Testimony: House Committee on Foreign Affairs

After the Withdrawal

The Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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March 19, 2013

1. Opportunities in Afghanistan and Pakistan and How the U.S. Might Nurture Them.

This past Saturday, March 16, 2013 marked an extraordinary moment in Pakistan's history, as this is the first time that a civilian government has served its entire five-year term (from 2008 to 2013). And, for the first time in its history, the Pakistani military appears both unwilling and unable to mount a coup against any civilian government. The military has mounted four coups since Pakistan's independence in 1947. Around six weeks from now, in May, Pakistanis will go again to the polls to elect a new civilian government for a five-year term, and there is now a good prospect for continued, uninterrupted civilian government until at least 2018.

While Pakistan's problems are many—in particular its weak economy, tiny tax base, chronic energy shortages and often-feckless leadership—there are some underlying strengths of its institutions that are too often overlooked. Pakistan may have a largely ineffectual state, but it has a vibrant civil society. As a result of this strong civil society, Pakistan had its version of the Arab Spring long before the wave of demands for accountable governments emerged in the Middle East. It was, after all, a movement of thousands of lawyers taking to the streets protesting the sacking of the Supreme Court chief justice by the military dictator Pervez Musharraf in 2007 that helped to dislodge Musharraf from power.[1]

Pakistan also has a vibrant media. A decade ago, there was only Pakistan TV, which featured leaden government propaganda. Now there are dozens of news channels:[2] many of them are conspiracist and anti-American, but many of them are also anti-Taliban and pro-democracy.

In the past year or so, the Supreme Court has taken on the ISI, Pakistan's powerful military intelligence agency, successfully demanding that the organization produce prisoners who had disappeared for years.[3]

In November 2011, Pakistan agreed to a pact with long-time rival India granting India "most favored nation" trading status;[4] something that would have been unimaginable a few years back. This important development was sanctioned by Pakistan's powerful army, which is a significant player in the country's economy and understands that one way out of Pakistan's economic mess is to hitch itself to India's much larger economy.

Despite the visibility of the hardline religious parties on the streets of Pakistan, in the voting booth, these parties have recently fared very poorly. A coalition of pro-Taliban religious parties known as the MMA secured control of two of Pakistan's four provinces in an election in 2002 and 11% of the votes to the National Assembly. But the MMA

garnered only a piddling 2% of the vote in the 2008 election.[5] The showing of the pro-Taliban religious parties in the May 2013 election is likely to be equally unimpressive.

In terms of Pakistan's long term health and stability, the fact that the country is poised to enter into a unprecedented era of lengthy civilian rule will help erode the Pakistani military's present position as having uncontested supremacy in all matters that relate to the country's national security, in particular its relations with India and with Afghanistan. The military has backed armed proxies in both India and Afghanistan to maintain its perceived interests in these countries. A more confident civilian Pakistani government is over time less likely to support these insurgent and terrorist groups.

The United States should seek to further cement ties to the next civilian government in Pakistan and some concrete ideas about how this might be accomplished can be found below in Section 5.

Another great opportunity (and potential peril) will present itself in Afghanistan within the next year, when Afghans go to the polls in April 2014 for the third presidential election since the fall of the Taliban. If that election is perceived as being relatively free and fair this would go a long way to ease tensions in the Afghan body politic, increase Afghanistan's overall security, and reassure both Afghan and outside investors that the country has a promising future. On the other hand, if the 2014 election is seen as unfair, corrupted and is deeply contested this would likely precipitate a vicious circle of conflict, deteriorating security, and capital flight.

The U.S., therefore, should do everything it can to provide technical and security assistance to make these elections go as well as possible. But unlike what happed in the run up to the 2009 Afghan presidential election, the U.S. should not get involved in backing certain candidates. This had the unintended effect of splitting the opposition to Afghan President Hamid Karzai as key leaders of the anti-Karzai opposition all believed that they were "America's candidate." It also deeply alienated Karzai, whose occasional diatribes against the United States are best understood as due to his lingering resentment over this issue.[6]

A key aspect of U.S. and NATO planning for the Afghan presidential elections in April 2014 is that given the fact that there are no discernible frontrunners to succeed Karzai, there may be no clear winner who attains more than 50 percent of the vote, which under Afghan electoral laws would necessitate a runoff election between the two leading candidates. Therefore security, technical and economic assistance for the Afghan elections should be prepared to extend into the summer of 2014 as it's not clear as yet when that run off might be held.

