

Reviving the United States' Commitment to Pakistan and Afghanistan

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Reviving the United States' Commitment to Pakistan and Afghanistan

Abstract

As President Obama is in the midst of deciding whether additional U.S. combat forces are needed in Afghanistan in addition to the 21,000 troops recently committed, he must realize that additional armed forces are only a stopgap measure in Afghanistan's downward spiral into an 'undergoverned' failed state. Similarly, as Pakistan's fragile and fractured civilian government continues to appease the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella organization of Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen with Taliban cultural values led by Baitullah Mehsud and others, it comes closer to the concept of a "misgoverned" failed state, possessing a small arsenal of nuclear arms. The problem for the U.S. administration is that neither of these countries can be allowed to fall further into disrepair. At the same time each requires a different and unique approach to the threat of "Talibanization" that faces each country—the control of territory within each country by Islamic radicals seeking to impose their ultraconservative interpretation of shar'ia law onto the general populace. Generally acknowledged is the belief that what has tentatively worked in Iraq, that is, the additional U.S. troops and employment of former Sunni insurgents to help fight foreign fighters associated with al-Qaida, will not work in either Afghanistan or Pakistan. While a regional approach to the conflict in these two countries is warranted, Afghanistan and Pakistan are on two different economic, social, and political playing fields. Hence, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution for the two countries, especially one that draws on the Iraq playbook. In addition to its internal political problems, Pakistan also faces the issue of al-Qaida and Taliban training camps positioned in its literal back yard, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA or Tribal Areas). Resolution of the War on Terror cannot come to fruition without addressing the problems that exist in the Tribal Areas. This largely self-governed terrain has come under Taliban influence and serves as a safe haven for Taliban and foreign-fighter cross-border attacks into Afghanistan and, more recently, large-scale attacks into Pakistan itself.

Reviving the United States' Commitment to Pakistan and Afghanistan

By Steve A. Young, Ph.D. and Imdad Hussain Sahito, Ph.D.

Introduction

As President Obama is in the midst of deciding whether additional U.S. combat forces are needed in Afghanistan in addition to the 21,000 troops recently committed,¹ he must realize that additional armed forces are only a stopgap measure in Afghanistan's downward spiral into an 'under-governed' failed state. Similarly, as Pakistan's fragile and fractured civilian government continues to appease the *Tehrik-i-Taliban* Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella organization of Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen with Taliban cultural values led by Baitullah Mehsud and others, it comes closer to the concept of a "misgoverned" failed state, possessing a small arsenal of nuclear arms. The problem for the U.S. administration is that neither of these countries can be allowed to fall further into disrepair. At the same time each requires a different and unique approach to the threat of "Talibanization" that faces each country—the control of territory within each country by Islamic radicals seeking to impose their ultra-conservative interpretation of shar'ia law onto the general populace.

Generally acknowledged is the belief that what has tentatively worked in Iraq, that is, the additional U.S. troops and employment of former Sunni insurgents to help fight foreign fighters associated with al-Qaida, will not work in either Afghanistan or Pakistan.² While a regional approach to the conflict in these two countries is warranted, Afghanistan and Pakistan are on two different economic, social, and political playing fields. Hence, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution for the two countries, especially one that draws on the Iraq playbook. In addition to its internal political problems, Pakistan also faces the issue of al-Qaida and Taliban training camps positioned in its literal back yard, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA or Tribal Areas). Resolution of the War on Terror cannot come to fruition without addressing the problems that exist in the Tribal Areas. This largely self-governed terrain has come under Taliban influence and serves as a safe haven for Taliban and foreign-fighter cross-border attacks into Afghanistan and, more recently, large-scale attacks into Pakistan itself.

Afghanistan: An Exercise in Persistence?

Three issues stand out when one considers the political, economic, and social situation in today's Afghanistan:

1. Since 2005, the Taliban have increased the frequency and lethality of their insurgency.
2. It is the world's largest producer of both white and black/brown heroin.
3. Its current government is largely ineffective and corrupt.

These three factors should figure prominently as the U.S. administration's Pakistan policy evolves over the coming months.

