



Instability in Pakistan: why and how should Australia contribute to counter the causes of instability?

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Abstract

This paper examines instability in Pakistan, and addresses the questions of whether and how Australia should contribute to counter its causes. It argues that Pakistan is of long-term importance to Australia's interests in South Asia, and that Australia can do more to build a stronger relationship with Pakistan, which would serve the national interests of both countries.

The paper proposes that the relationship could be enhanced through niche security sector contributions that would assist Islamabad in addressing internal sources of instability. It recommends two specific initiatives, namely a domestic security counter-terrorism policy and an enhanced policing policy, concluding that these initiatives would enhance the capacity of Pakistani security forces and support Australia's national interests for security and stability in South Asia.

Instability in Pakistan: why and how should Australia contribute to counter the causes of instability?

Introduction

Pakistan will remain an important partner to Australia in the region, regardless of the transition in Afghanistan.

Air Marshal Mark Binskin,
then Vice Chief of the Australian Defence Force, August 2013 ¹

Australia has increased its engagement in South Asia since committing military forces to Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks in the US.² The focus of Australia's strategic narrative has tended to centre on Afghanistan, with any reference to Pakistan inextricably linked to countering the insurgency in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan is of long-term importance to Australia's interests in South Asia, and Australia must therefore have a separate policy for Pakistan.

The Australia-Pakistan relationship has been longstanding, with Canberra being one of the first to establish diplomatic relations with Islamabad in 1947.³ The relationship spans political, security, developmental, economic and trade relations. The two countries have had a formal bilateral trade agreement in place since 1990.⁴ Their security relationship dates back to the Cold War period and deepened this century as a result of Australia's military commitment to the international forces in Afghanistan.⁵ Since 2008, the Australian Government has intensified its relations with Pakistan, with particular emphasis on economic reform, development, democratic governance, and security cooperation focused on defence and law enforcement.⁶

However, Australia can do more to build a stronger relationship with Pakistan, which would serve the national interests of both countries. In particular, this paper proposes that Australia's relationship with Pakistan could be enhanced through niche security sector contributions that would assist Islamabad in addressing internal sources of instability.

The paper substantiates this proposition by first summarising Australia's national interest in Pakistan and defining the threats to Pakistan's stability. It then recommends two specific initiatives, namely a domestic security counter-terrorism policy and an enhanced policing policy, to assist Pakistan in countering the causes of instability.

Why Pakistan matters

The Australian Government has publicly asserted that the stability and security of Pakistan is important to Australia's national interest, saying that 'Australia is committed to supporting Pakistan as a partner in its efforts to address security threats, build economic prosperity and enhance development'.⁷ This commitment from Canberra is founded on the premise that stability in Pakistan matters because of its influence on Australia's regional and broader interests.⁸ Commentators have similarly argued that the geopolitical situation of Pakistan is significant to Australia's interests in the Indo-Pacific region and is important to the international community's interests in South Asia.⁹

Kate Boswood *et al* assess that Pakistan is geopolitically significant due to four key attributes.¹⁰ First, it is located at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East, and is adjacent to the global energy supply artery in the Indian Ocean. Second, it has a large population base of over 170 million people, with a coming 'youth bulge' in the future. Third, Pakistan is nuclear-armed. Fourth, it has a history of using destabilising methods to pursue its national security interests, such as militancy and terrorism. Based on these attributes, any critical

destabilisation or failure of the Pakistan state has the potential to negatively impact the stability of South Asia and, indeed, the global order.

Australia's national interest in Pakistan is also linked to the continued existence of major terrorist organisations and training camps based in Pakistan's periphery.¹¹ The Federal Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan are regarded as the 'global hub for al Qaeda leadership'.¹² They also harbour other terrorist groups, such as Laskar-e-Tayyiba and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which have been responsible for planning and conducting attacks in Western nations.¹³

As noted by Claude Rakisits, the 'pivotal role' of Pakistan to neutralise these threats is seen as geopolitically important to the rest of the world (or at least to Western-aligned states).¹⁴ The importance of this role has been recognised by the Australian Government, with Air Marshal Mark Binskin, then Vice Chief of the Defence Force, noting in a speech to the Pakistan Command and Staff College in 2013 that 'the success of Pakistan's efforts to counter militant insurgency is critical to regional and global security'.¹⁵

Pakistan also matters because its location and historical influence make it a 'critical player' in the efforts to stabilise Afghanistan.¹⁶ With Australia's continued commitment of military forces and aid to Afghanistan, both during and after the transition of the NATO International Security Assistance Force mission, the security and stability of Afghanistan remains significant to Australia's national interest.¹⁷ Of particular concern to Australia is the existence of terrorists groups in Pakistan that serve to undermine the security and stability of Afghanistan.

