



**Statement Before the  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

***“U.S.-Pakistan Relations: Reassessing Priorities  
Amid Continued Challenges”***

A Testimony by:

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Thank you, Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify today at such an important hearing, “U.S.-Pakistan Relations: Reassessing Priorities Amid Continued Challenges.” In this testimony, I will argue that the United States needs to broaden its relationship with Islamabad beyond just security issues. But Washington also needs to be prepared for escalation if Pakistan refuses to adequately target militant groups that enjoy a sanctuary on Pakistan soil and are operating against the United States and its allies in Afghanistan.

My testimony is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the security situation in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan. The second highlights the evolution of U.S.-Pakistan relations. And the third provides recommendations for U.S. policy.

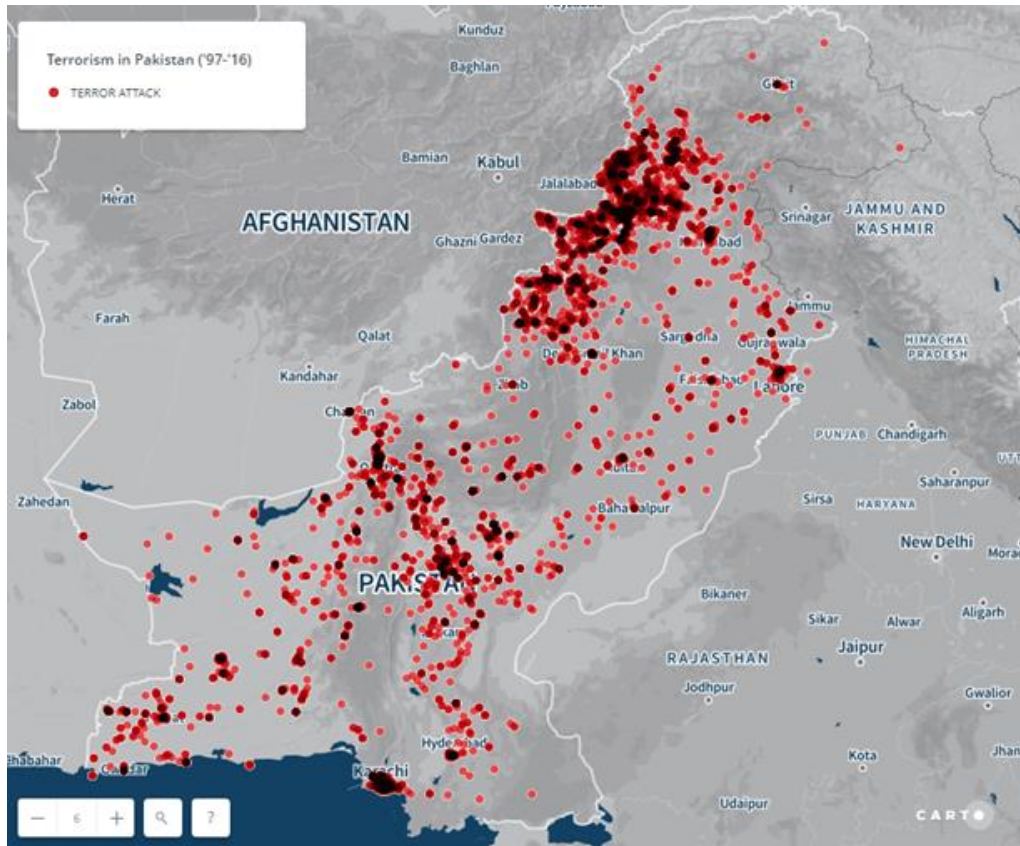
### **Overview of the Security Situation**

This section examines the security situation in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan. While the U.S. relationship with Pakistan shouldn’t be viewed primarily through an Afghan lens, the presence of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan makes it inevitable that U.S. dealings with Islamabad are, in part, tied to Afghanistan and broader regional developments. Moreover, Pakistan’s security is tied, in part, to Afghanistan’s security, since they share a border that is nearly as long as the U.S.-Mexican border.<sup>1</sup>

**Pakistan:** Pakistan has made countless sacrifices in both blood and treasure in its struggle against militants. Thousands of Pakistan soldiers, police, intelligence professionals, and other government officials have died fighting militant groups. Tens of thousands of Pakistan civilians have died because of terrorist attacks in Lahore, Peshawar, Islamabad, Karachi, and other cities. As Figure 1 highlights, violence has occurred across the country over the past two decades – though it has been most heavily concentrated in such areas as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan, as well as in cities like Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore.

