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A New U.S. Approach to Pakistan: Enforcing Aid Conditions Without Cutting Ties

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Preface

The new Trump Administration must review its policies toward Pakistan in order to more effectively contain, and eventually eliminate, the terrorist threats that continue to emanate from the country. The activities and operations of diverse terror groups on and from Pakistani soil, and the government's failure to rein them in, threaten vital U.S. national security interests in the region. These include stabilizing Afghanistan, keeping the country from again turning into a global terrorist safe haven, and preventing the outbreak of an India-Pakistan military conflict that could potentially go nuclear.

Obama administration officials came into office eight years ago with the idea that they could coax Pakistan into changing key policies by elevating the U.S.-Pakistan partnership. To these ends, Washington instituted a strategic dialogue and increased both economic and military aid levels.

Unfortunately, Pakistan never changed its policy of supporting certain militant groups that fight Afghan and coalition forces, thus making it impossible for the United States to achieve its objective of keeping Afghanistan from reverting to a safe haven for international terrorism. The U.S. clearly recognizes that Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network and other terrorist groups is not the sole reason for Afghanistan's security challenges. However, the other problems become insurmountable when the principal insurgent groups enjoy safe havens in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Pakistani military leaders also continue to support terrorist groups that attack India in an effort to keep it off balance and to draw international mediation into the dispute with India over Kashmir. Pakistan's seemingly unconstrained expansion of its nuclear arsenal, particularly the development of tactical nuclear weapons and extended-range missile systems, also remains a cause for concern, especially with regard to India.

U.S. assistance levels to Pakistan reached their height in 2011, when the U.S. provided \$3.6 billion in military and economic aid, and have decreased every year since. One reason for the decline in aid levels is due to the U.S. drawdown in Afghanistan and the decreased reliance on Pakistan for Ground Lines of Communication (GLOCs). Another reason is growing frustration, particularly among members of the U.S. Congress, with continued Pakistani support to the Taliban and Haqqani network that fight Afghan and coalition forces.

To accomplish U.S. counterterrorism objectives in the region and to reverse extremist trends in Pakistani society, Pakistani authorities – specifically the country's military leaders, who control its foreign and security policies – need to take a comprehensive approach to shutting down all Islamist militant groups that operate from Pakistani territory, not just those that attack the Pakistani state. In the end, turning a blind eye and providing support to some terrorist groups creates an environment conducive to the operation of all terrorist groups.

Pakistan's tolerance for terror groups also undermines the country itself, corroding its stability and civilian governance and damaging its investment climate, as well as inflicting death and injury on thousands of its own innocent citizens.

Accordingly, the objective of the Trump administration's policy toward Pakistan must be to make it more and more costly for Pakistani leaders to employ a strategy of supporting terrorist proxies to achieve regional strategic goals. There should be no ambiguity that the U.S. considers Pakistan's strategy of supporting terrorist proxies to achieve regional strategic advantage as a threat to U.S. interests. U.S. policy must also pay attention to non-proliferation goals while dealing with Pakistan.

At the same time, the Trump Administration should be clear in all forums that the U.S. issue is not with the Pakistani people or the Pakistani nation. Rather, Washington takes strong exception to specific policy choices by parts of the Pakistan Government – chiefly, the military and intelligence apparatus centered in Rawalpindi, adjacent to the capital, Islamabad – that support the existence and activities of terrorist proxies. Accordingly, the Trump administration should both publicly and privately maintain avenues for Pakistan to become a U.S. ally, as well as trade and investment partner, in the future, should its leaders embrace the conduct and policies of an ally.

Moving forward, the Trump administration must link U.S. policies toward Pakistan directly to U.S. objectives, especially in Afghanistan. The U.S. must find ways to limit Pakistan's ability to frustrate U.S. goals in Afghanistan. Likewise, the U.S. must refuse to get involved in the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir and instead focus on diplomatically isolating Pakistan over its continued support to terrorist groups that attack India and have connections to international terrorism. The U.S. should encourage both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and pursue measures normalizing their relationship.

Background

In March 2009, then-President Barack Obama defined his top priority as being to disrupt, dismantle and defeat the al-Qaida infrastructure in Pakistan, which posed an imminent and significant threat to the United States and its allies. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was the lead element in the fight. Drone strikes intensified dramatically. In May 2011 Osama bin Laden was tracked down by the CIA, and a Navy SEAL team delivered justice.