In October 2001, the United States responded to the tragedy of September 11 by joining forces with the Northern Alliance militia to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan and take revenge upon the al-Qaida leadership. Our new ally's charismatic leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, was assassinated two days before the September 11 attacks by suspected al-Qaida suicide bombers posing as journalists. In the wake of these events, small groups from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Special Operations Forces (SOF) persuaded remaining Northern Alliance leaders that the U.S. military was coming to help them take control of Afghanistan. The initial coordinated effort was eventually supported by U.S. air strikes. By the end of November 2001, the strategic northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif and the capital of Kabul were under the control of Northern Alliance forces, thus signaling the end of Taliban rule. Kandahar fell shortly thereafter in January 2002, setting up the final push to capture al-Qaida leader Usama bin Ladin at Tora Bora, a remote and geographically formidable region located in the mountains on the Pakistani border opposite the Pakistani city of Parachinar. After several failed attempts to locate and capture ibn Ladin, including Operation Anaconda, coupled with inactivity by American commander General Tommy Franks, there was no large U.S. troop presence at Tora Bora despite CIA requests, and ibn Ladin escaped with likely Pakistani assistance across the Afghan border.³

As a result of the conflict, the United States had relatively quickly pushed aside the Taliban and remaining foreign fighters, but not necessarily dismantled their residual fighting capability. Nevertheless, even after having missed the chance to capture ibn Ladin at Tora Bora, there at least now existed an opportunity for nation building. In the wake of the U.S.-supported Northern Alliance push, there were opportunities to speedily establish a working representative government and begin soft power pro-

grams to win local Afghan support even while continuing to employ force against the Taliban and al-Qaida remnants. Unfortunately for Afghanistan and the American public, the military effort stalled and the hearts-and-minds program was limited to a few well-meaning and modestly effective Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Meanwhile, the Bush administration turned its attention to Iraq and essentially abandoned the War on Terror in Afghanistan at a time when significant progress was seemingly attainable.

From the beginning of 2002 until approximately 2005 the security situation in Afghanistan remained relatively calm. But in the adjacent border area with Pakistan, the Taliban and what was left of the foreign-fighter contingent began to reconstitute themselves. Eventually, these forces started returning to their former strongholds in southern Afghanistan and employing insurgent tactics gleaned from former Iraqi fighters who had been displaced by U.S. pressure there.⁴ As a result, U.S. casualties in Afghanistan increased both in terms of quantity and lethality. Throughout the 2009 fighting season, the U.S. has remained poised to escalate its commitment of armed forces to correspond with anticipated increases in the number of U.S. casualties.

Efforts by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and others to increase licit commerce in Afghanistan—chiefly by building paved roads—has also led to increased illicit uses by narco-traffickers involved in moving raw opium to local laboratories for processing and the final product, heroin, to international markets. Over the past few years Afghanistan has become the world's largest producer of raw opium and processed heroin. Traditionally, the Golden Triangle of Southeast Asia, chiefly Myanmar, has been the world's primary source of heroin. However, poppy production has decreased there by 70 percent, according to Interpol.⁵ The reduced production capacity has been replaced by opium coming out of Afghanistan. In 2006, the United Nations estimated that Afghanistan had approximately one hundred and sixty-five hectares in poppy production yielding approximately six thousand metric tons of raw opium. If one assumes a ten-to-one ratio of raw opium to heroin product, then the yield of heroin was six hundred metric tons that year. In January 2008, the average price in Afghanistan for one kilogram of dry opium was US\$106. It is extremely difficult to quantify the amount of money derived from the drug trade going to Taliban and al-Qaida coffers; however, one estimate placed Taliban earnings in the US\$1 billion range over the last ten years.⁶

Afghanistan's president Hamid Karzai, head of a corrupt and mostly ineffective government, stood for reelection in August of 2009.⁷ The United States backed Hamid Karzai because he was among the few Afghan elite

that stayed behind in the 1979–1989 fight against the Soviet Union. While not an active fighter, Karzai was a significant fundraiser during the war and a political presence in southern Pakistan and Afghanistan afterwards. Moreover, his English language and political skills and his being ethnic Pashtun, the dominant ethnic group of the country, seemed a winning combination for the Afghan presidency. However, Karzai has proved to be ineffective when dealing with former warlords and even members of his own family regarding political corruption and involvement in the drug trade.

The Situation in Pakistan

Pakistan's current problems stem from a series of mostly ineffective and/or corrupt governments since it was founded in 1947. For more than a decade, the government has failed to control its borders in the FATA and to effectively respond to a homegrown Taliban insurgency.