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S.-Mexican border is roughly 1,954 miles, while the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is roughly 1,510 miles.

**Figure 1: Terror Attacks in Pakistan, 1997-2016<sup>2</sup>**

Despite these attacks, recent trends suggest that violence levels have notably *declined*, an indication that Pakistan security agencies have likely made progress against extremist groups. As Figure 2 shows, there was a significant decrease beginning in 2014. Pakistan has conducted a range of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations across the country, including in the FATA, against groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> In addition, fatality rates from terrorist attacks are at a near-ten-year low, and lethality rates also dropped dramatically from a 20-year high of 5.4 deaths per attack in 2015 to 1.3 deaths per attack in 2016.<sup>4</sup>

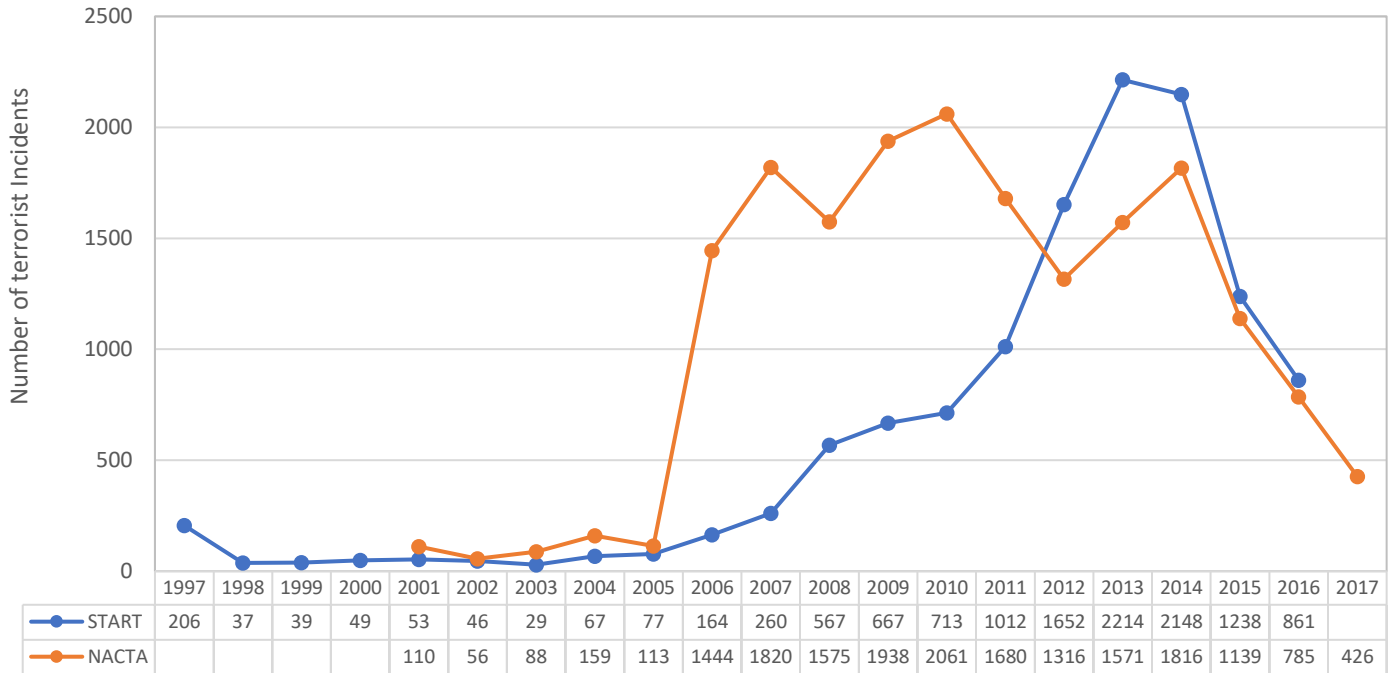
<sup>2</sup> Source: Map by CSIS Transnational Threats (TNT) Project; data from University of Maryland Global Terrorism Database. Available at:

<https://transnationalthreatscsis.carto.com/builder/569674cb-2eca-4d30-9143-6e29f315ae04/embed>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, such Pakistan documents as the National Internal Security Policy (NISP), which was presented to parliament in May 2014, and the National Action Plan (NAP), which was presented in December 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Data from the University of Maryland Global Terrorism Database.