It is widely contended that the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network have safe havens on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and receive covert support from some elements within Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate.¹⁸ According to Thomas Barfield, 'if Pakistan ever reversed its policy of support, as it did to Mullah Omar in 2001, the insurgency in Afghanistan would be dealt a fatal blow'.¹⁹ In recognition of the risk these safe havens have on Afghanistan, then Prime Minister of Australia Julia Gillard asserted in October 2010 that 'stability in Pakistan, and the uprooting of extremist networks that have established themselves in the border regions and terrorise both countries, is essential to stability in Afghanistan'.²⁰

The final characteristic which highlights why Pakistan matters is its troubled relationship with nuclear-armed India. Mohan Malik assesses that this is due to Pakistan's perception that 'India's size, power and ambitions are seen as an existential threat' to its survival as an independent state.²¹ This is based on a history of conflict between the two nations since they divided in 1947, including the 1971 India-Pakistan War, where—as a result of India's military action—Pakistan saw the dismemberment of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh.²²

This threat perception is further reinforced by India's interests in Afghanistan via the Indo-Afghan Strategic Partnership, which is assessed by Islamabad as an attempt to strategically encircle Pakistan.²³ Stable Pakistan/India relations are in Australia's national interest, as it benefits from an economically-prosperous India. Two-way trade between the two nations was worth approximately A\$16 billion in 2014 and is forecast to grow significantly.²⁴ Pakistan, therefore, matters greatly to Australia's economic dividend from trade with South Asia.

Threats to Pakistan's security

In setting the context for how Australia can utilise bilateral defence and policing initiatives to develop its relations with Islamabad, it is important to understand that Pakistan is facing what some have called a 'perfect storm' of crises, based on an increasing internal terrorist threat and continuing economic stagnation.²⁵ Pakistan's Government estimates that in the decade following September 11, the militancy in Pakistan has been responsible for the deaths of over 5000 security personnel and more than 46,000 civilians.²⁶ The economic price of this militancy is estimated to have cost Pakistan more than US\$67 billion.²⁷

According to William Maley, 'Pakistan is a country under threat, from a "witches' brew" of terrorism and extremism'.²⁸ Pakistan is seeing a rise in the 'Talibanisation' of its society, which is threatening the influence of its government.²⁹ While this is largely restricted to Pakistan's

periphery, in particular the Federal Administered Tribal Areas, the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan,³⁰ Malik contends that this rising militancy has become an increased threat to the survival of Pakistan—and greater than that posed by the conventional threat from India.³¹

Pakistan’s response to the increasing extremist threat has been haphazard, in part because of weak counterinsurgency capabilities within Pakistan’s security forces and the lack of a comprehensive government strategy to defeat militant organisations.³² Rakisits contends that Islamabad’s response to this threat requires the Pakistan Army to ‘hunt down the Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda and their Pakistani allies and permanently shut down their network’, while at the same time ‘extend[ing] the rule of law and promot[ing] sustainable economic development’ in Pakistan’s periphery.³³

One recent study has concluded that increased threats of terrorism in Pakistan are the result of high inequity in Pakistani society and poor policing and judicial practice.³⁴ Further, the poor governance, lack of political integration and the low socio-economic development of the periphery regions of Pakistan, particularly in the Federal Administered Tribal Areas, has set the conditions for the growth of terrorist organisations in these regions.³⁵

As a result, these areas are central to the instability of Pakistan.³⁶ The ingredients for increasing threats from terrorism are amplified through poor policing and the use of informal law and justice systems, which are susceptible to corruption and bias.³⁷ Accordingly, it is in these areas where Australia has an opportunity to assist Pakistan, and benefit as a result.

Policy opportunities

Australia lacks the influence to address the macro issues in Pakistan and thus should focus on niche opportunities to influence Australia’s strategic interests.³⁸ The Australian Government is well positioned to enhance its relationship with Pakistan, as it has very little ‘political baggage or perceived agenda’ in comparison to other Western nations.³⁹ Australia has excellent access to the Pakistani Government, where a functioning bureaucracy and military architecture exists.⁴⁰ These niche opportunities should be concentrated on problems of instability emanating from Pakistan’s geographic peripheries.

Initiative 1.1

Provide an interagency counterinsurgency training team to train Pakistani security leaders in Pakistan.

