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Dissuasion and Regional Allies: The Case of Pakistan

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Introduction

The U.S. ability to dissuade Pakistan is severely constrained because Pakistan is primarily concerned with regional threats. Dissuasion—the ability to prevent "potential adversaries from developing threatening capabilities by developing and deploying capabilities that reduce their incentives to compete"—was conceived with the belief that it was U.S. capabilities and threats which were the drivers of an adversary's security decisions. When that is not the case, the United States is left primarily with other tools to shape the other state's behavior. The United States has used a creative mixture of conflict management, ally assurance, and sanctions for "bad" behavior in an attempt to dissuade Pakistan. All of these tools have had significant limitations over the last several decades. As a consequence the United States was unable to dissuade Pakistan from pursuing threatening capabilities, most importantly nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. In fact, U.S. attempts to dissuade Pakistan towards a different course of action have frequently led to other behaviors which were often more damaging to U.S. objectives. This paper explores the difficulties and limitations of dissuading an ally in a regional context. It will examine the drivers of Pakistan's security policy and how U.S. actions shaped Pakistan's policy while it was an ally against communism (1954-1990), as a sanctioned ally (1990-2001), and as an ally against terrorism (2001-present).

Drivers of Pakistan's Security Policy

In its history, Pakistan has only faced one extraregional threat: when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Except for that period of time, Pakistan has been focused on a primary Indian threat, a much smaller Afghan problem, and a tertiary danger from Iran. To combat these regional threats, it has cultivated an alliance with the United States and an "all weather" friendship with China. While its relationship with China has never been elevated to a formal "alliance," Pakistan has historically relied upon Chinese assistance more than it has its U.S. ally. It has used the security benefits from both relationships to bolster its capabilities vis-à-vis India.

These security relationships were unable to balance Pakistan's daunting regional security threats. Several times in its history, Pakistan was painfully disillusioned when its "allies" refused to assist

it in times of dire need. In 1965, during a war clumsily initiated by Pakistan, the United States refused to provide assistance when India counterattacked and threatened key Pakistani population centers. In 1971, when India took advantage of a domestic crisis in East Pakistan, the United States and China stood by as India violently severed Bangladesh from Pakistan. More recently, both China and the United States sided against Pakistan after its nuclear tests in May 1998 and during the Kargil conflict of 1999. As a consequence, Pakistan has had to look for its own capabilities to deter future aggression. Stephen Cohen has likened Pakistan's security situation with that of Israel: "Both [Israel and Pakistan] sought an entangling alliance with various outside powers (at various times, Britain, France, China, and the U.S.), both ultimately concluded that outsiders could not be trusted in a moment of extreme crisis and this led them to develop nuclear weapons."^[1]

Pakistan pursued and continues to pursue a three-pronged strategy to combat regional threats. It maintains a large and capable conventional military to deny India strategic space in which it can prosecute a limited war. It has used proxies in an asymmetric strategy to tie India down, most notably in Kashmir, and more ambitiously to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan. And lastly, it has developed nuclear weapons in order to deny India victory in a general war. These last two prongs (the use of asymmetric proxies and the pursuit of a nuclear deterrent), while designed primarily to confront regional foes, ultimately undermined U.S. security objectives.

The creation of the Taliban and the A. Q. Khan nuclear supplier network are both products, in their own way, of this troubled U.S.-Pakistan alliance. Both are reminders that policies to combat a specific problem can generate a more difficult problem down the line. (Combating proliferation from primary nuclear suppliers can facilitate a global nuclear black market. Creating jihadi groups to fight the Soviets bolstered radical Islamist fighters which then turned on the United States and have destroyed the fabric of Pakistani society.) Also, they are evidence of a unique situation with Pakistan, where it is often the creator and sole solution to problems. (The Taliban, a creation of the Pakistani ISI, could only be dismantled with Pakistani support. The A. Q. Khan network, initially created for nuclear acquisition, could only be unraveled with Pakistani cooperation.)