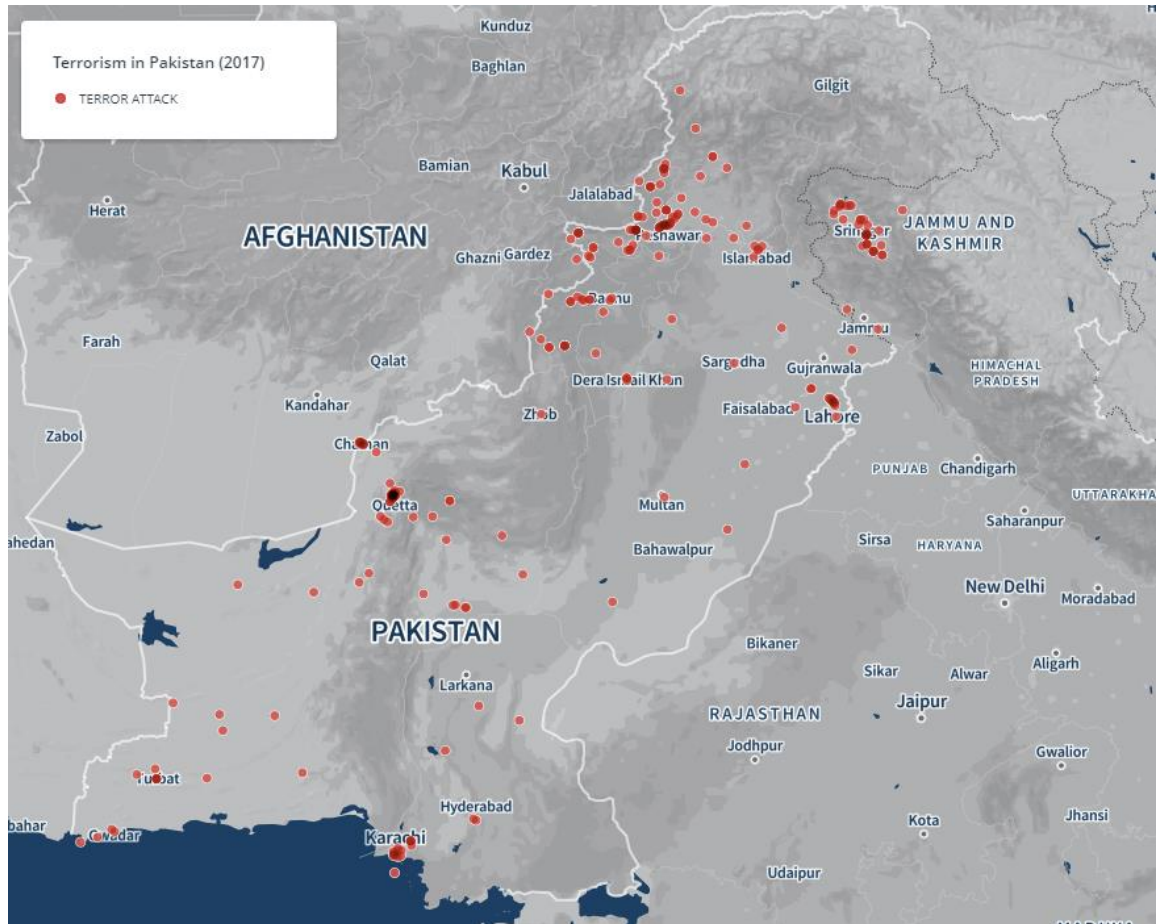
**Figure 2 Terror Attacks in Pakistan, 1997-2017<sup>5</sup>**



According to data collected and analyzed by the Transnational Threats Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, violence levels in 2017 were also relatively low. There were 249 recorded terror incidents in Pakistan, including Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>6</sup> Roughly 73 of these terror attacks occurred in Baluchistan Province, accounting for 29 percent of all incidents. FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa together accounted for 40 percent of all incidents in Pakistan in 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Data from the University of Maryland Global Terrorism Database and Pakistan’s National Counter-Terrorism Agency (NACTA). The NACTA figure for 2017 includes all attacks as of September 11, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> This research did not include military-to-militant clashes, which were accounted for in the NACTA estimates.

