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PRESIDENTS KARZAI, OBAMA, AND ZARDARI AT THE WHITE HOUSE, MAY 2009.

AN UNEASY ALLIANCE

IF THE U.S. WANTS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN, IT MUST TURN THINGS AROUND WITH PAKISTAN.

BY BRUCE RIEDEL

PAKISTANIS ARE USED TO BEING DISappointed and betrayed by America. For 63 years, the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan has oscillated between periods of intense, close alliance usually revolving around large, secret projects and periods of intense, angry animosity centering on sanctions and abandonment. Pakistanis who value democracy are even more used to disappointment and betrayal. Washington has fallen in love with every Pakistani military dictator, and done little to help elected civilian governments cope with the country's enormous problems.

Now that U.S. President Barack Obama has set July 2011 as the target date for drawing down American forces in Afghanistan, Pakistanis fear abandonment is in the works yet again. No one knows what will happen next year, but Obama will probably not walk away from either Pakistan or Afghanistan. He will, hopefully, broaden engagement instead.

The Pew Research Center survey released in June shows only 17 percent of Pakistanis view the U.S. favorably and just 7 percent want U.S. and NATO troops to maintain presence in neighboring Afghanistan. Poll after poll shows Pakistanis do not believe America is a reliable ally. They are right. For over six decades, the U.S. has had a love-hate relationship with Pakistan.

In the 1950s and 1960s Pakistan was a "most allied" ally, belonging to Communist-bulwarks the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and hosting U-2 flights over Russia. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon both adored Pakistan's first military rulers. Kennedy feted Gen. Ayub Khan at the exclusive Mount Vernon retreat, American founding father George Washington's manor home. And Nixon tilted toward Gen. Yahya Khan during wartime in 1971 when East Pakistan broke away with Indian intervention to become Bangladesh. President Ronald Regan supported Gen. Zia-ul-Haq. President George W. Bush was entranced by Gen. Pervez Musharraf and stuck with him long after the Pakistani people had made it clear they wanted democracy.

But this did not mean the U.S. was not averse to walking out on its partner. The first instance came in 1965, when the first Pakistan-India war broke out, and again in 1977, when the democratically-elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was ousted in a military coup. Another estrangement came in 1990. With the Soviets gone from Kabul, America gave up on Afghanistan and Pakistan. A. Q. Khan's bomb further roiled relations. Aid to Islamabad was cut off in 1989 by President George H. W. Bush invoking the Pressler Amendment, which made military and economic assistance to Pakistan subject to the U.S. president certifying to Congress each year that Pakistan did not possess the bomb. President Bill Clinton tilted America toward India, famously spending five days there and five hours in Pakistan in 2000.

Obama, a critic of the junior Bush's embrace of Musharraf, promised in his presidential campaign to wage the war in Afghanistan relentlessly, saying that he would go after Al Qaeda in Pakistan. Obama has stepped up unmanned aerial drone strikes in Pakistan which have proven more effective than they did under Bush, partly because Pakistan is providing more target information. But doubts persist in Pakistan whether Obama is in for the long haul. Those doubts are strongest in Rawalpindi, home to Pakistan's Army, which has the least confidence in America of any institution. It has repeatedly relied on U.S. weaponry to fight its wars and found arms supplies cut off when most needed. In the last decade, dozens of American politicians and generals have promised to help Pakistan fight the militancy but Islamabad has gotten far less than it said it required to wage war. Pakistan's doubts are understandable.

JIM WATSON—AFP

GENERAL TERMS
(FROM LEFT) JOHNSON, AYUB KHAN AND KENNEDY AT THE WHITE HOUSE, 1961; NIXON AND YAHYA KHAN IN LAHORE, 1969; REAGAN AND HAQ IN WASHINGTON, 1982.

But this time America has a bigger stake than ever in the stability of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Obama has rightly called the borderlands between the two countries "the most dangerous place in the world" for American interests today. It is the epicenter of the global jihadist movement centered around Al Qaeda that still sends terrorists to New York City to blow up subway trains and Times Square. As long as that threat remains acute, America has a vital national interest in helping Pakistanis, and Afghans, disrupt, dismantle and defeat the syndicate of terror that operates in their countries.

In the best case a year from now, Obama's strategy will show signs of modest success. In Afghanistan, the momentum of the Taliban insurgency will be broken, Kandahar will be a somewhat safer place and perhaps parts of the insurgency will be open to political dialogue with the government led by Afghan President Hamid Karzai. But it remains to be seen if the Taliban or some part of them are interested in reconciliation once they know they are not on the path to the inevitable victory they are expecting. In Pakistan, the Taliban will be on the defensive as well and Al Qaeda will be further degraded.

If that is the case—and it is a big if—then the U.S. and NATO can begin the long process of gradually handing over more control to Afghan national security forces. This process will take years and even when accomplished will require substantial residual presence from NATO to provide intelligence and financial support to the Afghans.

America will also need to be Pakistan's partner during the process. One crucial lesson of the last three decades is that stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan are interlocked. Chaos on one side of the Durand Line, the international border drawn almost arbitrarily by the British, begets chaos on the other. The jihadist Frankenstein cannot be effectively fought with partial measures on one side only or with a strategy that focuses on the short term. Thus the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation Obama signed last year to triple nonmilitary aid to Pakistan commits Congress to maintaining that level for at least five years.

If the situation a year from now is not moving in the right direction, then Obama will face the same tough options he has looked at since his inauguration in January 2009. He knows he can't cut and run. That would give Al Qaeda a world-changing victory, threaten the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as Central and South Asia, and vastly increase the threat to the American homeland from a larger, re-energized terrorist base.