The remainder of this paper examines U.S. dissuasion policies and objectives over time and a prognosis for the future.

The "Most Allied" Ally

From the 1950s till 1965 and later from 1979-1988, Pakistan was a close ally of the United States against the Soviet threat. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was at the center of a web of anti-Communist pacts, with the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO from 1954), the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO from 1955), and in a bilateral alliance (from 1958).

The United States sought to contain the Soviet Union, prevent its spread to southern Asia, and prevent it from reaching the Arabian Sea. Pakistan at its creation was unable to do this. After a traumatic Partition and an early war with India, the Pakistani state and military institutions were in shambles. Pakistan had to govern two wings separated by a thousand miles of hostile India. By allying with Pakistan, the United States injected large amounts of economic aid and larger sums of military assistance into Pakistan. It buttressed the institutions of state power and even more it created a formidable Pakistani military.^[2] During these first decades, the United States was the lifeline to Pakistan. Without U.S. diplomatic, military, and economic aid, Pakistan would have had great difficulties surviving.^[3] These early policies have had lasting impact. The Pakistan military would have more resources and would be better trained than any other sector of Pakistani society. The relative power balance between civilians and the military was tilted in the military's favor and has remained there ever since.

Indo-Pakistani relations in the 1960s were troubled, when Pakistan believed that the United States would support it even if it pursued aggressive policies to attain regional objectives. When it sought to "unfreeze" the situation in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir in 1965 by deploying guerillas across the Ceasefire Line (CFL), it was ostracized by the United States. When it launched a conventional operation across the CFL (Operation Grand Slam), India responded by an armored thrust at Lahore. Pakistan sought U.S. assistance to the Indian attack, but the U.S. supported an arms embargo against both countries. This embargo would more or less remain in place until the Ford administration. The U.S. sought to prevent the acquisition of threatening military capabilities in Pakistan-threatening to its neighbors not the United States-by denying Pakistan sales of military equipment. Rather than lessening the Pakistani appetite for military capabilities, these policies merely diverted Pakistan to a different source. For a brief time in the 1960s, Pakistan had a modest arms relationship with the Soviet Union, but more significantly in the 1960s, Pakistan developed a much broader strategic relationship with China. In attempting to shape Pakistani policy, the U.S. pushed Pakistan into the arms of its Communist foes. Instead of changing Pakistani behavior, U.S. policy diminished U.S. influence over Pakistan. This pattern-where U.S. leverage against Pakistan, if used, is diminished-has been repeated several times since.

The 1971 Bangladesh War fundamentally shaped Pakistani strategic thinking, casting a shadow up to the present. Pakistan's own mismanagement of the Bengali population in East Pakistan led to a crisis following elections in 1971. As the Bengali insurrection grew, Pakistan had greater and greater difficulty controlling the situation. Refugees spilled over the Indian border-and India decided to support Bengali insurgents from Indian territory. As the crisis mounted, India determined that only armed intervention would achieve its security objectives. As K. Subrahmanyam put it, the Bangladesh crisis presented India with "an opportunity the like of which will never come again." [4] India's invasion (or "liberation," depending on which side of the border you are on) of Bangladesh dismembered Pakistan. Despite President Richard Nixon's "tilt" towards Pakistan during the crisis-and the deployment of the U.S.S. Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal-Pakistan's U.S. ally was unable to prevent Dhaka's fall.

In 1972, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto launched Pakistan's nuclear weapons development effort. But only after India conducted its "peaceful nuclear explosion" in 1974, did Pakistan dramatically escalate its efforts. [5] The U.S. alliance was tailored for extraregional threats-and U.S. assurance messages were also directed at dangers beyond South Asia. Its inability to provide security against regional foes led Pakistan to develop its own capability to deter them.