The effort to set the conditions for a free and fair Afghan election in 2014 is far more important than the pipedream of getting some kind of peace deal with the Taliban. Years of U.S. talks with the Taliban haven't gone much of anywhere, and predictably so because the "moderate" Taliban who wanted to reconcile with the Afghan government have already long done so.[7] Second, "the Taliban" are really many Talibans, so a deal with one insurgent group doesn't mean the end of the insurgency writ large. Third, the history of "peace" deals with the Taliban in neighboring Pakistan shows that the groups can't be trusted. Deals between the Pakistani government and the Taliban in Waziristan in 2005 and 2006 and in Swat in 2009 were merely preludes to the Taliban establishing their brutal "emirates," regrouping and then moving into adjoining areas to seize more territory.

Finally, and most importantly: What do the Taliban really want? It's relatively easy to discern what they don't want: international forces in Afghanistan. But other than their blanket demand for the rule of Sharia law, the Taliban have not articulated their vision for the future of Afghanistan. Do they envision a democratic state with elections? Do they see

a role for women outside the home? What about education for girls? What about ethnic minorities?

It is the outcome of these general elections in Pakistan later this year and in Afghanistan in spring 2014, rather than the precise number of U.S. soldiers who are posted in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of American combat troops in December 2014 that are the most critical factors in determining the future of both countries, and also in securing the long term interests of the United States in the region.

Last year the United States and Afghanistan negotiated a Strategic Partnership Agreement, which ensures America will continue to play a supporting role there until 2024.[8] The exact details of what that agreement means in practice are still being hammered out (and these negotiations may take until November) but they are likely to include not only significant U.S. aid but also many thousands of American soldiers stationed in Afghanistan for years into the future as a guarantor of the country's stability.

The U.S. military has given Obama a range of options under which as few as 6,000 or as many as 20,000 soldiers would remain in Afghanistan after 2014.[9] Those forces would work as advisers to the Afghan army and mount special operations raids against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. While military experts can debate the efficacy of, say, 8,000 U.S. troops remaining in Afghanistan after 2014 versus 15,000 -- and this is an entirely legitimate discussion -- it is worth underlining that whatever the final decision is on troop levels, the key point is that the Obama administration and other U.S. officials should emphasize very clearly that the thousands of American soldiers who will remain in Afghanistan are there to support the U.S. long term partnership agreement with Afghanistan which stretches for more than a decade.

This is important to emphasize because Afghans have been understandably confused by some of the different signals the Obama administration has made about its commitment to Afghanistan in the past. Major confusion arose following President Obama's December 2009 announcement of the "surge" of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, which was coupled with the announcement that those troops would begin to withdraw beginning in July 2011. In many Afghans' minds the withdrawal date became more important than the fact that Obama actually tripled the number of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan during his first term from around 30,000 to a total of 90,000.

Once the post-2014 troop levels are finally determined, the Obama administration should emphasize that the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan is set to last until at least 2024. This will help in multiple ways: First, this guarantee of a long-term U.S. commitment to Afghanistan will encourage other NATO countries -- and also non-NATO allies -- to maintain some of their own troops in Afghanistan to continue to work with the Afghans in areas like training the army and police well past the end of the NATO combat mission in December 2014.

Such an announcement will also help reassure Afghans that the U.S. won't be simply turning off the lights in Afghanistan in December 2014. After the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, something that was accomplished at the cost of more than a million Afghan lives and billions of dollars of U.S. aid, the United States closed its embassy in Afghanistan during the George H. W. Bush administration and then zeroed out aid to one of the poorest countries in the world under the Clinton administration.[10] It essentially turned its back on Afghans once they had served their purpose of dealing a deathblow to the Soviets. As a result, the United States had virtually no understanding of the subsequent vacuum in Afghanistan into which eventually stepped the Taliban, who rose to power in the mid-1990s. The Taliban granted shelter to Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda organization from 1996 onward.

