Report

As part of the Pugwash South Asia dialogues project, Pugwash convened a consultation in Islamabad on 19 September 2012 to explore Pakistani views on how to improve US-Pakistan relations. This session engaged 27 senior current and former policy makers and other experts and opinion shapers. The session was designed to lay the groundwork for a series of meetings Pugwash will organize including meetings that will involve bringing Pakistanis to Washington, DC early in the new US administration.

Summary

Pakistanis are deeply concerned about the status of the US-Pakistan relationship, which was referred to as being at a ‘crisis point’. While the root causes of the current problems can and have been debated, it was noted that there are many in Pakistan who seek to find some way forward that can satisfy both short-term and longer-term interests of both sides. These voices, which include some of Pakistan’s most seasoned diplomats and military, intelligence and policy experts, seek a new dialogue to find common ground and identify confidence building measures that can help to set the tone for a more stable relationship. This requires, they say, a hard examination of the mutual distrust that exists. They believe there is an opportunity to explore such “new thinking” following the US election and the start of the new administration.

The stakes are considered high, given the planned withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in 2014. If this process is not properly managed, there are fears in Pakistan that it can aggravate the instability in the region and this will have a profound impact on Pakistan’s security. As a result of the seriousness with which Pakistanis view these challenges, this topic was a large focus of our meeting in Islamabad.

This brief overview highlights areas that were identified as in need of further examination. It is not meant to be a comprehensive report, but rather to lay out some areas for continuing dialogue.

An opportunity to redefine the relationship

1. Pakistanis believe there is an urgent need to redefine the “enigmatic” relationship between the two countries and to bridge the “gap of mutual suspicion.”
2. Some in Pakistan are concerned there is a new dimension to the current tensions, and if this is not urgently addressed, there is a danger that the two countries could become enemies. One participant warned it might be possible to consider the current relations as a ‘low-
intensity conflict. While this may be admittedly too drastic a description, the overriding point is that the current state of relations is “very grievous.” One person noted a recent poll indicated that the US is considered a greater enemy than India by the general Pakistani population. Others warned against over exaggerating such polls, as they have some methodological problems.

3. Some believe it is important to move toward a more strategic relationship, rather than simply muddle through based on shorter-term ‘transactional’ relations. There must be shift toward engaging with each other as “two noble countries, people to people.”

4. Pakistan has suspicions regarding US-India relations, the US long-term objectives in the region, and concerns about US objections to Pakistan-Chinese relations. Some participants warned this may be tied in with an apparent US effort to contain China.

5. Attention needs to be paid toward differences in perceptions among the elites and the general population in the two countries. This must be addressed, with more effort put into countering the negative popular perceptions in the two countries, otherwise it could have a profoundly limiting impact on the ability of decision makers to improve relations between the two countries.

6. Treating Pakistan like a “failed state with nuclear weapons” is not going to solve the problems. Pakistanis believe this narrative needs to be changed.

7. Many believe there is a need for greater mutual understanding on related nuclear issues. The general narrative in the USA is that the Pakistani arsenal is vulnerable, when in fact there are many safeguards in place, there are agreements between Pakistan and India to promote crisis stability, and there are ongoing military-military and intelligence cooperation between the US and Pakistan on these and related issues.

**Addressing extremism and terrorism**

8. The problems of extremism and terrorism are too often lumped together, further complicating an already difficult situation. Some Pakistanis believe it is important for Pakistan to put its own “house in order.” However, some believe the US focus on these questions is superficial, to make it look like the US is tough on terrorism without seeking ways to address the core issues. Some felt dialogue is needed on ways to “snuff out oxygen” from the sources of funding, for example.

9. Some wondered if there is more Pakistan can do to address indigenous extremism. Extremism impacts relations with both India and the US. Some think it may be in fact the gravest threat Pakistan faces. Participants noted that the extremist mindset “breeds on despair, despondency, and is fed by poverty” and these factors must be addressed.

10. Some believe the US has some responsibility for the rise of extremism in Pakistan, given its role in helping to convert madrassas to “incubators of the mujahideen.”