The first recommended initiative is that an Australian interagency Counterinsurgency Training Team should be established to educate mid-level leaders in the Pakistani security agencies, aimed specifically at the Major- to Colonel-level in the Pakistani Armed Forces and police. The aim would be to address the identified weaknesses in the Pakistan Army’s counterinsurgency operations, linked to the lack of a comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy.

A review of publicly-available statements indicates that the Australian Government has already offered Pakistan opportunities to conduct counterinsurgency and counter improvised explosive device (IED) training and exchanges in Australia.⁴¹ The current counterinsurgency training concept is concentrated on an exchange between the two nations respective Staff Colleges, which commenced in 2010.⁴² However, this program is constrained by the number of Pakistani

personnel able to attend activities in Australia. The current approach, therefore, restricts the potential to improve Pakistan’s whole-of-government counterinsurgency capability.

It is proposed instead that the Australian Government should offer an interagency Counterinsurgency Training Team to train Pakistani personnel in Pakistan. The emphasis would be to develop Pakistan’s ability to:

- Develop comprehensive, whole-of-government strategies in the unstable periphery regions of Pakistan in order to address the causes of terrorism and extremism;
- Plan and conduct interagency operations; and
- Develop counter IED training packages, with an emphasis on intelligence-led operations to enable the targeting of IED manufacturers and supply chains.⁴³

Sending an Australian team to Pakistan would demonstrate Australia’s commitment to Pakistan’s security and stability, and would also allow for a higher number of Pakistani security and government personnel to complete the training. Its prerequisites would include an appropriate status of forces agreement and a secure site for the training team.

Initiative 1.2
Provide assistance in community policing development in Pakistan’s periphery.

The second suggested initiative relates to community policing. A number of commentators have identified that local policing practices in Pakistan’s periphery are a critical cause for terrorism and extremism.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is recommended that the Australian Federal Police (AFP) develop a Community Policing Program for local police, with an emphasis on the periphery regions of Pakistan.

The program should aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increase governance of the local police and judiciary through making them more accountable to civilian oversight;⁴⁵
- Reduce the endemic levels of police and judicial corruption;
- Improve the professionalism of local police forces and have them focus on providing a sense of community security, in particular focusing on improved training for lower ranks;⁴⁶ and
- Develop the ability to conduct interagency counterinsurgency operations.

This initiative could be conducted as part of Initiative 1.1 or be delivered separately. The key issue for this program would be how to deliver it within the periphery regions of Pakistan, as these areas would likely be unsuitable for the AFP to operate in. Therefore, it is recommended that this program be delivered by a local or international implementing power, in partnership with the AFP.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Because of Pakistan's global geopolitical significance and its influence on regional security, it is in Australia's interest to ensure that Pakistan remains a secure and stable nation. It is evident that Pakistan's security and stability is threatened by the existential threat of terrorism and extremism. To address these threats, Pakistan should be encouraged to develop a whole-of-government approach to counterinsurgency. It is in this area that Australia has an opportunity to support Pakistan and, by doing so, enhance the bilateral relationship and help protect Australia's national interests in South Asia.

Australia's growing economic ties with South Asia are reliant on a stable and secure environment for trade and investment. Furthermore, Australia's objectives in supporting a democratic and stable Afghanistan are directly affected by the Pakistan Government's ability to control malevolent elements prevalent in its border areas. The two initiatives suggested in this paper seek to enhance the capacity of Pakistani security forces, and would support Australia's national interests for security and stability in South Asia.