Pakistan had helped capture some key al-Qaida leaders in the early years after 9/11. However, in the last decade, the U.S. has not been able to count on consistent Pakistani support in the war against al-Qaida. Today the al-Qaida infrastructure in Pakistan is much reduced but not destroyed. Bin Laden's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is still in Pakistan, producing propaganda that calls for attacks on Americans. U.S. intelligence officials reportedly believe that Bin Laden's son, Hamza, is also active in Pakistan.

Like several other U.S. presidents since the 1980s, former President Barack Obama saw Pakistan as a potentially useful ally in achieving limited U.S. goals in South Asia. The administration hoped that with the right kind of incentives – economic and military – Pakistan could be induced to change those policies that ran counter to U.S. interests. These undesirable policies included Pakistan's support for terrorists targeting Afghanistan and India and continued expansion of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

A Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) was designated to demonstrate American commitment to the region, as well as an understanding of the links between the challenges facing these two neighboring countries. The SRAP office became the inter-agency focal point for Afghanistan-Pakistan policy, separated from the State Department's South and Central Asia Bureau.

As part of the plan to reassure Pakistan of American support, Washington dispatched the SRAP for frequent visits to both Kabul and Islamabad; held structured strategic dialogues, both on a bilateral and trilateral basis; and invited Afghan and Pakistani leaders to visit Washington on a regular basis. The creation of the SRAP office, however, at times undermined the goals of the State Department's South and Central Asia Bureau and resulted in confused U.S. messaging to Pakistan.

Large amounts of economic and military aid have not induced Pakistan to end covert support for the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, or the myriad India-focused terrorist groups, most notably Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad, which Pakistan describes as "freedom fighters."

Encouraged by the election of a civilian government in Pakistan in 2008, the Obama administration decided to offer a multi-year civilian aid package to Pakistan as an incentive for the government to cooperate with the U.S. This was the first time the U.S. explicitly showed support for civilian rule in Pakistan with high doses of economic assistance. The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 (also referred to as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill) offered \$1.5 billion in civilian aid for five years with a possibility

of extension for another five years. It was presented as the end of “transactional” relations with Pakistan’s military and the beginning of a deeper partnership with its people and their elected representatives.

The package of civilian aid offered to Pakistan came with strings designed to gently nudge Pakistan’s military-intelligence establishment to back away from support to militant groups, whether they operated in Afghanistan or India. Positive inducements to the military were offered in the form of aid – materiel and cash, including reimbursements. Public praise was accompanied by private pressure to alter Pakistan’s policies.

Washington hoped that civilian aid (through the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill) and support to a civilian government would help strengthen democratic trends in the country and allow the civilians to exert greater control over the military and intelligence services. That hope was not fulfilled. The aid package, however, was not designed in such a way to make a significant impact on the economy and health or education systems. Pakistan’s civilian governments -- both the PPP government (2008-2013) and the PML/N government (2013-present) -- have proved unable to push back sufficiently against the existing national security paradigm, and policies framed by Pakistan’s security establishment have endured.

Moreover, the U.S. need for Pakistan’s logistics support in supplying its troops in Afghanistan resulted in a situation wherein Washington’s offer of carrots could not be backed by the threat of effective sticks. The Obama administration wanted to withdraw American forces from Afghanistan, leaving behind a secure and stable government in charge. To that end, it pursued a political solution to the Afghan conflict that depended on Pakistan’s using its influence to persuade the Taliban to negotiate.

While Pakistan’s military leaders may see advantages in a negotiated outcome, they have so far been unwilling to put enough pressure on the Taliban to lower the violence in Afghanistan and to induce the insurgents to negotiate seriously. Without sufficient pressure on their sanctuary inside Pakistan, the Taliban continue to assess they can win the war militarily. Indeed, there are past examples of Pakistan actively working to disrupt peace efforts between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

The fact that Osama Bin Laden was enjoying sanctuary in a location close to Pakistan’s military academy at the time of the U.S. attack in May 2011 reinforced American disenchantment with Pakistan. But American dependence on Pakistan for access and logistics support for U.S. troops inside Afghanistan preempted punitive action. The flow of U.S. assistance continued, despite intelligence that attacks on American and ISAF troops in Afghanistan by the Afghan Taliban or the Haqqani network were orchestrated from Pakistani territory.

