

Policy Analysis

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Extremist, Nuclear Pakistan An Emerging Threat?

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Executive Summary

Since the devastating attacks on New York and Washington, a wide range of actions has been taken by the Bush administration to neutralize the terrorist infrastructure arrayed against the United States. In addition, the president singled out Iran, North Korea, and Iraq as an "axis of evil." Iraq has been brought under intense pressure to give up its weapons of mass destruction or face military strikes.

One nation that has been overlooked so far is Pakistan, which the United States has touted as a "frontline ally" in the anti-terrorism war. But Pakistan's cooperation has been grudging and spotty. Thousands of al-Qaeda fighters managed to escape into Pakistan, where they have been sheltered and helped to regroup by Pakistani member groups of the International Islamic Front. Sections of the Pakistani military and its intelligence agencies continue to aid al-Qaeda and its sister terrorist groups in Pakistan. Many of the gains made during 2001 and 2002 in the U.S.-led war on terrorism in Afghanistan have been squandered because Pakistan has become al-Qaeda's new command center.

Even worse, Pakistani nuclear experts are under investigation for links with al-Qaeda. There is legitimate concern that President Pervez Musharraf's regime does not have full control over Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Furthermore,

Pakistan is reported to have shared its nuclear technology with North Korea, and possibly with Myanmar and Saudi Arabia, thus contributing to the problem of nuclear proliferation.

A nation that is penetrated by Islamic radicals and that possesses dozens of nuclear weapons and proliferates them to other dictatorial countries poses a tangible and immediate problem. But U.S. policy toward Pakistan does not reflect that reality. In the absence of pressure from the United States, Pakistan has not found it necessary to take serious action against Islamic extremists or to end its proliferation activities. Other unstable nations are likely to look to Pakistan as a role model that has achieved nuclear status and checkmated the United States into acquiescence. North Korea may be the first nation to follow the Pakistani path.

A reevaluation of U.S. policy toward Pakistan is imperative. Forcing Pakistan to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure within its borders and put a tight lid on its nuclear proliferation activities is more likely to fortify short- and long-term U.S. national security interests than is an invasion of Iraq. There is also a need for contingency plans to rapidly secure and extract Pakistan's nuclear weapons in case of a coup by Islamic radicals.

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Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001, led to an unprecedented recognition of the danger posed by anti-Western terrorist groups and nations that act as hosts to such groups. Despite having been routed from its haven in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda remains a serious threat to the United States.¹ The recent high-profile attacks in Bali and Yemen and the continuing attacks on U.S. targets in Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Pakistan provide further evidence of the limited results of the anti-terrorism war. The nightmare scenario is that al-Qaeda and related terrorist groups might acquire weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, and use them against American targets.

In his January 2002 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush cited three nations—Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—as the “axis of evil.”² The president specifically noted the possibility that those nations might provide weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. All three nations are in the process of developing, or in the case of North Korea may have developed, nuclear weapons, and Iran is known to support Hezbollah and other groups that target Israel.³ Iraq has had previous and persistent links to pro-Palestinian terrorist groups.⁴ North Korea has been linked mainly to terrorist incidents directed against South Korea and Japan.⁵ The history and volatile nature of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea provide cause for concern. Iraq has been singled out in recent months by President Bush for noncompliance with United Nations resolutions on disarmament and currently faces a strong threat of a U.S. attack if it defies the latest warning from the UN.⁶

President Bush has used the bully pulpit effectively to raise awareness within the United States and garner UN support for his hawkish policy against Iraq. However, he has failed to identify another threat—one perhaps graver than Iraq. That threat is Pakistan, which has become the new command center for al-Qaeda⁷ and possesses

dozens of nuclear weapons.⁸ The anti-terrorism war has floundered in large part because al-Qaeda has collaborated with like-minded Pakistani groups and is now relatively safe from U.S. anti-terrorism operations. Unlike those of the nations President Bush cited as the “axis of evil,” the military, intelligence, and religious bodies of Pakistan are heavily influenced by the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Pakistan is considered one of the most unstable nations in the world,⁹ and the country’s dictator, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, faces the constant threat of a coup by radical Islamic forces.¹⁰ Even in the absence of a coup, the dangers of pro-al-Qaeda groups getting closer to the levers of power in the nation have become troubling with the strong showing by an alliance of fundamentalist Islamic parties in recent parliamentary elections.

