

Asia-Pacific Homeland Security Summit Fellows Program

U.S. Policy Options to Counter Terrorism in Pakistan

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Executive Summary

Terrorists, specifically al Qaeda, represent the single greatest risk to the United States and its interests. Pakistan is currently the frontline in the battle against terrorism, as its tribal areas have become a safe haven for al Qaeda and the Taliban. Pakistani efforts in the war on terrorism have suffered due to a lack of resolve and military capabilities, as well as a general distrust of the United States. To combat and diminish the threat posed by al Qaeda and the Taliban, the U.S. must pursue a strategy of constructive engagement and unconditioned inducements.

Introduction

On October 9, 2008, Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Head of the International Centre for Political Violence & Terrorism Research and the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, delivered a presentation on the Current Terrorist Threat at the Asia-Pacific Homeland Security Summit. This conference is directed toward both government and private industry individuals focusing on homeland security in the Asia-Pacific region. In his presentation Dr. Gunaratna identified the Pakistani tribal region as “the crucible where virulent ideologies manifest” (Gunaratna, 2008). Given Dr. Gunaratna’s assertion, as well as the current U.S. involvement in the War on Terror, this paper aims to provide sufficient contextual information to make an informed decision on the appropriate U.S. policy in the region.

This paper will evaluate the severity of the terrorist threat in Pakistan, as well as its impact on U.S. interests. In order to understand the current situation in Pakistan, this paper will explore the presence of al Qaeda and the Taliban in the Pakistani tribal regions, the history of interaction between the U.S. and Pakistan, the effectiveness of the current U.S. policy, Pakistan’s economic situation, the cultures of the Pakistani tribal regions, and the Pakistani government’s stability and ability to broker a reliable partnership. Based on the current situation and concerns in Pakistan, this paper will evaluate several strategic options presently available to the U.S. These strategic options will then be used to formulate specific policy recommendations.

Interests

The prevailing and primary interest of the U.S. is the national security and protection of its citizens. Terrorism is currently the preeminent threat to U.S. national security. Former U.S. Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte identified the religious fundamentalist group al Qaeda as the single greatest terrorist threat to the United States and its interests (Negroponte, 2007). The July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate revealed that al Qaeda's central leadership "in the past two years has been able to regenerate the core operational capabilities needed to conduct attacks in the Homeland" (Intelligence, 2008). In addition to regenerating its core capabilities, al Qaeda is working "more efficiently as a beacon for other terrorist organizations around the world" (Muniruzzaman, 2008).

Dr. Rohan Gunaratna suggests that up to 95% of terrorist groups originate in the global south (Gunaratna, 2008). Major General Muniruzzaman, President of the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, further notes that South Asia is becoming a hub of radical ideology (Muniruzzaman, 2008). Al Qaeda's central leadership is currently based in the border area of Pakistan and represents al Qaeda's most dangerous component. Mike McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, stated that a future al Qaeda attack on the U.S. "most likely would be planned and come out of the [al Qaeda] leadership in Pakistan" (McConnell, 2007). Dr. Rohan Gunaratna described the Afghanistan/Pakistan border as a "terrorist Disneyland" (Gunaratna, 2008). The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) contains numerous terrorist training camps, many of which are associated with al Qaeda (Kronstadt, 2008). Dr. Gunaratna indicated that the 30-40 terrorist groups training in Afghanistan prior to the attacks on 9/11 have subsequently moved to the FATA (Gunaratna, 2008). The survival of the Taliban in the FATA has been "singularly responsible for the continuing regeneration of al Qaeda as an organization because it has permitted the leadership and the operatives of this terrorist group...to safely 'dissolve' into a larger environment either that is hospitable to them directly or that protects them by disguising their presence amidst a larger pool of Taliban adherents" (Tellis, 2008). Pakistan therefore represents the front line and a vital component in the U.S. war on terrorism. Pakistan is a major non-NATO ally in the war on terrorism and their cooperation and assistance is imperative to achieve success.