In November 2011, U.S.-led NATO forces carried out a counterterrorism attack on a location close to the Pakistan border. Pakistani troops used artillery and heavy machine guns to attack the U.S. helicopters, based on rules of engagement issued by the Pakistani military command following the U.S. raid that killed Osama bin Laden in May 2011. U.S. aircraft engaged the Pakistani border outpost with counter fire that resulted in the deaths

of 28 Pakistani soldiers. In retaliation, Pakistan closed the GLOCs for NATO forces. Until January 2013, the U.S. relied on the more expensive northern route.

Pakistan, whose port and trucking companies had benefited by serving the GLOCs, eventually agreed to a compromise solution that re-opened the routes. This gave Pakistani officials an opportunity to claim that the U.S. had effectively acknowledged Pakistan's indispensability to the U.S.

Now, at the start of the new Trump administration, the U.S. continues to provide economic and military assistance to Pakistan without having secured its objective of convincing Pakistan to end its policy of using terrorist proxies to achieve regional strategic objectives. However, there have been some positive developments with regard to Pakistan's fight against terrorists that attack the Pakistani state.

Since mid-2014, Pakistan has conducted a major crackdown on the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP, the so-called Pakistani Taliban) in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. This has helped reduce the terror threat inside Pakistan. The Pakistan government also passed a National Action Plan in Parliament in January 2015 to eliminate terrorism and extremism in the country. But these positive moves are incomplete and may not be sustained. They have thus far spared some of the country's most powerful terrorist organizations and have not targeted the Afghan groups that receive sanctuary in Pakistan -- the very groups that most threaten the Afghan state's existence.

There are conflicting signals as to whether the Pakistani civilian leadership understands the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to combating terrorism and extremism, while it seems clear that leaders within the military and intelligence establishment continue to favor a policy of supporting some terrorist groups that fight in Afghanistan and India. Some Pakistani civilian leaders are concerned over Pakistan's increasing international isolation over the issue of support for terrorism.

There has been some cautious optimism that Pakistan's newly-appointed Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Bajwa could pursue a tougher line on terrorism than did his predecessor, General Raheel Sharif. General Sharif cracked down on terrorists threatening the Pakistani state, but he did little to rein in those that attack in Afghanistan and India. The smooth transition from one Army Chief to another and the apparent lack of interference in Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's decision-making process on the appointment have been received positively by Pakistan's neighbors. However, it is too early to tell whether General Bajwa will follow through on any meaningful changes to Pakistan's terrorism policies. Similar hopes with previous army commanders over the last two decades have gone without fulfillment.

The Obama administration erred in relying on a combination of personal ties with Pakistani military commanders and offers of economic and military assistance as instruments for change in Pakistan's policies. Admiral Michael Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held 25 meetings with Pakistan's former army chief, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, hoping to influence his thinking. Numerous high level visits,

including meetings of Pakistan's top leaders with President Obama, also failed to result in desirable changes in Pakistani policies.

To be fair, the Obama administration was not the first to accept Pakistani assurances and promises of change at face value. U.S. administrations going back to President Eisenhower have pinned great hopes on their alliance with Pakistan only to be disappointed and frustrated.

Pakistanis believe that they offer a fair exchange to the U.S. for its aid by fitting into U.S. strategic plans – containing Communism in the 1950s and 1960s, fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and dealing with al-Qaida after 9/11. They complain that Washington does not always understand Pakistan's regional concerns and aspirations. In other words, Pakistan justifies its conduct towards the U.S. on grounds of its own threat perceptions.

Pakistan's use of terrorist groups as part of its security and foreign policy is a function of its obsession with India, which it perceives as an existential threat. From an outside perspective, Pakistan's paranoia regarding India is unfounded. While India may be unwilling to renegotiate Kashmir's territorial status, numerous Indian leaders have tried to reach a modus vivendi with Pakistan.

Pakistan's military has often disrupted nascent peace efforts pursued by Indian and Pakistani civilian rulers, most notably in 1999 during the Kargil conflict. The Pakistan military has been accused of facilitating the attack against India's Pathankot air base last January that derailed the goodwill created by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Lahore to meet with PM Sharif six days earlier. And Pakistan-backed militants have acted as spoilers numerous times when bilateral ties seemed to be warming.

American interests in the region are not served by Pakistan's strategic thinking, which is fueled by the belief that India seeks to weaken and then dismantle Pakistan. Nor are American interests fully compatible with Pakistan's desire to steer events in Afghanistan and counter any Indian role there. Continued U.S. assistance, offered in the hope of a gradual change in Pakistan's terrorism policies, only provides Pakistan an economic cushion and better quality military equipment to persist with those policies.