Furthermore, Pakistan is now known to have provided nuclear weapons technology to North Korea in exchange for missiles, thus helping Pyongyang flout an agreement with the United States.¹¹ Pakistan may also have provided nuclear technology to Myanmar and Saudi Arabia.¹² Such proliferation could provide an anti-U.S. nation or nonstate actor with the means to disrupt the peace and perhaps even attempt to blackmail the United States. U.S. policymakers need to be concerned about the Pakistani nuclear arsenal, the level of threat posed to that arsenal by al-Qaeda and related terrorist groups within Pakistan, the stability of Pakistan’s regime, and the country’s record on nuclear proliferation.

Pakistan’s Nuclear Arsenal

Pakistan’s nuclear program is nearly three decades old.¹³ The country became an overt nuclear power in 1998, when it carried out several tests in response to India’s resumption of nuclear tests. Estimates of Pakistan’s nuclear strength are about 425–800 kilograms (kg) of weapons-grade uranium, about 600 kg of plutonium,¹⁴ and up to 4 dozen nuclear weapons.¹⁵ A recent report suggests

that Pakistan possesses up to 48 nuclear weapons and has fissile material for up to 52 more.¹⁶ It is commonly believed that the fissile cores of Pakistan's arsenal are stored separately from the nonnuclear components.¹⁷ However, during the 1999 war over Kashmir, Pakistan is believed to have armed its nuclear-capable missiles in possible preparation for nuclear strikes on India, and Islamabad has hinted at having considered the nuclear option during the confrontation in 2002.¹⁸

None of the Pakistani nuclear materials is under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.¹⁹ The enrichment of weapons-grade material has progressed and the number of Pakistan's nuclear weapons has increased since the initial weapons tests in 1998. In 2002, after a year of frequent tensions with India, Pakistan was reported to have accelerated work on its nuclear arsenal, with workers putting in around-the-clock shifts.²⁰ Thus, one can assume that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal will continue to expand at a rapid pace, and the requirements for securing it will concomitantly increase.

In February 2000 Pakistan established a National Command Authority to oversee its nuclear assets.²¹ The A. Q. Khan Research Laboratory at Kahuta, which manufactures Pakistan's weapons-grade uranium, and the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission at Islamabad were brought under the control of the NCA. It is generally believed that the military, as the dominant player in the nation, has full responsibility for command and control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. However, after the events of September 11, 2001, there was in international circles considerable concern about, and analysis of, the safety of the Pakistani arsenal.²² There were reports that the nuclear arsenal had been dispersed to multiple locations after the September 11 attacks.²³ Dispersion could itself result in an increased internal threat to the arsenal by increasing the number of locations that could be targeted by terrorists. The Musharraf government was quick to dismiss concerns about the Pakistani arsenal.

Musharraf himself claimed that it was safe and that there was no chance of its falling into the hands of fundamentalists.²⁴ However, given Pakistan's history and its extensive and persistent links to Islamic radicals, such claims need to be viewed with some skepticism.

Potential dangers to Pakistan's nuclear assets include loss of control over nuclear technology, weapons, weapon components, or fissile materials. The most commonly discussed threat is from terrorists or their sympathizers within Pakistan's military and nuclear establishments. In addition, a coup could instantly transfer control of Pakistan's nuclear assets to a new regime with unknown intentions. There is also the possibility (albeit a relatively remote one) of the Pakistani establishment's knowingly passing some of its nuclear assets to another nation, or to a nonstate actor. Under any of those circumstances, the dangers to U.S. national security would increase. Possession of nuclear weapons by terrorists is an especially grave concern after September 11. Moreover, a currently nonnuclear state that acquires nuclear capability could indulge in nuclear blackmail, making the international system more unstable and striking a blow against Washington's objective of preventing further nuclear proliferation.