11. Drone policy needs clarity, on both sides. The US use of drones creates problems in Pakistan on the ground and in relations between the two states. However, it also was noted that there are conflicting signals within the Pakistani army and government on this issue, and the debate “keeps going in circles.”

12. Demands on Pakistan to use military force against militants on several fronts are short-sighted and do not reflect military realities on the ground. Some believe there is a danger that action in places like Swat such action could unite militant groups, and lead to further
destabilization of Pakistan. One person said it is “very surprising the US does not see the implications of such actions and keeps insisting on military action that is absolutely difficult and un-doable.” What works in South Waziristan, for example, may not work with the northern tribes. (The role of the US in Balochstan remains a question mark for many.)

13. The US emphasis on the Haqqani network, as opposed to the so-called Quetta Shura, was also questioned, as one person said the Haqqani network is responsible for approximately 10% of the attacks, albeit many of the highest profile ones.

14. Some noted a new dimension is that the Pakistan Taliban is carrying out attacks and then going to safe havens in Afghanistan. There is concern this is not getting enough attention.

15. It was noted that Pakistan has suffered greatly from terrorism, and there is frustration that the US does not recognize the strains this has placed on the Pakistan society.

**Afghanistan**

16. There is a deep concern that Pakistan is being made the scapegoat for the failed US policy toward Afghanistan.

17. Pakistanis insist that there cannot be peace in Afghanistan “at the expense of Pakistan.” Some believe that Afghanistan is the “linchpin” of relationship between Pakistan and the US, and the “prism” through which relations are judged. Both countries want a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, they both agree it is not possible to leave the Taliban out, and both agree they don’t want the Taliban in power. However, the two countries do not trust each other regarding a “coordinated approach.”

18. Some participants said Pakistan must wait until the after the US election is over, but that the situation may then be judged as untenable, at which time regional parties may be inclined for “some change to come about.”

19. Some expressed deep concern about the influx of US funds in Afghanistan and key regions, and the way this has created further problems of corruption and may lead to an economic downturn following withdrawal.

20. Some Pakistanis believe it is important for Pakistan to more clearly establish the fact that Pakistan is prepared to facilitate a process that will be Afghan-led, -owned and –driven, with a shared roadmap including timelines, budgets, milestones, etc, while recognizing the need for built-in flexibility (it was pointed out that perhaps two roadmaps are needed – a map to negotiations and a map for the negotiations). Afghans of all sides should come together and design a system and amend their constitution to reflect their consensus;

21. A facilitator who has authority to negotiate peace may be helpful (this person cannot be from the US as they are a party to the conflict, and it was a matter of debate whether or not this person could be from the UN given the UN role in Afghanistan).

22. The US must remove the Taliban from its terrorist list if peace talks are to occur, to enable them to move freely.

23. Safe passage is needed for those involved in negotiations. Some believe if the prisoners are released, talks will proceed. Others wondered if Pakistan can do more than offer safe passage. For example, some wondered if Pakistan could do more to encourage the Afghan Taliban to talk with the Afghan government.

24. Some suggest that one province of Afghanistan could be used as a “zone of peace” from which the Afghan army and coalition forces should withdraw;
25. Some believe that it needs to be more clearly understood that Pakistan is not interested in one group versus another (Pashtuns, Haqqanis, etc), since if all major groups are not part of political process, Pakistan will have trouble in its borderlands, but there is agreement that there should be no Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and no place for militants in Afghanistan. Avoiding a situation in which Afghanistan returns to factional fighting, will be dependent on withdrawal of US and foreign forces. While some small residual forces may be present, if they go beyond a 3,000-4,000 notional force to what some think will be a 35,000-40,000 force, this will create problems. One person said the “biggest stumbling block” is US ambiguity on its future intentions in the region; 

26. Regional countries should be involved in the process (Iran, Pakistan, Turkey). Some believe a neutral third party could be considered, to serve in a peacekeeping capacity to oversee transition from war to peace; 

27. How to bring expertise to those who seek to provide constructive proposals for this roadmap needs further exploration (via Track II meetings, etc). It may be necessary to “plant different seeds” in various peace efforts, to see which will grow, as it was pointed out there are problems in all various scenarios for when/how to meet. 

