



Meeting the Challenges in Pakistan

Trip report and recommendations for U.S. policy

Lawrence J. Korb, Brian Katulis, and Colin Cookman May 2009

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

During the Obama administration's first four months in office, Pakistan has reemerged as a top national security concern. Internal instability and violence in Pakistan has escalated, with a Taliban insurgency seizing more territory and militant groups undermining a weak Pakistani state. Divisions among Pakistan's political leaders, which came to a head in a battle between Pakistan's two leading political parties in March, have impeded a national consensus on addressing the long list of Pakistan's problems. Furthermore, a volatile regional security environment has deteriorated, with the Mumbai terrorist attacks in late November escalating tensions between India and Pakistan, and the war in Afghanistan having a direct impact on Pakistan's security. The United States is now transitioning from formulating a new strategy on Pakistan to the more difficult task of policy implementation and execution.

President Barack Obama, in his March 27, 2009 speech outlining the preliminary results of his administration's review of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, embraced the concept of building a long-term partnership with Pakistan, which the Center for American Progress outlined in last November's "[Partnership for Progress](#)" report on the country. This general concept of partnership has also informed a number of legislative proposals introduced in both houses of Congress in attempts to implement a shift in strategy on Pakistan.

At this pivotal juncture, the Center for American Progress sent a delegation to Pakistan in April 2009 to examine the dynamic situation in the country and gain a better understanding of the challenges facing the United States as it adjusts its bilateral policy toward Pakistan. The Center's analysts met with more than 100 individuals in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi, and Lahore, including representatives of the Pakistani civilian government, civil society, and non-governmental actors; serving and retired members of the Pakistani security services and diplomatic corps; scholars and local and international press observers; and United States embassy staff. The following observations and recommendations are a result of those conversations and our research.

Observations

The delegation assessed the situation in Pakistan and developed recommendations for advancing U.S. policy in Pakistan. The team found that:

- **The U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship remains plagued by a mutual trust deficit.** Both countries still need to take significant steps to enhance trust and cooperation in order to build a lasting bilateral partnership and overcome the “transactional” legacy of the relationship.
- **Weak governance remains an endemic challenge throughout Pakistan.** The challenges that the Pakistani government faces in delivering basic services, setting policy priorities, carrying out long-term planning, and implementing reforms has crucial implications for the country’s security as well as its economic development. In parts of the country where the state has failed to provide law and order and does not meet the basic needs of the people, extremist groups work to exploit the situation by filling the gap. Improvement will ultimately depend on Pakistan’s civilian leadership and the ability of its public to hold them accountable for their actions. Still, the United States needs to place an even greater priority on these issues in its own bilateral relationship with Pakistan.
- **Pakistan’s willingness and capacity to conduct comprehensive counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations remains limited.** Pakistan’s military establishment remains focused on conventional conflict with its neighbor India, and cooperation between civilian and military leaders on counterterrorism action remains mixed, despite increasing domestic anxiety about the actions of militants in the country’s northwest.

Ten key recommendations

As the Obama administration moves to implement key policy initiatives on Pakistan in the coming years, it should work to advance a comprehensive and integrated diplomatic, security, economic, and governance agenda aimed at building a long-term partnership with Pakistan. Based on our trip, our 10 key recommendations for U.S. policy are:

1. **Build on recent regional and international diplomatic initiatives such as the trilateral U.S.-Pakistan-Afghanistan talks and the Friends of Pakistan forum.** In addition to continuing to participate in international efforts to enhance regional security and increase economic development in Pakistan, the Obama administration should also reengage in regional diplomacy that seeks to revive dialogue between Pakistan and India, including a discussion of Kashmir. Pakistan’s threat perceptions are a factor in advancing stability in the country and broader region. Other key neighbors and global powers must also be included in discussions, including Russia, China, and Iran.