The U.S. also has a secondary and related interest in ensuring the development of a stable and secure Afghanistan. Previously a safe haven for al Qaeda and the Taliban, the U.S. drove the Taliban

out of Afghanistan in 2001 and many retreated to Quetta in Pakistan's Baluchistan province. The tribal provinces and the FATA "serve as a staging area for al Qaeda attacks in support of the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as a location for training new terrorist operatives" (Intelligence, 2008). Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan remain high, as al Qaeda and Taliban fighters consistently cross into Afghanistan to attack coalition troops and then escape back across the Pakistani border. Pakistani stability is also key to the success of the mission in Afghanistan because over three-quarters of U.S. supplies for Afghanistan come through or over Pakistan (Kronstadt, 2008).

The U.S. has several key objectives in Pakistan for the short-, medium-, and long-term. In the short-term, the U.S. must continue to work with Pakistan to combat terrorism and reduce the power of both al Qaeda and the Taliban. If the U.S. is successful in diminishing the threats posed by al Qaeda and the Taliban, the mid-term objectives of ensuring the stability and self-determination of Afghanistan and Pakistan will be more easily realized. With the achievement of stable and self-determined Afghanistan and Pakistan, the long-term U.S. objectives can more readily be obtained. The long-term goal of the U.S. is to have partners in the region who seek to marginalize al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, as well as to maintain and promote stability in the region.

Current Concerns

Despite significant U.S. aid provisions and a large Pakistani military presence in the tribal regions, Pakistan has not been successful in thwarting the resurgence of al Qaeda – as well as the 30-40 terrorist groups following in its footsteps – and the Taliban. There are many barriers to U.S. success, including the potential lack of resolve and capabilities on the part of the Pakistani government and military, as well as the prevailing anti-American sentiment in the region. Due to these aforementioned barriers, as well as the rugged geographic nature of the region, the support of the Pakistani military and public is crucial in routing out the Taliban and al Qaeda.

The Pakistani government has historically maintained close ties to the Taliban. The United States Institute for Peace report notes that "Pakistan sought to support a 'client regime in Afghanistan' that would be hostile to India, 'giving the Pakistani military a secure border and strategic depth'" (Bajoria, *The Troubled Afghan-Pakistani Border*, 2007). The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was heavily

involved in the recruitment, training, arming, and operations of the Taliban from 1996-2001. Many members of the ISI still maintain these close relationships and feel loyalty to the Taliban, though Dr. Gunaratna suggests that Pakistani leadership has now substantially eliminated Taliban sympathizers in all but the lowest levels of the ISI (Gunaratna, 2008). Analysts also suggest that Pakistan's purported continued support for the Taliban serves "as a hedge against either the failure of the Karzai regime in Kabul or the dreaded prospect of increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan" (Tellis, 2008). Additionally, many of the army's cadres are drawn from the local Pashtun population and sympathize with the Pashtun-based Taliban and Islamic militants. This is evidenced by numerous defections and refusals to fight and follow orders (Bajoria, *Pakistan's New Generation of Terrorists*, 2008). These factors call into question Pakistan's resolve to eliminate the Taliban and al Qaeda threats.

The failure to control the resurgence of the Taliban and al Qaeda in the tribal regions is also a result of a lack of Pakistani intelligence and military capabilities. While the tribal areas are technically located in Pakistan, they are not governed by Pakistan's rule of law. Rather, relations have historically been through an agent of the government and a tribal elder. Through these relationships, the government was able to secure tactical intelligence. In recent years, however, the tribal elders have been replaced by religious leaders who seek to protect the Taliban and al Qaeda and therefore deny the Pakistani government actionable intelligence. In addition, the rough terrain of the tribal regions makes it exceedingly difficult to monitor these locations (Tellis, 2008). Cooperation of the tribal populations is necessary for obtaining intelligence.

