United States' relationship with Pakistan

Marvin Weinbaum

Marvin Weinbaum served as analyst for Pakistan and Afghanistan in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research from 1999 to 2003. A professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he is currently a scholar-in-residence at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC. Weinbaum's research focuses on issues of national security, democratization and political economy. He is the author or editor of six books and has written more than 70 journal articles and book chapters, mostly about Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, but also on Egypt and Turkey.

After earning a doctorate from Columbia University in 1965, Weinbaum joined the Illinois faculty the same year and served for 15 years as the director of the program in South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. He has held Fulbright Research Fellowships for Egypt and Afghanistan and was a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace. He lectures regularly at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute.

The United States has forged close ties with Pakistan in its war on terrorism, but whether or not this relationship can be sustained going forward depends on the fortunes of one man: Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, noted Marvin Weinbaum in his address to the Global Executive Forum.

"I think we've gotten ourselves in a fix in Pakistan," he said. "We are very dependent on President Musharraf. Were he to leave the scene we would be in trouble because of the high level of anti-Americanism in the country."

While there is no movement in the country for Musharraf's removal,* nor are there any obvious successors, there are crises brewing that have the potential to bring him down.

- Kashmir. "Were he to look like he's selling out to India, or in any way seem like a liability to the military, the military would topple him."
- Economy/society. "The things that really matter in Pakistani society and the economy are not going in the right direction. Unless Musharraf corrects these problems, sooner or later our relationship with Pakistan will either erode or explode on us."
- Iraq. "Were Musharraf to send troops to Iraq, we could see a real explosive situation. It's not about Iraq, it's about Islam. Our actions there are seen as an attack on Islam."

Said Weinbaum: "Pakistan is becoming more Islamicized, in a political sense, than it was a decade ago or even a few years ago. This is because the state has failed. The economy and state's institutions have failed, especially the education system. There is virtually no state education to speak of.

"Instead, there are madrassas, some of which are a training ground for extremists. So now a whole generation of young people is coming through an educational system that does nothing more than teach them how to recite, from memory, the Quran and to hate the West, especially the United States."

*In the weeks following the Forum, Musharraf has been the target of two assassination attempts. Although he was unharmed, 14 people died and 46 were injured in the latest attack, described by Musharraf in news reports as the work of "extremists."

Anti-Americanism

The extent of anti-Americanism in Pakistan today is at an all-time high, said Weinbaum. "They think that having joined the coalition against the war on terrorism, they should have gotten more, particularly military
equipment and economic assistance." Adding to their resentments are the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and the way the U.S. has pressured Pakistan to cool its dispute with India over Kashmir.

"But even the more progressive Muslims, some of whom are secular, even they don't like us anymore because they hold us responsible for the fact that Musharraf is in power."

Musharraf led a military coup in October 1999, overthrowing an elected government. He was at the time chief of army staff. "Most Pakistanis were supportive of the general coming to power in the hope that the military would set things right and then get out," said Weinbaum. But in Pakistan that's not the way it happens. When the military comes in, it stays," despite the fact that today there is a democratically elected Parliament and a prime minister.

"Unfortunately, that Parliament meets very rarely, and the prime minister is nothing but a tool of Musharraf. It's the military that decides important issues," said Weinbaum.

Historically, the U.S. has viewed Pakistan in terms of its strategic importance at any given time, resulting in a love-them-and-leave-them kind of relationship.

"We have clearly let Pakistan down as far as they are concerned. When we needed them, we were fast friends. When we didn't feel we needed them, we let the friendship lapse. We turned to them at the time the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and lost interest in them after the Soviets pulled out. We showed up on their doorstep again when we needed their support in going after the Taliban.

"So, for different reasons, we have few friends in Pakistan today, yet the government's official policy is as aligned with us as we could possibly want. On general principal, Musharraf is with us as much as anyone. The Pakistani public is not, and he knows it; therefore, there are things he cannot do."

**Taliban sympathies**

The key to success in fighting the war against terrorism is Musharraf's "cooperation in flushing out the remnants of al-Qaida and the Taliban in his country and neighboring Afghanistan," said Weinbaum.

"We want him to make certain that these elements don't continue to regroup in Pakistan and then go back into Afghanistan and bring down the government that we support there, which is a very fragile government.

"Musharraf's got 70,000 troops out there, supposedly making sure that the border is not violated. But anyone who wants to cross that border can do so with near impunity, there are all kinds of ways to do it. So his effort is halfhearted. And half of the security forces are sympathetic to the Taliban."

Prior to 9/11, Pakistan was a major supporter of the Taliban. After 9/11, Musharraf saw that it was in his best interests to throw his support to the United States.

