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Path to Kashmir Resolution will be Arduous, but Uneasy Truce Should Hold

Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 7 (July 2005)

by [Matt Taylor](#)

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Introduction

With the “composite dialogue” between India and Pakistan most recently producing its own version of “cricket diplomacy” and a offer by Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf to discuss the re-drawing of Kashmir’s borders, India-Pakistan relations appear to be at a high-water mark. Three years after the two nations appeared set for their fourth war over Kashmir, the tension in South Asia has lifted. A change brought about by “a realization on both sides that war is not an option,” proclaimed Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar.^[1] Yet, it is a naive to believe that a solution to the Kashmir dispute is imminent or that armed conflict is out of the question. In fact, it is more likely that Kashmir will avoid resolution for at least the next several years and that violence and obstinacy will continue to plague the region.

Although a rapid resolution to the Kashmir dispute is unlikely, there is hope that an uneasy truce will remain in place. This is possible because of three conditions:

1. One, Pakistan’s decision to side with the United States in its war against the Taliban and al Qaeda resurrected a U.S.-Pakistan partnership that deteriorated at the end of the Cold War. Historically, periods in which Pakistan and the United States cooperate correlate to periods which Pakistan has moderated its behavior in Kashmir.
2. Two, India was able to effectively use the events of September 11, 2001 to its advantage and, citing the United States as an example, threatened Pakistan with war and backed it up with a major military mobilization if it did not halt cross border terrorism.
3. Three, the current Pakistani leadership, led by President Pervez Musharraf, who remains the country’s top military official, understands the threat Islamic fundamentalists pose to the future of their nation and appears intent on reigning in this segment of their society. This was a process that President Musharraf began prior to September 11, 2001 and was accelerated, broadened, and deepened in its aftermath.

However, these conditions do not indicate that Pakistan is willing to compromise on Kashmir. It is not, at least not yet. The conditions listed above significantly impact Pakistan’s strategy—*how* it chooses to pursue its goals in Kashmir—but they have little impact on its policy, its actual *objectives* in Kashmir.

Pakistan's objectives in Kashmir are primarily driven by internal factors. These factors are: a weak national identity, feeble political institutions, an inability to establish sovereignty throughout its territory, and the development and fostering of a national psyche that believes it is under siege. From Pakistan's inception its policy in Kashmir was driven by these factors—and they still exist today.

Why Pakistan Can't Let Go

The path to a resolution in Kashmir will be arduous and it is important that expectations be reconciled with what is possible in South Asia. Expectations must be managed because there is a difference between Pakistan's Kashmir policy and Pakistan's Kashmir strategy. Pakistan's Kashmir policy, its objective, has been relatively unchanged since 1947. Utilizing the language of self-determination, and supported by United Nations resolutions that called for Kashmir's status to be determined in accordance with the will of the Kashmir people, Islamabad has sought the full accession of Kashmir to Pakistan.

Although Musharraf has stated that he is willing to meet India "halfway" and put aside the U.N. Security Council Resolutions,^[2] that should not be interpreted as tacit acceptance of the Line of Control (LoC) as the border. Pakistan's claim to Kashmir has survived fifty years, two failed military operations, civilian and military governments, economic and military sanctions, and the threat of nuclear weapons. Even when the threat of war loomed in January 2002, President Pervez Musharraf repeated Pakistan's unyielding position on Kashmir:

Kashmir runs in our blood. No Pakistani can afford to sever links with Kashmir. The entire world knows this. We will continue to extend our moral, political and diplomatic support to Kashmiris. We will never budge an inch from our principle stand on Kashmir. The Kashmir problem needs to be resolved by dialogue and peaceful means in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiri people and the United Nations resolutions. We have to find the solution to this dispute.^[3]

The psychological and political underpinnings that caused Pakistan to seek Kashmir's accession at independence still exist. Ethnic cleavages continue to be a divisive issue, institutions remain weak, and the last fifty years have mostly reinforced Pakistan's beliefs about India's hegemonic intentions. The resilience of Pakistan's policy demonstrates that changes in the external environment, even military defeat, did little to change this policy. Even though he acknowledges the need for flexibility, Musharraf continues to stress that "Kashmir and strategic assets are our national interests and we will not give them up... There is no sell-out, I have said a hundred times, I am not a man to sell out."^[4]