Pakistan's military, which has conducted numerous engagements in the tribal regions, has limited counterinsurgency capabilities because it previously focused its attention on preparing for conventional war against India. As a result, they are "overly reliant on imprecise mass firepower" that causes significant civilian casualties (Kronstadt, 2008). The continued and large-scale Pakistani army presence in the tribal areas furthers the alienation and resentment of the indigenous population, the support of which is essential to successfully routing the Taliban and al Qaeda. Frontier Corps, Pakistan's paramilitary organization in the FATA, has closer ties with the local inhabitants. However, it is also ill-equipped to handle the resurgence of the Taliban and al Qaeda because it is "riddled with sympathizers,

inadequately motivated, suspicious of Islamabad's and Washington's intentions, and poorly trained and equipped for counterterrorism operations" (Tellis, 2008).

In efforts to alleviate the concerns of the tribal region, the Pakistani government negotiated peace deals with pro-Taliban militants in the tribal regions in 2005-2006. The Pakistani government agreed to allow tribal regions to control their own security in exchange for a ceasefire and the promise that the tribal leaders would not allow their regions to become havens for al Qaeda. However, these agreements failed and actually had the undesirable consequence of strengthening militants and the presence of al Qaeda (Bajoria, Pakistan's New Generation of Terrorists, 2008). Pakistan has repeatedly refused U.S. requests to increase its direct military presence in the region.

As demonstrated above, success in the war on terrorism is contingent upon the support of the Pakistani people. Public support in Pakistan for Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the Taliban has declined significantly, with a January 2008 public opinion poll showing favorable opinions of 24%, 18%, and 19%, respectively (Kronstadt, 2008). However, this does not equate to Pakistani support for the war on terrorism. Rather, the economy – especially in light of the recent food crisis – has the most prevailing impact on Pakistanis (Bennett-Jones, 2008).

The recent parliamentary elections underscored the depth of anti-American sentiment in the region and served as a referendum on President Musharraf's cooperation with the U.S. While President Zardari is purportedly pro-American, the Pakistani public is particularly sensitive to appearances that the U.S. government is trying to control Pakistan or prop up a dictator (as in the case of former President Musharraf). Pakistanis reject any U.S. military interventions, which they perceive as an assault on Pakistan's sovereignty (Tellis, 2008). President Asif Ali Zardari, in an address to the Pakistani Parliament, stated that Pakistan will not tolerate further U.S. cross-border raids, which he views as a "violation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Gall, 2008). Additionally, the Pakistani people do not trust U.S. support and view it as fickle due to a history of U.S. abandonment. They believe that they are already paying disproportionately for Washington's war (Tellis, 2008). Dr. Gunaratna indicated that Pakistan has lost over 1,500 troops in the war on terrorism (Gunaratna, 2008).

Notably, newly elected Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gillani has indicated that Pakistan intends to reevaluate its current counterterrorism policy. While Gillani emphasized that he views terrorism as a

serious threat to Pakistan, he expressed interest in developing peace accords with the tribal regions similar to those implemented by Musharraf. Regarding potential U.S. military intervention, Gillani stated: "We believe in democracy and the rule of law, and we want respect for the sovereignty of the country. ... These [unilateral attacks] ... will never happen again. We are capable ourselves" (Moreau, 2008).

Strategic Considerations and Analysis

In selecting an effective strategy, the U.S. must consider the interests, objectives, and current concerns (outlined above) of the U.S. in regards to the battle on terrorism in Pakistan. The U.S. must consider the signals that strategies could send to both the Pakistani public and military. In addition, the U.S. must consider the weaknesses in resolve and capabilities currently present in the Pakistani military. The following will evaluate the relative merits and deficiencies of U.S. strategic options in Pakistan.

Unilateral Military Action

Unilateral military action has significant benefits. Specifically, the U.S. military has more adept counterterrorism and counterinsurgency forces than the Pakistani military. A large scale invasion could serve to root out the Taliban and al Qaeda cells. The U.S. could also use drones to target specific al Qaeda or Taliban targets, resulting in less collateral damage than is currently caused by Pakistani military forces. Such intervention would demonstrate a strong U.S. resolve in the fight against terrorism that is currently lacking among many members of the Pakistani military. Operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban could deny the terrorists a safe haven in Pakistan and improve the security situation in Afghanistan.

