



**AFPAK:
10 Years Since Operation Enduring Freedom**

Pakistan and the Fight Against Terrorism

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This paper attempts to critically review Pakistan's role as a frontline state in the US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan and the region since 9/11, including its domestic implications, regional manifestations and international underpinnings. In the last ten years, Pakistan has made enormous contributions to this war and suffered irreparable losses in the process. However, since the Musharraf regime, its priorities in combating terrorism have been different from those of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan—a lingering issue that has eventually brought US-Pakistan relations to the brink of a conflict. The paper mentions the complexities and motivations underlying Pakistan's controversial counter-terrorism approach, and the dilemmas they create for domestic security and Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, India and the United States. It analyzes whether the United States may have also contributed to causing current strains in its relations with Pakistan, and how significant the recent thaw in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan and India is. The paper ends by emphasizing the Afghan reconciliation process as one recent trend that, despite facing some reversals, has the scope of creating compatibility among Afghan, Pakistani and Indian interests, especially as US and NATO troops start to gradually leave Afghanistan. Its conclusive argument is that Pakistan's domestic security and regional standing will continue to be in serious jeopardy unless the conflict in Afghanistan is politically resolved in a way that Afghanistan's internal power contenders and external stake-holders agree to a grand compromise.

Three observations concerning Pakistan's role in the fight against terrorism are worth making at the outset. First, Pakistan may have ended up being in the spotlight for practicing duality on combating terrorism, yet its contributions to the War on Terror are worth acknowledging. There are counter-terrorism successes in this war, which might have been impossible without Pakistani cooperation. It remains a country that has killed or captured the largest number of al-Qaeda terrorists and their affiliates, including high profile figures such as Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, the alleged mastermind of 9/11. It is Pakistan that provided the bulk of several hundred Guantanamo Bay terror inmates. Even the initial lead that eventually helped trace bin Laden, according to President Obama, was provided by Pakistani security officials. Moreover, Pakistan might have been coerced into a counter-terror partnership by the Bush Administration after 9/11, but its subsequent help to the US and NATO in the

form of the use of airfields for reconnaissance, logistics and even drone operations, regular cooperation in intelligence sharing and joint security operations and, most importantly, the use of its land routes for the bulk of supplies for US and NATO troops in Afghanistan have been extremely crucial for the Afghan war effort. During this war and the previous decades, Pakistan has continued to serve as a crucial transit link for land-locked Afghanistan. If Pakistan's wartime contributions are not enough, even in terms of the peace process in Afghanistan, if and when it resumes or moves forward, the country's potential to act as a principal player for the purpose remains intact. Like Afghanistan, its future potential to serve as a transit route for energy supplies from Central to South Asia and a trade corridor between the two regions is unquestionable.

Second, Pakistan's losses in the international war against terrorism seem to be far higher than gains. It has ended up facing a devastating terrorism ridden security quagmire and accompanying political instability, ethnic violence and economic downturn. With tens of thousands of civilians and security personnel killed, its casualty ratio in combating terrorism is estimated to be 30 per cent higher than US-NATO troop casualties in the Afghan war. Pakistan may have received over a dozen billion dollars or more from the United States in military assistance, and indirect US help in securing aid packages from the World Bank or a couple of IMF bailouts, but all of this has hardly helped relieving its suffering masses from an acute energy crisis and an unprecedented hike in the prices of essential commodities. The net economic loss caused by terrorism is estimated to surpass many times US assistance to the country, mostly military, in the last ten years. Participation in the War on Terror has further widened the state-societal gap, creating debilitating fault-lines in the society while aggravating previous social, ethnic and sectarian fissures. Businesses have collapsed. Foreign investment has dwindled. Galloping domestic turmoil has seriously jeopardised its regional standing and international stature as a principal South Asian player and the Muslim world's only nuclear power. Even the prospect of cultivating a strategic partnership with the United States, with billions of dollars of long-term US assistance for civilian sector development, seems to be in serious jeopardy.