This policy has its origins in the two-nation theory that Muhammad Ali Jinnah utilized to convince the British that a separate nation for the Muslims of South Asia was necessary in order to protect them from Hindu domination and to ensure peace. Jinnah's insistence on two nations, one Hindu and one Muslim, was driven by the belief that Muslims would be politically, economically, and socially dominated by Hindus in a single state.^[5] The outbreak of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims during the struggle for independence reinforced Jinnah's claims. Once he had won the battle for two separate states, Jinnah and his Hindu rivals, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi, began to jockey for territory. Pakistan's leaders believed that Kashmir's territorial contiguity with Pakistan, the pre-existing economic and political ties with Pakistan, and its Muslim majority made its accession to Pakistan a near certainty.

When this did not happen, Pakistan's leaders interpreted Kashmir's accession to India as evidence of an insidious Indian scheme to weaken and eventually eliminate Pakistan. In a statement to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in January 1948, Pakistan charged, "That India has never wholeheartedly accepted the partition scheme and has, since June 1947, been making persistent attempts to undo it."^[6] India's use of its military to quash independence

bids by the princely states of Hyderabad and Junagadh reinforced Pakistani trepidation. From the Pakistani perspective, India's actions in Kashmir were seen as the most threatening to the survivability of Pakistan and the most poignant evidence of the Hindu desire to dominate South Asia and contributed to the development of a national psyche that believes that is under siege and views compromise on Kashmir as the first step toward elimination.

Whether the threat was real or imagined, Pakistan's Kashmir policy has become highly politicized and inflexible because of Kashmir's implications for Pakistan's national identity and the widespread support the struggle received from the major domestic actors.^[7] Pakistani leaders of all shades pandered to a public stung by the tragedy of partition and emphasized Kashmir in Pakistan's struggle against the Hindu behemoth. Pakistan's first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, expressed this sentiment that Kashmir was part of the larger struggle of Muslims on the subcontinent against Hindu aggression in a speech in November 1947: "Our heart goes out to them—our brethren in this mortal struggle, for the choice before them now is freedom or death. If the plans of their enemies succeed they will be exterminated, as Muslims in various other parts of India have been exterminated."^[8]

The belief that India's strategy in Kashmir was intended to erode Pakistan's independence provided the ideological and emotional underpinnings of Pakistan's position, but it was Pakistan's internal political circumstances that fostered the nation's obsession with Kashmir.

First among these internal circumstances driving Pakistan's policy was the crisis of identity that Pakistan suffered from the moment of independence.^[9] Ayub Khan explained the problem succinctly, when he remarked that prior to 1947 "none of us was in fact a Pakistani."^[10] This problem was two-fold. First, the most obvious source of national solidarity, Islam, was problematic because of the secular character of Pakistan's new leadership. Second, although most of the Pakistani population was Muslim, the state of Pakistan was comprised of individuals that mostly identified themselves along on ethnic and tribal lines.