Pakistan and al-Qaeda

Pakistan's deep involvement with violent, anti-U.S. Islamist elements, including al-Qaeda, is well documented.²⁵ Moreover, al-Qaeda does not function by itself but under the umbrella of the International Islamic Front, other members of which are several Pakistani groups such as Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), as well as Egyptian, Uzbek, and Southeast Asian groups.²⁶ The groups of the Islamic Front frequently collaborate. Support from the Pakistani member groups of the front, who have powerful links to Pakistan's military

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and Inter-Services Intelligence, has allowed al-Qaeda escapees from U.S. operations in Afghanistan to gain shelter and regroup in Pakistan.²⁷

HUM and JEM are aligned with the Jamaite-Ulema-e-Islam, a radical Islamic political movement led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman. Rehman was nominated as the prime ministerial candidate by an alliance of anti-U.S. Islamic parties that won a significant number of national seats in recent elections. The HUM operations chief, Fazlur Rehman Khalil, signed the anti-U.S. fatwa issued by Osama Bin Laden in 1998.²⁸ JEM, an offshoot of HUM, was formed by HUM terrorists released by India after the December 1999 Indian Airlines hijacking. JEM was mentioned as one of the most dangerous international terrorist groups by President Bush in his January 2002 State of the Union speech.²⁹ JEM is also the Pakistani terrorist group most directly linked to the September 11 attacks³⁰ and is reported to have been directly funded by Bin Laden.³¹

Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI, has been the enabler of many al-Qaeda activities; most notably it propped up Afghanistan's Taliban regime, which harbored al-Qaeda. The troubling al-Qaeda-Pakistan links were clear for several years as the anti-U.S. threat crystallized in the run-up to September 2001.³² The Indian Airlines hijacking in December 1999 was orchestrated by HUM terrorists, whose boarding passes for the flight were later found in al-Qaeda hideouts in Afghanistan after U.S. forces ousted the Taliban in 2001. Despite the mounting evidence, the U.S. administration dithered over linking such groups as HUM, JEM, and LET to terrorism and putting Pakistan on notice for its support of the Taliban and its tolerance of al-Qaeda. A JEM leader, Shaikh Sayeed, who was freed by India as a result of the Indian Airlines hijacking, wired \$100,000 to World Trade Center hijacking leader Mohammed Atta.³³ Indian intelligence has reported that then-ISI chief Lt. Gen. Mahmud Ahmed had knowledge of the funds transfer.³⁴

After the September 11 attacks, Musharraf

acceded to U.S. pressure and took some steps to break off official links to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. However, HUM, LET, and JEM have merely changed names and locations to avoid sanctions resulting from their listing as international terrorist groups by the United States.³⁵ Pakistan has made only feeble efforts to freeze their funds and suppress their operations. In some cases the groups were informed before the funds were frozen, thus giving them time to move the funds.³⁶ Pakistan's lack of seriousness in sealing its borders during the U.S.-led operations against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan ensured that hundreds of operatives escaped the dragnet.³⁷ There are also reports of Pakistani officials having foiled U.S. raids against al-Qaeda through misinformation or by alerting suspects to the impending operations.³⁸ Pakistan's cooperation with the United States has been grudging—hardly the mark of a reliable ally.³⁹

