



214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE • Washington DC 20002 • (202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

After the Withdrawal: The Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Part II)

**Testimony before the
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
and
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives**

October 29, 2013

**Lisa Curtis
Senior Research Fellow, Asian Studies Center
The Heritage Foundation**

My name is Lisa Curtis. I am Senior Research Fellow on South Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

The election of Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Pakistan Muslim League/Nawaz (PML/N) party offers the U.S. an opportunity to forge a more effective partnership with Pakistan on a limited range of issues, including social and economic development and regional integration. Given that the Pakistani military continues to seek to undermine Indian regional influence through terrorist proxies operating in both Afghanistan and India, however, Sharif's election alone is unlikely to have significant impact on the core U.S. goals of stabilizing Afghanistan and rooting out terrorism from the region.

Despite the challenges, there are sound reasons for the U.S. to pursue engagement with Pakistan, including maintaining access for tracking global terrorists sheltering on its territory, encouraging Pakistan's leadership to pursue a moderate, democratic path, and maintaining a degree of leverage with the military leadership to ensure that Pakistan's nuclear weapons remain safe and secure and out of the hands of extremists.

Pakistan is home to a plethora of terrorist groups that keep the region unstable, and contribute to the spread of global terrorism. Its policies toward the Afghan Taliban and terrorist groups like the Haqqani network and the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) have remained largely unchanged over the last 11 years, despite U.S. pressure on Islamabad to crack down on the terror groups. Provision of nearly U.S. \$27 billion in military and economic assistance to Pakistan over the last decade has had little impact on Pakistan's strategic calculus with regard to Afghanistan and India. Pakistan's military and intelligence leaders maintain a short-term tactical approach of fighting some terrorist groups deemed to be a threat to the state, while supporting others that are aligned with Pakistan's goal of curbing Indian regional influence.

Moving relations forward with a country that is both hurting and helping in the fight against global terrorism has proven challenging. But cutting off relations with Pakistan altogether is a risky option. The U.S. instead should pursue policies that build up the economy and support Pakistani civil society, while conditioning military assistance on Pakistani cooperation with U.S. counterterrorism goals.

The Obama Administration exercised its national security waiver authority to skirt counterterrorism conditions on military aid to Pakistan earlier this year. This was likely prudent in the middle of the U.S. drawdown from Afghanistan, given Pakistani influence with Afghan Taliban leaders and U.S. reliance on the Pakistani Ground Lines of Communication (GLOCs). But a policy of continually overlooking Pakistani inaction against extremist groups on its territory would have long-term negative consequences for U.S. interests in the region and increase the chances for additional terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland. U.S. policymakers should make clear to Pakistani leaders that the future of U.S.-Pakistan ties will hinge on how helpful Pakistan is in supporting the U.S. objective of stabilizing Afghanistan and reining in terrorist groups on Pakistani territory.

Reviving Ties amidst Continuing Mistrust

Washington and Islamabad are making a serious effort to revive ties following a series of shocks to the relationship in 2011 and 2012. Relations started to spiral downward when CIA contractor Raymond Davis was arrested in Pakistan for shooting two Pakistanis in early 2011, then further plummeted following the U.S. unilateral raid on Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan on May 2, 2011. An attack on the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan by the Pakistan-based Haqqani network in September, 2011, and an accidental NATO strike on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers two months later put relations in cold storage for nearly a year.

Pakistan's full re-opening of the GLOCs and the U.S. reinstatement of coalition support funding (CSF) in December 2012 marked the beginning of a rapprochement in relations that culminated in last week's visit of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Washington, during which the Obama Administration announced full resumption of military and economic aid to the tune of \$1.5 billion. The Obama Administration had been working with Congress over the last several months to resume hundreds of millions in assistance programs aimed at strengthening Pakistan's counterterrorism capabilities. In the joint statement issued by Prime Minister Sharif and President Obama on October 23, the two sides committed to holding a ministerial-level strategic dialogue next spring. The priorities for the dialogue include law enforcement and counterterrorism; economics and finance; energy; security, strategic stability, and non-proliferation; and defense consultations.

The mutual goodwill generated by the Obama-Sharif meeting was welcome, but it should not mask the fact that each side remains deeply distrustful of the other. A recent report in *The Washington Post* details the challenges the U.S. faces in managing relations with Pakistan. According to the report, based on classified CIA documents and Pakistani government memos, Pakistan has secretly cooperated with the U.S. drone program.¹ This revelation followed closely on the heels of Sharif's calls on the Obama Administration to halt drone strikes and an Amnesty International report that denounced drones for causing civilian casualties.

