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The Anti-Terrorism Coalition
Don't Pay an Excessive Price

by Charles V. Peña

Executive Summary

To prosecute the war on terrorism, President Bush has assembled a diverse coalition of countries for political, diplomatic, and military support. Some of those countries are long-standing friends and allies of the United States. Others have new or changing relationships with the United States. Although there may be a price for their support, America should not pay an excessive price—one that could be detrimental to longer-term U.S. national security interests. And though it may be necessary to provide a certain amount of immediate aid (directly or indirectly) as a quid pro quo for the support of other nations in our war on terrorism, the United States needs to avoid longer-term entanglements, open-ended commitments, and the potential for an extreme anti-American backlash.

If the United States has the same kind of tunnel vision about terrorism that it had about the fight against communism during the Cold War, it could be blindsided by disastrous unintended consequences. In its zeal to go after the terrorists responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the U.S. government must understand that alliances of convenience (especially with countries of which it was legitimately critical before September 11) may be necessary, but they come with the potential for great risk. Ultimately—and paradoxically—the United States could end up doing more to breed terrorism than to prevent it.

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Introduction

In his address to a joint session of Congress and the American people on September 20, President Bush said: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[1] And he asked every nation to join the United States in its war on terrorism. But now that the war on terrorism has begun in earnest, the United States is also going to have to make some choices about who its friends and allies are and what the price will be for having their help.

To be sure, the United States has strong and staunch allies (e.g., Great Britain and the other NATO countries) that leave no question about their commitment or the potential cost of their support. However, there are other key countries (e.g., Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia), which have a new or changing relationship with the United States, whose support will be critical to the success of military operations in Afghanistan. Although there may necessarily be a price for their support, we should not pay an excessive price—one that may be detrimental to longer-term U.S. national security interests. And though it may be necessary to provide a certain amount of immediate aid (directly or indirectly) as a quid pro quo for their support in our war on terrorism, the United States needs to avoid longer-term entanglements, open-ended commitments, and the potential for an extreme anti-American backlash.

During the Cold War, the focus of our foreign and defense policy was on the Soviet Union and containing the spread of communism. That guiding principle led to U.S. military involvement—directly or indirectly—in areas around the world, including Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Afghanistan. Ironically, our support for the Afghan rebels in their war with the USSR resulted in the training of many of those who are now loyal to Osama bin Laden and the ascendancy of the Taliban government.

The United States backed the Afghan rebels because we focused single-mindedly on the "evil empire" threat of Soviet communist expansion. As a result, we were willing to support even the most radical elements as long as they were "anti-Soviet." We assumed—wrongly—that the result would be a "pro-American" regime in Kabul. We were myopic then because of our preoccupation with the Soviet Union, and we run a similar risk now if we focus on terrorism to the exclusion of all else. We need to avoid making the same mistake of thinking that "anti-terrorism" means "pro-American."

Furthermore, the United States must be careful not to repeat some of the same mistakes that contributed to creating strong anti-American sentiment and radicalizing elements toward terrorist activity—such as supporting unpopular and undemocratic regimes, having an interventionist foreign and military policy, and staging large, permanent U.S. military deployments overseas. Experience shows that those policies often have severe unintended consequences.[2] To avoid such consequences, the United States needs to be cognizant of the fact that its friends and allies—particularly the newest ones in the immediate region—are likely to have their own agendas well outside the goals and objectives of the U.S. war on terrorism: destroying bin Laden's terrorist network and destabilizing the Taliban regime. Those agendas may be completely self-serving and may conflict with longer-term U.S. national security interests. Three case studies—Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia—will be used in this paper to illustrate the larger problem and examine potential pitfalls.

Pakistan

Prior to September 11, Pakistan was a concern to the United States for two reasons: (1) its nuclear weapons program and resulting nuclear competition with India, which threatened stability in the region, and (2) the military government of General Pervez

Musharraf, which overthrew a democratically elected government and has used very undemocratic methods to control Pakistan. Also, Pakistan was previously accused of being complicit in the terrorist hijacking of an Indian Airlines aircraft (ironically, the group accused—Harkat ul-Mujahedeen—is linked to Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda).