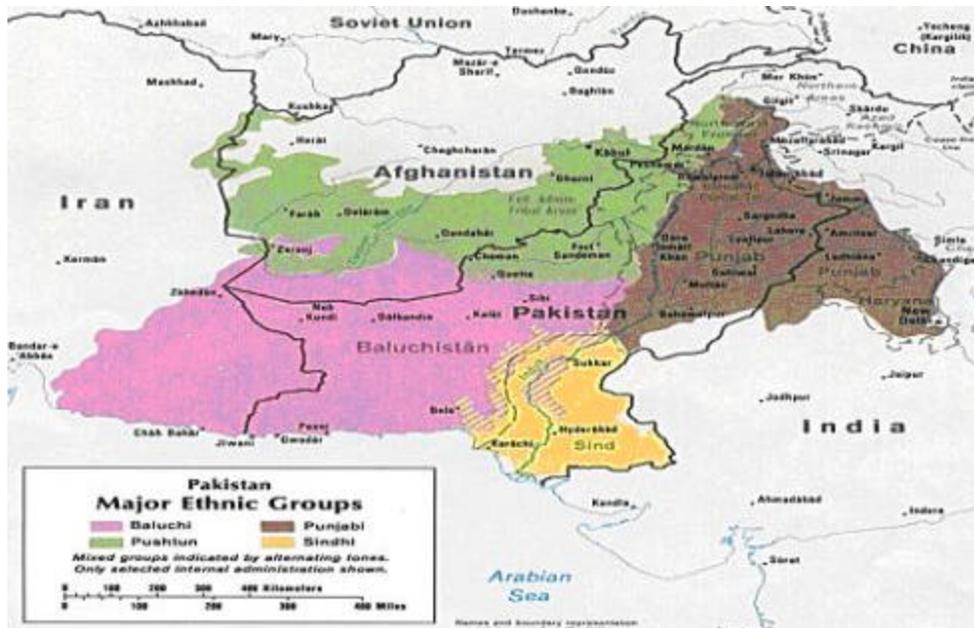
Pakistan's Islamic identity posed problems for the new nation because the secular leaning politicians, bureaucrats, and military officers that occupied the positions of power in the new state did not want to make Islam the sole basis of national identity. Trained and schooled in British secular ideals, they were leery of rallying around an idea that inherently put them at a political disadvantage vis-à-vis the Islamic religious authorities. Pakistan's new secular leadership envisioned a secular, Islamic state and relying on appeals to Islam in order to forge a nation would have provided the traditional religious authorities a mechanism to assume political power.

Even if the Pakistani leadership had opted to forge a nation based on religious solidarity, it would have been forced to do so in the face of the profound challenges presented by the ethnic and tribal loyalties that trumped all other forms of identification. Jinnah's two-nation theory divided the subcontinent along religious lines, but Islam alone had not been a strong enough force for Jinnah to forge a sense of nationalism.^[11] The Pashtun in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) are one example how ethnic divisions were a problem for the new state and how the struggle for Kashmir became an entangled with Pakistan's internal crisis.

When the prospect of independence arose, Gaffar Khan, the "Frontier Gandhi," was remarkably successful in mobilizing a Pashtun nationalist movement that sought independence for the NWFP. In fact, had it not been for Jinnah's ability to convince Mountbatten that he would be opening a Pandora's box of ethnic fragmentation if he allowed independence, it is likely the NWFP and the adjacent tribal areas would have opted for independence.^[12] When the vote was held to determine which nation the NWFP would join, Ghaffar Khan boycotted it, but the decision for the Pashtun Muslims who did vote was easy—99 percent voted to join Pakistan.^[13] Despite the overwhelming vote in favor of accession to Pakistan, the central government in Karachi realized it had a problem. This problem, the inability to exert its authority throughout its territory, also contributed to Pakistan's policy. The nascent government was in no position to directly challenge

the relatively well-armed tribesmen, and the jihad in Kashmir served as a useful distraction from the idea of a Pashtunistan, the proposed homeland for Pakistan's Pashtuns.[14]

Figure 1: Pakistan's Major Ethnic Groups[15]



In addition to the Pashtuns, Pakistan consisted of four other major ethnic groups: Baloch, Punjabi, Sindhi, and Mohajir. The Mohajirs, Muslims that fled from areas of South Asia that had become part of India, possessed a disproportionate amount of political power because of the positions they held in the Muslim League, which had essentially morphed into the Pakistan government. Sensitive to their status as minorities and transplants, many Mohajirs were the most ardent advocates of the two-nation theory and were especially sensitive to India's attempt to annex Kashmir. Surrounded by Pashtuns and Punjabis, ethnic groups that had reputations as fierce warriors, the Mohajirs reluctance to appear weak also contributed to their refusal to concede on the highly charged issue of Kashmir.