The Washington Post article further detailed how U.S. officials have had to confront Pakistan's leadership with evidence that Pakistan retains links to groups involved in attacking U.S. forces. In one instance, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Pakistani officials the U.S. had found cell phone numbers of Pakistani intelligence officials on bodies of dead militants. In another case, former Deputy Director of the CIA Mike Morell showed Pakistani officials video of militants clearing explosive materials from plants the U.S. had asked Pakistan to raid. U.S. officials said the videos proved that Pakistani authorities had tipped off the militants before the raid was launched. The article is a reminder that despite all the talk about putting relations on a more even keel, the two sides remain deeply divided over the counterterrorism issue.

¹ Greg Miller and Bob Woodward, "Secret memos reveal explicit nature of U.S., Pakistan agreement on Drones," *The Washington Post*, October 24, 2013, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-pakistani-leaders-secretly-backed-cia-drone-campaign-secret-documents-show/2013/10/23/15e6b0d8-3beb-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story_1.html.

Pakistani Calculus on Afghanistan

Pakistani leaders appear to believe that U.S. forces will depart the region before Afghanistan is stabilized and thus calculate that continuing support for the Taliban and Haqqani network constitutes their best chance to counter Indian regional influence. Unfortunately, President Obama's aggressive withdrawal strategy and questions about whether the U.S. will retain a residual force presence in the country post-2014 only reinforces their view.

Pakistani officials publicly voice support for a stable Afghanistan, but the truth is they want to ensure that their own proxies remain influential in the country to prevent India from making further inroads into Kabul. Pakistan's concerns about increasing Indian influence and presence in Afghanistan over-ride its desire for a stable Afghan neighbor. This leaves U.S. policy in a conundrum in which American officials acknowledge the need to work with Pakistan on encouraging a peace process in Afghanistan, but also recognize that Pakistan has different regional goals than the U.S., making it an unreliable partner.

Taliban Reconciliation Talks

U.S. efforts to encourage talks between the Afghan government and Taliban have faltered in recent months. The proposed opening of a Taliban political office in Doha, Qatar this past summer turned into a fiasco when the Taliban raised its flag on the office and posted a sign referring to the group as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Afghan President Hamid Karzai was furious about the move and demanded the office be closed down.

There is skepticism among many regional experts about the Taliban's sincerity in the negotiating process. The insurgents have stepped up their attacks and shown signs of confidence that time is on their side. A 2012 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Afghanistan raises concerns that the Taliban could manipulate negotiations with the U.S. to gain international legitimacy, and simply stall for time as America draws down its forces.² Other unidentified Western intelligence officials have also expressed reservations about talks with the Taliban, and their assessment is that the Taliban is playing a waiting game and has no real interest in reconciling with the Karzai government.³

U.S. officials say Pakistan has been helpful in facilitating the travel of Afghan Taliban leaders to meetings in third countries with U.S. and Afghan officials. But there are no signs that Pakistan has used its leverage to pressure either the Taliban leadership or its Haqqani network allies to compromise for peace. Details of the relationship between the Pakistan military and the Haqqani network are laid out in a recent book, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973–2012*, by Vahid Brown and Don Ressler.⁴ The book highlights that Pakistan is actively assisting the Haqqani network the same way it has over the last 20 years, through training, tactical field

² Sara Sorcher, "Peace Talks with Taliban a Good Step, But Unlikely to Pay Off," *National Journal*, January 23, 2012, at <http://mobile.nationaljournal.com/nationalsecurity/insiders-peace-talks-with-taliban-a-good-step-but-unlikely-to-pay-off-20120123>.

³ Con Coughlin, "Talking to the Taliban: Are Afghanistan's Insurgents Really Serious About Peace Talks with Washington and Kabul?" *The Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2012.

⁴ Vahid Brown and Don Ressler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), page 171.

advice, financing, and material support. The assistance, the authors note, helps to sustain the Haqqani group and enhance its effectiveness on the battlefield. For reconciliation talks to succeed, the Taliban and Haqqani network would have to come under more pressure in Pakistan. As U.S. national security expert Anthony Cordesman pointed out, the U.S. inability to convince Pakistan to give up support for the Taliban, the Haqqani network, and other terrorist groups has been a “critical failure” of U.S. strategy in the region.⁵

The case of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the pro-talks Taliban leader whom Pakistan held in detention for over three years, also shows that Pakistan’s role in the reconciliation process has been more opaque than U.S. officials seem willing to acknowledge. Pakistani authorities captured Mullah Baradar in February 2010. Baradar was reportedly involved with peace negotiations with the Karzai administration at the time, so his arrest seemed clearly aimed at disrupting the talks. Islamabad refused the Afghan government’s request for Baradar’s extradition.

