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Pakistan and Afghanistan: The Enemy is Not India

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NEW DELHI—The road to stability in Afghanistan, it is now clear, runs through Pakistan—specifically the tribal areas that Taliban and al Qaeda fighters use as a sanctuary. Less understood is that the road to stability in the tribal areas, and across the region, also runs through India.

Old fears of India, with which Pakistan has fought three wars since their 1947 partition, are at the root of much of today's dangerous Pakistani behavior. Islamabad's long-running goal of achieving "strategic depth" with a compliant Afghanistan lingers in elements of its army and powerful spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and their support to anti-Afghan Islamic militants.

Even now, with those militants turning their guns on the Pakistani government and with Pakistani forces engaged in a long-overdue offensive in the tribal areas, most of Pakistan's military remains deployed in the east—toward India and disputed Kashmir.

The result? When American officials recently pressed Pakistan's army chief Ashfaq Kayani to be more aggressive in the tribal areas, he claimed, according to Newsweek, that he lacked the military capability to confront several sizable insurgent strongholds at once.

Islamabad's fears of India are surpassed only by its fears of ethnic disintegration. Many of its ethnic parts, cobbled together like so many other post-colonial states, have never accepted Punjabi domination of the government and military, which—unlike in India—has prevented the emergence of stable federal structure of more or less equal, autonomous units.

Indeed, among Islamabad's greatest worries is that the tens of millions of Pashtuns on either side of the border with Afghanistan could realize their ancient dreams of an independent Pashtunistan.

Islamabad therefore misreads Indian efforts to promote security and economic development in Afghanistan, including New Delhi's massive \$1 billion reconstruction program, as attempts to isolate or encircle Pakistan. The answer from Pakistani-backed militants? This summer's deadly suicide bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul.

If old Pakistani fears of India are key to understanding Pakistani behavior toward Afghanistan, then removing those fears is key to changing that behavior.

As the dominant political and economic power in the region, India should take the lead. New Delhi should continue to assure Islamabad that India's only objective is a truly independent, united, stable and drug-free Afghanistan.

Specifically, India could offer credible assurances of the security of Pakistan's eastern frontier, explore mutual force reductions on that frontier and unilaterally open its borders—including the Line of Control that divides Kashmir—to tariff-free trade.

For its part, Islamabad must recognize that a stable Afghanistan to its west and a friendly India to the east will help prevent a catastrophic implosion in Pakistan. Finally assured of a secured eastern frontier with India, Pakistan should build on its recent offensive and deploy enough troops in the west to secure the border with Afghanistan, followed by extensive investments in education and development in the tribal regions.

Islamabad should put an end to financing, arming, training and infiltrating terrorists into Kashmir and other parts of India. This would pave the way for other confidence-building steps—visits of senior military leaders, free trade and joint economic ventures.

The United States could help allay any lingering fears in Islamabad by endorsing Indian assurances of the integrity of Pakistan's eastern frontier. More broadly, Washington should support Pakistan's fragile democracy by focusing aid on economic and social development rather than the military.

With Pakistan finally assured that India no longer poses a threat, India could then consider a truly historic step worthy of a great and growing power—contributing military forces to stabilizing Afghanistan. Such a deployment would require a joint request from Kabul, Washington and the United Nations. Indian training teams could play a critical role in strengthening the Afghan military and police.

Reconciliation between Pakistan and India and the presence of Indian forces in Afghanistan may seem illusory. But the return of civilian government in Islamabad gives new hope. If attention can be focused on the real and growing terrorist threat to the region—not those imagined in Islamabad—then fear and loathing in Pakistan could finally give way to trust and cooperation in Afghanistan.

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