

The U.S.-Pakistan Alliance Against Terror

An address given to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council
on, February 23, 2007 by His Excellency Mahmud Durrani,
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Pakistan has been a steadfast ally of the U.S. in almost every major challenge it has confronted in the post World War II period. Starting with the Cold War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and now the global war against terrorism, Pakistan was the conduit through which President Nixon visited China in 1972, to begin a new chapter in the relationship between the two countries. At one point Pakistan came to be known as the most allied ally of the U.S., quite a compliment in the presence of UK and Israel. Yet, Pakistan also has the dubious distinction of being the most sanctioned ally of the US.

In the mid-fifties Pakistan became a member of U.S. led CENTO and SEATO security arrangements, essentially designed for the containment of the Soviet Union. While NATO contained the Soviet Union from the West, we contained it from the South and the South East. From the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties our relations were outstanding. The U.S. was probably the most popular country in Pakistan during that golden period.

Unfortunately, relations between the two countries began cooling off in the second half of the sixties, soon after India and Pakistan fought the 1965 war. We became the forgotten ally and by the seventies we had a number of sanctions imposed on us for a variety of reasons.

In the closing days of 1979 when I happened to be in Washington D.C., the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and the U.S., once again, badly needed Pakistan. Pakistan obliged as there was a convergence of interest. Thus began another decade of close relations between our two countries.

The U.S. in close collaboration with Pakistan, supported, funded and trained mujahadeen from Afghanistan, Pakistan and some other nationalities within them the not well known Osama Bin Laden. This cooperation led to the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan and their ultimate withdrawal. This defeat proved to be the last straw which broke the back of the Soviet camel.

Unfortunately after its victory in Afghanistan, the attention of the U.S. was diverted elsewhere, leaving Pakistan and Afghanistan to contend with the wreckage of the jihad in Afghanistan. Therein lay the seeds of the rise of the War Lords in Afghanistan and the present day Taliban. The US believing that it no longer needed Pakistan chose to invoke

punitive legislations, such as the Symington and Pressler Amendments, and stopped military sales to Pakistan citing concerns about Pakistan's nuclear program.

The slide in the relationship continued through the 90s. This was the time of the rule of the warlords in Afghanistan, followed by the rule of the Taliban and the birth of Al Qaeda, also in Afghanistan. As if this was not enough, India conducted nuclear tests in May 1998 followed by very offensive rhetoric, leaving no choice for Pakistan but to conduct nuclear tests of its own. These tests resulted in fresh sanctions and the downslide in Pakistan-US relations continued.

Yet once again it was Afghanistan, in the wake of 9/11 that pulled the relationship out of the rut to the present day when Pakistan is once again an important ally and a frontline state, this time to fight global terrorism.

I strongly believe that the rollercoaster of the past must stop. If we are to rid the relationship of its past oscillation, we must broaden the relationship and give it greater depth. We have to develop a relationship capable of weathering the irritants of the day. Unfortunately I can already see bad weather ahead.

Let us step back to March of last year when President Bush visited Pakistan. During his historic visit to Islamabad the two presidents announced a long-term partnership and initiated a strategic dialogue process to lend sustainability to the relationship. Pakistan and the US are today engaged in cooperation in the fields of economics, trade, science and technology, energy and education. However, security relations continue to be the center-piece and within that is our joint operation to defeat global terrorism. Incidentally, terrorism and extremism are a bigger threat to Pakistan than it is to the US.

A positive of the new Pakistan-U.S. relationship, in the post 9/11 phase is the presence of a mechanism to conduct a periodic review of the relationship at a very senior level. This mechanism is called the Strategic Dialogue, to be held alternately in Pakistan and the US. The first dialogue was held in Washington DC last year. We are now preparing for the second session of dialogue between Under Secretary of State Nick Burns and Pakistan's Secretary of Foreign Affairs Riaz Mohammad Khan. Hopefully it will be held in Islamabad in March 2007. This dialogue reviews the full spectrum of the relationship with the purpose of removing irritants and providing impetus.

Besides the forum of the strategic dialogue we have a similar forum for military cooperation between Afghanistan, Pakistan and ISAF forces, known as the Tripartite Commission. Essentially a coordinating mechanism which brings together officials from Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States to discuss all issues they confront in their battle against terrorism. Unfortunately, at times this Commission is bypassed, and the parties bring their differences into the public domain through the media, thus making it even more difficult to bridge the gap.

In spite of the recent spate of criticism in the U.S. media, it is my belief that Pakistan is playing a pivotal role in the fight against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. We have arrested some of the most senior Al-Qaeda leaders and rooted out Taliban strongholds from our tribal areas. Pakistan has also taken some of the heaviest hits in the war against terrorism. It has lost more than 900 soldiers in operations against the Taliban, with twice as many wounded. Over the last few weeks over 100 security personnel have been killed by suicide bombing across Pakistan - in Peshawar, Islamabad, Quetta and the interior of Punjab.