After continuous requests over the last three years from the Afghan government for Baradar’s release, Pakistan finally let him go last month. Afghan leaders have praised the Pakistani action but say that Baradar remains under the supervision of Pakistan’s intelligence agencies. Afghan Taliban leaders have so far refused to meet him inside Pakistan. Pakistan has released several other Taliban prisoners over the last year, but it is still unclear whether this will have an impact on the talks.

Pakistani intelligence officials understand better than anyone how to break apart and disrupt the Taliban–Haqqani–al-Qaeda nexus. Pakistan’s Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has had close relationships with members of these groups for three decades and has a well-developed understanding of the dynamics among the organizations and the strengths and weaknesses of each group’s leaders. But if Pakistan is unwilling to use its leverage to help bring genuine peace to Afghanistan, there are other policies—aside from pursuing reconciliation with the Taliban—that the U.S. can pursue. Political reconciliation involving the Taliban is desirable only to the extent that it contributes to the goal of ensuring that Afghanistan never serves as a safe haven for global terrorists again.

Peace Efforts with the Pakistani Taliban

Pakistan’s fostering of various militant groups has backfired badly as some extremists have turned their guns on the Pakistani state. This is the case with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, the Pakistani Taliban), which has killed several thousand Pakistani civilians and security forces in terrorist attacks since its creation in 2007. Despite ongoing attacks, an All Parties Conference (APC) in Pakistan decided in early September to endorse the idea of peace talks with the TTP. The Nawaz Sharif government has reached out to the group, even though nearly 140 people were killed in terrorist attacks in the Pakistani city of Peshawar in just the last month. Pakistani leaders say the attacks are being carried out by militant elements opposed to negotiations, implying the TTP may be splintering as an organization.

⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Afghanistan–Pakistan War at the End of 2011: Strategic failure? Talk Without Hope? Tactical Success? Spend Not Build (and then Stop Spending)?” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 15, 2011, <http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/showRecord.php?RecordId=36405>.

TTP leader Hakimullah Mehsud, during a recent interview with the BBC, said his group was ready for serious negotiations with Islamabad.⁶ It is unclear what the two sides would discuss, however, since Mehsud made clear that one of the TTP's main goals is to wage jihad against the "infidel" system of governance in Pakistan. He said the TTP would demand the country be run exclusively according to Shariah law even after the U.S. and NATO withdraw combat forces from Afghanistan. Mehsud also called for an end to the U.S. drone campaign in Pakistan's tribal border areas and claimed his group would consider a ceasefire, if drone attacks were halted.

The APC resolution notwithstanding, some Pakistani commentators have expressed skepticism about efforts to engage the TTP and see the government's offer as a sign of weakness in the face of escalating attacks. In the six weeks before the elections in early May 2013, the TTP took responsibility for attacks that killed scores of election workers and candidates mainly from the secular-leaning parties. The PML/N's support for negotiations with the TTP during this campaign of violence and failure to denounce the attacks seemed to play in to the TTP's strategy of using violence to intimidate civilians and impose its agenda.

Pakistani leaders have a poor track record of past efforts to forge peace deals with militant groups. The most disastrous attempt at peacemaking with militants came in 2008 and 2009, when Taliban fighters took control of the Swat Valley and then sought to make inroads in other parts of Pakistan. The military finally regained control of the Swat Valley through force in mid-2009, but its initial appeasement of the militants had allowed them to entrench themselves in society and emboldened them to try to gain more territory.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Afghanistan-Pakistan relations have seen both highs and lows in the last few years. The political leaders have held several meetings but President Karzai often directly blames Pakistan for attacks in Afghanistan. Relations took a downturn earlier this year following a meeting in the United Kingdom in which Pakistan apparently demanded that Afghanistan scale back its relations with India and agree to allow Pakistani training of Afghan security forces.⁷ President Karzai visited Islamabad in late August, and many see the recent release of Mullah Baradar and other lower level pragmatic Taliban leaders as a result of those meetings and an effort to improve Afghan-Pakistani relations.

There have been some flare-ups along their shared 1,500-mile border in the last six months. In May, an Afghan border policeman was killed and two Pakistani soldiers were injured during a firefight along the border. In mid-September, Pakistan accused Afghan border forces of killing five innocent Pakistanis along the border in Baluchistan province.