**Figure 3: Terror Attacks in Pakistan, 2017<sup>7</sup>**

**Afghanistan:** While violence levels are down in Pakistan, the security situation is more concerning in Afghanistan. There are several sets of indicators that provide a sense of the state of the Afghan war. The first are changes over time in population control, since that is a major goal of the Taliban and the Afghan government. According to U.S. Department of Defense data, there has been a slight increase in Taliban control or influence of Afghanistan's population—from 9 percent in August 2016 to roughly 10-12 percent in October 2017. There has also been a decrease in Afghan government control—from 69 percent in August 2016 to between 60 and 64

<sup>7</sup> Map and data by CSIS TNT Project. The data include the contested areas of Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan. These numbers likely underestimate the total number of attacks. Map available at: <https://transnationalthreatscsis.carto.com/builder/a11adb12-0e01-4027-82e4-afc5f803b81f/embed>

percent in October 2017. This leaves roughly a quarter of the Afghan population living in contested areas where neither side has significant control or influence.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the data also show that Taliban gains have been almost entirely in rural areas of the country, where it enjoys some support among conservative Afghans that have become disillusioned with the Afghan government and who support the Taliban's religious zealotry. The Taliban controls no major urban areas. After briefly seizing the northern city of Kunduz in September 2015, the Taliban quickly lost control of it within days. In 2017, the Taliban failed to mount a sustained threat against any provincial capital and instead engaged in high-profile attacks in Kabul and other populated areas. Even in Helmand Province, where the Taliban have made advances in rural areas, local commanders have so far failed to seize and hold such cities as Lashkar Gah and Gereshk.

A second set of indicators includes changes over time in local support, since both the government and Taliban need to mobilize support to hold and expand areas. The Taliban's ideology may be amenable to some Afghans, such as those living in conservative rural pockets of the south and east. But it is still too extreme for many Afghans who adhere to a much less conservative form of Islam that permits most modern technology, sports, elections, and some women's rights. The Taliban and its ideology are deeply unpopular, even compared to the current government and its security forces. A nationwide poll in 2015, for example, found that 92 percent of Afghans supported the Kabul government and only 4 percent favored the Taliban.<sup>9</sup> While the Taliban may be unpopular in many areas, several indicators suggest that Afghans are deeply unhappy with their government. Nearly two-thirds of Afghans say the country is moving in the wrong direction, compared to only one-third who believe it is moving in the right direction.<sup>10</sup> Afghans also believe their government is corrupt, a finding that is consistent with the assessments of international organizations. Afghanistan ranks 169 out of 176 countries on

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<sup>8</sup> Data from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, January 30, 2018); U.S. Department of Defense, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan: Report to Congress in Accordance With Section 1225 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (P.L. 113-291), as amended* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, December 2017).

<sup>9</sup> ACSOR and D3, *Afghan Futures: A National Public Opinion Survey* (Kabul: ACSOR and D3, January 29, 2015). Available at: [http://acsor-surveys.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Afghan-Futures-Wave-6-Analysis\\_FINAL-v2.pdf](http://acsor-surveys.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Afghan-Futures-Wave-6-Analysis_FINAL-v2.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> The Asia Foundation, *A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2017* (Kabul, Afghanistan: The Asia Foundation, 2017).

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, and over three-quarters of Afghans say that corruption is a serious problem in the country.<sup>11</sup>

These indicators suggest that the Afghan war is, at best, a draw. The Taliban has slightly increased its control of populated areas, but it lacks a strong popular support base. The Afghan government has lost some rural areas, and Afghans harbor numerous grievances against their government. But most of the population would rather live under the government of Ashraf Ghani than under Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhunzada.