After the creation of Pakistan, the government adopted policies toward the FATA inherited from British colonial rule. Special regulations under the traditional local system were adopted. Not only were people allowed to keep their weapons without any government licensing, but these areas proved to be centers of arms production, whence they were supplied illegally to the rest of the country and Afghanistan. Many hardened criminals from other parts of the country obtained refuge there because of the absence of Pakistani law. The FATA also served as a source of mujahideen during the 1979–1989 conflict with the USSR.

Pakistan's political history chronicles the actions of a series of military and civilian governments, none of which has been particularly effective in solving Pakistan's persistent political and economic problems. Pakistan's deep flaws in governance began almost as soon as its first leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, died, little more than a year after its independence. A series of military and civilian leaders followed, setting the stage for General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's military takeover of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government in July 1977.

An avowed Islamist, Zia began establishing Pakistani *madrassas* (Islamic religious schools that tend toward extremist ideology) built with Saudi Arabian funds and staffed by Saudi Imams preaching the very conservative Wahhabist brand of Islam. The number of Pakistani *madrassas* increased substantially during Zia's rule and formed the ideological and numerical basis for what was to become the Taliban, or "religious students" in the Arabic language. Following Zia's death in 1988, Ali Bhutto's

daughter, Benazir Bhutto, and Nawaz Sharif alternately shared the prime minister's office until 1999, when Pervez Musharraf displaced Sharif by military coup.

Musharraf eventually assumed the presidency until August 2008, when he resigned under pressure from the new civilian government. Asif Ali Zardari, Musharraf's successor and widower of Benazir Bhutto, previously served two separate jail terms for corruption and accusations of murder. Musharraf's internal security policy was one of appeasement with the Pakistani Taliban as they extended their influence beyond the Tribal Areas into the Swat District of northern Pakistan. Such appeasement was the hallmark of the fractious state of control over Pakistan's domestic and international affairs. Moreover, radical Islamists have recently attempted to assert control over even more of Pakistan through violence, a situation that has raised concerns in the Obama administration about the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.⁸

Sometimes it is difficult to assess where the real power lies in Pakistan as there are four potential power centers: the president, the prime minister, the chief of the army staff, and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief. That the Afghan Taliban had been supported both in terms of finance and manpower by the Pakistani ISI since their inception had been rumored within U.S. intelligence circles for many years and only recently confirmed by media reporting.⁹ The ISI had always assumed that it could control the Taliban, but has since found out that the Afghan Taliban have their own agenda: to continue the fight against the United States in order to regain sovereign control of Afghanistan. The Pakistanis had assumed the view that the Taliban were a friendly alternative to an Indian-influenced Afghanistan. However, since their ejection from Afghanistan, the Afghan Taliban and foreign fighters present in the Tribal Areas began radicalizing conservative Islamists in the Tribal Areas, especially in Southern Waziristan. The new Pakistani Taliban quickly spread into North Waziristan, then further northward through the Khyber Agency to its terminus in the Bajaur Agency.

The term "Talibanization" was first used to describe the Pakistani Taliban taking over or highly influencing the political and social structure of the Tribal Areas.¹⁰ Such takeovers have been facilitated by numerous Pakistani Government agreements with the Pakistani Taliban; an appeasement exercise that has yielded none of the peace elements promised by the Pakistani Taliban. This futile policy of appeasement culminated in December 2008, with the Pakistani Taliban takeover of the Swat Valley located in Swat District of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Girls now no longer attend school there and the District is sub-

ject to shar'ia law. The area under Taliban influence or direct control now extends throughout the Tribal Areas into northern Pakistan.

The Taliban have extended their attacks from the FATA to Pakistani major cities including Lahore. Moreover, the number of suicide attacks inside the country has become so common that people feel insecure to walk in the cities. Thousands of people have been killed and properties destroyed. The following table demonstrates the result of violence in Pakistan between 2003–2008.

Annual fatalities from terrorist violence in Pakistan, 2003–2008

Year	Civilians	Army personnel	Terrorists	Total
2003	140	24	25	189
2004	435	184	244	863
2005	430	81	137	648
2006	608	325	538	1471
2007	1523	597	1479	3599
2008	2155	654	3906	6715
Total	5291	1865	6329	13485

Source: Institute for Conflict Management (SATP)

Institute for Conflict Management (SATP) and Pakistan Assessment 2009, <http://www.satp.org/satporqtp/countries/pakistan/>.