But their shared border has also led to limited economic cooperation and increasingly robust people-to-people linkages. About 3 million Afghan refugees continue to reside in Pakistan and 30,000 Afghan students study in Pakistani schools, while around 50,000 Afghans move back and

⁶ "Full Text: BBC interview with Taliban's Mehsud," *BBC*, October 9, 2013, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24466791>.

⁷ Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," *CRS Report for Congress*, September 19, 2013.

forth across the Afghan-Pakistani border every day. The two countries signed a “transit trade” agreement three years ago to allow for easier export of Afghan agricultural products through Pakistan. Afghan trucks are not permitted to move cargo back from India, however. Afghan-Pakistani trade currently totals around \$2 billion. The two countries also are discussing the possibility of joint economic projects like building a common hydroelectric station.⁸

Indo-Pakistani Ties

India is committed to building economic and political links with Afghanistan both to prevent the re-establishment of terrorist sanctuaries in the country and to gain trade and energy access to Central Asia. India has pledged nearly \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan, making it one of the top donors to the country, and is moving forward with major economic investments. President Karzai and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh completed a Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2011 that allowed, among other things, Indian training of Afghan security forces.

Pakistani military and intelligence officials remain highly suspicious of ties between Kabul and New Delhi and believe that India uses its embassy and consulates in Afghanistan to recruit insurgents to fight in Pakistan’s Baluchistan province. From the U.S. perspective, however, India is contributing positively to Afghanistan’s economic and democratic development and it is, thus, in the U.S. interest that India remain engaged in Afghanistan. The only way to reduce Pakistani paranoia about Indo-Afghan ties is to promote dialogue and improved relations between India and Pakistan.

Indo-Pakistani tensions are rising after a series of firing incidents in August that killed several Indian and Pakistani troops along the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Kashmir. LoC tensions flared again last week when India accused Pakistani troops of firing guns and mortars on at least 50 Indian border posts in Kashmir. Indian officials said it was the most serious ceasefire violation between the countries in a decade. Meanwhile, Pakistan said that Indian troops targeted 27 Pakistani posts near Sialkot in the same timeframe.

During his previous stint as prime minister from 1997 to 1999, Sharif encouraged back-channel negotiations with India on Kashmir that made significant progress until the Pakistan military occupied Indian positions in northern Kashmir. That slammed the brakes on talks and precipitated a brief border war in the spring of 1999 in the Kargil region along the LoC that left more than 1,000 Indian and Pakistani soldiers dead. Sharif is likely to tread carefully on the issue of Kashmir because of this experience.

U.S. Policy Recommendations:

Pakistani military leaders have so far resisted cracking down on Taliban and Haqqani network sanctuaries largely because of their failure to envision a new strategy that both protects Pakistan’s regional interests and uproots support for terrorist activities and ideology. Islamabad’s practice of relying on violent Islamist proxies in Afghanistan (and India) has backfired badly on Pakistan and there is increasing recognition among Pakistanis that a Taliban-dominated

⁸ Roundtable discussion with visiting Pakistani National Security and Foreign Affairs Advisor Sartaj Aziz, Willard Hotel, Washington, DC, October 23, 2013.

Afghanistan would likely have a destabilizing effect on Pakistan. U.S. officials must build on this sentiment by convincing Pakistani leaders that unless they use their resources now to force the Taliban to compromise in Afghanistan, Pakistan will suffer from an emboldened Taliban leadership that will project its power back into Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan will face increasing isolation and lose credibility with the international community for continuing policies that encourage terrorism and endanger the safety of civilized nations.

Moving forward the U.S. should:

Condition military aid. Despite nearly \$27 billion in civil and military aid to Pakistan over the last decade, the U.S. has been unable to sway Pakistani leaders to adopt consistent and comprehensive policies that crack down on terrorism in all its forms. Islamabad has not changed its fundamental strategy of supporting extremist groups like the Taliban, Haqqani network, and LeT. The U.S. must strictly condition further military aid to Pakistan on it cracking down on terrorism in all its forms. Language in the House of Representatives version of the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Act bill that conditions reimbursement of Coalition Support Funds for Pakistan on it taking action against the Haqqani network is helpful.

In September 2012, the Administration waived FY 2012 certifications on U.S. military aid to Pakistan and in February 2013, it issued a waiver to allow the transfer of major defense equipment.⁹ If the Administration continues to rely on its waiver authority, it will undermine its ability to influence Pakistani terrorism policies.