Looking forward

28. There is a concern in Pakistan that shifting US priorities will impact Pakistan, perhaps negatively. Some expect a major shift in US national security strategy will put the “war on terror” on the back burner, while pivoting toward Asia and the containment of China. One person noted that “any containment of China by the US won’t be accepted by the majority of people in Pakistan.” Some wondered if there might be a future role for Pakistan in helping to increase understanding between the US and China. 

29. All sides need a better understanding of the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan nexus. One person pointed out that for geopolitical reasons the US “would love” to have Delhi-Islamabad-Kabul on the same page, but they don’t know how to do it. The question is, to what extent can and should Pakistan play a role in fostering this trilateral relationship? Someone else noted that such an axis would be “a boon” for Pakistan in terms of trade, etc. Others spoke of the tremendous potential of this unexploited “geoeconomic location.”

30. Some believe that there needs to be greater sensitivity in the US to the reality that US actions in a wider context affect the US-Pakistan relations. The approaches and policies toward the Muslim world in general are affecting the US-Pakistan relations. It was noted that a possible strike on Iran by either Israel or the US, for example, would “severely affect” in many ways the US-Pakistan relations.

31. Some believe that the US is pressuring Pakistan to accept Indian leadership in the region. India-Pakistan relations must be addressed, including issues related to Kashmir, but such pressure or perceived favoritism from the US is not seen as particularly helpful. 

32. There is an urgent need to explore points of convergence. Someone said there is a need on both sides to “roll up our sleeves and talk to each other.” He said there must be some initial step toward honest and very serious dialogue at multiple levels “to see if there is any common interest left, and then work on it.” This has to go beyond the typical diplomatic meetings where principals sit for 2-3 hours but do not address the real issues. The sides have been talking past each other, and not convincing the other side about that real issues.
33. Though it has been said before it remains true that there is a need to create a counter-narrative. Some participants noted that anti-Americanism in Pakistan is being fed by “intellectual confusion” from many sources, including the establishment, Urdu language media and also social media. Helping to create a counternarrative will also demand greater sensitivity on the side of the US to the “spirit of tribalism.” One participant noted that some key decision makers in Pakistan are using a double track policy of saying on public platforms what they think the public wants to hear, while pursuing a parallel private track where they are saying there is a need to calm down. This strategy has an “inherent danger” in that it is not preparing the public for a climb down and at some point this may lead to a clash since, he said, there is a “disconnect between what we are doing and what we tell people we want to do.” Another person noted that there is an extensive Pakistani diaspora in the US, and that the embassy might do more to facilitate their efforts to create a counter narrative.

34. One participant said that if US – Pakistan cooperation continues, it will be “no free lunch” for Pakistan. “Something must be done on our part.” However, the way Pakistan is being portrayed in the USA and elsewhere is weakening the ability of those in Pakistan who are working for change and better internal structures and inciting the forces that seek to benefit from anti-Americanism within Pakistan, as evidenced by the tensions that were stirred up at the time of our meeting as a result of the You Tube video.

35. Many Pakistanis believe Pakistan cannot afford bad relations with the US, and seek to repair the relationship. They seek to engage with US decision makers at this critical time to identify steps to redefine the relationship, in ways that can be of greater mutual benefit to all sides. Pugwash has been asked to continue to play a role in fostering these and related discussions.
Participant List

**Maj. Gen. (ret) Athar Abbas**, recently retired from the post of Military Spokesman and Head of Inter Services Public Relations, Islamabad

**Ms. Safiya Aftab**, Freelance consultant, Islamabad

**Mr. Cyril Almeida**, Journalist

**Mr. Khalid Aziz**, Chairman, Regional Institute of Policy Research & Training Peshawar [formerly: Advisor to KPK Govt on National Finance Commission, Chief Secretary of NWFP & FATA, former Director General National Accountability Bureau, Islamabad; Political Agent and District Commissioner at various places]