Also this announcement of long-term commitment to Afghanistan's stability by the United Sates will signal to

regional powers like Pakistan and Iran that the U.S. plans to remain engaged in Afghanistan for many years into the future.

The United States continues to station thousands of troops in South Korea more than five decades after the end of the Korean War. Under this American security umbrella South Korea has gone from being one of the poorest countries in the world to one of the richest. It is this kind of model that most Afghans want and the U.S. needs to provide so Afghanistan doesn't revert to the kind of chaos that beset it in the mid-1990s and from which the Taliban first emerged.

2. What are the security implications for Afghanistan and the US of drawing down the number of troops in Afghanistan?

Some smart commentators on Afghanistan worry that the Afghan civil war will renew itself after the United States and other NATO countries withdraw combat troops at the end of 2014. In an influential July report in the New Yorker, veteran war correspondent Dexter Filkins described how Afghans are girding for another civil war, and he quoted a former U.S. official based in Kabul as saying, "A coup is one of the big possibilities -- a coup or civil war."[11]

This is overwrought. A return to the kind of civil war in which hundreds of thousands died following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the 1992 collapse of the Najibullah communist government is quite unlikely for many reasons, not least the fact that the United States is not going to collapse as the Soviet Union did, an implosion that precipitated the fall of the Najibullah government. When the Russian aid stopped flowing to Najibullah, he couldn't maintain his military, which opened the way for his overthrow.

Much has been achieved in Afghanistan over the past decade, which will not be undone when American combat troops leave at the end of 2014. Afghanistan just after the November 2001 fall of the Taliban resembled Germany after World War II: The country had been utterly destroyed, around a third of the population had fled, and more than one in 10 of its citizens had been killed in the previous two decades of war. Many Afghans had fled for Pakistan and Iran during the 1980s and 1990s -- some 6 million out of a population of 15 million.[12]

As a result of the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan and the enterprising spirit of the Afghans themselves millions of Afghans have voted with their feet: Since the fall of the Taliban, more than 5 million have returned home.[13] By way of contrast, some 2 million Iraqis left their country during the recent war there. Only a tiny fraction of those refugees has gone back.

The country to which those millions of Afghans have returned is in fundamental respects very different from the one it was before the 9/11 attacks. Let's start with the most obvious point: The Taliban are removed from power. This was a movement that gave sanctuary not only to Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, but also to pretty much every jihadi militant group from around the Muslim world.

Thanks to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, al Qaeda ("the base" in Arabic) lost the best base it ever had: a country in which it ran something of a parallel state, with training camps churning out thousands of recruits, and from which bin Laden and his henchmen conducted their own foreign policy, attacking U.S. embassies and warships, and planned the deadliest mass murder in American history.

Al Qaeda has never recovered from the loss of its Afghan base. Its last successful strike in the West was the July 2005 series of suicide attacks on London's transportation system. Meanwhile, the war against al Qaeda continues to be fought from Afghanistan. The SEAL team that killed bin Laden in 2011 took off in stealth helicopters from an airfield in Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan. And the drones that have

inflicted heavy losses on other al Qaeda leaders continue to deploy from Afghan bases.

The chances of the Taliban coming back to run Afghanistan are now vanishingly small. Favorable views of the Taliban in polling across Afghanistan over the past several years are consistently no more than 10 percent. There is nothing like experiencing life under the Taliban to convince Afghans that the group cannot deliver on its promises of an Islamist utopia here on Earth. And if the Taliban have scant chance of returning to power, their al Qaeda buddies have even less chance of returning to Afghanistan in any meaningful way. Few Muslim countries harbor a more hostile view of al Qaeda and its Arab leaders than Afghanistan.

Afghans have good reasons to fear the Taliban. The group imprisoned half the population inside their homes, preventing women from having jobs and girls from attending school. Although Afghanistan today remains a deeply conservative Muslim society, proportionately more women are now serving in the Afghan parliament than in the U.S. Congress. And while only fewer than 1 million children, almost entirely boys, were in school under the Taliban, now more than 8 million children are in school, more than a third of whom are girls.