So the alternative option will be to trim down NATO presence in Afghanistan and focus on a smaller counterterrorist mission. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden has been associated in the press with this approach although he says he is firmly onboard with Obama's bomb-and-build Counter Insurgency (COIN) strategy. But this option still requires America to have a significant military presence in Afghanistan and a robust relationship with Pakistan.

In practice this option could be best described as Fortress Kabul. NATO would concede much of the south and east of Afghanistan to the insurgents but would maintain a large base, or bases, in the north to wage attacks by

FROM LEFT: KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES; ARTHUR SCHATZ—TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY IJAZ UL HAQ

unmanned drones and Special Forces on Al Qaeda and affiliated terrorists to try to keep them off balance. Rather than shortening the time frame for a complete American and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, it would lengthen it. We would be committed to an open-ended containment approach to fighting terrorism with little hope of destroying the terrorist nest. The counterterrorism-focused strategy accepts living in an Afghan quagmire for years.

This would make a robust relationship with Islamabad all the more critical as the U.S. containment strategy would require even more drone attacks in Pakistan to try and disrupt terror plots. The tension between the two would be a challenge for both Washington and Islamabad to manage. While one can hope that Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of U.S. troops in Afghanistan since June, delivers the best outcome, there are several things America can do now to help strengthen Pakistan's young democracy.

Following through on commitments already made is crucial. It is time to get Pakistan the helicopters and other military equipment it needs. The economic assistance promised in the Kerry-Lugar Bill, now the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009, should be concentrated on some visible infrastructure projects in highway construction and power plants so Pakistanis can see the U.S. is serious. Some $60 million from this aid is being routed to assist Pakistan's flood victims. America's tariffs can be adjusted so that more Pakistani textiles are sold in the U.S. Every American think tank that has studied the Pakistani economy has concluded that trade will do more than aid. Obama should declare freer trade with Pakistan a national security imperative.

OBAMA SHOULD DECLARE FREER TRADE WITH PAKISTAN A NATIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVE.

The U.S. president will also have a unique opportunity in November, when he visits India, to nudge along dialogue between Islamabad and New Delhi. Obama has wisely kept his public profile on this issue low, and he should keep it there, but behind the scenes there is every reason to encourage Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress Party chief Sonia Gandhi to do what they already know is in India's own interest: reduce tensions with Pakistan, open communications links, and stimulate cross-border trade. Progress on this track is the game changer for the better in South Asia.

Obama will need help from Islamabad on the critical issue of Lashkar-e-Taiba to move New Delhi. Taiba, the outlawed jihadist organization that continues to operate in Pakistan under assumed names and which is linked to the Mumbai attacks of November 2008, is the ticking time bomb that could wreck the nascent U.S.-Pakistan partnership, and take the subcontinent to disaster. Thanks to Taiba henchman, Pakistani-American David Headley's extraordinary confessions, we now know how thoroughly

BY THE NUMBERS
COLOR OF MONEY

Pakistan's importance to the U.S. can be gauged from the military and economic assistance it has received over the years. Most aid has flowed in during periods of military rule in Pakistan. Here's the rundown:

10.8

billion dollars during the period 1950-1979, which covers the military rule of Gen. Ayub Khan and his successor Gen. Yahya Khan

5.0

billion dollars from 1979-1990, coinciding with Gen. Zia-ul-Haq's rule and the Afghan jihad against Soviet occupation

0.4

billion dollars came from 1991-2000, during which time Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif both led two civilian governments each

12.6

billion dollars from 2001-2009 on the watch of Gen. Pervez Musharraf, a central figure in the war on terror

7.5

billion dollars for nonmilitary purposes expected to come from the Kerry-Lugar legislation over five years

CONSTITUTIONAL
MUSHARRAF AND BUSH ON THE GROUNDS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, ISLAMABAD, MARCH 2006.

Taiba planned the Mumbai attacks and how closely linked it is to Al Qaeda. There is no excuse for not pursuing a more robust crackdown on Taiba and its front organizations. So far only good counterterrorism cooperation with India and others has prevented Taiba from striking in Denmark and Bangladesh. Another Mumbai would be the game changer for worse for the U.S. and Pakistan.

America has pursued its short-term gains at the expense of Pakistan, whose civil institutions crumbled and whose civil-military ties became unbalanced. In the 21st century, Pakistan will be one of the giants of Asia, not as big as China or India, but a major player whose actions will affect every major global issue. Pakistan can become an economic tiger that lifts tens of millions from poverty and it can become a functioning democracy.

America's new vision for Pakistan should be based on what the people of Pakistan want. One way to help Pakistan is to provide an automatic $1 billion in extra aid each year that the U.S. president can affirm Pakistan is a democracy. This was proposed in the original Kerry-Lugar legislation. Pakistan's inclusion in the summit on securing nuclear weapons from terrorism was a good start. The U.S. should also invite Pakistan to sit at the high table for world summits on issues like climate change. If Pakistan is treated like a global player, it will perform more by global rules.

In the end only Pakistanis can decide their future. In the last couple of years the Pakistani people have rejected military rule and rewritten their Constitution. They fought for democracy without America's help using the power of civil society. Now they are fighting the jihadist problem they helped to create over many decades (with our help in the beginning) and need American support. America and Pakistan need constancy and consistency in their partnership. We have had enough highs and lows. What we need now is a sustainable partnership. We will have honest disagreements but we both need to recognize that we need each other. No more estrangements, no more dictators: just two democracies working together.

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FROM LEFT: TEK IMAGE—AFP; AAMIR QURESHI—AFP