With both ethnic and religious definitions of nationality problematic, Pakistani leaders attempted to rally the new nation against the threat of the imposing Hindu neighbor as a way to forge a sense of unity. The consequence of the focus on India was the "India syndrome," defined by Jean Luc-Racine, as "a feeling of insecurity [that] has been nurtured constantly since 1947... its successive leaders have not been able to free the national mind from its Indian obsession—rather, they used it deliberately for their own purposes." [16] Therefore, the decision to fight for Kashmir not only had ideology to support it, but it also had the political objectives, primarily that the struggle for Kashmir served to strengthen the tenuous national bonds of the new nation-state.

In conjunction with these nationalist goals, the struggle between embryonic institutions further contributed to Pakistan's uncompromising position on Kashmir. When Jinnah died shortly after partition, Pakistan's prospects for a strong, secular, civilian government suffered a major blow and power rapidly devolved to the institutions that had been previously established by the British—the military and the bureaucracy. Prior to 1956, political power rested mostly in the hands of the Governor-General. The prime minister and his cabinet possessed very little power. In fact, they served at the behest of the governor-general. This early institutional imbalance had several political consequences with regards to Pakistan's strategy toward Kashmir.

First, in order to compensate for their lack of real power, politicians attempted to build a political base by pandering to the public's emotions. In August of 1953, at a large demonstration in Karachi protesting the Indian government's removal and arrest of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the Pakistani Prime Minister told the crowd that his government would not rest "until they have secured for the people of Kashmir their inalienable right to determine their future by free exercise of their vote."^[17] Three days later at an Independence Day celebration he declared: "We are bound to the people of Kashmir by ties of religion, culture, tradition, economy and geography. It is but natural that we should feel the deepest sympathy for them in their hour of trial."^[18]

Kashmir's implications for Pakistan's sovereignty and national identity, Pakistan's internal divisions and weaknesses, and the imbalance in institutional strength led Pakistan to see Kashmir in uncompromising terms. In Pakistan's case the dispute had dual purposes. On the one hand, Kashmir was an ideological struggle against India and its ambitions. On the other, the dispute served to unite an otherwise fractured polity. Since it had both ideological and nationalist implications, neither of which is easily compromised, Pakistan's policy toward Kashmir became rigid and unyielding.

Fifty years of hostile relations with India have reinforced Pakistan's Kashmir policy because it has confirmed Pakistan's notion that India's occupation of Kashmir was intended to simultaneously demonstrate that Pakistan was politically unnecessary and physically weaken it. Kashmir became sacrosanct in Pakistani politics and it is politically untenable to "lose" Kashmir. Over time, the cost of surrender in Kashmir has risen. Too much Pakistani blood has been spilled over Kashmir for any government to survive a capitulation on Kashmir. In addition to years of confidence building with India, altering Pakistan's policy on Kashmir will require major domestic changes. Therefore, the United States should, at least in the short-term, focus on encouraging Pakistan toward a strategy that does not provoke an Indian retaliation that could spiral toward nuclear war.

The Evolution of Pakistan's Strategy

In contrast to Pakistan's policy, its strategy has responded to external stimuli. Pakistan has used diplomacy, war, and proxy war to pursue its claim to Kashmir. Each strategy was the product of both internal and external constraints or opportunities and was selected because it was considered to be the most effective way to pursue Pakistan's objectives. By analyzing Pakistan's decision to launch a military assault in 1965 after fourteen years of diplomacy and the initiation of a proxy war in the early 1990s three conclusions become evident. First, changes in Pakistan's domestic power structure have an important impact on Pakistan's strategy because they can either reduce or increase the strategies available to the policymakers. Second, Pakistan's assessment of what the external environment necessitates or allows has been crucial to the type of strategy Pakistan utilizes. Third, the United States-Pakistan relationship has had an important influence on Islamabad's strategy decisions.

