

4th Pakistan-U.S. strategic dialogue – beyond the optics

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Has the Pakistan-U.S. 'trust deficit' been reduced? ⁱ

With the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, threatening 'severe consequences' and 'wanting more' from Pakistan following the failed bombing attempt in New York in May 2010,ⁱⁱ is the Pakistan-U.S. 'strategic dialogue' truly headed towards creating a 'long-term, deep-rooted' relationship between the two countries? Or, is it going to be taking the two into yet another roller coaster ride that has been the hallmark of the casual relationship over the last six decades?

Are the Americans really serious about building a more permanent friendship? A friendship that is willing to recognise Pakistan as a 'strategic' partner in the South Asian region, rather than being awarded with such high-sounding labels as the 'most allied ally', the 'frontline State', a 'non-NATO ally'; all short-term, meaningless labels that the U.S. has applied over the decades for tactical gains first against communist expansion, and at present with regard to the ongoing U.S.-NATO 'overseas contingency operations' inside Afghanistan.

Is there a future regional role for Pakistan in the American strategy under President Obama that calls for 'drawing down' of military forces in Afghanistan by July 2011?

Strategic dialogue: where we stand today

Following the 4th round of their bilateral 'strategic dialogue' in March 2010, Pakistan's relations with the United States entered, what Hillary Clinton referred to as, a 'new phase' whose beginning turned a corner in October 2009 when she and the Pakistani foreign minister agreed to raise the calibre of their 'strategic dialogue' in order to ensure and recommit themselves to building a productive and lasting relationship that will yield greater benefits for the people of the two countries.ⁱⁱⁱ

What set the 4th round apart from the previous dialogues was that it was the first that had been raised to the ministerial level, and which also included the

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Pakistan Army Chief, Gen. Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani, and the head of the country's Inter Services Intelligence, Lt. Gen. Shuja Pasha, whose presence, according to Ms Clinton, "reflects the importance that we place on this relationship." ^{iv}

Together with the 'high level' of the dialogue, what separated it from the kind of 'carrot and stick' approach the U.S. has invariably followed in its relations with Pakistan, was what has been offered on ground at the dialogue.

That includes:

1. U.S. \$ 125 million assistance to upgrade three Pakistani thermal power stations in Guddu, Jamshoro and Muzaffargarh by 2011 in order to improve the efficiency of the energy sector in the country.
2. Replacement of some 11,000 agricultural tube well pumps in the country.
3. Assistance to the Benazir Income Support Programme.
4. Assurance of the release of U.S. \$ 2.1 billion of the Coalition Support Fund (CSF) claims for 2009. Claims under CSF for 2008 amounting to \$1.1 billion have been already been cleared by the U.S. administration. Successful negotiations in Washington on Pakistan's claims would lead to the release of \$1.2 billion by the end of June 2010. The remaining \$700 million would be processed for disbursement in the next fiscal year. According to a U.S. embassy spokesman in Pakistan on May 4, America has released \$656 million to Pakistan for some of the costs incurred in 2009 in military operations against Taliban militants.^v
5. Assurance to fast track some of the military hardware required by Pakistan. The U.S. has agreed to provide 14 F-16 jet fighters by the December 2010.

Some of the other issues that were taken up in the strategic discussions included:

1. Early approval of the U.S. appropriation of \$7.5 billion under the Kerry-Lugar bill. Pakistan is supposed to receive \$500 million under the Kerry-Lugar law during the ongoing fiscal year 2009-10. The delegation sought U.S. assurances for the early release of \$1.5 billion under the same head for the next fiscal year to carry out Pakistan's development agenda.
2. Provision of immediate trade market access to Pakistan
3. Access to civil nuclear technology to combat the energy crisis in Pakistan through a deal similar to the one signed with India – U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has assured the delegation that the U.S. will “consider” Pakistan's request for a civil nuclear deal. However, she has also pointed out that the deal with India did not happen “easily or quickly” and was the result of “many, many” years of strategic dialogue.^{vi}

4. Pakistan's demand for the discontinuation of U.S. drone attacks on Pakistani territory. There have been some 30 such attacks by the U.S. drones inside Pakistan since January 2010. The attacks have often resulted in civilian deaths, stirring anger among Pakistanis and even bolstering support for the Taliban and anti-U.S. sentiment. Two months before the dialogue, the U.S. had offered to provide Pakistan with a dozen unarmed 'Shadow' drones to Pakistan that will significantly upgrade its reconnaissance and surveillance ability and will supply video to help cue strikes from the ground or the air.^{vii}
5. Early establishment of the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) in the Khyber-Pakhtoonkha province. A few days after the dialogue, on March 29, citing security reasons, the U.S. offered Pakistan a free trade pact instead of establishing the ROZs in the tribal region. A U.S. delegation led by Congressman David Price visited Pakistan at the end of March 2010 in order to convince Pakistan to take back its demand for ROZs in the tribal areas.^{viii}