Establish a congressional commission to investigate Pakistan's role in Afghanistan. The public contradictions within the Obama Administration regarding the extent to which Pakistan supports U.S. enemies in the region is leading to speculation that the Administration is reluctant to rock the boat with Pakistan in the middle of a drawdown of forces from Afghanistan. This in turn is weakening the U.S. position in the region and emboldening Pakistan's military leadership. A bipartisan panel would help to bring clarity to U.S. policy toward Pakistan.

Maintain a robust residual force presence in Afghanistan post-2014 and ensure that people in the region know that the U.S. will remain engaged there diplomatically, financially, and militarily even after 2014. The major reason that Pakistan continues to support the Haqqani network (and other Taliban proxies) is the belief that the U.S. will fully withdraw from Afghanistan before the situation is stable and that the Haqqanis provide the best chance to secure Pakistan's interests in the country. Announcing the U.S. intention to leave a robust number of forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014 would signal the Pakistanis that the U.S. is committed to finishing the job in Afghanistan.

Remain open but clear-eyed on the issue of Afghan reconciliation. The goal of Afghan peace talks should be to split the Taliban from al-Qaeda and encourage them to become part of the political process, not to allow them to dominate power at the expense of other ethnic groups and progress made for the people of Afghanistan over the past 12 years. The U.S. must be realistic about the threat that Taliban extremists and their al-Qaeda allies pose and not pin false hopes on

⁹ Susan B. Epstein and K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance," *CRS Report for Congress*, July 1, 2013.

a political reconciliation process merely to justify a troop withdrawal. Political reconciliation is desirable -- but only if it contributes to the goal of ensuring that Afghanistan never again serves as a safe haven for global terrorists.

Encourage Indo–Pakistani dialogue. The U.S. should fully support dialogue between Islamabad and New Delhi but should also avoid any kind of mediation role. Pakistan and India made strong progress in peace talks from 2004 to 2007, and Washington should encourage the two countries to return to the terms of those talks. The U.S. should not seek to restrict India’s diplomatic and economic involvement in Afghanistan to appease Pakistan. India has an important role to play in encouraging democratic institution-building and economic development and shares the U.S. strategic objective of preventing global terrorists from re-establishing a safe haven in Afghanistan.

Foster U.S.-Pakistan civil society dialogue. Although the Pakistan military and intelligence establishment has pursued dual policies toward terrorists that have strengthened support for extremism, there are plenty of Pakistani citizens who are working hard and indeed risking their lives to reverse extremist trends and ensure the rights and freedoms of all Pakistanis. U.S.-Pakistan government-to-government interactions alone will not help Pakistan achieve the goal of becoming a moderate, successful, and stable country. There is a need for more and deeper civil society engagement between Americans and Pakistanis. The U.S. should support initiatives like the U.S.-Pakistan Leadership Forum, organized by three U.S.-based non-governmental organizations (Convergence, the Consensus Building Institute, and the Institute for Resource and Security Studies). The Leadership Forum brings together American and Pakistani civil society and private sector leaders in cooperative endeavors in the fields of media, the arts, education, business, and agriculture development. The Pakistanis involved in the forum are voices for democracy and good governance and can mobilize support for a more stable and cooperative U.S.-Pakistan relationship.

Conclusion:

The global terrorist threat emanating from Pakistan remains a core U.S. national security concern as a multitude of different extremist groups with varying degrees of ties to al-Qaeda operate in and from Pakistan. While the U.S. has made progress against al-Qaeda’s core leadership base in Pakistan, it must use whatever pressure is necessary in its engagement with Pakistan to ensure that all terrorist groups in the country are denied sanctuary. Failing to make additional progress in rooting out terrorism from Pakistan could set the stage for future attacks on the U.S. homeland. Perhaps the strongest argument for continuing to pursue some level of engagement with Pakistan, despite its lack of cooperation against some terrorist groups, is to help it avoid facing the nightmare scenario of its nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists.

The Heritage Foundation is a public policy, research, and educational organization recognized as exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. It is privately supported and receives no funds from any government at any level, nor does it perform any government or other contract work.

The Heritage Foundation is the most broadly supported think tank in the United States. During 2012, it had nearly 700,000 individual, foundation, and corporate supporters representing every state in the U.S. Its 2012 income came from the following sources:

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Individuals | 81% |
| Foundations | 14% |
| Corporations | 5% |

The top five corporate givers provided The Heritage Foundation with 2 percent of its 2012 income. The Heritage Foundation's books are audited annually by the national accounting firm of McGladrey & Pullen. A list of major donors is available from The Heritage Foundation upon request.

Members of The Heritage Foundation staff testify as individuals discussing their own independent research. The views expressed are their own and do not reflect an institutional position for The Heritage Foundation or its board of trustees.