One of the most common questions pollsters ask is, "Is your country going in the right direction?" A poll by Rasmussen at the end of December found that 33 percent of American voters believed their country was going in the right direction.[14] By contrast, a poll of some 6,000 Afghans conducted by the well-regarded Asia Foundation found that in 2012, 52 percent of Afghans thought their country was on the right track.[15]

This finding isn't so surprising when you consider what remained of the Afghan economy under the Taliban. There were just six commercial banks in the entire country, and, according to the IMF, they were "largely inactive."[16] There was virtually no phone system.

Afghanistan's GDP in 2001 was some $2 billion -- about the size of Burkina Faso's. In a decade, GDP has gone up to $20 billion (though a good deal of it is attributable to foreign aid). Today, one in two Afghans has a cell phone, which they use for everything from getting their salaries wired to them to making utility payments. There are also now dozens of newspapers and TV channels. Where once Kabul's streets were largely silent, they are now a bedlam of traffic and thriving small businesses.

At the time of the Taliban, only a tenth of the population had access to basic health care, a situation made more complicated by the Taliban's medieval view of women.[17] Now, almost all Afghans have access to more and better health care. As a result, in just one decade Afghan life expectancy has gone up an average of 18 years from 45 years to 62 years for men and 64 for women. This kind of dramatic increase in longevity took four decades to accomplish in the United States between 1900 and the beginning of World War II.

Many Westerners have a skewed assessment of the scope of the war in Afghanistan, bracketing it with the war in Iraq. But the conflicts in the two countries are quite different. At the height of the Iraq war in 2006, 100 civilians were dying every day. Today in Afghanistan, around six civilians are dying daily in a war in a country that has a population roughly on par with Iraq's. And who is causing most of those casualties? The Taliban. U.S. and other NATO forces have taken care to ensure that their soldiers do not contribute to the civilian death toll. Indeed, some American cities are today more violent than Afghanistan. In New Orleans, residents are now around six times more likely to be murdered than Afghan civilians are to be killed in the war.

3. What is the capacity of the Afghan government to address various security, crime and corruption issues, as well as the threat from the Taliban?

A key issue facing the Afghan government as the U.S. draws down its forces is how will the Afghan economy fare? Should the economy collapse, the Afghan government's ability to deal with security and crime issues as well as the threat from the Taliban would all be substantially eroded. Already, rents in Kabul are tumbling and NGOs are laying off staff. Surprisingly, however a rigorous and comprehensive World Bank study last year found that Afghanistan will continue to have a healthy growth rate dropping from its present robust 9 percent a year rate "to closer to 5 percent on average until 2018."[18] (U.S. yearly growth rates over the past four years have been around 2 percent).

The economic contraction as the U.S. draws down is likely to be less severe than might be supposed partly because the hundreds of billions of that the US military has spent in Afghanistan over the past decade is spending that almost entirely benefits....the United States. The World Bank study points out that "military spending by the United States (and other countries) finances the salaries of military personnel, investments in weapons equipment and systems, sustainment, logistics and research of international forces, and operations contracted and paid for outside the country. Although it indirectly benefits Afghanistan's economy by supporting security, the direct positive impact on poorer households appears to be limited. The impact of its withdrawal is therefore likely to be muted."

It is incontrovertible that a good deal of aid to Afghanistan has ended up lining the pockets of corrupt Afghan officials. Less well understood is that good chunks of the aid have also gone back West in the form of large salaries and perks for expatriates. A 2008 report by the British charity Oxfam found that around 40 percent of aid to Afghanistan was funneled to donor countries to maintain home offices in the West and pay for Western-style salaries, benefits, and vacations.[19]

And even less well known is that one of the world's most successful aid programs has been implemented in Afghanistan, funded by organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Bank. Known as the National Solidarity Program, the cost-efficient and popular program gives modest grants to local self-elected village councils to do with as they will.[20] Around 30,000 councils have been set up, and they have disbursed some $1 billion for some 60,000 specific projects since 2003. As a result, thousands of schools and countless irrigation networks have been built, positively affecting the lives of about two-thirds of the rural population.[21]

