States and NATO members. China is making huge public and private investments in Pakistan—developing its mineral resources, roads, and ports—as well as in Afghanistan. It has a major long-term interest in stabilizing both countries in order to establish a reliable corridor to the Indian Ocean for imports and exports. Saudi Arabia is another country with the

capability to assist Pakistan economically, as well as having the potential to bring Islamic extremists under control and assist in the reform of the Islamic schools.

Fourth, in addition to greater near-term support, the United States ought to consider collaborating with Turkey, which has a long history of close relations with Pakistan, in training the Pakistani army. It is also essential that the United States, preferably in cooperation with other countries (such as Turkey), help Pakistan develop a long-term program for training and equipping its police forces. Such programs have been a major part of U.S. strategy for both Iraq and Afghanistan. There has only been minimal assistance to Pakistan in this respect. The Pakistani army has neither the training nor the equipment to deal with the significant criminal threat in major cities (such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad) and is already badly overstretched.

Fifth, there needs to be Pakistan-India rapprochement. Ever since partition, Pakistan's fears about its larger neighbor—and anger over what it sees as the unjust occupation of Kashmir—have been the chief motivator for Pakistani support of jihadist movements and the dominant political role of its army, as well as the cause of several wars. Even an interim agreement would make it much easier for Pakistan to make the necessary political reforms. More significantly, it would open the way for Pakistan to drop its restrictions on trade with India. The latter would then become a locomotive that is badly needed to help revitalize Pakistan's economy.

Sixth, there also needs to be continued progress in U.S.-sponsored efforts to improve relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and relieve the deep distrust between them. The recent meetings in Washington between Presidents Obama, Zardari, and Karzai were helpful, yet progress is going to be slow. In addition to what can be accomplished on the political side, there is a great deal to be done on the economic front, including regional economic cooperation. Pakistan was already in deep economic crisis before the global meltdown. Its situation now is truly desperate. The United States has taken the first step in organizing an international conference of major partners (including China, Saudi

Arabia, Japan, Europe, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [IBRD], Asian Development Bank, and International Monetary Fund) and developing both short- and long-term plans to revive and reform the economy. The United Nations and the IBRD could play the leading role. However, these plans should include Central Asia, which could play an important role as a potential source of oil, natural gas, and electric power for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

### **given the extreme sensitivity of Pakistan-U.S. relations, the U.S. policy should avoid being perceived as advocating specific changes in Pakistan's political institutions or leadership**

The perils of the present situation in Pakistan are enormous not only for that country and Afghanistan but also for the entire region, including India. The danger of another military confrontation between India and Pakistan is very much alive, with the risk that it could develop into a nuclear exchange. Amid all the current discussion on counter-insurgency operations, this issue has received little coverage in recent months.

Despite its scope and scale, the new U.S. strategy for Pakistan has to be considered against realistic expectations, which in turn have to take into account the longstanding fundamental nature of the factors that have shaped Pakistani strategic priorities and culture. Thus, expectations for U.S. policy and assistance will have to be set accordingly. Hopes for near-term significant changes in Pakistan's strategic culture or U.S. ability to dictate Pakistan's national interests are likely to prove exceedingly optimistic. Previous attempts to do so have been futile, and there are few reasons to expect it to be otherwise in the future.

Whatever their faults, the Pakistani army and ISI remain absolutely essential forces for security and stability in Pakistan.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Pakistan," March 2009, available at <[www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3453.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3453.htm)>.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of civil-military relations in Pakistan, see Mazhar Aziz, *Military Control in Pakistan: The Parallel State* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 47–76.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description, see Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), chapters 10, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Center for American Progress, "U.S. Aid to Pakistan by the Numbers," August 21, 2008, available at <[www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/08/pakistan\\_aid\\_numbers.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/08/pakistan_aid_numbers.html)>.

<sup>5</sup> The White House, remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, March 27, 2009, and State Department, press release: "U.S. Pledge at the Tokyo Donors' Conference," April 17, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed description of the background of the military defeat, see Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army and the Wars Within* (New York: Oxford Free Press, 2008), chapter 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 320–350. Bhutto introduced his own brand of Islamic socialism, banned alcohol, and bowed to Islamic radicals to counterbalance the still influential army leadership by amending the constitution, which officially made Pakistan an "Islamic State."

<sup>8</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, *Pakistan and the War on Terror: Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 12.

<sup>9</sup> "Background Note: Pakistan."

<sup>10</sup> Nawaz, 359–360.

<sup>11</sup> Kanishk Sathasivam, *Uneasy Neighbors: India, Pakistan, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 133–134.

<sup>12</sup> Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 188–189.

<sup>13</sup> Sathasivam, 136; Coll, 180–182.

<sup>14</sup> Sathasivam, 134.

<sup>15</sup> Nawaz, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Thahir-Kheli Shirin, *India, Pakistan and the United States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997), 74–89.

<sup>17</sup> Nawaz, 437.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>19</sup> Coll, 287–297.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>21</sup> Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargaining," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November/December 2008), available at <[www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64604/barnett-r-rubin-and-ahmed-rashid-from-great-game-to-grand-bargain](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64604/barnett-r-rubin-and-ahmed-rashid-from-great-game-to-grand-bargain)>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Nawaz, 539–542.

<sup>24</sup> "U.S. Aid to Pakistan by the Numbers."

<sup>25</sup> For example, the BBC reported that Mohamed el-Gharani was arrested in Pakistan in October 2001. See BBC News, "Chad man released from Guantanamo," June 12, 2009, available at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8096402.stm>>.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed account of the Taliban's influence on Pakistan, see Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington

Press, 2001), chapter 5; and Rizwan Hussein, *Pakistan and the Emergence of Islamic Militancy* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), chapter 6.

<sup>27</sup> Tellis, 26–27.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Pakistani former Chief of the Army Staff Jehangir Karamat referred to the new civil-military relationship as the "Kayani model" in Jehangir Karamant, "The Kayani Model," *Pakistan Ka Khuda Hafiz*, March 21 2009, available at <<http://pakistankakhudhafiz.wordpress.com/2009/03/21/the-kayani-model/>>.

<sup>31</sup> Gallup Poll, "Pakistanis Give New Civilian Leadership Low Marks So Far," January 13, 2009, available at <[www.gallup.com/poll/113737/pakistanis-give-new-civilian-leadership-low-marks-far.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/113737/pakistanis-give-new-civilian-leadership-low-marks-far.aspx)>.

<sup>32</sup> General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. Central Command, said in an interview with Fox News on May 10, 2009: "With respect to—the nuclear weapons and—sites that are controlled by Pakistan, as President Obama mentioned the other day, we have confidence in their security procedures and elements and believe that the security of those sites is adequate." Transcript available at <[www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,519696,00.html](http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,519696,00.html)>.

<sup>33</sup> David E. Sanger, "Obama's Worst Nightmare," *The New York Times*, January 8, 2009, available at <[www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11pakistan-t.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11pakistan-t.html?pagewanted=all)>.

<sup>34</sup> Tellis, 43.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> International Republican Institute, "IRI Pakistan Index," May 2009, available at <[www.iri.org/newsreleases/pdfs/2009%20May%2011%20IRI%20Pakistan%20Index,%20March%207-30,%202009.pdf](http://www.iri.org/newsreleases/pdfs/2009%20May%2011%20IRI%20Pakistan%20Index,%20March%207-30,%202009.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Behind the Indian Embassy Bombing," *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 2008), available at <[www.theatlantic.com/doc/200808u/kaplan-pakistan](http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200808u/kaplan-pakistan)>.

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