



## The Missing Piece in the Pakistan Puzzle

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This week's round of trilateral talks between the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan in Washington offers an important opportunity for the Obama administration to address the weakest link in its "Af-Pak" strategy—the deteriorating situation in Pakistan. Just back from my most recent visit to Pakistan last week, I don't share the rather alarmist and pessimistic views dominating U.S. news coverage and political debates on Pakistan.

Yes, the situation is very serious and not improving, and some grave risks to U.S. security lurk in Pakistan. But most of Pakistan, a country of 170 million people, has not fallen into anarchy. The Taliban are a fringe minority isolated in small pockets of the country, and Pakistanis in recent weeks have turned against extremist Islamists. It is a country with millions of ordinary middle class citizens working in universities, banks and law offices who strive for the same things we want—stability and prosperity. With the right approach, a strategic framework agreement, the United States can more effectively address Pakistan's multiple security, political and economic challenges. It has no other option but to work to develop stronger partnerships in Pakistan.

I highlight the word partnerships, in its plural form, because the United States must move quickly to develop a broader set of relationships across the full spectrum of Pakistan's government, vibrant civil society and business communities. One of the biggest mistakes the United States has made throughout the past sixty years in Pakistan was investing in one faction or institution to the detriment of a broader-based approach. At times, we've partnered with Pakistan's military and intelligence services. Most recently, in the closing years of the Bush administration, we centered our policy on President Pervez Musharraf, who was ultimately a weak foundation.

Legislation in Congress, such as the Kerry-Lugar bill, introduced this Monday and supported by the Obama administration, takes a step in the right direction by proposing tripling non-military aid to Pakistan and imposing greater accountability on security assistance. Another piece of legislation proposes creating reconstruction opportunity zones in the troubled northwest part of the country. A new Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund proposed by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates last week adds another important element to a new policy.

Yet, on their own these new legislative initiatives and the proposed counterinsurgency fund, along with the trilateral talks this week, are not enough to form the broad-based partnerships needed to effectively address the problems in Pakistan. These initiatives by themselves could fall into the same old transactional trap that has plagued U.S.-Pakistan relations, one that I heard a lot about on my trip, with the United States saying "do more," and Pakistan saying "give more."

What is missing from the equation is a comprehensive U.S.-Pakistan strategic framework agreement that outlines two-way commitments between the countries on enhancing cooperation in all spheres—defense, intelligence, nuclear policy, the economy, energy, law



President Obama and Pakistani President Zardari (AP)

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"So what should the Obama administration learn from the Taliban's tactical victory? First, soft power and economic development are irrelevant to this situation unless they are enabled by hard power. ... Indeed, unless the president and the secretary of state understand that soft power and accommodation are about as effective at countering Islamism as lollipops are at curing cancer, the march to Buner may become the symbol of the Obama presidency, played out repeatedly, from Baghdad to Basra to Beirut."  
—Michael Rubin, resident scholar, American Enterprise Institute, "Sixty Miles from the Capital," *The Weekly Standard*, May 11, 2009

VS.

"[W]hat is urgently needed is a surge in U.S. support for civilian law enforcement, including supplying police in the four provinces the equipment, training and intelligence that they need to protect these communities against the armed

enforcement and even educational and cultural cooperation. The United States has signed similar agreements recently with other important countries, including Iraq, and it should aim to enhance bilateral ties with Pakistan by working out a comprehensive framework for deepening cooperation between our two countries.

Without such a comprehensive agreement, the United States and Pakistan will find it difficult to break what has been a destructive cycle of mutual distrust, one that has played out prominently in the media over the past two weeks. A strategic framework agreement can serve as a more solid foundation for setting common goals in the medium and longer term. Without a longer-term set of goals, U.S. policy in Pakistan will remain stuck in a reactive mode lacking a clear vision, responding to recent negative trends with no clear line on the horizon. A strategic framework agreement can clearly outline commitments and expectations on both sides in trying to build a stronger partnership.

Such a strategic framework agreement also can open the door for broader-based cooperation between the two countries on official and non-official levels and ensure that various approaches are integrated. One good example: Pakistani academics I saw during my visit praised recent increases in Fulbright scholarships to bring more Pakistanis to the United States, but they wanted to see an expansion of efforts to bring U.S. scholars to Pakistan. Instead of dealing with each of these policy initiatives piecemeal, a strategic framework agreement can outline the basis for a long-standing partnership between the two countries in an integrated fashion, one with a view to the long-term relationship needed to make the United States more secure.

The United States cannot afford to fail in Pakistan, and fortunately it has millions of potential partners, in government as well as in the well-educated middle class and a vocal civil society and press. Last month's armed takeover by the Taliban in certain parts of the country was not only a wakeup call for the Obama administration—it was a wakeup call for millions of Pakistanis. The United States faces several threats in Pakistan, but it also has an historic opportunity to put the bilateral relationship on more solid footing.

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Taliban. ... There also is a need for community policing. Civilian police forces know their community, can be trained to defend it and can do so as a core pillar of the law. Relying largely on the military to combat a religious extremist insurgency in a country where the military has a history of collaboration with jihadi extremists, and violation of constitutional norms and corruption, is doomed to fail."  
—**Mark Schneider**, senior vice president, *International Crisis Group*, "A Strategy Needed for Pakistan and Afghanistan," *GlobalSecurity.org*, May 5, 2009

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Discussion moderated by:

**Brian Katulis**, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress, advisor, Middle East Progress

**When:** Friday, March 20, 2009  
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