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*“More Than a Marriage of Convenience: Restoring the U.S.-Pakistan Relationship”*

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## **More than a Marriage of Convenience: Restoring the U.S.-Pakistan Relationship**

Pakistan has been described alternatively as a critical ally of the United States in the Global War on Terror and as a failing state that harbors terrorists. As the U.S. escalates its military withdrawal from neighboring Afghanistan, improving the fragile U.S.-Pakistan relationship will be a foreign policy priority in President Obama's second term. Strengthening bilateral cooperation requires traditional government-to-government diplomacy hand-in-hand with economic and people-to-people diplomacy. The U.S. can improve relations through multi-dimensional engagement with Pakistan's government and civil society that addresses issues of regional security, economics, and public relations.

Although Pakistan is a country of strategic importance for the United States, bilateral political and security ties remain in a state of constant flux, characterized by a fundamental “trust deficit” among senior officials.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and increasingly after September 11, 2001, geostrategic goals have dominated U.S. policy considerations toward Pakistan. Since 2002, Pakistan has received roughly \$25 billion dollars in economic and military aid in return for permitting NATO overland transit to move allied troops and supplies into Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> The Afghan war caused remnants of the Taliban to stream across the border into Pakistan's remote and fiercely independent border areas, further destabilizing an already fragile region. This gave rise to growing Islamic militarization within Pakistan from groups that include Al-Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, and factions of the Pakistani Taliban. Over the past decade, several of these groups have carried out unprecedented terrorist attacks within Pakistan, striking both civilian and security targets.

The tepid response to militant groups by Pakistan's government and military establishment has severely strained the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in recent years. American officials strongly suspect

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1 Constable, Pamela. *Playing with Fire: Pakistan at War with Itself*. New York: Random House, 2011. 245.

2 Congressional Research Service, “Direct Overt U.S. Aid Appropriations and Military Reimbursements to Pakistan, FY2002-FY2013.” Web. 19 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/pakaid.pdf>>.

Pakistan's military and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency of double-dealing, accepting money from the U.S. while covertly financing radical groups. They allege the ISI tacitly or deliberately allows militants sanctuary in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, from which insurgents launch cross-border attacks on NATO troops in Afghanistan. Lending credibility to these suspicions, the May 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden found the Al-Qaeda leader living comfortably near a Pakistani military training camp in Abbottabad, only 50 kilometers northeast of Islamabad. U.S.-Pakistan relations reached an all-time low following the raid, which was carried out without prior knowledge of Pakistan's government. The clandestine operation highlights the extreme mistrust with which U.S. officials view their counterparts' commitment to counterterrorism. Pakistani officials strongly dispute the characterization of their country as an unreliable ally. They assert that Pakistan has paid a high price for its support in the War on Terror, suffering billions of dollars in damage and hundreds of thousands of casualties at the hands of extremists.

Bilateral security cooperation will remain the most critical area demanding high-ranking diplomatic engagement during President Obama's second term. With the looming NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan will be faced with a porous 2,000 km border with Afghanistan that is difficult for either country to defend. The U.S. and Pakistan have a mutual interest in ensuring Afghanistan is secure and politically stable. U.S. officials should prioritize strengthening the bilateral political, economic, and security relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This includes facilitating agreements between the two countries on critical issues such as prisoner exchanges. Discussions must center on what military and intelligence support Pakistan and the U.S. can provide to counter a Taliban insurgency that is largely planned and carried out from Pakistani soil.

To protect Afghanistan's and Pakistan's security in the long-term, the U.S. and Pakistan must improve their security and intelligence cooperation to undermine militants operating in the tribal areas. While pressuring Pakistan to punish intelligence leaks; prevent collusion between the ISI and the

Taliban; and proactively confront terrorists within its borders, U.S. officials must also strike a more conciliatory tone, acknowledging that Pakistan has made significant sacrifices in the War on Terror.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the U.S. cannot afford to confirm Pakistan's worst fears that the U.S. will abandon Pakistan to face the possibility of an increasingly volatile security situation in Afghanistan. It is partly for this reason that Pakistan's security forces cooperate with both the United States and the Taliban, hedging their bets to safeguard against the risks of any potential outcome. U.S. officials should reassure Pakistan of their continued commitment to regional stability and maintain military contingents to work with Afghan and Pakistani counterparts.

Discussions surrounding counterterrorism in Pakistan cannot avoid the contentious issue of U.S. drone policy. A recent New America Foundation survey found that three-quarters of all Pakistanis living in the tribal areas oppose the strikes, while a separate survey found nearly 90 percent of all Pakistanis believe U.S. drones cause too many civilian casualties.<sup>4</sup> Despite reports of the Pakistani government's tacit approval and provision of intelligence support, officials have repeatedly voiced their opposition in public. They argue that unilateral drone strikes undermine Pakistan's sovereignty, violate international law, and are counter-productive as a whole, creating more terrorists than they kill by provoking popular backlash and alienating local communities. In deliberating its policy, the Obama administration should be transparent on the legal justification for targeted killings and develop a regulatory framework to govern drone use, institute greater accountability, and minimize civilian deaths. U.S. officials should also determine ways to bring Pakistani counterparts into the decision-

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3 Khar, Hina Rabbani. "Pakistan Relations Beyond Security Concerns." Council on Foreign Relations. 21 September 2012. Web. 16 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/pakistan-relations-beyond-national-security-concerns/p29106>>. This includes what the government of Pakistan estimates to be between \$75 and \$100 billion of dollars in damage and 40,000 civilian and military casualties.