The investigation of the troubled Kabul Bank, in which some 900 million dollars was lost to fraud, shows that the culture of impunity for corrupt Afghan officials is beginning to erode. Earlier this month 21 officials were found guilty of fraud and two of the former heads of the bank were sentenced to five years in prison. The Afghan Attorney General's office said last week that it would appeal the sentences as being too soft given the scale of the fraud.[22]

(It is worth noting that while complaints are often justifiably made about the corruption and impunity of certain Afghan officials, in the United States itself according to Bloomberg Businessweek, "The fraud analytics firm Interthinx estimates that there were between $1 trillion and $4.8 trillion in fraudulent mortgages issued nationwide between 2005 and 2007, yet criminal cases against banks for originating such mortgages have been very rare. There have been a few prosecutions of individuals, a few large civil suits brought against banks such as Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase, and deferred prosecution deals where lenders have paid a financial penalty in lieu of criminal charges. But in the wake of the financial crisis only one bank in the whole country has, as an institution, been criminally indicted for mortgage fraud.") [23]

A key question is the extent to which the Afghan army and police can operate effectively against the Taliban as the U. S. withdraws. As yet the Afghan army hasn't shown the ability to conduct large-scale operations without significant American support. In addition, a big issue for the army is the extraordinarily high attrition rate. Today, a little more then a quarter of the recruits to the army drop out every year. As result, NATO is now considering maintaining the size of the Afghan army and police at 352,000 soldiers through 2018.[24] (Estimates of the size of the Taliban typically are in the 25,000 range.)

Despite the inability of the Afghan army to conduct large-scale missions without U.S. help, the transition of Afghanistan's provinces and districts to Afghan army and police control has gone somewhat well over the past year. According to NATO, "Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have been taking the lead for security in areas where 87% of the Afghan population lives. In 2013, it is expected that all areas of the country will have entered the transition process and the ANSF will assume security lead across the whole country."[25]

As Afghan forces have assumed more responsibly for security, American casualties have dropped. In January, three U.S. soldiers died in Afghanistan -- the lowest monthly American casualty count in four years.[26] In short, the war is winding down, and the "surge" of 30,000 U.S. soldiers into Afghanistan that was completed in September has indeed blunted the Taliban's momentum, as it was intended to do.

In 2012 Taliban attacks dropped as much as a third compared with the year before. These figures come from the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO), an organization that has collected data about violence in Afghanistan for many years and is far from a cheerleader for NATO.[27] In a 2012 report ANSO stated that the sharp drop in violence is "the first reliable indicator that the conflict may be entering a period of regression after years of sustained, and compounded, growth by all actors in the field."[28]

The Afghan National Army, which certainly needs to be further professionalized, is already the single most admired institution in the country. It will not collapse as Najibullah's military did once the Russian money flow dried up, not least because the United States and other NATO countries will not allow it to do so.

4. The relationship between the Taliban and other extremist organizations with Pakistan.

In 2009 as the Taliban marched some 70 miles away from the Pakistani capital Islamabad, the army launched major military operations in the northern region of Swat and the western area of South Waziristan to end the Taliban's control of these areas; operations that were generally successful and were done with a good amount of Pakistani public support.

Pakistani officials are swift to point out, correctly, that as a result, more Pakistani soldiers have died fighting the Taliban than the servicemen of the U.S. and other NATO countries combined.

What of "core al Qaeda," which attacked the United States on 9/11 and is headquartered in Pakistan? This group hasn't, of course, been able to pull off an attack in the United States in twelve years. Nor has it been able to mount an attack anywhere in the West since the attacks on London's transportation system eight years ago.

Osama bin Laden, the group's founder and charismatic leader, was buried at sea almost two years ago and despite concerns that his "martyrdom" would provoke a rash of attacks in the West or against Western interests in the Muslim world there has instead been...nothing.[29] Meanwhile, CIA drone strikes in Pakistan during President Obama's tenure alone have killed 38 of al Qaeda's leaders

in Pakistan, according to a count by the New America Foundation.