The combination of inadequate Pakistani cooperation and ready availability of support from International Islamic Front members HUM, LET, and JEM has resulted in Pakistan's becoming the new command center for al-Qaeda.⁴⁰ The persistent links between the ISI and al-Qaeda were highlighted by the kidnapping and gruesome murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl.⁴¹ Some reports indicate that al-Qaeda camps have been established in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir as well as in western Pakistan.⁴² During 2002 few big successes, other than the capture of Abu Zubaidah and Bin al Shihb, were reported against al-Qaeda within the country. Other al-Qaeda leaders, including Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, continue to operate.⁴³ In all, about 5,000 al-Qaeda and Taliban members are believed to be present in Pakistan and collaborating with about 25,000 jihadis who belong to JEM, HUM, and LET.⁴⁴ The U.S. policy of letting Pakistan handle the disbanding of al-Qaeda is clearly not working, because Pakistan will not act seriously against JEM, HUM, and LET, which now form the support structure for al-Qaeda.⁴⁵ Al-Qaeda will likely continue to gain strength in Pakistan if the anti-terrorist

operations in that nation are left to Pakistani officials and if the Pakistani member groups of the International Islamic Front are ignored.

Pakistan and Nuclear Terrorism Concerns

Fears of nuclear terrorism against the United States were heightened in November 2001, barely two months after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, when news reports surfaced about contacts between Pakistani nuclear scientists and al-Qaeda. At least six Pakistani scientists are reported to have met with Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri, as well as other top al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders in Kabul.⁴⁶ Of those six, Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood held the most senior position at the Pakistani Atomic Energy Commission and is one of the founders of the Pakistani nuclear program. Mahmood and his colleague Abdul Majid, who reportedly hold strongly Islamic views, were interrogated by U.S. officials.⁴⁷ CNN reported that Mahmood repeatedly failed lie detector tests.⁴⁸ The two scientists formed a charitable organization that supported construction projects in the then-Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.⁴⁹

Pakistan has maintained that Mahmood and Majid did not possess knowledge about creating nuclear weapons. However, Mahmood was involved in the development of the Kahuta plant, where Pakistani scientists enrich uranium for Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Mahmood was reported to have attended the annual conference of the Markaz-ul-Dawa-il-Irshad, the parent organization of LET, along with ex-ISI chiefs Hamid Gul and Mahmood Ahmed.⁵⁰ Those annual conferences are gathering places and discussion platforms for jihadis.

Mahmood admitted during interrogation to discussing nuclear technology with Bin Laden but did not acknowledge passing nuclear secrets to him.⁵¹ But if Mahmood failed lie detector tests, there is grave doubt

about what information was actually exchanged. Mahmood is no minor figure. He had previously worked with Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.

Suspicious about links between Pakistan's nuclear establishment and al-Qaeda, and the role of Pakistan's own government in covering up those links, were also fueled when two other Pakistani nuclear scientists, Suleiman Asad and Mohammed Ali Mukhtar, hastily departed to the reclusive nation of Myanmar. Pakistan sent Asad and Mukhtar to Myanmar shortly after September 11, 2001.⁵² Those two individuals, who were high on the list of nuclear scientists wanted for questioning by U.S. officials, have not been recalled by Pakistan. The importance of those two scientists might be gauged from a report that Musharraf personally asked the rulers of Myanmar to grant them asylum.⁵³

Acquiring nuclear weapons is a major goal of Bin Laden and his compatriots, and Bin Laden considered Pakistan's Islamic-leaning nuclear establishment a prime source of aid for such a project. Furthermore, the willingness of Pakistani scientists to work with Bin Laden leaves open the possibility that, with or without official sanction, Pakistani nuclear technology is likely to be leaked to resourceful Islamic radicals.

In June 2002 LET leader Hafiz Mohammed Sayeed claimed that his group controlled two of Pakistan's nuclear weapons.⁵⁴ That claim is questionable, and it may have been timed to exploit the exacerbated tensions between India and Pakistan. Some analysts even believe that al-Qaeda, through its ISI links, controls some of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, although there is no conclusive evidence on that point.⁵⁵ On the other hand, there is substantial suspicion that al-Qaeda does possess some amount of nuclear material and thus may have the capability to build and use a "dirty" radiological bomb. Fears of such a device being used inside the United States have persisted during the past year, and some experts also believe that nuclear devices could be used to wreak havoc

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in Middle Eastern oil fields, thus devastating the international economy.⁵⁶ In any case, there are enough credible reports of connections between Pakistan's nuclear establishment and terrorist groups to warrant legitimate concern in the United States.