4 Qazi, Shehzad. "US-Pakistan Relations: Common and Clashing Interests." World Affairs Journal. Web. 23 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/print/15631>>. 4. According to the most reliable estimate by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, civilian casualties could range from 474 to 881 during the period from June 2004 to September 2012.

making process regarding the use of drones. A more collaborative approach to security will help rebuild confidence between the two countries.

Increasingly in Obama's second term, diplomats must also re-orient the bilateral relationship from a purely “transactional” and security-based relationship to more holistic engagement that supports Pakistan's development and improves public perceptions of the United States.<sup>5</sup> To this end, a promising opportunity for U.S.-Pakistan cooperation is in the area of economic relations. Alongside increased security cooperation, diplomats can strengthen the bilateral relationship through stronger economic and trade ties. The administration should move forward on bilateral free trade agreements, removing barriers to Pakistani textiles and agricultural products. Improving Pakistan's economy by strengthening economic relations will put Pakistan on the path to stability, reducing employment pressures that often become a catalyst for youth to join extremist groups.

One issue that will dominate discussions is regional economic integration through the so-called “New Silk Road” initiative. The U.S. and Pakistan both have a large and potentially mutually reinforcing stake in the outcome of these trade, energy, and logistical relationships among the countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, and China. Energy routes that avoid the use of Iran's Chabahar port (potentially substituting it with Pakistan’s Gwadar port) will advance U.S. geostrategic and energy interests. Likewise, trade and pipeline routes that incorporate Pakistan – such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline – will also support the country's economic development by encouraging the growth of industries along value chains and providing a source of additional tax revenue. The U.S. should determine how best to support Pakistan's stake in the New Silk Road, pursuing an outcome that simultaneously aligns with U.S. interests. Solutions must balance the U.S. relationship with India, strategic concerns regarding Iran and China, and security and development objectives in Afghanistan.

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5 Qazi 5.

The third major area for diplomatic engagement is improving Pakistanis' perceptions of the United States. According to a 2010 Pew Research Poll, only 17 percent of Pakistanis hold a favorable view of the United States, and 60 percent view the U.S. as an enemy of their country.<sup>6</sup> This underscores the profound set of challenges confronting the U.S. relationship with Pakistan, a fragile country where domestic politics is a key driver of government policy. While the population remains overwhelmingly mistrustful of American intentions, the government is limited in its ability to seek a conciliatory middle ground with respect to drones and counterterrorism cooperation.

The cornerstone of strengthening the U.S.-Pakistan relationship is improving people-to-people relations through public diplomacy and local outreach. Discussions could center on issuing more educational visas for students to study in the United States; using public forums for U.S. officials to communicate with civil society; investing in Pakistan's education sector; and implementing cultural and educational exchange programs. Resolving the contentious issue of non-military foreign aid should top the agenda of U.S. deliberations on Pakistan. Increased development assistance in areas such as livelihoods and financial services can greatly improve public perceptions of U.S. commitment to Pakistan. For it to be an effective foreign policy tool, aid must also be accompanied by comprehensive outreach efforts that communicate the activities and impact of U.S. assistance.<sup>7</sup> Holistic American engagement in Pakistan that leverages public diplomacy will expand the nature of the bilateral relationship beyond merely the support of Pakistan's government to include its constituents. Building popular domestic support will cement a far more stable relationship in the long run.

Strengthening U.S.-Pakistan cooperation requires diplomats and senior officials to address controversial security issues surrounding the Afghan insurgency, militants operating in Pakistan, and an

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6 Constable, Pamela. *Playing with Fire: Pakistan at War with Itself*. New York: Random House, 2011. 239.

7 Despite Pakistan being one of the largest annual recipients of U.S. foreign aid, the impact is not always felt or perceived positively by those on the ground. As cited in the International Crisis Group's 2012 report, "Aid and Conflict in Pakistan," the volatility of U.S. aid – combined with the dominance of military aid – fuels public suspicion that the U.S. only values Pakistan for its geostrategic benefit and uses foreign assistance to coerce Pakistan to join in the War on Terror.

appropriate regulatory framework for drones. At the same time, U.S. officials must leverage economic and public diplomacy to improve livelihoods and repair damaged local perceptions of the United States. Through multi-dimensional engagement, the U.S. and Pakistan can move beyond a “marriage of convenience” to a more durable partnership built on mutual economic and security interests.