A third observation regarding Pakistan's role in the War on Terror pertains to its controversial nature. Pakistan's security establishment has apparently pursued a counter-terrorism approach, whose priorities have been different from other players engaged in combating terrorism in Afghanistan and the region—a lingering issue that now threatens to rupture the country's relations with the United States and has caused consistent tensions in its ties with Afghanistan and India in the last ten years. The duality in Pakistan's counter-terrorism approach seems to manifest itself in contrasting but controversial notions of 'good Taliban' and 'bad Taliban.' Good Taliban are said to include jihadi groups who do not threaten the state, or kill its civilians and security personnel; but, rather, are or have been engaged in militancy across the country's frontiers, in Afghanistan or India. Bad Taliban are generally identified as those jihadi outfits, which follow al-Qaeda's ambition of destroying Pakistan from within through targeting both civilian and security targets. Their focus is on domestic rather than regional terrorism. Accordingly, Pakistan's security establishment is largely believed to be pursuing a policy of zero tolerance against al-Qaeda and jihadi groups involved in domestic insurgency and terrorism, and a lenient approach towards jihadi outfits engaged in regional terrorism—even though there may be some exceptions in its respective responses to jihadi undertakings in each case.

However, the issue of duality in Pakistan's counter-terrorism approach is not as simple as it is often portrayed. What Pakistan has done or not done cannot be seen in isolation from what others involved in Afghanistan have done or not done. Therefore, it is unfair to hold the country alone responsible for the terror troubles in Afghanistan and the region, in which each player, internal and external to the region, has had a fair share. A host of historical intricacies, cultural complexities, and current and past circumstantial realities significantly constrain Pakistani security establishment's ability to harmonise its counter-terrorism approach with those of external players. These compulsions, as much as the security establishment's traditionally India-centric perceptions of regional security environment and their adventurist expressions, may explain why it has so far failed to act firmly against Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network, as desired by US and Afghan authorities, and effectively target home grown jihadi groups like Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, as demanded by India.

Four of these compulsions are particularly significant. First, the forces of jihad have during the course of the last over 30 years spread their tentacles so wide and deep within Pakistan that even if the country's security establishment desires so, it cannot afford to fight all of them at one time. The terrorist backlash from the fight against al-Qaeda and local Taliban forces has already been so intense and continuous and, therefore, difficult to absorb or tackle. Under these circumstances, extending the scope of the battle to North Waziristan and South Punjab could be suicidal, even more disastrous and, thus, unaffordable. Second, some of the very jihadi groups or their splinters, which once enjoyed the alleged support from Pakistani security establishment, as part of its regional security ambitions in Afghanistan and Kashmir, have turned against it during the course of the War on Terror. For instance, some spectacular terrorist attacks specifically against security targets—such as the October 2009 attack on Army GHQ and two assassination attempts against General Musharraf in December 2003—were reportedly carried out by groups earlier involved in Kashmir militancy.

Third, mushrooming of jihadi forces in the country, with or without state patronage, has allowed them to operate independently. This limits the ability of Pakistani security establishment to influence their agendas or control their activities. The general perception that state security agencies somehow enjoy the sort of a command and control clout over groups like Haqqani Network, Afghan Taliban or, for that matter, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba does not seem to hold ground anymore. What Pakistan's participation in the War on Terror may have done is to reduce the level of trust between state security agencies and the jihadi outfits with a regional agenda. Whatever relationship there still may be between the two, it is realistically based on mutual needs. Finally, several state and societal factors such as the Islamic foundations of the Pakistani state, General Zia's bid to Islamize Pakistani society and state system, the continuing legacy of the anti-Soviet jihad in the form of insurgent sanctuaries in tribal areas, where the culture of jihad gets additional sustenance for peculiar tribal Pashtun cultural traditions, further constrain the state's counter-extremism capacity. Even otherwise, it should take a generation or more for jihadi or extremist tendencies to disappear from any radicalised society. The world fought the

Afghan jihad for ten years. The region was inflicted by jihad for the next ten years. A gory tendency that had taken a couple of decades to flourish could not be expected to fizzle out within some years.