By the mid-1970s, the Sardar Mohammed Daoud government was playing a complicated game with Afghanistan's Communists. In 1978, Daoud lost and the Communists took control in Kabul. The government was unstable, however, and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979. For the first time in its history, Pakistan faced an extraregional threat at its doorstep. The U.S. alliance, designed for such a contingency, finally came through, and massive amounts of U.S. aid and equipment were moved into Pakistan to face off the Soviet threat. Pakistan could not defend itself from the Soviet forces conventionally, let alone defeat them. It decided, however, working with the United States to support guerrillas in Afghanistan who could take the fight to the Soviets asymmetrically.

Pakistan, the United States, and Saudi Arabia poured money into Islamic groups to fight the anti-Soviet jihad. While Pakistan and the United States were locked in proxy conflict with the Soviets over Afghanistan, Pakistan was an invaluable ally. Despite Islamabad's progress in pursuing nuclear devices, U.S. economic and military aid continued to flow to support the anti-Soviet campaign. U.S. dissuasive policy against nuclear development was designed around the belief that a conventionally well-armed Pakistan would not pursue the nuclear track aggressively. To some extent, the policy did slow Pakistani efforts. The Zia ul-Haq government, however, played

off of the U.S. policy masterfully, slowing open nuclear development, continuing covert efforts, and simultaneously building up conventional forces, including those necessary to deliver nuclear weapons (F-16s). This illustrates a fundamental challenge in dissuading an ally. An alliance is premised on a security threat which the United States cares deeply about. When that threat is at the doorstep, the exigencies of defeating the enemy trump abstract dissuasion goals. When the threat recedes, dissuasion's prominence reappears.

The Most Sanctioned Ally

In 1977, following India's nuclear test three years earlier, Senators John Glenn and Stuart Symington sought to prevent states from importing uranium-enrichment or nuclear fuel processing technology without international safeguards. If they did so, sanctions against that country would be triggered. Building on this "stick", Secretary of State Henry Kissinger also added a "carrot": a substantial conventional arms package if Pakistan agreed to forgo a plutonium reprocessing plant.^[6] The U.S. proposal, while substantial, was seen by Pakistan in the light of 1965 and 1971. Only a nuclear device, not an uncertain U.S. alliance, could protect Pakistan from India. While the United States was trying to persuade Pakistan away from fissile material production, Pakistan was redoubling its efforts and had wooed A. Q. Khan back from his work in Europe.

The sanctions were a nuisance that could be overcome by presidential waiver during the Afghan war years. After the Soviet defeat and retreat north of the Amu Darya, the United States was less willing to cut Pakistan slack. In 1990, the United States applied the Pressler amendment because of Pakistan's nuclear efforts. As a consequence, major U.S. military equipment sales were stopped, most notably preventing the delivery of additional F-16s. Pakistan was left without large numbers of F-16s and as a consequence without a reliable delivery vehicle for its nuclear warheads. It began an all-out effort to acquire alternative delivery means, pursuing missile development relationships with China and North Korea. The North Korean relationship would prove particularly troubling for U.S. interests. In order to win prestige for himself and his laboratory, A. Q. Khan has acknowledged transferring Pakistan's nuclear secrets to Pyongyang.

Sanctions and other diplomatic efforts to deny Pakistan the traditional routes to nuclear weapons pushed them in other directions. When the French cancelled a reprocessing plant, Pakistan turned instead to a black market of suppliers in order to acquire centrifuge components. When the U.S. cancelled F-16s, Pakistan turned to North Korea and China for ballistic missiles. The United States was pushing on a balloon-while its policies diminished efforts in one area, they simply expanded elsewhere. In fact, by pushing Pakistan towards the nuclear black market, the non-proliferation problem was dramatically compounded.^[7]

Both the United States and Pakistan were also burdened by a legacy of the Afghan war. After Soviet withdrawal, despite high-minded U.S. declarations that it would support Afghanistan's reconstruction, civil war descended on Afghanistan. While the U.S. withdrew, Pakistan was embroiled in the conflict on its borders. A group of young men emerged in the 1990s who sought to bring back stability to Afghanistan. Their success on the battlefield quickly led Pakistan to give them additional support. The Taliban, however, would prove to be fiercely independent from their Pakistani and Saudi funders. While Pakistan's policies stabilized its northern border, the policy began to blowback and damaged Pakistan internally. Simultaneously, the Taliban turned Afghanistan into a terrorist haven, the consequences of which were evident on 9/11. The U.S. focus on nonproliferation policy, while ignoring civil conflict in the region, meant that dissuasive efforts were poorly focused. Rather than dissuading Pakistan from not supporting the Taliban, the United States was fighting a losing battle against nuclear weapons development. U.S. global objectives failed to conform to regional realities.