Stability of the Pakistani Regime

Pakistan has a dreary history of frequent military coups during its half century of existence. In the 1970s an increasingly unpopular civilian prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was overthrown by General Zia-ul-Haq. Years later, Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, likewise was removed from her post as prime minister by the military and the ISI when she tried to take actions they regarded as against their interests. The latest coup was by Gen. Pervez Musharraf, shortly after he perceived that elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had caved in to U.S. pressure to abandon the Kashmir invasion in 1999.

To a certain extent, Musharraf himself is in an analogous situation today. After abandoning the Taliban government under intense U.S. pressure and allowing U.S. forces to use Pakistani air bases, he is widely regarded as an American stooge. His popularity plummeted after his manipulation in 2002 of a referendum that gave him the presidency for five years.⁵⁷ A number of military and intelligence officials, both current and retired, feel slighted by Musharraf's response to U.S. prompting on the terrorism issue. Musharraf dismissed or transferred several officials in the aftermath of September 11. Lt. Gen. Mahmud Ahmed, who is linked to the transfer of funds to September 11 hijacker Mohammed Atta, was removed as ISI chief in October 2001. Another senior official transferred was Lt. Gen. Mohammed Aziz, who is now the chief of army staff and thus still has influence over the military. It is possible that terrorists in league with sections of the ISI orchestrated Daniel Pearl's kidnapping and murder.⁵⁸

Restive Pakistani officials' instinct of self-preservation may be postponing another coup. They have seen U.S. military prowess devastate their Taliban protégés and may not want to suffer the same fate. However, the United States should keep all contingencies in mind while following developments in Pakistan for the near future. The recent elections, manipulated by Musharraf to split Benazir Bhutto's and Nawaz Sharif's parties, resulted in an alliance of Islamic parties gaining an unprecedented number of electoral seats. Also waiting in the wings is strongly anti-American and pro-Taliban ex-ISI chief Hamid Gul, who was elected to the national assembly. Gul is apparently playing a quiet, behind-the-scenes role in bringing Islamic extremists closer to power.⁵⁹

Nuclear Proliferation: Another Dimension to the Pakistani Threat

While concerns about al-Qaeda's links to the Pakistani establishment linger and many questions remain unanswered, another deeply troubling set of recent revelations has brought attention to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. On October 17, 2002, the *New York Times* revealed that North Korea had admitted to reneging on its deal with the United States to not pursue nuclear weapons.⁶⁰ The reports suggested that Pakistan had been supplying technology, including gas centrifuges and other crucial machinery for making weapons-grade uranium, for nuclear weapons development to North Korea, possibly since 1997.⁶¹ The covert supply of nuclear technology by Pakistan appears to have been a quid pro quo for supply of missile technology from North Korea. The exchange of those technologies between Pakistan and North Korea appears to have continued after September 11, when Pakistan was inducted as an ally in the anti-terrorism war, and as recently as late 2002.⁶² Another report indicates that the clandestine supply of Pakistani nuclear technology to North Korea may have been going on since 1993, under

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government, and the operation was inherited first by Nawaz Sharif and then by Musharraf.⁶³ Thus Pakistan may have been aiding North Korea in undermining its accord with the United States ever since it was signed, defeating U.S. efforts to prevent the unpredictable Pyongyang regime from going nuclear.