But now that Pakistan has pledged its support to the United States in its war on terrorism,[3] those concerns have apparently been swept aside. Within days of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, General Musharraf agreed to cooperate with the U.S. effort to find Osama bin Laden and root out his al Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan. He agreed to share intelligence information, allow U.S. use of Pakistani air space for military operations, and provide logistical support. Initially, Islamabad would not go so far as to allow the stationing of troops in or the launching of attacks from Pakistan, but that position has since been reversed, with the United States now using a military airfield in Jacobabad.[4] In return, the United States has agreed to lift sanctions previously imposed in response to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program—even though there is no promise or evidence that the program will cease—and reschedule (maybe even forgive) $379 million of debt owed to the United States.[5] According to a senior U.S. official who accompanied Secretary of State Colin Powell on a visit to Pakistan, "U.S. financial cooperation, coupled with International Monetary Fund assistance, will lift direct and indirect assistance to Pakistan to more than $1 billion."[6]

But just as America funneled millions of dollars to authoritarian regimes around the world during the Cold War because they were considered "anti-communist," America ought to be wary about providing ongoing support to Pakistan simply because it professes to be "anti-terrorist." If history is any guide, such support does not guarantee a more democratic government or a reformed economy. Even worse, when the United States supported undemocratic and unpopular regimes simply because they were friendly to us, and when those regimes were overthrown, the results were virulently anti-American successor governments (e.g., Iran and Nicaragua).

There is also the issue of U.S. involvement in the Kashmir dispute with India, which had been taking place even before Pakistan and India both won their independence from Britain in 1947. Islamabad claims Kashmir should become part of Pakistan since the majority population is Muslim. New Delhi claims that the Maharaja, Kari Singh, ceded Kashmir to India in 1947. Both parties reject the third option of Kashmiri independence. But even though both India and Pakistan support the U.S. war on terrorism (and each has accused the other of sponsoring terrorist actions in the Kashmir dispute), they have continued to exchange small arms fire across the so-called Line of Control. Clearly, Pakistan hopes its new relationship with the United States will include Washington's involvement and support in resolving the dispute. The United States, however, seems to be more concerned with assuaging India than appeasing Pakistan. Secretary of State Colin Powell has said, "We deplore terrorism wherever it exists, whether on September 11 or on October 1 in Srinagar [referring to a suicide bombing that India has blamed on Kashmiri militants backed by Pakistan]."[7] And privately, U.S. officials have told their Indian counterparts that the United States will pressure Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue.[8] Perhaps even more than in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the United States must be careful about choosing sides in Kashmir and inserting itself in a conflict between two nuclear-armed countries.

Finally, there is the question of the stability and viability of the Musharraf regime itself, which came to power in a bloodless military coup in October 1999. Musharraf has essentially neutralized all political parties in Pakistan and, as a result, has no real base of support outside of the military—even with those who oppose Islamic extremism and support the U.S. anti-terrorism efforts.

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Musharraf has repeatedly urged the United States to conclude military operations in Afghanistan as quickly as possible. The longer the campaign continues, the more likely Pakistani public sentiment against Musharraf's support for the United States will grow.[9] This will be further exacerbated by stationing U.S. troops in Pakistan and staging military operations from there. Another possible contribution to public resentment against Musharraf is what Afghanistan's post-Taliban government will look like. For Pakistan, support of a government revolving around the Northern Alliance would be tantamount to installing a hostile regime. It would be seen as creating more instability by imposing a minority government on Afghanistan's population, with whom many Pakistanis are sympathetic. There will continue to be strong domestic pressure on Musharraf to use force in Kashmir, in spite of the United States' wish for Pakistan and India to resolve their differences. Thus, there is a real possibility of the Musharraf government being overthrown (especially if support within the military wavers or fractures). If this were to occur, along with a likely strong anti-American backlash, control of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal would be of major concern (especially if the successor government is an Islamic fundamentalist regime).

Uzbekistan

The former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan has opened an airfield for U.S. search and rescue teams, but not attack forces (although 1,000 American troops have been deployed in Uzbekistan at Khanabad, about 125 miles north of the Afghan border).[10] It is not yet clear what the ultimate price will be for Uzbekistan's cooperation against Afghanistan. President Islam Karimov has maintained a totalitarian secular state that represses all dissent, including religious expression (religious political parties are banned and Muslims—who comprise 90 percent of the population—are allowed to pray only at government-sanctioned mosques).[11] The United States could be pressured to acquiesce to Karimov's use of the terrorism issue (against the extremist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, or IMU, which has been linked to Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda) to justify a broader and far-reaching crackdown on Muslims who practice Islam beyond the state restrictions.

According to Human Rights Watch, "Uzbekistan . . . has in recent years imprisoned thousands of non-violent Muslims for worshiping outside state controls or joining unregistered religious organizations."[12] Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, expresses a legitimate concern: "Many countries are sensing that the United States will condone actions committed in the name of anti-terrorism that it would have condemned a short time ago."[13] This concern appears to be justified by the fact that the State Department delayed publicizing its annual "Religious Freedom" report "to avoid offending countries whose support the United States needs in the war against terrorism."[14] Uzbekistan was reportedly considered for inclusion as a "country of concern" but was pulled from the list after the September 11 attacks because of the support it could provide in a military campaign against Afghanistan.[15] Previously, the State Department had been critical of the Karimov government for lack of religious freedom.