Notes

- 1 Mark Binskin, 'Speech to Pakistan Command and Staff College, Quetta', Address by the Vice Chief of Defence Force, [Australian] *Department of Defence* [website], 16 August 2013, p. 14, available at <<http://www.defence.gov.au/VCDF/docs/speeches/130816%20-%20AIR%20MARSHAL%20MARK%20BINSKIN%20SPEECH%20TO%20PAKISTAN%20COMMAND%20AND%20STAFF%20COLLEGE.pdf>> accessed 2 September 2015.
- 2 This paragraph based on Claude Rakisits, 'Engaging Pakistan', *Lowy Institute* [website], 3 December 2008, p. 3, available at <<http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/engaging-pakistan>> accessed 17 October 2015; and Kate Boswood, Jacob Townsend and Silal Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', *Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)* [website], Strategic Insights No. 55, March 2015, pp. 1-2, available at <<https://www.aspi.org.au/publications/strategic-insights-55-beyond-af-pak-australias-long-term-interests-in-pakistan>> accessed 17 October 2015.
- 3 Binskin, 'Speech to Pakistan Command and Staff College, Quetta', p. 10.
- 4 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 'Country Brief: Pakistan', *DFAT* [website], available at <<http://dfat.gov.au/geo/pakistan/pages/pakistan-country-brief.aspx>> accessed 19 August 2015.
- 5 David Brewster, 'The India-Australia Security Engagement, Opportunities and Challenges', *Gateway House* [website], Research Paper No. 9, 30 October 2013, p. 41, available at <<http://www.gatewayhouse.in/the-india-australia-security-engagement-opportunities-and-challenges/>> accessed 19 October 2015.
- 6 DFAT, 'Country Brief: Pakistan'.
- 7 DFAT, 'Country Brief: Pakistan'.
- 8 This position is also supported by statements by Australian ministers. A clear example is when then Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd said in 2013 that '[w]hat happens in Pakistan directly affects the security of the region and Australia's long-term national interests. All countries of our region and beyond will benefit from a Pakistan which is democratic, stable and prosperous': Kevin Rudd, 'Australia and Pakistan: a long-term friendship', [Australian] *Foreign Minister* [website], 28 November 2010, available at <http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2010/kr_sp_101128.aspx?ministerid=2> accessed 25 August 2015.

- 9 Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', pp. 2-7.
- 10 Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', pp. 6-7.
- 11 Rakisits, 'Engaging Pakistan', p. 4.
- 12 Moeed Yusuf, 'Pakistan-US relations: an inconvenient partnership of convenience', in Ashutsh Misra and Michael E. Clarke (eds.), *Pakistan's Stability Paradox*, Routledge: London, 2012, p. 10.
- 13 Laskar-e-Tayyiba has conducted attacks in the region, predominantly in India, and has had operatives arrested in the US, and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan was involved in the 2010 Times Square plot in New York City: Seth Jones, 'After the Withdrawal - A Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan', Testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa and Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific- United States House of Representatives, *Rand* [website], 19 March 2013, pp. 1-3, available at <<http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT382.html>> accessed 16 February 2015.
- 14 Rakisits, 'Engaging Pakistan', p. 4.
- 15 Binskin, 'Speech to Pakistan Command and Staff College, Quetta', p. 14. See also DFAT, 'Country Brief: Pakistan'; Julie Bishop, 'The role of women and families in challenging terrorist propaganda', Address by the Australian Foreign Minister to the Regional Summit to Counter Extremism Panel, [Australian] *Foreign Minister* [website], 11 June 2015, available at <http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2015/jb_sp_150611.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FIS0K%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D> accessed 2 September 2015; Mateen Haider, 'Australian Defence Chief calls on General Raheel Sharif', *Dawn News* [website], 11 February 2015, available at <<http://www.dawn.com/news/1162925/australian-defence-chief-calls-on-general-raheel-sharif>> accessed 2 September 2015; Angus Houston, 'Opening Statement to Media Roundtable 13 September 2010', Address by Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, [Australian] *Department of Defence* [website], available at <<http://www.defence.gov.au/media/speechtpl.cfm?CurrentId=10808>> accessed 2 September 2015.
- 16 Rakisits, 'Engaging Pakistan', p. 4.
- 17 Julie Bishop, 'Address to North Atlantic Council', Address by the Australian Foreign Minister, [Australian] *Foreign Minister* [website], 24 April 2015, available at <http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2015/jb_sp_150424.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FIS0K%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D> accessed 2 September 2015. This national interest includes 400 ADF personnel committed to the NATO Resolute Support Mission and a financial commitment of US\$300 million to security sector sustainment in Afghanistan.
- 18 Many academics, academic journals and journalists state these facts: see Jones, 'After the Withdrawal- A Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan', pp. 7-9; Rakisits, 'Engaging Pakistan', p. 4; A. Nicoll, 'US and Pakistan: a troubled relationship', *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1 March 2012, abstract available at <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13567888.2012.671054>> accessed 19 October 2015; Mohan Malik, *China and India: great power rivals*, First Forum Press: Boulder, 2012, pp. 176-9; and William Maley, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan relations', in Misra and Clarke, *Pakistan's Stability Paradox*, pp. 128-30.
- 19 Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: a cultural and political history*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2010, p. 328.
- 20 The statement also noted that Australia's and NATO International Security Assistance Force's 'new strategy ... includes a greater focus on partnership with Pakistan to address violent extremism in the border regions that threatens both Pakistan and Afghanistan: see Julia Gillard, 'No safe haven', Prime Ministerial Statement, House of Representatives, [Australian] *Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet* [website], 10 October 2010, available at <<http://pmtranscripts.dpmpc.gov.au/release/transcript-17471>> accessed 24 August 2015.
- 21 Malik, *China and India*, p. 172.
- 22 Paul J. Smith, 'The Tilting Triangle: geopolitics of the China-India-Pakistan relationship', *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2013, pp. 314-6.
- 23 Smruti Pattanaik, 'India's Afghan Policy: beyond bilateralism', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July-August 2015, p. 576.
- 24 Julie Bishop, 'Tabling and Statement in Parliament - Australia-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement', Address by the Australian Foreign Minister, [Australian] *Foreign Minister* [website], 28