Unfortunately today Pakistan seems to be a victim of its own success. Many in the U.S. are pushing us to do more. Many analysts, within and outside your government consistently see the glass as half empty. Let me explain our mutual dilemma as explained to me by a British scholar who has spent considerable time in Pakistan in the recent months, and I quote, "The Americans speak the truth as they see it. They think that Pakistan is not doing enough. The Pakistani side tells the truth as it sees it. Pakistani authorities believe that they are handling the issue of terrorism as effectively as they can." Unquote. I believe the logical way out of this dilemma is to develop a common perspective and improve coordination. Easier said than done.

A strategic partnership requires mutual trust and confidence. To inspire confidence we should avoid public reproach and criticism of each other. This is not to say that we should not talk frankly. We should talk very frankly but, not through the media. It is unfortunate that the media has become the preferred mode of communication between Afghanistan, Pakistan and now the U.S.

In the 80s, our coordinated efforts in Afghanistan led to the defeat of the Soviet Union. We need a similar jointness to get rid of the terrorism that has destabilized the entire region.

Now let me briefly focus on Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a neighbor of Pakistan. We want peace, we want Afghanistan to prosper, for the simple reason that Pakistan talks today about being a strategic hub, an energy hub, a business hub. We think we can provide an opening into central Asia, for India, for the Middle East through our coast to the rest of the world. But this can never take place unless Afghanistan is strong, stable and peaceful. So it is in our vital interests that Afghanistan become strong, stable, contrary to many views people have around the world.

It is convenient to externalize the causes of Afghanistan's current problems, especially the resurgence of the Taliban. Taliban are essentially an Afghan phenomenon. No one denies that some elements of the Taliban and their sympathizers crossed over into Pakistan and back again. If I were to quote a figure for the Taliban/Al-Qaeda problem, I'd say 90 percent of the problem is in Afghanistan and ten percent of the problem is in Pakistan. I think the security forces in Afghanistan have to get their act together and stop blaming Pakistan.

Pakistan has taken major steps to prevent cross-border movement by Taliban militants and by other terrorists across the rugged 2400 border. However with 200,000 people crossing the border daily it is very difficult to sift the good guys from the bad guys. We believe that fencing the border at selected places, introduction of documentation and the repatriation of Afghan refugees who live in the borders of Pakistan would substantially reduce the threat of cross border movement of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

However, we believe that despite every effort by Pakistan, Afghanistan will not be able to prevail over the Taliban unless it resolves to improve governance, reduce the hold of the warlords, eliminate corruption, and uproot the drug mafia. These pervasive problems promote an environment in which terrorism will flourish. I am glad that President Bush in a policy speech delivered on the 15th of this month acknowledged this when he said that he has five goals in Afghanistan and he talked about all those issues of governance and strengthening the military and security forces, of upgrading the international forces and getting rid of corruption. If all that is done, I think 70 percent of the problem will be licked.

A recent bill, HR-1, essentially designed to implement recommendations of the 9/11 Commission was passed by the House of Representatives in January this year. This bill has some piggy-back clauses against Pakistan. If adopted in its present form the bill will cause a huge setback to Pakistan-U.S. relations. The sanction approach in this bill remind Pakistan of the 1990s when sanctions were imposed. Sanctions did not work in the past and will not work in the future. More likely it will strengthen the hands of the anti-American forces in Pakistan.

Let me tell you also that I and my colleagues in the embassy are talking to the Senate, are talking to Congress, and trying to give them our perspective, to say this is not the way to treat an ally and I think you could get much more from Pakistan if you don't have these punitive kinds of sanctions.

A few words on the state of Pakistan's economy. We have achieved economic recovery and sustainable growth as a result of financial discipline and a consistent policy of liberalization, privatization and deregulation. This would make more sense to you if you knew we were on the brink of economic disaster. Our economy is now on a high growth trajectory. All macro-economic indicators are positive. After a GDP growth of over seven percent in fiscal year 2004-05, the economy grew by six and a half percent last year and is expected to grow by seven percent this year. All sectors of the economy are showing progress including manufacturing, agriculture and services sectors. A growing middle class has increased consumption of goods including automobiles, consumer durables and telecom. And here I must acknowledge the United States of America, this is possible because of your help in providing us with some funds.

For those of you in business, Pakistan today has a very attractive investment climate in the region. There are enormous opportunities for cooperation between our two countries, ranging from energy, telecom, engineering, textile and the service sector. More than 600

foreign companies are doing business in Pakistan and posting impressive profits. Many of them are companies from the United States. Today, the U.S. is our largest business partner in the world. Pakistan is acknowledged to be the most liberalized economy of South Asia. The U.S. therefore needs to discover the Pakistani market.

As Pakistan's ambassador to the U.S. it is my mandate to expand and strengthen our relationship to a point where it can withstand the occasional shocks which come our way. If we have a sustained, strong relationship I think we will be able to withstand those shocks.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the end I would like to make two points. First, Pakistan is totally committed to fight terrorism in our region, irrespective of what it takes. Not so much for your sake but for the sake of Pakistan itself. Let us not waste time in mistrusting each other, which will only strengthen our common enemy. Second, in spite of the great physical distance that divides us, the people of Pakistan share common moral values with the people of the United States based on our common Abrahamic heritage and the principles of liberty, equality and freedom. We need to work together to build a long-term sustainable relationship based on these shared values and other common interests.

I thank you for your attention.

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