One result of Pakistani military operations has been a humanitarian crisis not seen in recent years. According to the NWFP government, the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) has exceeded three million. These people have migrated to various parts of the country and have severely stretched the capacity of the Pakistani Government to provide food and shelter for the refugees.

A Comprehensive Regional Strategy for Afghanistan

Recently, President Barack Obama announced that there would be a regional strategy directed at stemming the influence, reach, and lethality of al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. His secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, appointed former U.S. ambassador Richard Holbrooke to serve as Special Representative to both countries. In addition there will be more diplomatic and civilian personnel assigned to Afghanistan to try to help rebuild the country's political and economic infrastructures. While these initiatives are sound efforts, neither diplomatic nor infrastructure improvements can be made without increased security in the countryside. However, new boots on the ground will not achieve the president's stated goal of destroying al-Qaida because (a) the administration maintains the policy of no hot pursuit into the Tribal Areas, and (b) an increase in troops will only serve to solidify government control in urban areas while the Taliban potentially retain control over the rural areas. Therefore, the administration should have a different goal than their predecessors: that of controlling territory.

All too often, U.S. troops clear an area of Taliban then leave, only to have the Taliban return and wreak vengeance on the village for cooperating with the enemy. Upon returning to a previously "liberated" village, U.S. commanders frequently find friendly but not necessarily cooperative inhabitants. The recently enacted "take and hold" policy of capturing and occupying local towns with friendly forces, however, may convince villagers and the village elders that the United States will protect them from the Taliban. This is likely the only policy that could succeed in Afghanistan as no counterinsurgency program can succeed without the support of the general population.

The Afghan Army is a well-respected institution amongst the population, but the police are among the most corrupt of public servants. Drug money influences their decisions and undermines any semblance of the rule of law. This is relatively understandable as the police are grossly underpaid, if at all, and their training is superficial at best. Nevertheless, the police and the army are those who are most acquainted with local problems and presumably know what is happening in their areas of operation. Therefore, it would appear necessary to initiate a concerted countrywide effort to upgrade the army's training in counterinsurgency techniques and tactics, and to train and outfit local police forces using a similar template applied by U.S. forces in Iraq. In addition to basic police investigation techniques, chief among the training topics should be classes in ethics and rule of law. These concepts have to become inculcated within law enforcement in order to gain some respect and trust from the local populations.

At this time, there are few details about which additional U.S. civilians would be encouraged to go to Afghanistan, but personnel from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are ideal given their depth of expertise in all facets of development including economics, education, environment, and health issues. Therefore, increases in USAID's budget are essential in order to get the necessary expertise into the country. Once security improves via the aforementioned take-and-hold policy, international NGOs should be encouraged to return to these secure sites. The culmination of these synergistic factors would go a long way toward social, political, and economic reconstruction and development.

Beyond the efforts of USAID, additional capability is needed in the form of a reconstituted U.S. Information Agency (USIA), which was disestablished as a post-Cold War dividend. Dissolved in 1999, USIA was a part of public diplomacy that never received much attention in the United States, but was well known overseas. For over forty years, this government agency, known as the U.S. Information Service (USIS) overseas, was an oasis in foreign territory for persons wanting to read English language newspapers and magazines and take English language lessons. Although sometimes portrayed as a U.S. propaganda vehicle, in actuality, USIS served as an informal U.S. cultural center for persons not wanting to be identified as visiting the local U.S. embassy or consulate. If winning hearts and minds is an Obama administration goal, then the public diplomacy plan for Afghanistan should be a key component of the overall strategy regarding the country.

Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking

While extra boots on the ground and additional civilian personnel are key to stabilizing Afghanistan, what has not yet been discussed in any detail are plans for addressing poppy production and introducing the concept of replacement crops or other tactics intended to remove reliance on the production of illicit drugs. Any move to block opium income, however, will be viewed as widely unpopular. One only has to see the issue from an Afghan farmer's perspective to see why: opium production yields approximately US\$2,154 per acre, while irrigated wheat generates approximately US\$230 per acre, and dry wheat farming generates only about US\$113 per acre.¹¹ With this reality, one can only accomplish so much nation building with troops and soft power.