Policy Recommendations

U.S. engagement with Pakistan must be based on a realistic appraisal of Pakistan's policies, aspirations, and worldview. The U.S. must stop chasing the mirage of securing change in Pakistan's strategic direction by giving it additional aid or military equipment. It must be acknowledged that Pakistan is unlikely to change its current policies through inducements alone.

The U.S. must also recognize that its efforts over several decades to strengthen Pakistan militarily have only encouraged those elements in Pakistan that hope someday to wrest Kashmir from India through force. Furthermore, the continued provision of military assistance leads many Pakistani leaders to conclude that (1) the U.S. needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs the U.S.; (2) the U.S. is not serious in its expressed concerns about Pakistan's support for terrorism, lack of democracy, and disregard of human rights; and (3) Pakistan can continue its policy of minimally satisfying the U.S. to keep it on Pakistan's side.

The Trump administration must be ready to adopt tougher measures toward Islamabad that involve taking risks in an effort to evoke different Pakistani responses. While there is no silver bullet to change decades of Pakistani policy, there are some policies that would improve chances of gaining Pakistan's cooperation in dealing with terrorism in a vital region of the world.

Designating Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism, as some U.S. congressional members have advised, is unwise in the first year of a new administration, but should be kept as an option for the longer term. Indeed the administration should state up front that it intends to review the intelligence on Pakistani involvement in supporting terror much more critically than its predecessors.

Avoid viewing and portraying Pakistan as an ally. The new U.S. administration should recognize that Pakistan is not an American ally. It has engaged in supporting the Afghan Taliban, who have killed American troops and their allies in Afghanistan. Thinking of Pakistan as an ally will continue to create problems for the next administration as it did for the last one. At the same time, Pakistan is an important country that is willing to cooperate occasionally and partially with the United States. It cannot be treated, for example, in the same way the U.S. deals with North Korea. As a first step, the U.S. must warn Pakistan that its status as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) is in serious jeopardy. Unless Pakistan takes immediate steps to demonstrate that it fully shares U.S. counterterrorism objectives, the U.S. will revoke its MNNA status within six months.

At the same time, maintain the option for Pakistan to be an ally of the United States in the future. Were Pakistan to cease its current tolerance of and support to terrorist groups, one can envisage grounds for common interest and policies on a range of issues that would form the basis of mutual interest. This could involve a package of trade and investment cooperation that would be mutually win-win for the economies of the United States and Pakistan. Pakistan's economy has strengths and significant

potential, and a package that would include catalyzing U.S. private investment, joint activities between U.S. and Pakistani firms, and facilitating trade within the region through infrastructure development could be, if designed appropriately, a key building block of this alliance.

Prioritize engagement with Pakistan's civilian leaders and continue humanitarian and social assistance programs that are administered by Pakistan's civilian authorities. Rolling back the tide of extremism in Pakistan will be an enormous task and could take a generation, but once again there are some recent hopeful signs that the Pakistani civilian government under Prime Minister Sharif is trying to move the country in this direction. In March 2016 the Sharif government followed through with the execution of the assassin of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, who was killed in 2011 because of his support for religious minorities and efforts to roll back controversial blasphemy laws. Prime Minister Sharif also recently re-named its National Center for Physics after a Nobel Prize-winning Pakistani physicist, Abdus Salam, a member of a minority sect of Islam that is considered heretic by hardline Islamists. These important first steps toward signaling a more moderate and tolerant course for Pakistani society must be recognized and encouraged by the international community. It is important, however, to monitor the overall trend and direction of Pakistani policy, given the track record of policy reversals.

Humanitarian and social aid should not be impacted by the counterterrorism issue since it is the military that controls policies toward terrorist groups. Programs such as International Military Education and Training (IMET) on the military side and the Fulbright Program as well as other exchange programs, on the civilian side, should be continued to build and maintain relationships with Pakistan's military and civilian elite.

Work through diplomacy with other countries, especially China and Gulf Arab states that share U.S. concern about Pakistan's tolerance of terrorist organizations and individuals. The U.S. must lead efforts, including at multilateral forums, to sanction Pakistani terrorist groups and individuals. In particular, Washington must seek to work more closely with China, which shares concerns about the presence of terrorist groups in the region and the threat they pose to the proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). While China will avoid steps that embarrass Pakistani leaders or that significantly skew the two countries' historically close ties, Beijing may be willing to work with Washington behind the scenes to press Pakistan to crack down on terrorists within its territory. Gulf Arab countries, too, must be encouraged to press Pakistan to change its direction.