It is within such constraints that the Musharraf regime began its counter-terrorism partnership with the United States after the terror events of 9/11. However, from the start, this relationship was as much realistically grounded as the 80s partnership over jihad in Afghanistan between the Zia government and the Reagan Administration. General Musharraf wanted international legitimacy for his rule, and saw its perpetuation through the lifting of democracy and nuclear-specific US sanctions on Pakistan and restoration of American assistance to the country. The Bush Administration, which was revengefully focused on demolishing al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan and the region, wanted Pakistani help for the purpose. It did force Pakistan to ban Kashmir-specific groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, after the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament, but not to rein in on them, as was the case with its approach towards al-Qaeda or Afghan Taliban. General Musharraf's strategy to prolong his rule with US support was based on his self-portrayal as a bulwark against Islamic radicalism. His domestic pursuits for the same purpose, however, involved cutting deals with Taliban leaders such as Baitullah Mehsud. The Bush Administration continued to press General Musharraf to "do more," but without taking any tangible steps to secure this goal. However, it was eventually the aggravated internal crisis beginning with his clash with the higher judiciary followed by the Red Mosque Operation in Islamabad during 2007 that Musharraf's power started to crumble.

Pakistan may have remained economically or politically more stable during much of Musharraf's era than that of his successor. However, what his regime consistently failed to achieve, despite claiming to be a frontline state in the War on Terror, was to make this war as Pakistan's own and bring about the requisite shift in national public opinion against Taliban terrorism. It is only since the coming to power of the present civilian government in March 2008 that the leadership has publicly started pronouncing the war as Pakistan's own. In March 2009, the Obama Administration announced its Af-Pak strategy, expecting Pakistan to act against

terrorists and promising the country billions of dollars in US civilian assistance. Coincidentally, the same month, Pakistan decided to act against local Taliban. Subsequent security operations by Pakistani army and paramilitary against Taliban insurgents in Swat, South Waziristan and some other agencies of tribal areas have produced significant results and been consistently hailed by top civilian and security officials of the Obama Administration. It is only in the last year or so that US and Pakistani security leaders have shown growing difference of opinion over the issue of Haqqani Network in North Waziristan—which has now become a source of major conflict between the two countries.

US-Pakistan relations were also previously marred by recurrent crises, but each one of them was defused through enhanced interaction between top civilian leaders and security officials of the two countries. Starting this year, however, conflicting trends seem to supersede cooperative tendencies in this relationship. The open conflict following two major instances of the arrest of Raymond Davis and the killing of Osama bin Laden has now conflated over the issue of Haqqani Network, whom the United States accuses of orchestrating recent attacks against US targets in Afghanistan. Admiral Mullen's allegation that ISI supports the Haqqanis has been rebuffed by Pakistan, with Foreign Minister Khar warning Washington of "losing an ally" if it continued to publicly level such charges against the country. The current deterioration in US-Pakistan relationship is in sharp contrast to its promising trends just a year ago, when the Obama Administration committed itself, under the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act, to a 7.5 billion dollars US civilian assistance programme in Pakistan spanning five years. An additional sum of 2 billion dollars in military aid was also agreed upon in the third round of the US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue in Washington last October.