### **U.S.-Pakistan Relations**

In part because of the Afghan war, relations between Washington and Islamabad have soured over the past several months. In July 2017, President Trump remarked that "Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence, and terror."<sup>12</sup> On New Year's Day in 2018, President Trump went further, tweeting that the U.S. has "foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years" with little in return, promising "No more!"<sup>13</sup> Pakistan officials quickly returned fire. Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif said that Mr. Trump is likely "disappointed at the U.S. defeat in Afghanistan and that is the only reason he is flinging accusations at Pakistan." Mr. Asif also warned that Pakistan wouldn't budge. "We have already told the U.S. that we will not do more," he said, "so Trump's 'no more' does not hold any importance."<sup>14</sup>

There is a bit of *déjà vu* with this escalating war of words. Since 2001, the relationship between Washington and Islamabad has largely been transactional. Washington has needed Pakistan's help in targeting al-Qaeda and other terrorists operating on Pakistani soil, as well as moving supplies from port cities like Karachi to U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Pakistan, in turn, has used the billions of dollars in U.S. aid to support its economy. The United States and Pakistan have also cooperated in border operations against militant groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban

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<sup>11</sup> Transparency International, *Bridging the Gaps: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Afghanistan's Anti-Corruption Agencies* (Berlin, Germany: Transparency International, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia," Arlington, VA, August 21, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Quote came from President Trump's Twitter account, @realDonaldTrump, on January 1, 2018. The full Tweet was: "The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!"

<sup>14</sup> "Trump's 'No More' Holds No Importance, Says Pakistan," *Daily Times (Pakistan)*, January 2, 2018.

Pakistan, which have conducted terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Yet Washington and Islamabad have regularly clashed over issues like the Osama bin Laden raid, U.S. intelligence collection against militant groups in Pakistan, Pakistan aid to groups like the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network, and skirmishes along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

What is different today is how quickly relations plummeted. The Bush and Obama administrations generally had cooperative relations with Islamabad at first, but eventually became frustrated. Trump administration officials had little patience from the beginning. Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, still provides sanctuary and aid to groups like the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network that are fighting the United States and its allies in Afghanistan. Pakistan is engaged in a balance-of-power struggle with India, which has close relations with the Afghan government. Islamabad is also skeptical that the U.S. will remain in Afghanistan for the long run and fears a spiking civil war when U.S. forces eventually depart. Consequently, Pakistan uses proxies like the Afghan Taliban as a tool of foreign policy.

Moreover, Islamabad and Beijing have established increasingly close political, security, and economic relations. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to bring valuable infrastructure and economic activity to Pakistan, including in Baluchistan Province. But recent attacks on convoys and train lines in Baluchistan have shown that China will also need to secure their infrastructure developments. China is already Pakistan's number one supplier of armaments and defense technology.

## **Recommendations**

The United States is right to get tough with Pakistan. But Washington still needs to work with Pakistan in areas where they share a common interest. The combination of terrorism, nuclear weapons, and great power politics in South Asia make the region a huge potential flashpoint and important for U.S. national security. Moving forward, there should be several components of a revamped U.S. strategy toward Pakistan.

**1. Broaden Trade and Other Relations:** The first is to emphasize that the U.S.-Pakistan relationship is multi-faceted and should include economic, diplomatic, and development components – not just security. Pakistan has the sixth largest population in the world at nearly 200 million, a gross domestic product of nearly \$300 billion (on par with South Africa and



Colombia), and a respectable 2016 growth rate of 5.5 percent.<sup>15</sup> In 2016, the U.S. exported machinery, aircraft, cotton, iron and steel, and agricultural products to Pakistan, while the U.S. imported textiles, knit apparel, and leather products from Pakistan.<sup>16</sup>

There are other areas where the United States and Pakistan share common interests. One example is countering terrorist groups like the Islamic State-Khorasan Province, the regional Islamic State branch. The Islamic State has a foothold along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province, as well as cells in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Washington, Islamabad, and neighboring governments should continue to coordinate efforts to weaken and ultimately defeat the Islamic State in the region. Finally, Islamabad is building a fence along its border with Afghanistan, a move that the Trump Administration might support if it could be effectively negotiated with Kabul – including territory disputed by Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>17</sup>

**2. Work Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan:** A second component is to work with Pakistan toward a settlement in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban is too weak to overthrow the Kabul government or even to seize and hold a major Afghan city. And the Afghan government is too weak to defeat the Taliban on the battlefield. The result is a military draw, an important prerequisite for a political settlement. Pakistan has long-term interests in a safe and stable Afghanistan, and Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban makes it an important player in peace negotiations. It was unhelpful for U.S. officials to publicly call off peace negotiations, as the U.S. president did on January 30 after a series of high-profile bombings in Afghanistan. Peace efforts need to continue, and Pakistan will be essential in reaching a political resolution in Afghanistan.