**Mrs. Sandra Ionno Butcher**, Senior Program Coordinator, International Secretariat, Pugwash Conferences, UK; Director, Pugwash History Project; Honorary Research Associate, Science and Technology Studies Department, University College London [formerly, Joint Executive Secretary, British Pugwash Group, Executive Director, Student Pugwash USA, Interim Research Director and Senior Analyst, British American Security Information Council]

**Ms Azeema Cheema**, Policy scholar

**Prof. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino**, Secretary-General, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs; Member, Pugwash Executive Committee; Professor of Mathematical Physics, University of Milan, *Italy* [formerly: Secretary General, Union of Italian Scientists for Disarmament (USPID); Director, Program on Disarmament and International Security, Landau Network – Centro Volta, Como, Italy]

**Lt. Gen. (retd) Asad Durrani**, Former DG, ISI, Rawalpindi, Pakistan


**Lt.-Gen. (retd) Agha Farooq**, Member, Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, Islamabad [formerly: President, National Defence University, Islamabad; Lieu]

**Mr. Imtiaz Gul**, Executive Director, Centre for Research and Security Studies, Islamabad


**Mr. Fahd Hussain**, Islamabad Journalist working for the Nawa-i-Waqt group

**Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussein**, Professor of Security Studies, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad; Visiting Professor, CISAC, Stanford University (2012-2013) [formerly: professor and chairman, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad; Executive Director, Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS) Colombo, Sri Lanka (2005-2008)]

**Mr. Zahid Hussain**, Writer and freelance journalist, Islamabad

**Amb. Aziz Ahmad Khan**, former Ambassador to Afghanistan and High Commissioner to India, Islamabad
Brig. Feroz Khan, Lecturer, Dept. of National Security Affairs, U.S Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

Dr. Humayun Khan, former High Commissioner from Pakistan to India and United Kingdom

Mr. Trevor Martin, Head of Office, UNAMA Islamabad

Mr. Rustam Shah Mohmand, Pakistan Afghanistan Jirga, Former Chief Secretary NWFP, former Ambassador to Afghanistan

Mr. Hussain Nadim, Lecturer, National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Islamabad; Adjunct Scholar, The International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR), London; Visiting Faculty, Department of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad [formerly: Visiting Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Washington, DC.]

Amb. Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director, Center for International Strategic Studies, Islamabad; Distinguished Visiting Fellow, National Defence University, Islamabad [formerly: Ambassador of Pakistan in Jordan, Cuba, Venezuela and Austria (in which post served as Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the IAEA, UNODC and UNIDO); Deputy Chief of Mission, Pakistan Embassy, Washington DC; Advisor to the Chairman, Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission]

Dr Ilhan Niaz, Historian

Mr. Tariq Parvez, former Director General of the Federal Investigation Agency; former National Coordinator, National Counter Terrorism Authority, Pakistan

Dr. Moeed Pirzada, Director World Affairs, Content Head Ptv English, Pakistan Television Corporation

Ms. Raana Rahim, Political Affairs Office, UNAMA, Islamabad

Amb. Najmuddin Shaikh, retired Pakistan Foreign Service Officer; Member, Board of Governors, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad; Senior Vice President, Karachi Council of Foreign Relations; Columnist for Dawn, Karachi [formerly: Foreign Secretary to the Government of Pakistan (1994-97); Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran (1992-94), the USA (1990-91), the FRG (1989-90) and Canada (1987-89)]

Amb. Ahmad Shamshad, Retired Ambassador and Foreign Secretary of Pakistan (1997-2000) [formerly: Pakistan’s Ambassador to South Korea (1987-1990), Iran (1990-1992), and Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN (2000-2002), Secretary-General, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) (1992-1996)]

Mr. Ali Sultan, Senior Research Fellow, Research Society of International Law Pakistan, Lahore; Lecturer in Public International Law at The Institute of Legal Studies, Lahore [formerly: Visiting Lecturer in International Humanitarian Law at Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore]

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