So, in a sense, eruption of open hostility between the two countries seems quite unfortunate. Consequently, we are now faced with the potentially dangerous possibility of the focus of the Afghan war effort shifting to North Waziristan or elsewhere in Pakistan's tribal areas beyond the intensified US drone campaign in recent years remains a hugely risky probability. Such eventuality will be unaffordable to Pakistan any way, but its consequences for Afghanistan as well as outside and

regional powers involved in securing and developing the war-torn country may be equally unbearable. The severity of terrorist backlash from al-Qaeda and local Taliban groups has already raised serious concerns over the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. There are both technical and circumstantial reasons that dispel the prospect of these arsenals falling into terrorist hands. The sheer absence of any such attempt in the last ten years of terrorism in the country testifies that its security establishment has undertaken institutional and security arrangements to guarantee effective command, control and intelligence of nuclear assets. More importantly, even while the US decided to suspend \$800 million military assistance following the Osama bin Laden episode, its collaboration with Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division continues. Still an expansion of the war effort to North Waziristan carries the risk of worsening the terrorist backlash and its consequent negative fallout on the issue of the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear assets.

Keeping Pakistan stable is, therefore, an issue of utmost importance. Equally important is to let its democratic system continue and flourish. After all, Pakistan under current democratic dispensation has performed better in fighting terrorism as compared to the military regime preceding it, especially in terms of securing a predominantly anti-Taliban public opinion and owning a relatively effective counter-insurgency campaign by the country's army and paramilitary. Of course, during this campaign as well, deals were made with two insurgent leaders Mullah Nazir and Maulvi Gul Bahadur in South and North Waziristan, securing their neutrality during the South Waziristan operation against TTP. However, the practice of such tactics during a counter-insurgency campaign is not unusual. In the initial years of the Afghan war, the Americans also had to appease notorious Afghan warlords so as to gain the liberty of tackling the Taliban insurgents. If Pakistan has its definition of good and bad Taliban, as do all the other stakeholders in the conflict, including the United States.

As for the current US-Pakistan dispute over the issue of Haqqani Network, its alleged backing by ISI and the US demand from Pakistan army to extend its counter-insurgency campaign to North Waziristan, it can be resolved if Pakistan agrees to operate against the Haqqanis, is prepared to absorb a potentially more devastating

terrorist backlash at home, and is also ready accept its negative fallout on the Afghan reconciliation process, especially in terms of its own declared and promised role for the purpose. Obviously, if we presume that peace in Afghanistan is possible only by reconciling current Afghan insurgents—a stance the Obama Administration has taken even though linking the issue with certain pre-conditions—then the Quetta Shura of the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network are two of the strongest Afghan insurgent groups to lead the reconciliation process from the insurgents side. Thus, the choice for Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States—each of which has made a respective bid for Afghan reconciliation in recent years—is quite limited, and the dilemma amply clear: Military action against such groups would dissuade them from reconciling, and no military action means continuity or aggravation in their insurgent campaign.

For its part, the United States also needs to resolve a continuing recent tension in its Afghan policy between the declared goal of pursuing a negotiated political settlement and a military strategy still centered on kinetic actions, including several thousand Special Operations by US and NATO forces in insurgency-hit southern and eastern Afghanistan this year and intensified Drone-fired missile attacks into North Waziristan since last year. As Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan’s former envoy to the US and UK, argued recently, different parts of the Obama Administration seem to want different things. While the White House and the State Department appear to want the reconciliation process to accelerate and military strategy recalibrated to support that goal, it is not clear if the Pentagon and the CIA are fully on board. The US military still seems to balk at talks with the Taliban, regarding them as an admission of failure to win the war. Whatever the internal dynamics in Washington, operational US strategy is still at odds with its declared objective of seeking a negotiated end to the war.

Such divergence is clear even on the issue of Haqqani Network, with the State Department recently announcing to “work constructively with Pakistani authorities to address concerns about the Haqqani Network.” Realistically speaking, neither Pakistan nor the US can afford a rupture in their relationship. When it comes to seeking political resolution of the Afghan war, the respective interests of Pakistan and the United States seem to only coincide. Without Pakistan’s help, Afghan

reconciliation is next to impossible. Even while the war in Afghanistan is going on, the US and NATO have no choice but to rely on Pakistan for the bulk of supplies meant for over 140,000 troops in Afghanistan. For Pakistan as well, direct and indirect US military and civilian assistance is and will be crucial for overcoming the terrorism-infested security quagmire. Thus, whether Afghanistan remains at war or makes a move towards peace, the mutual dependence of the United States and Pakistan in either case is quite clear. This creates a realistic framework for cooperation, a logical rationale against conflict, in their bilateral partnership in the region.