The underlying cause of the grief of Afghanistan, and indirectly Pakistan, is the thriving drug trade in these countries, and it will continue to mire Afghanistan in the third world unless it is addressed. Most important will be cutting off access to the money generated by the sale of opium and

heroin.¹² This lesson was learned in the 1980s drug wars against the Cali Cartel in Colombia. Two items are necessary to have a successful insurgency: a modicum of popular support and financial resources. Therefore, in order to defeat an insurgency each of these factors must be successfully addressed. The combination of hard and soft power will increase security and popular support. A reduction in financial resources can only be achieved by going after the drug trade, an effort in which many lessons were learned under the auspices of the U.S. sponsored Andean Initiative and the efforts of current Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

Like an insurgency, success against the drug trade requires a combination of hard and soft powers as well as the political will of the host government. Active pursuit of the Taliban will create some success against the heroin trade, but the Taliban are not the only ones involved in the drug trade. It may be easier initially to address the growers. One suggestion has been for pharmaceutical companies to purchase more legally grown raw opium.¹³ On the surface, this idea has merit as there would be market forces deciding the product's price. Addressing illicit poppy production, then, becomes the underlying solution to Afghanistan's problems. Take away the proceeds from the sale of heroin and the Taliban's fiscal resources eventually dry up or are seriously curtailed. It is doubtful that Pakistan or other countries could or would want to make up the funding differences for any sustained time period. Since the drug trade is also the source of Afghanistan's political corruption, take away the illicit profits and corruption declines to a rate normally associated with developing countries.

U.S. Strategy in Pakistan

President Obama's strategy for Pakistan appears much less clear, but no less difficult. As the United States prepares to send more troops to Afghanistan, it also needs to address the stability of neighboring Pakistan. Unfortunately, there appears to be little change in the two-prong policy of the previous administration: more Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Predator and Reaper drone attacks in the Tribal Areas and aid money for Pakistan, much of it directed to the military. Unfortunately, while appearing necessary to keep the pressure on al-Qaida and Pakistani Taliban elements in the Tribal Areas, the UAV attacks are becoming more known for indiscriminate civilian killings while achieving occasional success against high-value targets. Generally these attacks are considered negatively and not fruitful for the cause. In the absence of a persistent and

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effective Pakistani army presence, there appears to be no other military alternative in the short term. These attacks do nothing, though, for winning grass-roots local support.

Money for Pakistan has been squandered in the past and there is little reason to think that future financial outlays will not follow suit. Recent attacks in Lahore by elements of either *Lashkar-e-Tayyiba* (LeT)¹⁴ and/or the Pakistani Taliban have highlighted the Pakistani Government's inability to deal with these homegrown terrorists.¹⁵ Moreover, these attacks indicate the increased confidence and ability to reach beyond the Tribal Areas and these groups' main bases of support. LeT, once highly supported by the ISI for the Kashmir insurgency, has now turned its attention to destabilizing Pakistan's central government and was linked to the November 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai. The Pakistani Taliban's goal is to turn the country into some semblance of Afghanistan. Any measure of success by either group or combination of these and other like-minded groups would lead to a significant destabilization of the Pakistani Government.

In order to comprehensively address these issues, a multifaceted approach to Pakistan's insurgency problems should be developed in concert with the Afghan program. Of course, there will be additional U.S. funding for training Pakistan's armed forces and hopefully police as well. But, the U.S. effort must be coordinated between and within each country, because neither country's insurgency or terrorist problem can be solved independently of the other. However, if any of these problems are to be solved, or at least contained, one must attack the source of the problem: radicalization and instability in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Threat of Radicalization in the FATA

Since their eviction from Afghanistan, the Taliban and al-Qaida have reconstituted themselves in what has become an insurgents' safe haven. The FATA were used consistently during the war between 1979 and 1989 with the Soviet Union for the same purpose, and their use is one of the reasons the mujahideen were able to keep fighting during that time period. Currently, the FATA are home to those most likely to attack the Pakistani state and its American allies. That the FATA harbor what the United States considers high-value targets is evident in the number of UAV attacks launched in the area.¹⁶ Terrorist training camps once found in Afghanistan are now active there, and successful attacks on U.S. convoys bearing supplies for the war in Afghanistan originate from the FATA.¹⁷

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The Pakistani Taliban was organized in South Waziristan and its influence has extended northward to Bajaur Agency and into the Swat District, threatening Pakistan proper, with Islamabad, the nation's political capital, only one hundred miles from Swat. The Tribal Areas are also home to many heroin processing laboratories. Logic therefore dictates that to be successful in either Afghanistan or Pakistan, what must be addressed are the issues that make the people of the Tribal Areas susceptible to Taliban recruitment and the cultural traditions that offer safe harbor to the Taliban and foreign fighters, such as Pashtunwali. The goal is to develop an approach or policy that offers an alternative to the Taliban in Pakistan's FATA.