An even more vexing potential problem is the prospect of a more permanent U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan. According to a senior administration source: "The Uzbek government has been privately urging the United States to set up and maintain military bases in Uzbekistan even after any Afghan mission is over. The purpose is to protect the former Soviet republic from Russia as well as any terrorists who may flee across the border."[16] And Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has stated that "the interest of the United States is in a long-standing relationship with this country [Uzbekistan],"[17] suggesting a prolonged U.S. presence. But a military commitment in Uzbekistan could complicate the warming U.S. relationship with Russia and would only fur-

ther contribute to the problem of an overextended U.S. defense perimeter throughout the world, which does not increase U.S. national security.[18]

Perhaps the greatest concern about U.S. commitment to and support of Uzbekistan is that the Karimov government is analogous to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Whereas the Taliban is a repressive extremist Islamic government that does not tolerate any views except its own, Karimov's is a repressive secular government that has a similar lack of toleration for dissent and religious freedom. Although Uzbekistan does not have a sizable anti-American faction in its government or population, a repressive regime backed by the United States could ignite an unintended fire. According to Mikhail Ardzinov, chairman of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan and a former political prisoner: "Karimov's policy against independent and opposition groups is already repressive. It is hard to imagine how it could get worse, yet it could."[19] If it does get worse, it is conceivable that moderate Muslims in Uzbekistan, who are repressed by a government supported by the United States, could become radicalized toward groups such as the IMU and thus become anti-American terrorists.

Russia

Almost immediately after the September 11 terrorist attacks, President Vladimir Putin of Russia (whom President Bush now refers to as "my friend") pledged support to the United States, including sharing intelligence about the suspected terrorists, opening its airspace to U.S. aircraft, and supporting the United States' use of bases in former Soviet republics that are still considered under Moscow's sphere of influence. But such support does not come without a price.

First and foremost is the question of Chechnya. For the past seven years, Chechen rebels have been waging a war of independence. Russia's military tactics in Chechnya have been criticized by the United States, other countries, and independent organizations (such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International) as brutal. Just a few days after the September 11 terrorist attacks, President Putin said in televised comments: "We have reason to believe that bin Laden's people are connected with the events currently taking place in our . . . Chechnya. We know his people are present there. Our American partners cannot but be concerned about this circumstance. So we have a common foe, the common foe being international terrorism."[20] Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov reemphasized the point of a common struggle: "What we need is closer ties and efforts in fighting terrorism."[21] The obvious implication is that Russia wants to use counterterrorism as a justification for the United States and other countries to look the other way concerning Moscow's actions in predominantly Muslim Chechnya.

While there may indeed be ties between some of the rebels in Chechnya and Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network, the United States must be extremely careful about giving tacit approval for Russia to wage a repressive and brutal war against Muslims in Chechnya. President Bush has stated several times that the war on terrorism is not a war against Islam or Muslims.[22] Yet "sanctioning" military actions by Russia against a predominantly Muslim population in Chechnya has the appearance of a war against Islam, and it has the potential for an extreme anti-American backlash. Stephen Sestanovich at the Council on Foreign Relations warns: "Getting too close to Mr. Putin's Chechnya policy is far more dangerous than keeping our distance from it. If the United States is to win this new war, our coalition partners need to believe that the effort is not anti-Islamic, that we do not apply the terrorist label carelessly and that we will not target civilians indiscriminately."[23]

Reportedly, President Putin has also asked President Bush that Russia be given higher consideration in world politics and that the enormous Russian debt owed the United States and other Western countries be

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restructured or eventually forgiven.[24] The former could probably be done easily enough. But the latter means potentially forgiving as much as $163 billion[25]—not an insignificant amount. That could be too steep a price to pay for Russia's help, especially if combined with U.S. acquiescence on Chechnya.

Conclusion

Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia are just three examples, but they highlight some of the pitfalls the United States might encounter as it assembles a coalition of friends and allies to prosecute the war on terrorism. We need to be wary about letting terrorism become the sole focal point of U.S. foreign and military policy. Our history of supporting regimes simply because they were "anti-communist" does not portend well for supporting regimes that claim to be "anti-terrorist." The U.S. track record for creating more open and democratically elected governments along with reformed and more stable free-market economies is not promising. If the United States provides support simply on the basis of "anti-terrorism" without regard to whether the recipient countries share common core values (beyond claiming to be anti-terrorist), and if such support is simply used by corrupt or repressive regimes to continue repressive actions—especially against Muslims (as would be the case in Uzbekistan and Chechnya)—then there will be great potential for a nasty anti-American backlash.