Those drone strikes were so effective that shortly before bin Laden died he was contemplating ordering what remained of al Qaeda to move to Kunar Province in the remote, heavily forested mountains of eastern Afghanistan, according to documents that were discovered following the SEAL assault on the compound where bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Core al Qaeda is going the way of the dodo.

It was the U.S. intelligence community's assessment within weeks of the Abbottabad operation in which bin Laden was killed that there was no Pakistani official complicity in bin Laden's five-year sojourn in Abbottabad and nothing in the "treasure trove" of thousands of pages of documents recovered from his compound provided any proof that bin Laden had support from Pakistani officials.

U.S. officials, however, continue to believe that the Pakistani government provides some level of support or at least acquiescence to the presence of the Haqqani network in Pakistan's tribal areas, which unlike a number of other Taliban groups doesn't attack the Pakistani state. Given that the Haqqanis are influential in eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan wants to be able to have some influence in that region after the US drawdown in 2014 this state of affairs is unlikely to change.

In short, if it is in Pakistan's interests to attack a Taliban group or associated extremist group like al Qaeda it will. And if it isn't, it won't. In this regard its helpful to recall that the United States provided massive support to the Sunni ultra-fundamentalist Afghan warlord Gulbudinn Hekmatyar during the war against the Soviets, but is now at war with him.

5. The future of US Pakistan relations and US regional security.

U.S.-Pakistani relations -- which were at a nadir in 2011 because of a CIA contractor killing two Pakistanis, the bin Laden raid and the death of some two dozen Pakistani soldiers during a NATO airstrike -- are gingerly improving. Pakistan has reopened the ground routes for NATO supplies to cross Pakistan into Afghanistan, which were closed for months to protest the deaths of the Pakistani soldiers during the NATO airstrike.[30]

Tellingly, Pakistan has never even threatened to close the crucial air corridor across Pakistan that allows U.S. and NATO aircraft to fly into Afghanistan. One can get a sense of how important this air corridor is from the fact that Kandahar Air Field near the Pakistan border in southern Afghanistan is reported to have the busiest runway in the world with some 700 flights landing or taking off there every day.[31]

Pakistan is the second most populous nation in the Muslim world and is armed with nuclear weapons. The United States cannot allow such an important country and an ally of the past three decades to become an enemy.

Michael J. Mazarr, professor of national security strategy at the U.S. National War College, and myself, together with a group of Pakistani economists, journalists and former government officials as well as their American counterparts with considerable experience in Pakistan, over the course of an examination of the troubled U.S.-Pakistan relationship during 2011 determined that a key step to improve the relationship would be a shift from a relationship in which the U.S. sends aid to Pakistan to one in which the emphasis is on trade that benefits both sides. In short, trade rather than aid.[32]

Textiles constitute 60% of Pakistani exports, half its manufacturing output and a third of its industrial

employment. Yet Pakistani textiles make up less than 4% of U.S. textile imports. Pakistani textile imports to the United States are taxed at roughly 12 percent, while those from France are taxed at only 3 percent. The tariffs on Pakistani textiles should be reduced.

A further step should be to negotiate a U.S.-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement. Even if such negotiations were protracted, as is often the case with such agreements, they would be a signaling device showing that the United States is serious about a new kind of relationship with Pakistan and would help to assuage the bruised Pakistani feelings surrounding the U.S.-Indian civilian nuclear deal.

Pakistanis want access to American markets, not more American handouts, which in any event come so laden with caveats and reporting requirements that a good deal of the aid is never actually spent. This is not to suggest that the U.S. should cease activities such as the aid that was given to the earthquake victims in Pakistan in 2005 and the flood victims in 2010 -- efficacious actions for which Pakistanis were grateful -- but rather that the US-Pakistan relationship should be reconceived of as not simply a donor-recipient relationship but rather a real relationship through increasing trade.[33] Such initiatives on tariffs and trade will surely confront political obstacles in the United States but could perhaps gain traction when proposed as an alternative to aid.