North Korea is not the only "country of concern" to benefit from Pakistani nuclear expertise. Myanmar, which has been ruled by a military dictatorship for many years and is under international sanctions, is interested in developing nuclear weapons. The *New York Times* reported that the Pakistani nuclear scientists who fled to Myanmar after September 11 may be helping that nation to acquire nuclear technology, possibly in return for sanctuary from Central Intelligence Agency interrogation.⁶⁴

Pakistan may also have initiated nuclear links with Saudi Arabia. According to the Pakistani English-language newspaper *Dawn*, Saudi officials discussed nuclear technologies with Pakistani experts and were invited to tour Pakistan's nuclear weapons facilities.⁶⁵ Saudi Arabia is reported to have acquired nuclear-capable missiles from China recently.⁶⁶ Pakistan has denied any such deals, but the denials do not take away the perceptions of a pattern of being loose with its nuclear assets.

Comparing Pakistan with Iraq

As the world's sole superpower, the United States has considerable power to shape future events, as evidenced by its arm-twisting of the United Nations on Iraq. The case for immediate action against Iraq is dubious. Table 1 compares the threat presented by Iraq with the threat posed by Pakistan.

The table compares and contrasts Iraq and Pakistan on some of the most common criteria cited by U.S. officials as justification for urgent action against Iraq, as well as other factors affecting U.S. national security. The comparisons in the table reveal that Iraq,

which has become a high priority for U.S. military action if it does not comply with recent UN resolutions, does not present as much of a danger to either international peace or U.S. national security as does Pakistan.

Nuclear Rogue States and U.S. Policy

Some critics within and outside Pakistan claim that Pakistan was "abandoned" by the United States, resulting in the rise in extremism and the emergence of nuclear dangers.⁶⁷ However, the reversal of this "abandonment" in the past 16 months has not resulted in any significant changes in Islamabad's conduct on the nuclear issue. Billions of dollars have been pumped into Pakistan in the form of U.S. loan writeoffs and IMF grants during the past 16 months, yet Pakistan continues to pose nuclear dangers.⁶⁸ The deterioration of the situation in Pakistan was initially due to the Clinton administration's lack of action between 1996 and 2000. The U.S. government has given Pakistan a blank check to continue its activities by refusing to put it on the State Department's list of terrorist-sponsoring nations even as the ISI and the many terrorist groups it sponsors provided crucial support to al-Qaeda and its allies.

It is not clear that the current U.S. administration has learned from past mistakes. Musharraf's moves to clamp down on al-Qaeda have not produced significant results because many of those moves have been cosmetic. In the absence of perceptible U.S. pressure on Musharraf, he has not seen any reason to control anti-U.S. forces, which continue to build strength within the nation.

Pakistan's nuclear aid to North Korea has put tens of thousands of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea in danger. North Korea and Pakistan have received aid from the United States to shore up their collapsing economies, while at the same time engaging in proliferation of nuclear weapons and missiles that threatens U.S. interests. What is

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Table 1
Comparison of Pakistani and Iraqi Records on Proliferation, Terrorism Connections, and Military Aggression

Criterion	Iraq	Pakistan
Regime	Military dictatorship	Military dictatorship/flawed elections
Cooperation with U.S.	Antagonistic relationship	Cooperates officially
Nuclear arsenal	None yet	Dozens of weapons
Chemical, biological weapons	Yes	Yes
Nuclear proliferation	NA	North Korea, possibly Myanmar and Saudi Arabia
Nuclear ties to terrorists	NA	Top nuclear scientists discussed nuclear weapons with Bin Laden, Taliban; nuclear devices under threat of terrorist takeover
Terrorist presence	Sanctuary to Mideast terrorists—most not active against the U.S., or retired.	Hosts dozens of HUM, JEM, and LET camps, many part of al-Qaeda-led infrastructure; terrorists trained in Pakistan have operated around the world
Aggressive actions against neighbors	No attacks on neighbors since Gulf War in 1990	Sponsors jihad in Indian Kashmir; invaded Kargil region in 1998
Use of WMD	Used chemical weapons against Kurds and against Iran in 1980s war.	Hasn't used WMD, but has regularly threatened Indian population centers with nuclear strikes
Indoctrination of jihadis	Despite support to Palestinians and demonization of Israel, the Iraqi state has maintained a secular character	Thousands of madrassas train jihadis, many of whom are pro-Taliban and Bin Laden supporters; top Taliban leadership graduated from madrassas