However, unilateral action is not a viable option because of the significant disapproval on the part of the Pakistani public and military. Unilateral action would likely be perceived as a breach of sovereignty by both the public and the military, as Pakistanis are already very sensitive to signs that the U.S. plays a large role in Pakistan's political and military environment. In previous U.S. drone attacks, the Pakistani public has also expressed strong disapproval of the resultant loss of innocent lives. Additionally, increased U.S. military engagement could enhance suspicions within the Pakistani military concerning U.S. goals in the region. As noted above, the cooperation of the Pakistani public and military is essential in combating terrorism in the region. Without Pakistani support, the U.S. would find it exceedingly difficult

to navigate the tribal regions and gain enough intelligence to sufficiently cripple the Taliban and al Qaeda forces.

An invasion of overwhelming force could result in the collapse of an already weak Pakistani government. This would run in direct opposition to U.S. interests, as this would likely encourage the further growth of al Qaeda and the Taliban. In addition, Pakistan's nuclear arsenal could be put at risk of falling into the wrong hands.

Lastly, an invasion of overwhelming force is currently infeasible. Given current U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. could not commit sufficient troops to Afghanistan. The monetary costs of such an action would also be prohibitively high. Further, the U.S. would lack domestic public support for increased military engagement in the region.

Coercion

Coercion has the defined benefit of demonstrating U.S. resolve in the war on terrorism. Properly implemented, coercion allows the U.S. to be proactive and avoid appearing to appease Pakistan. With a credible threat, the U.S. could apply pressure to Pakistan and compel it to adopt a stronger response to the resurgence of al Qaeda and the Taliban in the tribal regions.

The U.S., however, does not possess a credible threat. As discussed above, the U.S. does not currently have the military capacity to engage in a large-scale invasion of Pakistan. Targeted strikes using drones also do not represent a credible threat. Carried out in a limited fashion, these strikes would be insufficient to eradicate al Qaeda and the Taliban due to the sheer size and rugged geographic nature of the region. Carried out in a larger fashion, these strikes would likely engender a backlash not only from moderate Muslims, but also from the international community. In addition, without the assistance of the Pakistanis the U.S. likely does not have sufficient actionable intelligence to carry out substantial targeted strikes.

The U.S. also does not possess a credible economic threat. The Pakistani government has repeatedly stated that it will consider sanctions or conditioned aid to be a signal that the U.S. is only using Pakistan for its short-term interests in Afghanistan. Economic coercive efforts could result in an adversarial relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan. Pakistan could turn to China for economic

assistance, as it has been enhancing its relations with China in recent years. As Pakistan is the frontline of the terrorist threat and Pakistani support is critical to winning this war, the U.S. cannot risk alienating the Pakistani government. Pakistan is well aware of this.

Constructive Engagement and Inducements

Given that the war on terrorism is vital to U.S. interests and unilateral military action and coercion are not viable strategies, the U.S. must continue to pursue constructive engagement with Pakistan. The majority of the senior Pakistani government and military officials understand and appreciate the risks posed by both al Qaeda and the Taliban. However, current security concerns and fears of domestic repercussions prevent them from pursuing these groups to the full extent of their ability. Given the high degree of control the Pakistani military maintains over the country, the U.S. must convince the Pakistani military that the war on terror is critical to its self-interest.

Distrust of the U.S. is one of the key barriers to increased Pakistani efforts in the fight against terrorism. The U.S. must therefore continue its efforts to provide Pakistan with unconditioned military and economic aid to alleviate this distrust. Any attempts to condition aid or implement targeted sanctions would affirm Pakistani suspicions that the U.S. intends to abandon it once its commitments in Afghanistan have been addressed. Conditions or sanctions could also call into question U.S. long-term objectives in the region. This would result in further retraction on part of the Pakistanis. Unconditioned aid will convey to the Pakistanis that the U.S. is offering a genuine, long-term partnership.

Multilateral engagement with Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan is necessary to assuage Pakistani security concerns. Pakistan must be convinced that it does not risk being strategically encircled by a hostile India and Afghanistan. The U.S. must also convey to Pakistan that it intends to ensure a stable and self-determined Afghanistan.