In addition to the actual commitments, there was also a pledge to expand the scope of the bilateral dialogue in some 12 fields, including: economy and trade; energy; defence; security, strategic stability and non-proliferation; law enforcement and counter-terrorism; science and technology; education; agriculture; water; health; communications; and public diplomacy. A policy steering group has also been established to intensify and expand the 'sectoral dialogue' process. There will be a series of sectoral meetings of U.S. officials with concerned officials in Islamabad to work out the details of assistance required in these fields.^{ix}

Even with the 'sectoral dialogue' process underway following the 4th round of 'strategic dialogue', the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had begun assistance to a number of projects in Pakistan for the year 2010 before the official strategic dialogue in March 2010 (see Appendix).

The foreign minister of Pakistan and the U.S. secretary of state have also "reaffirmed their commitment" to a "wide-ranging, long-term and substantive strategic partnership between the United States and Pakistan;"^x and the next round of the dialogue process is expected to be held in Islamabad some time by the end of 2010 after the sectoral dialogue teams have worked out the details of the kind and quantum of assistance required in each of the 12 sectors identified during the dialogue.

The presence of Gen. Kiyani and the head of Pakistan's military inter services intelligence at the 4th round of the strategic dialogue was an import milestone that

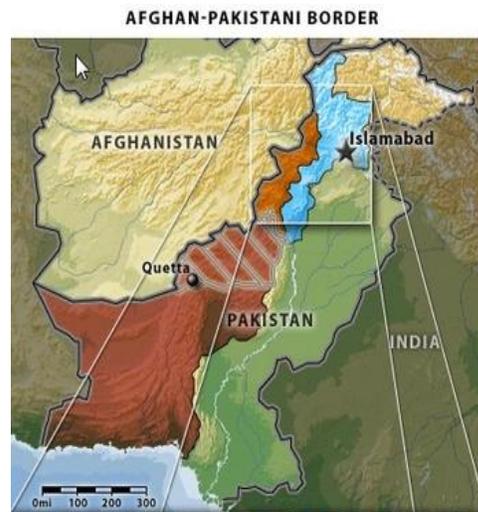
prepared the ground for meaningful security cooperation. The very fact that the dialogue was attended by the US secretaries of State and Defence, representatives from the military, the National Security Council and aid agencies made the dialogue a substantive process.

In a hearing before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on March 25, 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was emphatic that the U.S. has now made a “strategic priority” to strengthen its partnership with Pakistan, and that U.S. efforts in Pakistan were vital for America’s success in Afghanistan. The hearing set the stage for the upcoming debate in the U.S. Congress over the White House requests for \$33 billion in new war funding, coupled with \$4.5 billion in foreign assistance, chiefly for the Afghanistan-Pakistan policy.

But while the contents of Gen. Kiyani’s meetings with U.S. high military command remain secret, the dialogue process led by the American secretary of state and the Pakistani foreign minister was able to set up an ‘architecture’ of future cooperation based on a 56-page comprehensive document outlining Pakistan’s interests that was made available to the Americans before the dialogue process. Going by the ‘architecture’ analogy, the two countries have now put in place a plan for the future structure of their relationship that would be raised on cooperation on a more solid foundation.

An ‘architecture’ that is based on providing and maintaining a sustainable mutually beneficial growth of interests in vast array of political, economic, military social sectors. An ‘architecture’ that is based on not just relations between governments but those which will transcend official contacts to reach out to people of the two countries. This is what Hillary Clinton may have had in mind when she addressed the people of Pakistan directly in her remarks along the Pakistani foreign minister, stating that dialogue that America now seeks “is not with the government of Pakistan, but with the people of Pakistan.”^{xi}

Despite the gifts, undoubtedly, the approach to relations with Pakistan remains very much embedded in the larger context of its security and military



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policy in Afghanistan and the ongoing 'surge' operations in southern Afghanistan province of Helmand and the coming operation in the heart of the Taliban territory in Kandahar – both of these provinces share border with the Balochistan province in Pakistan. The operations in Kandahar, expected to begin in June 2010, will be "as critical in Afghanistan as Baghdad was in Iraq in the surge."^{xii}

Following the operations in Marja, the U.S. military has begun to tighten the screws on the Afghan Taliban, and is becoming increasingly critical of their 'safe havens' across the border inside Pakistan, primarily along the eastern and southern Afghan provinces that merge into the Pakistani tribal regions and the Balochistan province which is increasingly becoming of critical importance for the American war effort not only because of being a vital route for supplies, but also because of the rising concerns about the Taliban and Al Qaeda presence in the provincial capital of Quetta.