The same holds true for Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. Continuing instability in Afghanistan hurts Pakistan more than any other country. And Pakistan remains Afghanistan's economic lifeline. Rather than recreating conflict, as it appears to be the case after President Rabbani's murder, the two countries need to build upon the growing thaw in their ties since the present government in Pakistan came to power in March 2008. Barring his accusatory tone against the country following Rabbani's murder, President Karzai has consistently argued that Pakistan's role in Afghan reconciliation process will be crucial. In January 2011, the two countries agreed to establish a Joint Commission of their diplomatic, military and intelligence officials, with a mandate to facilitate the Afghan reconciliation process through direct talks with hard-line Afghan insurgent leaders.

The Karzai regime has already put in place the institutional mechanism for securing integration and reconciliation, including Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme and Afghan High Peace Council. It has held secret talks with the insurgent leaders with tacit approval by the United Nations. Even the United States, for that matter, is reported to have held a couple of rounds of secret parleys with Taliban leader Mullah Umar's envoy Tayyab Agha in Qatar and Germany during early this year. The only way out of the current stalemate in Afghan war is a compromise political solution involving reintegration of Afghan insurgent fighters and reconciliation with their leadership. However, unless the legitimate political, economic and security grievances of the Taliban-led Afghan insurgent forces, who

happen to belong to Afghanistan's Pashtun majority population, are addressed credibly, they will continue to threaten peace in Afghanistan.

India and Pakistan also cannot hope to make progress in their peace process, which resumed early this year and has made some headway on trade and terrorism issues, if their strategic rivalry over Afghanistan continues unabated. In the 90s, Afghanistan paid a heavy price, as it became a theatre of a proxy war between the two countries. Progress in India-Pakistan peace process is imperative for preventing the recurrence of this proxy war following the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. This is the only way to address Pakistan's insecurity dilemma caused by India's proactive role in post-Taliban Afghanistan and India's principal worry about Pakistan attempting to re-install the Taliban in power. Perhaps including Afghanistan as additional agenda item in the peace process may help to harmonise the hitherto conflicting approaches of India and Pakistan towards Afghanistan and enable them to recognise each other's legitimate interests in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. It is only after India's decided to mutually negotiate with Pakistan the issue of cross-border terrorism that the peace process between the two countries resumed early this year and has since then progressed uninterruptedly. However, its fate now hangs in the balance, with the conclusion of a strategic partnership agreement between India and Afghanistan—even though Pakistan's response to this rather unsavoury development has thus far been quite cautious.

The Karzai regime and Afghanistan's regional and international stakeholders, have to understand that reconciliation with insurgents remains the only way to end the war in Afghanistan. Given its unique ethnic, geographical and historical linkage with Afghanistan, Pakistan, more than any other immediate and distant neighbour of Afghanistan, stands to gain maximum benefit from the end of this war. A couple of pragmatic reasons explain why reconciliation in Afghanistan suits Pakistan, particularly in terms of liberating its people from the devastating spill over effect of this war. First, the forces constituting Afghan insurgency are primarily Pashtun and Pakistan's Afghan border regions are also Pashtun. Thus, if a reconciliation process in Afghanistan helps redress political grievances of the country's majority Pashtun population, dissuading them from violence, Pakistan's Pashtun-dominated Taliban

insurgent movement will have less rationale to engage in militancy. Second, the end of war in Afghanistan suits Pakistan because of the unaffordability of aggravating social, economic and security cost of its role as a frontline state in this war. In sum, it can be argued that Pakistan's domestic security and regional standing will continue to be in serious jeopardy unless the conflict in Afghanistan is politically resolved in a way that Afghanistan's internal power contenders and external stake-holders agree to a grand compromise.