Nevertheless, "Musharraf is not sure he wants to give up on the Taliban. Because if the government in Afghanistan should fall apart, what could result is the division of the country into spheres of influence separately controlled by Iran, Russia and Pakistan. In this scenario, Pakistan will need the neo-Taliban to be the foot soldiers."
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Musharraf's game is to keep all his options open, and he does that by being "a marginal satisfier," said Weinbaum. "He has a great instinct for knowing what all of his various constituencies need to keep them minimally satisfied. That's the way he plays with us, with the jihadists, with India, with the business community, with religious parties and with everyone including the military establishment."

The Kashmir dispute

In 1947 India and Pakistan gained their independence from Britain. Kashmir, which sits on the northern borders of the two countries, became part of India, but Pakistan also claimed Kashmir as part of its territory. This set the stage for the war that followed in 1965.

The war failed to resolve the dispute and Pakistan and India adopted a UN-sponsored resolution that created the LOC or Line of Control.

To the east of the LOC lies the Vale of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh, which are administered by India. To the west lies the area now known as Azad (Free) Kashmir, which has its own government and strong ties to Pakistan.

"Pakistan got part of the state, but the most valuable part, the valley of Kashmir, lies within India," said Weinbaum.

Of Kashmir's 12 million population, 70 percent are Muslims, with Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists accounting for the rest. Hindus live mostly in the south and around the city of Jammu.

"The dispute now centers on India's refusal to hold a plebiscite to allow the Kashmiri people to choose between Pakistan and India as their sovereign nation. In 1989 Kashmir militants rose up against Indian rule, and India accused Pakistan of supplying weapons to the militants.

"Since then, tens of thousands of people have been killed by the unrelenting border fighting between Indian troops and Pakistani-infiltrated terrorist groups," said Weinbaum.

"India has made a mess of Kashmir, and there is resistance within Kashmir to India's rule. Most Kashmiri people, even Muslims, would prefer not to be a part of Pakistan because of a lack of economic opportunity in that country. But now they are so angered by India's policy that they might very well vote in favor of Pakistan."

"Here are two states abutting one another, both with nuclear weapons. In a couple of minutes they could hit the other with missiles," said Weinbaum, adding that "a nuclear war between Pakistan and India could be catastrophic for the globe."

Under pressure from the United States, Musharraf has managed to slow the rate of Pakistanis crossing the border into Kashmir to stir up trouble. Consequently, India has moved its troops back from the border. "India still has half a million troops in Kashmir, but there is now a formal cease fire, at least on the border."

What Musharraf hasn't done is to dismantle the terrorist groups, which he is reluctant to do because of the leverage they give him with India. "He wants to force India to the negotiating table despite the fact that India has no interest in trading any territory. There's nothing on the table at the moment, but at least they're talking, not shooting."
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"It's argued that the Pakistani army needs Kashmir to justify its size and role in Pakistani politics and society. And Musharraf, as head of the army, needs the military. The Pakistani military owns most of the major assets in the country. The joke is that Pakistan doesn't have a military, the military has a state."

Future unknown

"So like it or not, we've got Pakistan as a partner. The question is, what kind of partner and whether Pakistan will continue to want us as a partner? By and large, the answer to that question is Yes, with the current kind of leadership; No, if the state should change its ideological direction in the future.

"Pakistan has nuclear weapons and an ongoing program that will continue to produce nuclear weapons. Of even greater concern than the weapons themselves is the sharing of that technology so that it becomes anybody's bomb."

### Pakistan

- Population: 150,694,740
- Population growth rate: 2.01%
- Infant mortality rate: 76.53/1000 live births
- Life expectancy at birth: 62.2
- Literacy: Total population 45.7% (Male: 59.8%, Female: 30.6%)
- Religion: 97% Muslim (Sunni 77%, Shi'a 20%)

### India

- Population: 1,049,700,118
- Population growth rate: 1.47%
- Infant mortality rate: 59.59/1000 live births
- Life expectancy at birth: 63.62
- Literacy: Total population 59.5% (Male 70.2%, Female 48.3%)
- Religion: 81.3% Hindu, 12% Muslim

### Pervez Musharraf

- 10/12/99. After a military coup, Chief of Army Staff and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Pervez Musharraf suspends Pakistan's constitution and assumes the additional title of Chief Executive.
- 5/12/00. Pakistan's Supreme Court unanimously validates the Oct. 1999 coup and grants Musharraf executive and legislative authority for three years from the coup date.
- 6/20/01. Musharraf names himself as president.

Sidebar source: CIA World Factbook 2003