also common in U.S. policy toward the two nations is that U.S. leaders have succumbed to nuclear blackmail in each case. Thus Washington has excused Musharraf's lack of serious action against al-Qaeda because U.S. officials fear creating more instability in a nation armed with nuclear weapons. The United States provided North Korea with

essential food and fuel, and even offered help in developing light-water nuclear reactors, while North Korea pretended to put its nuclear weapons program on hold. In both cases, Washington adopted a policy of wishful thinking rather than confront some unpleasant realities.

The proliferation of Pakistan's nuclear assets to North Korea, and possibly to other nations, is detrimental to U.S. national security. U.S. equivocation in response to this scenario will encourage other nations to seek nuclear weapons as a means to flout international norms and carry out such actions as the sponsoring of international terrorism. Pakistan has demonstrated that it can go easy on al-Qaeda, let its nuclear experts talk to Bin Laden, break promises to dismantle terrorist camps, and help North Korea flout its commitments to the United States—without any consequences. U.S. policy appears impotent in the face of such nuclear-backed brazenness.

Closing the U.S. Policy Gap

It is clear that U.S. policies toward unstable states that acquire nuclear weapons have failed to deter such nations from rogue actions that could threaten U.S. national security. While action against Iraq could be considered a signal that the United States will take serious action against nations flouting international norms, Pakistan has demonstrated that American leaders can be manipulated into acquiescence once a nation obtains nuclear weapons. Thus, the different treatment of Pakistan and Iraq, despite a serious threat posed by the former, may encourage other nations to clandestinely acquire nuclear weapons and then expect the United States to turn a blind eye to their transgressions. North Korea, in its latest actions, has become the first nation to adopt the Pakistani model of nuclear blackmail.

Such a policy is a recipe for disaster in the 21st century. Other aggressive or unstable nations, including Iran, Syria, and Myanmar,

wait in the wings. If those nations acquire nuclear weapons, Washington's goal of nuclear nonproliferation will be in tatters. Also, the greater the number of unstable or unscrupulous nations that have nuclear weapons, the greater the danger that terrorist groups will someday acquire them. Finally, if Pakistan is allowed to manipulate U.S. policy through implicit nuclear blackmail, other nations will see it as a pattern to emulate.

Currently, the U.S. administration has significant financial leverage over Pakistan. That leverage has been greatly underused. During the past 16 months, the United States has given Pakistan billions of dollars in loans and other forms of aid, either directly or through the IMF. Little accounting has been asked of the Pakistani military dictatorship, and one analyst has suggested that much of the aid is being funneled into the pockets of Musharraf's top generals.⁶⁹ At the very least, such aid should be made conditional on a verifiable end of proliferation as well as a substantial change to smoke-and-mirrors cooperation on al-Qaeda. Handing over a couple of al-Qaeda suspects every few months simply should not be rewarded with billions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer money.

While pressuring Iraq to disarm, the Bush administration is in danger of losing its focus on al-Qaeda in Pakistan, where terrorists have escaped and reestablished themselves after their rout from Afghanistan. This concentration of al-Qaeda presents the largest risk to U.S. national security because of the proximity of al-Qaeda and its sympathetic jihadi groups to power centers in nuclear Pakistan. The ISI and the Pakistani military are providing only partial support for U.S. anti-terrorism operations and may be acting as impediments in some cases. Pakistani jihadi groups are biding their time while sheltering al-Qaeda's activists and gaining political strength as a result of Musharraf's political manipulations. The presence of U.S. bases is likely to further inflame Islamists within Pakistan, and the longer the operations drag on, the greater the threat of extremist leaders using the U.S. presence to recruit more jihadis and gain political power.