Despite its stated inflexible policy, Pakistan used diplomatic instruments to pressure India to yield on Kashmir during the 1950s and early 1960s. This strategy did not shift when India forsook the option of a plebiscite in Kashmir, the pillar of Pakistan's legal position. This alteration only came after Pakistan assessed that it had rectified the post-partition military imbalance vis-à-vis India and the United States-Pakistan relationship suffered a major decline. When the United States warmed up to India during the early 1960s and then initiated an economic and military aid program to India after its war with China in 1962, Pakistan concluded that time was not on its side and that its window for obtaining a satisfactory solution to Kashmir was closing. A brief uprising, which began after a hair believed to have belonged to the Prophet Muhammad went missing, provided Pakistan's leaders with reason to believe Kashmiris were ripe for revolt. However, it was nearly two years later, in August 1965, after United States-Pakistan relations had gone from strained during the Kennedy Administration to poor with the Johnson Administration, that Pakistan launched a military assault into Kashmir. It was an effort to accomplish militarily what their diplomatic strategy had failed to do.

Six years later, the East Pakistan rebellion and India's intervention divided Pakistan in half and resulted in the independent state of Bangladesh. The event directly challenged Pakistan's claim that all Muslims of South Asia should belong to one state. Although the tenure of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is often seen as a period of relative stability in Kashmir, Bhutto's decision to launch Pakistan's nuclear development program and his rhetorical campaign to maintain Kashmir's disputed status reveal that he conceded nothing to India. In fact, Bhutto's pursuit of nuclear weapons began the process of moving Pakistan's strategy toward asymmetric options because conventional military options were no longer considered feasible. Additionally, Bhutto's mishandling of the political situation in Pakistan increased the role Islamist forces in Pakistani society. After his rigging of the elections in 1977, the chaos that engulfed the nation provided the impetus for General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq to reassert military control in Pakistan.

Zia, a devote Muslim, recognized the popular support that the Islamist parties possessed and, rather than suppress them, chose to co-opt the Islamists into his government. The nature of the Afghan war institutionalized the bonds between the military, the Islamist parties, and their associated mujahedin fighting in Afghanistan. Notably, as during the 1970s, Kashmir was relatively calm during most of the 1980s and there was little mention of cross-border terrorism by the Indian leadership. In 1989, however, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan and the following year the United States abandoned its relationship with Pakistan. Also, in 1989 an indigenous Kashmiri uprising provided an opportunity for Pakistan to reverse the Indian attempts to degrade Kashmir's status as disputed territory. Devoid of a relationship with the United States and with weak political leadership, diverting the attention of the highly energized, extremely violent segment of Pakistani society returning from Afghanistan and refocusing the political economy that had developed to fight the Soviets was a highly attractive option. Thus, Pakistan shifted from a strategy of negotiations to a proxy war strategy.

Pakistan's strategy to bleed India continued through the 1990s under both Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a Punjabi with a close relationship with the Islamist parties, and Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was educated in the West and espoused secular, progressive principles similar to her father. Through most of the 1990s, it appeared that Pakistan was getting the results it sought from its strategy in Kashmir. India was unable to pacify the region, and therefore it remained an issue on the international agenda (although relatively low on that list). Additionally, Indian soldiers were dying and Pakistani soldiers were not. By 1999, however, the insurgency began to wane and the Pakistani-supported mujahedin had managed to alienate the Kashmiri people. With the threat of nuclear war looming over South Asia after India and Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in May 1998, Pakistan believed that it could make a limited incursion across the LoC and India's ability to retaliate would be constrained because of international concern over the possibility of nuclear war. Instead, the Clinton administration viewed Pakistan's provocation as a threat to the entire world and Nawaz Sharif was offered only limited political cover and no option but to order the withdrawal of Pakistan's forces.