- 2. Initiate a comprehensive diplomatic engagement with a broad range of Pakistani institutions and actors.** The military in Pakistan retains considerable influence and must also be included in any partnership, but the history of relations under former President Pervez Musharraf shows that it is insufficient for any U.S. policy to rely on an exclusive partnership with army chiefs or particular leaders to advance U.S. interests in the country. The administration should initiate an expansive plan to establish broad contacts and cooperation between Pakistani and American civilian institutions, including think tanks, lawyers groups, civil society organizations, and the general public.
- 3. Formulate and sign a bilateral strategic framework agreement with Pakistan.** Formalizing the goals for cooperation in a bilateral strategic framework agreement can help both countries engage in strategic planning on a range of fronts—and it can help both the United States and Pakistan break the cycle of transactional and reactive policymaking that has plagued the bilateral relationship for decades.
- 4. Strengthen the police and judicial component of counterterrorism assistance.** A top priority for U.S. counterterrorism assistance should be providing professional training, equipment, and manpower to the courts, the Federal Investigation Agency, the Intelligence Bureau, and provincial police forces—which serve on the front lines of Pakistani counterterrorism operations—in order to conduct successful investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of suspected terrorists. The military has an important role in stabilizing key parts of the country, but in the long run, a well-functioning police and judicial sector are more effective weapons in countering terrorist networks.
- 5. Increase assistance for internally displaced persons.** The Obama administration's May 2009 announcement of \$110 million in assistance for internally displaced persons fleeing conflict areas is a good start. But much more assistance will be needed given the size of displacements resulting from internal violence in Swat and other parts of the country. The quick response to the devastating 2005 earthquake in Pakistan helped the United States improve its standing with the Pakistani people and marginalize militant groups, and the growing IDP crisis is a moment when the United States can stand with the Pakistani people and address their basic needs.
- 6. Enhance efforts to keep Pakistan's nuclear arsenal safe and secure.** Increased cooperation on the nuclear front will help prevent the illegal transfer of nuclear technology and expertise and safeguard the arsenal from unauthorized access. Broader diplomatic efforts will be necessary to reduce the regional tensions that contribute to the argument for an arsenal expansion.
- 7. Launch a comprehensive effort to advance Pakistani civilian government capacity and expertise in coordination with proposed bilateral development assistance increases.** To the greatest extent possible, the Obama administration should work with the institutions of the Pakistani government and key non-governmental organiza-

tions to conduct long-term economic and social development planning for the country, identify key projects for new assistance money, and build habits of transparency with their Pakistani partner ministries. Making an increased U.S. development assistance program effective will require greater coordination with other bilateral assistance programs and international and multilateral initiatives by the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, World Bank, and the Friends of Pakistan group.

8. **Include careful oversight and accounting mechanisms in assistance legislation.** The U.S. administration should work through a bilateral framework to gain input from the Pakistani government to the greatest extent possible on which projects new assistance money should fund.
9. **Reform the leading institutions of U.S. diplomacy and foreign development assistance.** For decades, the United States has underinvested in its own civilian institutions of diplomacy and economic development. Pakistan will likely be the greatest test case of whether the Obama administration can reform these institutions to meet the challenges of the 21st century.
10. **Engage with Congress and the American people on the importance of Pakistan policy.** Broad consensus currently exists within the foreign policy community about the need to shift greater attention to Pakistan. Yet the Obama administration needs to do a better job in engaging members of Congress and the American public to garner support for a policy aimed at building a long-term partnership with Pakistan. The American public needs to hear a stronger rationale for its policy and specific plans for implementation of the expanded commitment toward Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The observations and recommendations in this report build on CAP's body of work on the situation in the broader region—including Afghanistan. Our previous strategy report, the November 2008 "[Partnership for Progress: Advancing a New Strategy for Prosperity and Stability in Pakistan](#)," discussed Pakistan's multiple and interrelated challenges of internal and regional insecurity, political instability, and economic underdevelopment in greater detail. That report concluded that the U.S.-Pakistan relationship needs to shift away from the short-term, transactional pattern that has characterized much of the two nations' relations for decades.

Replacing that relationship with a proactive long-term bilateral engagement will serve as a bulwark against regional and global instability. This report aims to offer practical steps for making this necessary shift in the strategic relationship a reality, while taking into account the dynamic landscape in Pakistan and the United States.

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