Diplomatic engagement with the Pakistani government will express that the U.S. has a strong respect for Pakistan's sovereignty. Specifically, the U.S. must engage the new Pakistani president, prime minister, and parliament. The U.S. cannot defeat the terrorists without the support of the Pakistani government and military. Diplomacy and the provision of inducements will provide the U.S. the opportunity to train and improve the Pakistani military forces so that they are more effective in

counterterrorist operations, specifically as it relates to the FATA. Intelligence, particularly human intelligence, is the U.S.'s most effective weapon (Gunaratna, 2008).

Engagement with the Pakistani government will also increase support among the Pakistani public, as it will allay concerns that the U.S. is seeking full control over the country. To further enhance Pakistani public support, the U.S. must continue and increase its development aid. The main concerns of the Pakistani public are economic in nature. The Afghan/Soviet war produced six million refugees, many of which now reside in Pakistan's tribal regions. This area therefore serves as an ideal terrorist recruiting ground (Gunaratna, 2008). Provisions of aid have historically had positive effects in the reduction of anti-Americanism, as was seen when the U.S. provided large amounts of aid following the 2005 earthquakes. Through diplomacy and further provisions of aid, the U.S. must work to create a norm and ethic in Muslim society against terrorism (Gunaratna, 2008). It is critical to win the hearts and minds of the Pakistani people.

Policy Recommendations

The U.S. must engage in close and constant communications with the newly elected Pakistani government concerning the shared goals of combating al Qaeda and the Taliban, as well as the U.S. desire to promote stability and sustainable economic development in the country. First, the U.S. must convey to Pakistan that it has the U.S.'s unqualified support. While refraining from public rebukes, however, the U.S. should not hesitate to have tough discussions in private. The U.S. should express its disappointment with Pakistan's counterterrorism performance and emphasize that a terrorist attack on the U.S. originating from Pakistan would result in a significant change in U.S. support. The U.S. should strongly encourage Pakistan to focus on targeting Taliban leadership and should request low-profile access to Pakistani intelligence operatives and information.

The provision of aid is a vital component to U.S. policies in Pakistan. The U.S. currently provides substantial amounts of unconditioned security and economic aid to Pakistan, in addition to Coalition Support Funds that are reimbursements for Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. The U.S. should fund a new, multiyear aid package and avoid placing any conditions on this aid. The U.S. should continue to provide resources, technology, and training to the Pakistani military to further develop counterterrorism

capabilities. Specifically, the U.S. should focus on building capacity in the Pakistani military and intelligence services, as well as training and equipping elite forces (Gunaratna, 2008).

Past U.S. policy has failed to sufficiently invest in combating extremist ideologies; rather, U.S. efforts have focused largely on military and operational measures (Muniruzzaman, 2008). Economic aid currently makes up less than half of total aid provisions. In order to emphasize that the U.S. has interests greater than the narrow focus on terrorism, the U.S. should significantly increase its provision of economic aid. Specifically, this economic aid should focus on education so that Pakistanis are less reliant on madrassas. Schools can be used to counter extremist ideologies and disseminate ideas of peace. Further, aid should be directed to educating and counseling detainees. By exposing detainees to mainstream clerics and scholars, the U.S. can expose the “half-truths and lies” on which extremist ideology is based (Gunaratna, 2008). In addition, aid should be focused on improving Pakistani infrastructure. This aid should be made visible to the Pakistani public in order to reduce anti-American sentiments, as well as feelings of injustice and deprivation.

The U.S. should implement a plan to provide substantial amounts of aid to the FATA for education, the development of healthcare services, and the development of economic opportunities in order to win the hearts and minds of the tribal populations. In collaboration with the Pakistani government, the U.S. should provide substantial training opportunities for the Frontier Corps.

To allay Pakistani security concerns, the U.S. should conduct three-way diplomacy between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the U.S., as well as between India, Pakistan, and the U.S. The U.S. should affirm to Pakistan its intent to ensure a safe and stable Afghanistan and should facilitate talks between the countries to develop the best means to control border traffic. In addition, the U.S. should leverage its relationship with India to promote political dialogue. This dialogue should focus on permitting the transfer of goods and services across the India-Pakistan border. India should be offered inducements to participate in these talks.

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