The Kargil operation was not irrational or the product of an over zealous rogue agency. In fact, the operation can be seen as an extension of Pakistan's proxy war strategy. Since the insurgency had lost momentum and in light of its numerous benefits, Pakistan sought a way to re-energize it.^[19] At the same time, the results of the Kargil operation "probably caused the Pakistani leadership to conclude that Kargil-like operations are not legitimate in the current international environment."^[20] The reasons for this are two-fold. First, Pakistan's leaders understand that international, and particularly U.S., condemnation will entail severe economic and political consequences.^[21] Second, India's willingness to escalate the conflict, especially the extensive use of air power, demonstrated that nuclear weapons were not necessarily the firewall against a wider war that Pakistani decision-makers had anticipated.^[22]

Beyond Proxy War—First Steps Toward Resolution

The manner in which Kashmir's accession was obtained, the belief that India's control over Kashmir was intended to weaken Pakistan so that it could not survive, and India's invasion of East Pakistan have all reinforced Pakistan's mistrust of India. If those are the underlying reasons for Pakistan's policy, then changing it will require, at a minimum, a change in Pakistani beliefs about India and a change in Pakistanis understanding of what Kashmir means to their nation. These are changes that will require years, and if Pakistan continues to support a proxy war they are changes that will not come. Therefore, the first task should be to focus on ending the proxy war.

President Musharraf indicated in his first major address to the nation after assuming power in October 1999 that he saw the rise of militant Islam as a threat to Pakistan. He stated, "Islam teaches tolerance, not hatred, universal brotherhood and not enmity, peace not violence, progress not bigotry." He also urged the ulema "to curb elements which are exploiting religion for vested interests and bringing bad name to our faith."^[23] When he pitched his plan to rehabilitate Pakistan's reputation and economy by eliminating militancy and violence to an annual conference of Pakistan's top clerics in June 2001, he informed them that the world "looks upon us as terrorists." He explained, "We have been killing each other, and now we want to spread violence and terror abroad. Naturally, the world regards us as terrorists."^[24] In August that year, the Pakistani government made its first strike against militant Islamist organizations when it banned the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Muhammad. The events of September 11, 2001 appear to have accelerated Musharraf's plan to rein in the Islamist organizations, however, until that point there was no discussion of changing strategies in Kashmir. India's bid to utilize the atmosphere created by the U.S. war on terror forced Pakistan to re-assess the costs and benefits of maintaining its proxy war strategy.

Prior to the crisis in January 2002, Pakistan realized the rising violence, weapons smuggling, and growing militancy posed a threat to the nation. Sartaj Aziz, a former Pakistani foreign and finance minister, observed, "For every ten [militants] who are trained here to fight in Kashmir, one goes and the rest stay in Pakistan to cause trouble."^[25] But the assault on India's Parliament demonstrated that unpredictable militant proxies presented a greater risk to Pakistan beyond the danger of fomenting internal instability. The proxy war strategy was useful because it was a weapon that Pakistan believed it controlled. The Taliban's obstinacy in the face of U.S. demands and the series of militant attacks against India indicated that any Pakistani notion of control was illusory. In late 2001, Retired Pakistani Lieutenant General Talat Masood acknowledged that Pakistan was going to have to make adjustments in its Kashmir strategy: "Thanks to the U.S. antiterrorism campaign, the mujahedin fighting in Kashmir will have to be reined in. The state has to have a monopoly of armed force. Above all, our possession of nuclear weapons makes this essential, because there is internal instability here, there will be attempts at intense international scrutiny of us."^[26]

Musharraf's decision to rein in the proxy war won him the enmity of the militants and their supporters. Retired Lieutenant General Hamid Gul, the former head of ISI, criticized Musharraf for "only echoing India's position" by calling those who attacked India's Parliament terrorists during his 12 January 2002 speech.^[27] Since the speech, rumors have swirled about Musharraf's ability to withstand the militant backlash. However, he has endured the criticism of the Islamist organizations as well as two failed assassination attempts in December 2003. Moreover, despite speculation, there has been no evidence that the military brass is opposed to the shift and is plotting a coup to unseat Musharraf.