The U.S. can also work with partners to emphasize the potential for Pakistan's international isolation as a consequence of Pakistan's own decisions and actions. Both history and recent events demonstrate that the Pakistan Government is deeply aware of and anxious about its international image. Threatening to damage that image in subtle or obvious ways will garner attention in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Enforce counterterrorism conditions on U.S. military aid and reimbursements to Pakistan. Even though counterterrorism conditions on military aid have been in place for the last seven years, the Obama administration for several years used its national security waiver authority to bypass the legislative conditions. However, Congress over the last two years has included in the National Defense Authorization Act language that prohibits a portion of military reimbursement payments for Pakistan from falling under waiver authority. Thus, for the first time, this past summer the Obama administration withheld \$300 million in military reimbursements for Pakistan because of its failure to crack down on the Haqqani network. In addition Congress blocked U.S. Government funding for the transfer of additional F-16 aircraft to Islamabad for the same reason.

It no longer makes sense to waive the counterterrorism conditions on U.S. aid to Pakistan. The U.S. can and must better leverage U.S. military aid to encourage tougher policies against terrorists who operate from within Pakistan. While a grace period may have been merited for Pakistan seven years ago, it would be foolish to keep giving the Pakistanis a pass when it comes to taking action against terrorist groups that are directly undermining U.S. regional interests, not to mention killing U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. Whereas U.S. government agencies were divided seven years ago over the nature and extent of Pakistan's support to the Afghan Taliban and other terrorist and extremist groups, today no one in the U.S. government disputes that Pakistan provides such support.

Keep the option of using unilateral action (including drones) to target Taliban targets in Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban safe havens in Quetta and elsewhere should no longer be safe. This does not require a campaign on the scale of that against al-Qaida from 2009-2012, but it should be more than the one-off attack against Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour in 2016.

Lay out a sequence and timeline for specific actions Pakistan must take with regard to terrorists responsible for attacks outside Pakistan and link these steps to future U.S. military assistance. An important benchmark should be for Pakistan to arrest and keep in jail known terrorist leaders. In April 2015, Pakistan released from jail the ringleader of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, a decision it should be asked to reverse. Other steps should involve closing down terror training camps and disrupting financing of terror activities. Additionally, the U.S. must demand that Pakistan stem infiltration of militants across the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Kashmir. Militant infiltration into Indian-controlled territory dropped considerably when former President Pervez Musharraf was in power, especially from 2004-2007, demonstrating Pakistan has the ability to turn off the taps when it chooses to do so.

Present to Pakistan a list of calibrated actions for ending its support to the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network, and make clear that failure to make substantial progress on these steps could eventually result in Pakistan's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. The U.S. must convey its expectation that Pakistan will take steps that end support to the Taliban, such as preventing Taliban leaders from living and meeting in Pakistan and curtailing export of

arms, explosives, and ammunition to the Taliban in Afghanistan. The U.S. must also demand deportation of all Afghan Taliban leaders in accordance with Pakistan's declared policy of returning all Afghan refugees. In addition, Pakistan must invalidate all Pakistani ID cards, passports, and special passes for the Taliban to prevent them from easily passing through military checkpoints. Lastly, Islamabad must seize the financial assets and real estate holdings of all Afghan Taliban and Pakistani terrorist groups that support them.

If Pakistan does not make progress on the above steps, the U.S. should consider compiling a list of Pakistani military and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officials, current and former, who are known to have facilitated acts of terrorism -- including supporting the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network) -- and barring them from travel to the U.S.

Pursue Taliban reconciliation talks on a track separate from U.S. and NATO troop-level decisions and levy consequences on Pakistan if it poses obstacles to such peace efforts. Washington should remain open to attempts to restart Taliban talks with the Afghan government, but should not plan its strategy around this long-shot scenario. It is likely the Taliban will try to convince the international community that they are willing to negotiate, in order to influence decision-making on troop levels in Afghanistan by the new Trump administration. Although Prime Minister Sharif's government has helped to bring Taliban leaders to the negotiating table, Pakistan's intelligence services at times also have played spoiler when it feared that Afghan Taliban interlocutors could not be trusted to represent Pakistan's interests. There should be consequences for Pakistan if it blocks realistic efforts to begin peace talks.

Seek to avoid a complete breakdown in U.S.-Pakistan relations. The U.S. cannot achieve its counterterrorism objectives in Pakistan so long as Islamabad tolerates those terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and India. Yet it also is not in the U.S. interest to make an enemy out of Pakistan without fresh efforts to change Pakistani behavior.