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Without delay, the United States must pressure the Musharraf regime to dismantle the entire terrorist infrastructure in the Northwest Frontier Province and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, which serve as reservoirs for anti-U.S. jihadis. It should warn Musharraf that, if Pakistan is unwilling or incapable of cleansing itself of its terrorist infrastructure, the U.S. military will take matters into its own hands and extend the anti-terrorism war into Pakistani territory.⁷⁰

To further mitigate the risk, the United States must convince Pakistan to accept security systems such as alarms and anti-terrorism measures for its nuclear arsenal. While this might be unpalatable to Pakistan, the grave threat posed by its arsenal outweighs those considerations. U.S. contingency plans should be in place to secure and extract nuclear weapons from Pakistan, if there is an Islamic extremist coup in that nation. The United States should not, however, offer missile defense support for Pakistani nuclear installations. Such aid would drastically alter the strategic balance on the subcontinent and give Pakistan the impetus to continue its regional destabilizing activities that fuel its Islamic extremists.

Conclusion

Since the September 11 attacks, comprehensive U.S.-led efforts have been under way to destroy the terrorist movement led by al-Qaeda and defuse the threat of large-scale terrorist attacks. As part of those efforts, U.S. and British forces deposed the Taliban and forced its al-Qaeda guests to flee from Afghanistan. Worldwide moves to freeze terrorist funds were undertaken, and President Bush identified three nations as the “axis of evil” that needed to be contained. One of those, Iraq, is under intense pressure to give up its chemical and biological weapons, but it does not have any nuclear weapons. Both Iran and North Korea are pursuing nuclear weapons, and the latter may already have a small number.

Yet Pakistan is potentially a greater source of danger than any of the “axis of evil” nations. Despite Pakistan’s being officially an ally in the anti-terrorism war, sections of its military and intelligence wings have facilitated the escape and regrouping of al-Qaeda. The Pakistani member groups of the International Islamic Front that collaborate with al-Qaeda continue to be well funded and active. Leaders of Islamic extremist parties that still support the Taliban, as well as pro-Islamic military leaders who were instrumental in creating the Taliban, wait in the wings to dethrone Musharraf and take over the nation’s rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal. Not enough is known about what secrets of their trade were discussed by Pakistani nuclear scientists with Bin Laden. Furthermore, Pakistan has been selling its nuclear weapons technology to North Korea, Myanmar, and Saudi Arabia. There are questions about whether Musharraf has full control over his military and intelligence apparatus as well as his nuclear arsenal.

U.S. policy toward Pakistan has failed to consider the cumulative dangers that nation presents. America continues to pump billions of dollars of aid into Pakistan, without accounting for its fate. Few questions about possible ISI links to the September 11 attacks, the organization’s role in sheltering al-Qaeda, or Pakistan’s nuclear proliferation activities have been asked, let alone answered.

U.S. policy appears to be frozen, concerned only with the preservation of Pakistani dictator Musharraf and overlooking the larger goal of fortifying U.S. national security. Despite having considerable leverage over Pakistan, U.S. officials have given that country a free ride to continue posing as an anti-terrorism ally. If Musharraf is unwilling or unable to weed out al-Qaeda from his nation’s territory, Pakistan is the next logical theater of the anti-terrorism war. That should also help bring to an end the need for politically provocative U.S. bases in Pakistan. The United States must develop contingency plans for securing and extracting the Pakistani nuclear arsenal in case of an Islamist coup. And if Musharraf does not have full control over his

expanding nuclear assets, then the world may be dealing with a nuclear rogue nation. President Bush would then have a far greater problem than a Saddam Hussein who might someday possess nuclear weapons.

Notes

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2. "Bush State of the Union Address," *CNN.com*, January 29, 2002, www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt.

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