Throughout his tenure, Musharraf's administration has continued to focus on the rehabilitation of Pakistan's reputation, its economy, and its relationship with the United States. His score on the economy has been positive and his decision to abandon the Taliban in the face of U.S. pressure restored Pakistan's status as a U.S. ally. It has been more difficult for Musharraf to restore Pakistan's international reputation because of the proxy war in Kashmir and the revelations by Abdul Qadeer Khan that he was surreptitiously selling nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea,

and Libya. However, despite knowing that cracking down on Khan, a national hero in Pakistan, would bring public anger, Musharraf decided it was necessary to assuage U.S. and international concerns. It appears that Musharraf is convinced that the costs of maintaining a proxy war in Kashmir now outweigh its benefits. The United States has a crucial part in ensuring that Pakistan remains committed to that assessment.

Pakistan's leaders recognize that their current favorable standing with the United States is largely due to the U.S. war on terror and Pakistan's willingness to assist in that war. Prior United States-Pakistan partnerships have been forged in response to common threats and when these threats receded, so did the usefulness of the relationship. This pattern has led to a perception on Pakistan's part that the United States has been a fickle friend. It remains concerned over what the United States will do when bin Laden is caught and the war on terror's urgency eases.^[28] Will U.S. assistance last beyond the capture of Osama bin Laden? Will sanctions be renewed against Pakistan for its nuclear program?

Although the United States can not force Pakistan to shift its policy on Kashmir, it should continue its effort to persuade Pakistan to shift away from proxy war. In order to do this, a two-pronged strategy is necessary. First, the United States should establish a partnership with Pakistan that is grounded in the understanding that Pakistan's future is a national security interest of the United States. Pakistan's economic, political, and institutional development is in the interest of the United States. The United States-Pakistan relationship must be rooted in this belief. Pakistan still values and seeks a strong relationship with the United States. The United States should use this influence and establish a commitment to Pakistan that goes "beyond bin Laden."^[29] The Bush administration is on the right track. Its agreement to provide a three billion dollar aid package over five years indicates a serious long-term U.S. commitment to Pakistan's development. Second, the United States must press Pakistan to liberalize its economy and strengthen its political institutions.^[30] In the long run, a one man solution is not sustainable and only a government with clear political legitimacy will be able to make any concessions on Kashmir.

With a framework for a long-term United States-Pakistan commitment established, Pakistan must understand that with commitment comes responsibilities. Although the United States and Pakistan cooperated in a proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, the use of militant proxies has had negative repercussions for both the United States and Pakistan. Pakistan must understand that its national interests are jeopardized as a result of this proxy war strategy and it must end. The United States should continue to quietly press Pakistan to maintain its crackdown on militants within its borders. Beyond the economic and societal costs of the strategy, the introduction of nuclear weapons has made the frequent crisis instigated by the insurgency extremely dangerous.

Finally, India has a critical role in Pakistan's continued shift away from proxy war. India should maintain its position that it will no longer tolerate a proxy war strategy, but it also should provide Pakistan with incentives to pursue a peaceful strategy. Its agreement to discuss all bilateral issues, including Kashmir, in the composite dialogue meetings is an important first step toward India's acknowledgment that Kashmir is a political problem and that refusing to address the dispute with Pakistan over the last fifty years has failed to solve it. India's willingness to discuss the issue and the initiation of a process that facilitates confidence-building should provide Pakistan's leaders with the necessary political capital to maintain this shift away from proxy war and to continue the peace process.

It appears that India and Pakistan agree that their approach to the issue must change, creating the necessary flexibility in their respective policies is likely to take years. Kashmir is a political question loaded with national identity and sovereignty implications for India and Pakistan that make it far more important and complicated than simply a territorial dispute. Reaching a solution that accounts for these complexities will require years of confidence building measures and internal political changes, but a solution will not be reached with the continuation of the proxy war.

The United States should not attempt to mediate the dispute. However, it should continue to stay actively involved and stress the political, economic, and societal costs the Kashmir dispute has on both countries and help the leaders of India and Pakistan fend off demands from hard-liners in their countries that advocate a more violent strategy to settle the dispute.

About the Author

Matt Taylor is a captain in the U.S. Air Force and a March 2004 graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School. This article is a condensed version of his thesis titled "Pakistan's Kashmir Policy and Strategy since 1947," which can be found on the NPS website.

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