Designating Pakistan a "State Sponsor of Terrorism" early in the Trump administration, as some in Congress have recommended, would preclude the U.S. from providing any kind of aid to Pakistan and would lead to an irreparable breach in the relationship. While Pakistan frequently does not behave like an ally, it does selectively cooperate with the U.S. If Pakistan's overall conduct does not change, however, the U.S. should be prepared to review whether Pakistan fits the criteria for designation as a "State Sponsor of Terrorism," in accordance with the graduated measures proposed above.

Conclusion

After 15 years of the U.S. pursuing engagement and providing significant aid to the country, Pakistan has not altered its support for certain terrorist groups. We have seen the limits of relying mainly on inducements to encourage greater cooperation. Moving forward, the U.S. should develop a framework for pragmatic engagement with Pakistan that includes normal trade ties, identifies and rewards areas of cooperation, and penalizes policies that undermine U.S. interests.

A firmer U.S. commitment to remain engaged in helping Afghans achieve a stable and peaceful state and society is critical to motivating Pakistan to reassess the support it has given to the Taliban and its allies over these many years. The wavering level of commitment to Afghanistan by previous administrations, together with timelines for withdrawal based largely on U.S. domestic political considerations, has undoubtedly contributed to Pakistan's hedging its bets in Afghanistan by supporting the Taliban and its allies.

With India-Pakistan tensions also on the rise, the Trump administration must formulate a new policy approach toward Pakistan quickly. Both Indian and Pakistani officials have ratcheted up their rhetoric toward the other in recent weeks, and neither shows much interest in reviving dialogue. Another major terrorist attack in India conducted by Pakistan-based militants could precipitate a wider conflict that has the potential of going nuclear.

After years of restraint in the face of Pakistani terrorist provocations, the Modi government has laid down a new marker that it will not stand by in the face of such attacks. India's September 28-29 cross-LoC (Line of Control) strikes against terrorist bases on Pakistani territory were welcomed as a catharsis by the Indian public, whose frustration with Pakistan had reached a tipping point.

The new U.S. administration must be prepared for the possibility of an escalation in India-Pakistan tensions and plan ahead for how it would intervene to defuse any potential military crisis between the nuclear-armed rivals. It would be helpful for Trump administration officials to examine the U.S. role in helping to defuse past India-Pakistan crises, like the 1999 Kargil border conflict and the 2001-2002 India-Pakistan military stand-off. In both cases, the U.S. took a firm stance against Pakistani support for anti-India militant groups and resisted Pakistani calls for the U.S. to play a mediator role in Kashmir. In this way, the U.S. sent a clear signal that it held Islamabad responsible for the escalating regional tensions.

With decreasing U.S. military aid to Pakistan, Pakistani leaders will seek to strengthen ties to traditional allies like China and Saudi Arabia and also explore new partnerships as with Russia. Fortunately, these nations share the U.S. goal of containing terrorism in the region and preventing India-Pakistan hostilities and may be cooperative with the U.S., especially in crisis circumstances. In any case, Washington's policy should not be constrained by fear that other countries will displace the U.S. role in Pakistan.

For too long, the U.S. has given Pakistan a pass on its support for some terrorist groups based in Pakistan, including those used against India. The U.S. squandered a valuable opportunity in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2001-2002 India-Pakistani military crisis to alter the Pakistani military's fundamental calculations on the use of terrorism for foreign policy ends. Pakistan has long insisted that it is unable to meet U.S. counterterrorism demands in any but the long term. Pakistani officials have privately argued that local terrorist groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad or Lashkar-e-Taiba are too powerful and pervasive for the military establishment to challenge now. The U.S. should no longer settle for Pakistan's excuses for delaying a full-throttle crackdown on these terrorist groups and should instead hold Pakistan accountable for the activities of all terrorist groups on its soil.

The U.S. should no longer sacrifice its anti-terrorism principles in the region for the sake of pursuing an "even-handed" South Asia policy, but rather should levy costs on Pakistan for policies that help perpetuate terrorism in the region. In particular, U.S. officials must break the habit of trying to balance policies toward India and Pakistan and should instead pursue shared mutual interests with each. At the same time, the U.S. should be modest about its ability to bridge what divides India and Pakistan.

Convincing Pakistan to give up its terrorist proxies may require a basic change in Islamabad's regional security calculus. This is indeed a tall order that may in the end fail. But given the stakes for the global fight against terrorism and regional conflict, it is a goal well worth the new administration's pursuing.

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