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- October 2015, available at
<http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2014/jb_sp_141028.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FISOK%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D> accessed 2 September 2015.
- 25 Malik, *China and India*, p. 165.
- 26 Zain Rafique and Muhammad Azfar Anwar, 'Insurgency in Afghanistan: implications for Pakistan's internal and external security', *Defense & Security Analysis*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 12 June 2014, p. 273.
- 27 Safiya Aftab, 'The 2014 ISAF pullout from Afghanistan: impacts on Pakistan', *NOREF [Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre]* [website], 12 December 2013, p. 2, available at
<<http://www.peacebuilding.no/Regions/Asia/Afghanistan/Publications/The-2014-ISAF-pullout-from-Afghanistan-impacts-on-Pakistan>> accessed 19 October 2015.
- 28 Maley, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan relations', p. 132.
- 29 'Talibanisation' is a process of promulgation of an ideology of Islamic purification, and the emergence of organised groups that see implementation of this ideology as a fundamental goal and a consequent limiting of the autonomous capacity of the state, either throughout the country or in particular regions: Maley, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan relations', p. 131.
- 30 Clause Rakisits, 'The evolution of the Pakistani Taliban', in Misra and Clarke, *Pakistan's Stability Paradox*, p. 135.
- 31 Malik, *China and India*, p. 176.
- 32 Christopher L. Budihas, 'What Drives Pakistan's Interest in Afghanistan?', School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College: Fort Leavenworth, April 2011, p. 12.
- 33 Rakisits, 'The evolution of the Pakistani Taliban', p. 150.
- 34 Research conducted at Forman Christian College, Lahore, Pakistan, cited in Shahib Haider Syed, Luqman Saeed and Roger Martin, 'Causes and Incentives for Terrorism in Pakistan', *Journal of Applied Security Research*, Vol 10, No. 2, 9 April 2015, pp. 198-201.
- 35 Rakisits, 'The evolution of the Pakistani Taliban', p. 137.
- 36 Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', p. 8.
- 37 This is based on Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', pp. 8-12; and Rakisits, 'The evolution of the Pakistani Taliban', pp. 138-40.
- 38 Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', p. 2.
- 39 Rakisits, 'Engaging Pakistan', p. 6.
- 40 Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', p. 2.
- 41 Binskin, 'Speech to Pakistan Command and Staff College, Quetta', pp. 10-14; DFAT, 'Country Brief: Pakistan'; Department of Defence, 'Chief of the Defence Force visits Pakistan', 13 February 2015, [Australian] *Department of Defence* [website], available at
<<http://news.defence.gov.au/2015/02/13/chief-of-the-defence-force-visits-pakistan/>> accessed 2 September 2015; and Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin and Hayley Channer, 'Terms of Engagement - Australia's regional defence diplomacy', *ASPI* [website], July 2013, pp. 61-2, available at
<<https://www.aspi.org.au/publications/terms-of-engagement-australias-regional-defence-diplomacy>> accessed 19 October 2015.
- 42 Bateman, Bergin and Channer, 'Terms of Engagement - Australia's regional defence diplomacy', p. 61
- 43 Note that the counter IED training concept announced by Air Chief Marshal Binskin on his visit to Pakistan stated that the two nations would explore options to cooperate on counter IED training, exercises and exchanges, however, there are no further details available at this time: Department of Defence, 'Chief of the Defence Force visits Pakistan'.
- 44 Syed, Saeed and Martin, 'Causes and Incentives for Terrorism in Pakistan', pp. 200-1.
- 45 Syed, Saeed and Martin recommend that the local police should become more accountable to the already established 'Public Safety Commission': Syed, Saeed and Martin, 'Causes and Incentives for Terrorism in Pakistan'.
- 46 Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', p. 11.
- 47 Boswood, Townsend and Shafqat, 'Beyond Af-Pak, Australia's long-term interests in Pakistan', p. 12.