Although a very difficult task, there are several initiatives that can be implemented while being sensitive to the cultural realities of the Tribal Areas. To date, Pakistan's policy toward the Tribal Areas has been to either militarily root out foreign fighters and Islamic extremists or appease extremists bent on establishing the Taliban creed in Pakistan. What has not yet been attempted is a sustained effort at economic development within the Tribal Areas. For economic development to have a chance to succeed, however, basic infrastructure development in the form of roads and bridges and the creation of additional border crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan must be constructed. The long-term goal should be to establish the Tribal Areas as a free trade zone, drawing foreign direct investment from Arab, Western, and Asian sources. Currently, hard-top roads in the Tribal Areas are poorly maintained and most are dirt track. This hampers incidental travel and commerce within the Tribal Areas and creates a more insular society. Moreover, a more efficient transportation system can only help farmers and tradesmen get goods and services to market in a timelier manner that reduces loss of fresh produce and increases quantity of scale for other goods.

Requisite in any comprehensive regional strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is creating additional controlled border crossings within the Tribal Areas. Presently Pakistan and Afghanistan share a one-thousand-six-hundred-mile border, but maintain only two official border crossings. In Pakistan there is one border crossing northwest of Peshawar at Torkum and another at Chaman, located northwest of Quetta in southwest Pakistan. Spin Boldak is Chaman's corresponding Afghan border town while there is no official Afghan town opposite Torkum (in comparison, the border between the United States and Mexico is slightly greater than one thousand nine hundred miles and runs through four U.S. states and six Mexican states; in Texas alone there are twenty-six official border crossings). The road to Torkum is via the tortuous and infamous Khyber Pass, which has been subject to many recent attacks on NATO

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convoys by militants and Pakistani bandits.¹⁸ Having only two official border crossings presents challenges to govern or secure legal commerce and prevent widespread banditry.

The addition of controlled border crossings would result in an immediate increase in commerce between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Additional border crossings also have the advantage of creating additional tax revenues from customs fees and tariffs. There should also be greater cross-border cooperation between the two countries since the majority Pashtun ethnic group transcends both sides of the border. Extended families on both sides of the border may also welcome the additional convenience of ease of passage between the two countries. Choosing locations of additional international border crossings would not be difficult. One immediate candidate is the Afghan town of Khost. The nearest Pakistan Tribal Area town is Miram Shah and there are numerous informal trails leading to the border on both sides used by militants to fire on U.S. and allied troops stationed in Khost. Creating additional international border crossings is a concrete confidence-building measure that would link these two neighbors and provide needed security and stability without undue fear of attacks from militants.

Conclusion

There are many sources of conflict and internal pressures facing Afghanistan and Pakistan; the Obama administration is right to consider a regional approach to formulating U.S. policy on these two strategic South Asian countries. Both countries are facing their own versions of homegrown insurgencies and both countries suffer from ineffective governments. Central to the violence impacting both countries are Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, which also serve as a safe haven for the Taliban and terrorists waging war against the United States and its allies.

Possible common solutions applicable to both countries include the additional build up of exogenous armed forces and the provision of qualified training for local police. Moreover, soft-power activities such as increased diplomacy in both countries and convincing regional powers such as Iran and Russia that a stable Afghanistan is in their best interest could be an effective approach, especially when used synergetically with other military force. Additional USAID projects and a robust public diplomacy presence in certain areas also seem appropriate. In addition, Afghanistan faces a debilitating poppy production problem that also must be taken into account.

In all respects, Pakistan's Tribal Areas are the source of many of the problems of both countries. It would seem appropriate that government stakeholders from both Pakistan and Afghanistan seek common ground to work against the insurgency by creating greater economic access to each country's goods and services by making the FATA a free trade zone, while simultaneously working to create binational institutions for management of their border problems.

About the Authors

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