The issue that presently dominates Pakistanis' perception of the United States is the CIA drone campaign in their country. Upon taking office in January 2009, President Barack Obama almost immediately made drones one of his key national security tools. By February 2013, he had already authorized 301 strikes in Pakistan, six times more than the number of strikes carried out during President George W. Bush's entire eight years in office. Under Obama, the drone program accelerated from an average of one strike every 40 days to one every four days by mid-2011.

Using reports from a range of reliable news outlets, the New America Foundation, has calculated that over the life of the drone campaign in Pakistan, between 2004 and February 2013, some 1,963 to 3,293 people were killed. New America estimates that the confirmed number of Pakistani civilians who have been killed by drone strikes during the same time frame is between 261 to 305, or 10 percent of the total number of casualties.

The London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) and the D.C.-based Long War Journal also maintain counts of drone casualties in Pakistan. TBIJ reports that between 411 and 884 Pakistani civilians have been killed in U.S. drone attacks, representing 16-25 percent of the total casualties TBIJ has counted.[34] On the low end, the Long War Journal reports that 153 Pakistani civilians have been killed, representing just 5.6 percent of the 2,645 deaths it has recorded over the life of the drone campaign.

In March 2013 following a visit to Pakistan, Ben Emmerson, the U.N. special rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism, emailed the Associated Press that the Pakistani government had told him it has confirmed at least 400 civilian deaths by U.S. drones.[35] This number is in the range of the low estimate of 411 civilian deaths estimated by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and also comports with the New America Foundation figures estimating between 261 and 305 civilians have been killed and a further 200 to 330 "unknowns" have also been killed. These "unknowns" are individuals who may be militants or civilians, but there is not enough public information to make any such determination.

Even if it is the case that over time fewer civilians have been killed by drone strikes, the program is deeply unpopular within the Pakistani public.[36] During the summer of 2010 the New America Foundation sponsored one of the few public opinion polls ever to be conducted in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas where all the drone strikes are located and found that almost 90% of the respondents opposed U.S. military operations in the

region.[37] A Pew poll conducted in June 2012 found that just 17% of Pakistanis support the U.S. conducting drone strikes to help combat militancy in their country.

Beginning in 2012, Pakistani officials rarely based their criticism of U.S. drone strikes on the incidence of civilian casualties and have instead pointed, quite reasonably, to another objection: the U.S. violation of Pakistan's national sovereignty.[38] The Pakistani parliament voted in April 2012 to end any authorization for the program, a vote that the United States government has ignored.[39]

Seemingly at least partly in response to the deep unpopularity of the drone program in Pakistan, the number of drone shrikes has declined significantly since 2010 when there was the greatest number of strikes, 122, to 48 strikes last year.[40] This is a good development because if the cost of drone program that kills largely low level members of the Talban is deeply angering 180 million Pakistanis that is a very high price to pay.

On Afghanistan, Pakistan has some important common goals with the United States, NATO and Afghans themselves. Pakistan does not want to see Afghanistan collapse into a renewed civil war, which would destabilize Pakistan, nor does it want to see the Taliban in charge of the country again. When the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan the group resisted Pakistani efforts at control, while the Pakistani Taliban have killed tens of thousands inside Pakistan. These basic shared goals: No civil war and no Taliban control of Afghanistan can help to create the conditions for a successful post-2014 Afghanistan.

Pakistan also wants a Pashtun-led government in Kabul and for the Taliban to have some representation in the south and the east. These are also goals the Afghans can live with. Karzai is, after all, a Pashtun and given the fact that Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group, the next president of Afghanistan almost certainly will be a Pashtun. And other ethnic minorities can live with a situation in which the Taliban assume a number of provincial and district governorships providing they lay down their arms, join the political process and recognize the Afghan constitution.

The Afghans could go a long way to reducing the tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan by recognizing the Durand Line that was drawn by the British in 1893 as the border that divided Afghanistan from what is now Pakistan. The fact that Afghanistan doesn't officially recognize this border makes its claims that Pakistani-based militias routinely violate this border ring a little hollow. Also recognizing the border would reduce Pakistan's concerns about a renewed "Pashtunistan" movement that seeks to create a country for Pashtuns carved from both Pakistan and Afghanistan.[41] And it would be an important confidence building measure between the two countries.

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