Pakistan and the Global War on Terrorism

On September 13, 2001 the United States presented Pakistan with a list of demands in its fight against al Qaeda. When General Pervez Musharraf agreed to them, Pakistan was re-enlisted as an ally, this time in the global war on terrorism. Sanctions from the nuclear test in 1998 and the military takeover in 1999 vanished in the light of this new cooperation. A new military aid and equipment package was agreed to, and by 2003 Pakistan was designated a major non-NATO ally. Today, U.S. policy aims to walk a difficult tightrope, where it bolsters Pakistan's ability to confront Islamic radicals but not threaten neighboring India. Neither side trusts the other. The United States fears that if it gives Pakistan too great of military capability, it will return to dangerous adventurism as a nuclear power. Pakistan fears that the United States will abandon it when the current foe goes away, and is therefore keeping its options open on other fronts.

Today's Challenge

Today, the U.S. aims to dissuade Pakistan in three areas: non-proliferation, regional instability, and support to radical Islamists. In other words, it wants to prevent the repeat of the A. Q. Khan affair, Kargil, and the Taliban. All of these are derivative of Pakistan's security drivers. Pakistani senior leadership indicates today that all three past episodes were more damaging than beneficial to Pakistani security and that they have learned their lessons from the past. However, except for nuclear deterrence, Pakistan still has no assured security either from India or from Afghanistan. For the United States, minimizing the India-Pakistan competition and stabilizing the Pak-Afghan border, are the surest ways to dissuade Pakistan from dangerous behaviors. In South Asia, dissuasion is conflict management and, ultimately, conflict resolution.

The problem, however, is that dissuasion of military competition will be a distant goal. The U.S. alliance with Pakistan against terrorism and the U.S. strategic partnership with India will always have higher priority than conflict resolution. In Pakistan's case, it is too strategically important to punish. The U.S. hopes to defeat terrorism in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's troubled tribal areas. It seeks to prevent the downside of Pakistan into Islamic radicalism, in particular avoiding at all cost a loss of control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons to extremists. It strives to prevent further proliferation from Pakistan, only possible with Pakistani assistance. And lastly, it aims to prevent a war with India that could potentially escalate to the nuclear level. These front-burner issues will keep dissuasion goals (conflict resolution) on the back burner. Assurance messages are likely to be too targeted to dissuade an ally from developing threatening military capabilities and the importance of the alliance decreases the likelihood of punishment for "bad" behavior. Dissuading an ally, particularly one with intense regional security concerns, will be very difficult for a global power. U.S.-Pakistan relations over the last five decades provide ample evidence of these challenges.

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1. Stephen Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001), 204.

2. See Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *Pakistan's Defence Policy, 1947-58* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), in particular chapter five.

3. During the 1960s, Pakistan was model developing country according to the Harvard Development Advisory Group, with GDP growth rates above six percent annually. See Ahmed Faruqi, "[Pakistan's Security Environment in the Year 2015: Scenarios, Disruptive Events, and U.S. Policy Options](#)," paper presented at a workshop sponsored by the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Washington, DC, June 27, 2001.

4. Subrahmanyam quoted in Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001), 206.

5. Munir Ahmed Khan quoted in Kux, *United States and Pakistan*, 212.

6. *Ibid.*, 223.

7. This does not mean that U.S. policy was in error, but it does identify the limitations and disadvantages to such non-proliferation policies. Those policies, however, may still be the best of many bad options.