Since September 2009, besides the increased drone strikes in the tribal regions of Pakistan, the Americans have also now focussed their attention on the Balochistan province, claiming that Quetta, the capital of the province, has become a major Taliban base for the so-called 'Quetta Shura' from where Mullah Omer and his commanders plan and launch cross-border strikes. Both the U.S. ambassador in Pakistan, Anne Patterson, and the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley A. MaChrystal, have warned the Obama administration that the 'Quetta Shura' has now become a major command centre for the increasing attacks by the Taliban.^{xiii}

Although Pakistan has committed some 140,000 of its troops for operations against the Taliban and other extremist groups inside its own territory where troops have never before been deployed, it has so far resisted pressure from the United States to expand the ground operations by its military forces to North Waziristan, from where the Americans have alleged that the Afghan guerrilla faction led by Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani stage attacks on U.S. and NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Despite resisting ground operations as in other tribal Agencies, the Pakistan armed forces are already carrying out selective operations against hostile targets including the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in North Waziristan.

However, the U.S. media continues to allege that Pakistan is pursuing a double game in seeking to maintain its relations with the U.S. and Afghanistan, as well as some 'favourite' insurgent networks, in order to shape the outcome when the U.S. starts 'drawing down' of its fighting forces in Afghanistan in July 2011.

Pakistan's complete and absolute willingness to take action against the Taliban and Al Qaeda factions not just inside its tribal areas, but now also inside southern Punjab, has been a consistent demand by the U.S. officials according to leaks in the American media. In that context, getting Pakistan on board is considered to be of extreme importance to the ongoing 'surge' operations by the U.S. and NATO/ISAF forces.

However, what may have been of some concern to the U.S. officials and may have led to their decision to invite the Pakistani military and intelligence chief for the 4th round of strategic dialogue was a rare briefing to journalists by Gen. Kiyani on his return from Brussels in February 2010, that it was in fact a peaceful and friendly Afghanistan that was required in the region. The general owned up to the war on terror inside Pakistan as 'our war' and not the 'U.S. war'. He also identified a comprehensive Pakistani strategy based on four phases of 'clear, hold, build and transfer', maintaining that these fundamentals should remain strong, short- and long-term interests be reconciled, strategic direction should be maintained, and most important of all, coordination with U.S./NATO/ISAF forces be effect-based.^{xiv}

Of course, there is much to hope for; taking into consideration the joint statement that was issued after the strategic dialogue. On the other hand, in the case of Pakistan and the United States, the very foundation on which the two countries are now planning to raise the future structure of their relations, is, going by the 'architecture' metaphor, unstable. The proof of this instability can be found in the history of Pakistan-U.S. relations that have always been based on short-term tactical gains for both sides, as, for example, Pakistan's support in the fight against communism from the 1950s to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. And, in the post-Soviet era, much of the Pakistan-U.S. relations have revolved around the U.S.-led 'war on terror' and Pakistan's support to 'disrupt, dismantle and defeat' the militant Muslim groups – namely, Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the fight against communism, and now against terrorism, Pakistan-U.S. relations, therefore, have thrived primarily only when the U.S. 'national' interests have come face-to-face with external threats. Much of the U.S. assistance to Pakistan, consequently, has invariably gone into reinforcement of Pakistan's security apparatus at the cost of the long-term developmental growth needs of the country in various other sectors such as agriculture, trade, investment and industry.

Only if the U.S. partnership can in the next five years build on high-impact infrastructural programmes in Pakistan, it would be visible to the people of Pakistan; and whose effects are clearly felt to have made a difference, only then

can one claim that the ‘new phase’ has begun to make a dent in the overwhelming hostility that the majority of the people of Pakistan feel towards the United States. Only then can the government and the people of the two countries move towards constructing a relationship that will improve people’s lives, reduce the ‘trust deficit’ and help take Pakistan-U.S. relationship beyond the optics.

APPENDIX

US Assisted Projects in Pakistan – 2010

(Source: United States Agency for International Development.)

ENERGY

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>Improve operating capacity of Tarbela Dam.</i>	<i>January 2010:</i> U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan announced that the U.S. government will contribute \$16.5 million (1.4 billion rupees) to improve the operating capacity of the Tarbela Dam hydroelectric plant. Grant funding will be provided to the Ministry of Water and Power (MoWP), and implemented through the Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA).
2.	<i>Up-gradation of Guddu, Jamshoro, and Muzaffargarh thermal power stations.</i>	<i>March 2010:</i> Implementation Letter signed between USAID and Pakistan’s Ministry of Water and Power, for US \$125 million commitment to improve the efficiency of the country’s energy sector. USAID will provide \$51 million in assistance to refurbish, rehabilitate and renovate the Guddu, Jamshoro and Muzaffargarh power stations by the next 12 months, depending on the availability of spare parts. The refurbishment of the three power stations will increase power to Pakistan by 315 megawatts.