**3. Be Prepared for Escalation:** With the Trump Administration's decision to keep U.S. forces in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future, Washington should continue to emphasize that it is in Islamabad's interest to work toward a peace settlement and end its sanctuary for the Taliban and Haqqani Network. The Trump Administration is already moving in this direction. The Afghan and Pakistani people have suffered far too long in violence that is supported on various

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<sup>15</sup> Data from the World Bank, 2017. Available at: [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?year\\_high\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?year_high_desc=true)

<sup>16</sup> Data from "U.S.-Pakistan Trade Facts" at the Office of the United States Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President, February 15, 2017. Available at: <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia/pakistan>

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Saeed Shah, "Pakistan Starts Building Fence Along Border With Afghanistan" *Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 2017.

sides by the United States, European countries, India, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and China. Afghanistan, in particular, is the quintessential example of the historical “great game.”

The entire leadership of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network, which the U.S. and its allies are fighting in Afghanistan, are situated on the Pakistan side of the border. Examples include the Taliban’s leader, Haibatullah Akhunzada; his deputies, Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mohammad Yaqub; and a range of senior leaders like Abdul Qayyum Zakir, Ahmadullah Nanai, Abdul Latif Mansur, and Noor Mohammad Saqib. All reside in Pakistan. While the bulk of Taliban and Haqqani foot soldiers live in Afghanistan and fight a government they consider corrupt and incompetent, the United States cannot accept a situation where Islamabad covertly supports insurgents – some of which are targeting U.S. forces. This situation is a far cry from the 1980s, where both Islamabad and Washington worked together and ran a covert campaign to support the mujahideen in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. If Pakistan continues to harbor Taliban and Haqqani leaders, and fails to support an Afghan peace process, the U.S. should consider several steps on an escalatory ladder:

- Provide more public transparency about Pakistan activities. This could include, for example, publicly disclosing the names of senior Taliban and Haqqani leaders residing in Pakistan;
- Commit to aggressively pursue U.S. enemies wherever it finds them. The United States should be prepared to target the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Islamic State, and other groups wherever it finds them – including in Pakistan;
- Continue to freeze or terminate most military aid to Pakistan;
- Consider suspending or terminating Pakistan’s status as a non-NATO ally. This designation is given by the U.S. government to allies that have a strategic relationship with the United States, but are not members of NATO. Non-NATO ally status offers military and financial advantages that generally are not available to non-NATO countries;
- Consider making it more difficult for Islamabad to get access to multilateral financial lenders;
- Consider placing Pakistan on the U.S. State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism. The U.S. military and intelligence agencies have collected an abundance of information over the years about ISI ties to terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and India, from Lashkar-e-Taiba (or Jamaat-ud-Dawa) to the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network.

Washington should be prepared to carefully escalate if there is not an improvement in cooperation. It also needs to develop alternative routes to bring material to U.S. forces in Afghanistan, particularly through countries like Uzbekistan situated along Afghanistan’s

northern distribution lines. Pakistan officials warn that the U.S. aid freeze is driving Islamabad toward China. But as already noted, this development is not new. Pakistan has long been developing close relations with China, including through CPEC.

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The U.S. decision to stay in Afghanistan should send a strong signal to Islamabad that Pakistan officials need not prepare for a post-American region, a rationale that Pakistan policymakers repeatedly used to justify their support to the Taliban and other militant groups. With a long-term U.S. commitment to the region, Washington and Islamabad can focus on building a more constructive and enduring political, economic, and security relationship. A U.S. commitment should help allay Pakistan fears that the country will again face an Afghanistan to its west in chaos or an Afghanistan dominated by its rival, India. It may also provide renewed vigor to peace talks with the Taliban, particularly if Taliban leaders increasingly recognize that they cannot win on the battlefield.