If the United States has the same kind of tunnel vision about terrorism that it had about communism during the Cold War, it could be blindsided by disastrous unintended consequences. In its zeal to go after the terrorists responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the U.S. government needs to understand that alliances of convenience (especially with countries that it was legitimately critical of before September 11) may be necessary, but they come with potentially great risks. Ultimately—and paradoxically—the United States could end up doing more to breed terrorism than to prevent it.

Notes

1. George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," September 20, 2001, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/ 20010920-8.html.

2. Ultimately, it is important to understand that U.S. actions overseas—particularly interventionist foreign policy and military actions—were a contributing factor in motivating the September 11 terrorist acts against the United States. In fact, in 1997 the Defense Science Board acknowledged that the "historical data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States," The Defense Science Board 1997 Summer Study Task Force on DoD Responses to Transnational Threats, *Final Report*, vol. 1 (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, October 1997), p. 15.

3. Jack Kelley, "Musharraf: U.S. Has Our Support," USATODAY.com, October 17, 2001, www.usatoday.com/news/world/2001/10/17/powell.htm.

4. "Nic Robertson: The Problem of Pakistani Protests," CNN.com, October 23, 2001, www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/10/23/ret.robertson.otsc/index.html. See also, "Pakistan Silent on Reports of U.S. Presence," CNN.com, October 11, 2001, www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/south/10/11/ret.pakistan.base/index. html.

5. Carla Anne Robbins and Neil King Jr., "The War on Terrorism Means Making Allies out of Old Enemies, *Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 2001, p. A9.

6. Quoted in "Powell, Musharraf Reach Agreement," USATODAY.com, October 16, 2001, www.usatoday.com/news/attack/2001/10/16/powell.htm. See also John Whitesides, "House Backs Waiver of Pakistan Sanctions," Yahoo!News, October 16, 2001, dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20011016/pl/attack_pakistan_congress_dc_2.html, which reports that the direct U.S. economic assistance package to Pakistan is expected to be $600 million, the EU has proposed a package of trade concessions that could boost Pakistan's exports of clothing and textiles by $908 million over the next four years, Japan has rescheduled $550 million of Pakistani foreign debt, and Canada has lifted all economic and political sanctions imposed on Pakistan.

7. "No End in Sight to Kashmir Fighting," CNN.com, October 18, 2001, www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/south/10/18/pakistan.india/ index.html.

8. Jack Kelley, "Powell, Musharraf Face Kashmir

Issue," USATODAY.com, October 15, 2001, www.usatoday.com/news/world/2001/10/16/powell.htm.

9. See for example, Edward Cody, "U.S. Warned Not to Strike during Ramadan," *Washington Post,* October 23, 2001, p. A13.

10. Michael Duffy, "War on All Fronts," *Time,* October 15, 2001, p. 34.

11. "Terror No Stranger to Afghanistan's Neighbor Uzbekistan," CNN.com, October 3, 2001, www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/10/03/vinci.otsc/index.html.

12. "U.S. Should Oppose Allies' Misuse of 'Anti-Terror'," *Human Rights News,* September 25, 2001, hrw.org, www.hrw.org/press/2001/09/powell0925.htm.

13. Ibid.

14. Andrea Koppel and Elsie Labott, "U.S. Holds Report Critical of Key Nations," CNN.com, October 1, 2001, www.cnn.com/2001/US/10/01/gen.religion.report/index.html.

15. Ibid.

16. "Rumsfeld in Egypt on Third Leg of Trip," CNN.com, October 4, 2001, www.cnn.com/2001/US/10/04/ret.rumsfeld.visit/index.html.

17. Susan B. Glasser and Thomas Ricks, "U.S. to Base Troops, Planes in Uzbekistan," *Washington Post,* October 6, 2001, p. A1.

18. For a more detailed discussion and analysis, see Ivan Eland, *Putting "Defense" Back into U.S. Defense Policy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001).

19. Quoted in Calum MacLeod, "Amnesty Deplores Allies' Rights Records," *Washington Times,* October 12, 2001, www.washtimes.com/world/20011012-60815848. htm.

20. Quoted in Susan B. Glasser and Peter Baker, "Putin, Bush Weigh New Unity against a 'Common Foe,'" *Washington Post,* September 13, 2001, p. A25.

21. Quoted in ibid.

22. See for example, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People": "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them," and "Radio Address of the President to the Nation," October 6, 2001, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011006.html: "Our enemy is not the Arab world. . . . Our enemy is not Islam, a good and peace-loving faith, that brings direction and comfort to over one billion people, including millions of Americans."

23. Stephen Sestanovich, "The Challenges of Alliance with Russia," *New York Times,* October 5, 2001, www.nytimes.com/2001/10/05/opinion/05EST.html.

24. Yuri Zarakhovich, "Russia Names Its Price for Anti-Terror Help," TIME.com, October 10, 2001, www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,176157,00.html.

25. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook,* www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/rs.html.

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