GOVERNANCE

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Program</i>	<i>January 2010:</i> A three-year strategic plan launched in collaboration with the Sindh Provincial Assembly. The plan provides a blueprint for all the legislature’s departments to

	(PLSP).	work together toward common objectives of becoming an effective Assembly, protecting the citizens' rights and working for providing them better quality of life.
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HUMANITARIAN

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>Assistance to Bolton Market Traders.</i>	<i>February 2010:</i> Programme launched to provide \$10 million (Rs. 840 million) in cash grants to Bolton Market traders who lost their businesses in the fire that followed city-wide riots in December 2009. The assistance augments \$41.6 million (Rs. 3.5 billion) in relief already provided to the traders by the federal and Sindh provincial governments through the Karachi Chamber of Commerce.
2.	<i>Assistance kits for Bajaur.</i>	<i>February 2010:</i> U.S. Consul General delivered 1,000 humanitarian assistance kits to the Political Agent for Bajaur Agency, in response to an urgent request made by the FATA Secretariat. The kits contained mattresses, quilts, cooking equipment and other essential items to bring immediate relief to some 10,000 people in Bajaur Agency.
3.	<i>Support to Benazir Income Support Program (BISP).</i>	<i>March 2010:</i> Rs. 7.2 billion (\$85 million) announced in March 2010 by the U.S. Coordinator for Civilian Assistance, Ambassador Robin L. Raphel, to help support some 600,000 low-income Pakistani families through the BISP programme.

EDUCATION

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>Center for Entrepreneurial Development (CED)</i>	<i>February 2010:</i> Initial Rs. 42.5 million (\$500,000) provided to the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in Karachi to develop the expertise of the CED staff and build the Center's capacity for future expansion to support new businesses, help to establish new Pakistani enterprises, and connect students with the private sector.

2.	<i>FATA Center for Excellence for the Gems and Jewellery.</i>	<i>February 2010:</i> The U.S. announced plans to help create a FATA Center for Excellence for the Gems and Jewellery Sector during a graduation ceremony for FATA students who had recently completed a gemology training course funded by the USAID. The U.S. is providing the top 15 graduates with gem faceting machines that should enable them to establish their own small enterprises.
3.	<i>Training for Pakistani women entrepreneurs.</i>	<i>March 2010:</i> More than 100 women entrepreneurs from Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, NWFP and FATA participated in training programmes held in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar from March 25 to April 9, 2010. USAID will conduct another round of trainings in May and June 2010. It is expected that by June 2010, USAID will have trained nearly 350 current and potential women exporters across Pakistan.
4.	<i>Refurbishing of the laboratory at the Girls Model School, Islamabad.</i>	<i>April 2010:</i> Congresswoman Jackson Lee visited the Girls' Model School in Islamabad to discuss curriculum planning, educational development, and student achievement. The school's new science laboratory has been refurbished and supplied by the USAID ED-LINKS project, a five-year, \$90 million project working at all levels of the education system to improve student learning outcomes and to strengthen federal, provincial and district government capacity to deliver quality education.
5.	<i>Assistance for higher education budget.</i>	<i>May 2010:</i> U.S. \$ 45 million to be injected to Higher Education Commission budget to help 28 public universities in Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa, southern Punjab and Balochistan in budgetary shortfall and fee waiver for more than 7000 students from the IDP (internally displaced persons) areas.

INFRASTRUCTURE

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>Construction of</i>	<i>February 2010:</i> The U.S. is financing the

	<i>Tank-Makeen road.</i>	construction of the important Tank-Makeen road through the FATA Secretariat under the December 31, 2009, Implementation Letter pledging USAID infrastructure support in South Waziristan. When complete, it will provide lifelines for development activities and commerce for people living in the FATA.
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ECONOMY & TRADE

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>FATA marble mining industry</i>	<i>March 2010:</i> U.S. Consul General announced a 187.6 million rupee (\$2.23 million) agreement to provide a modern machinery pool for the marble miners of Bajaur and Mohmand agencies in FATA.

HEALTH

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>Ambulances for four district health departments.</i>	<i>February 2010:</i> U.S. government donated 40 ambulances to the Dadu, Jafferabad, Vehari and Multan district health departments. The ambulances will help save the lives of those in need of urgent medical care, especially pregnant women and newborns, by providing more rapid access to local health centres.

COMMUNICATIONS

No.	Project Field	Status
1.	<i>Radio access in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa & FATA.</i>	<i>May 2010: U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan signed an \$8 million agreement with the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation to purchase and install new AM transmitters in Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan. The project will expand radio access for millions of Pakistanis in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.</i>

Notes & References

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