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Pakistan and India

A rivalry that threatens the world

Pakistan's dangerous fondness for jihadis, the Taliban and nuclear weapons is rooted in its fears of India

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OUTSIDERS, especially Indians, have expressed dismay ever since Osama bin Laden was killed this month in Abbottabad, a prim military town in Pakistan. Here is a state that both fights, and protects, Islamic fanatics. Even when Pakistanis themselves are the main victims of attack by *jihadis*, the state fails to act.

On May 13th suicide-bombers sent by an al-Qaeda-affiliated group, the Pakistani Taliban, killed 80, mostly young army cadets, in Shabqadar, a town in the north-west. That attack was claimed as retaliation for bin Laden's death, but such strikes have grown dismally common. As America's ambassador in Islamabad, Cameron Munter, puts it, "If you grow vipers in your backyard, you're going to get bitten."

At moments Pakistan sounds ready to co-operate with America against extremists. John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, whizzed through Kabul and Islamabad this week and claimed, after four hours of talks with General Ashfaq Kayani, Pakistan's army chief, that the troubled bilateral relationship was again "on track". Pakistan will hand over the remains of the stealth helicopter blown up in the Abbottabad raid. And America's secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, will visit in the coming weeks.

More important, America's spies, after a year of lurking by madrassas and in dark corners of towns without telling their Pakistani counterparts what they were up to, will start working again with the Pakistani military spy outfit, the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI). Any more strikes against "high-value targets", which presumably means Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's deputy leader, or Mullah Omar, boss of the Afghan Taliban, will officially be joint efforts. Almost immediately, on May 17th, Pakistan announced results: the army arrested a Yemeni in Karachi, said to be a senior al-Qaeda operative.

Many Pakistanis, however, cannot see things as Americans do. On Abbottabad, for example, they care little that bin Laden was there, and much more about the ease with which American forces swooped in. A poll a week after the raid of 2,500 people found that only 26% believed bin Laden had been killed. Around half, 49%, reckoned the event had been faked, and nearly as many thought bin Laden, if dead, was anyway a martyr. Around 68% were most bothered that an outsider had violated Pakistan's sovereignty.

The Abbottabad affair was especially galling because the town sits close to the border with the Indian-run bit of Kashmir, supposedly a well-guarded frontier. Ordinary Pakistanis are conditioned to fret that India has still not come to terms with the existence of their country, and may one day simply come strolling in. It is no surprise that a resident in a house across from bin Laden's, describing the raid, said: "We first thought the Indians were invading."

At a joint session of the Pakistani parliament on May 13th, attended by army chiefs, the real concern was India. India's army chief, foolishly, had boasted just after the bin Laden raid that his special forces had the means to do something similar. Pakistan's spy chief, Ahmad Shuja Pasha, told MPs that the Pakistani army had not only picked targets in India for retaliation but had also rehearsed striking them.

The usefulness of jihad

Amid all the threats, MPs did not bother to ask questions about bin Laden. That may have been pride, or it may have reflected Pakistanis' sense that *jihadis* are less snakes in the yard than a practical, if unconventional, means for a weak country to project power against a much bigger one.

Mismatched

2010

	India	Pakistan
GDP, $bn	1,430	175
GDP 2011, % increase on previous year, forecast	8.2	2.8
Population, m	1,200	180
Defence budget, $bn	38.4	5.2
Army, active troops, m	1.1	0.55

Sources: IMF; IISI; National statistics

India's population and its economy are now both eight times bigger than Pakistan's, and growing fast (see table). Whereas Pakistan relies on aid and begs foreigners to equip its army, India, by contrast, races on, is now an aid-giver and has America eager to be its friend. As a longstanding, stable democracy, it has moral power. It sits on the United Nations Security Council, shares intelligence closely with America and plans to spend tens of billions of dollars a year on defence.

Pakistan's relative insecurities have been intensified over the years by natural disasters, such as huge floods in 2010, and self-inflicted wounds such as frequent military coups. But they are all the more deeply felt because they are not new. The country was born from partition with India in 1947, a bloodbath that killed hundreds of thousands (both Muslims and Hindus) and displaced many millions. That, and Islam, helped forge a sense of nationhood. But the wounds of partition also caused Pakistanis to fear for their existence.

For a weak country, using proxy armies and *jihadis* has often seemed a good idea. Just after partition, late in 1947, fierce Pushtun tribesmen poured into Kashmir to seize territory for Pakistan from India. Where they reached is still, more or less, the territory's line of control (see

map). Later, with American help, the then ruler of Pakistan, General Zia al Haq, sent *jihadis* to take on the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan. His eventual successor as dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, recently admitted what everyone knew, that militants had then been sent to stir trouble in Indian-run Kashmir.

Deploying *jihadis* is cheap, easy and somewhat deniable if things go wrong. It occupies men who might otherwise make mischief at home, and may also help foster a sense of national unity in Pakistan, as *jihadis* fight in the name of Islam. But as Ijaz Gilani, a Gallup pollster in Islamabad, points out, national feeling is also fuelled by hostility to India. Many Pakistanis are quick to explain away, or even actively support, *jihadis* who strike even at soft, civilian, targets in India, such as the attack in Mumbai in 2008 when 170 people died.

A trial that started on May 16th in America may test this idea. Prosecutors in Chicago accuse a businessman of Pakistani descent, Tahawwur Hussain Raina, of helping the Mumbai attackers, among whose victims were six Americans. A government witness has already said that an ISI officer, a "Major Iqbal", helped to fund and guide the Mumbai attackers.

If Pakistan's unhealthy tolerance of *jihadi* groups is the result of an obsession with India, what of its disruptive behaviour in Afghanistan? It lets America drive three-quarters of its war supplies from Karachi, and goes along with immensely unpopular drone strikes against extremists in its own tribal areas. Yet it also diverts funds to its Pushtun brethren, the Afghan Taliban, and resists any ground attack on another group connected with al-Qaeda, the Haqqani network (active in Afghanistan, based in Pakistan), though it is said to be pressing them to join Afghan peace talks.

Seen from Kabul, Pakistan's ISI is behind the growing activity of Afghan insurgents. Researchers there totted up 12,244 attacks in the country last year, a more than five-fold increase since 2006. "Those connected to the insurgency say to us that ISI activities have increased [especially] over the past 18 months," reports a well-connected observer. The Pakistanis deny that they are actively helping the Taliban.

They also refuse to accept that they are duplicitous in their dealings with America. Yes, they say, they agreed to back America's war: refusing would have made an enemy of a superpower. But that does not mean they are adopting America's aspirations in Afghanistan. Pakistanis plainly see quite different national interests there—again, largely, because of India.

Where America broadly hopes to clamp down on Islamic extremists, impose some sort of order and find a way to get its soldiers home, Pakistan, by contrast, does not want to see a strong Afghan state—particularly one where ethnic groups such as Tajiks, traditionally friendly to India, tend to predominate in positions of power.

Manmohan Singh, India's prime minister, drove home the point on a rare visit to Kabul on May 13th. In Afghanistan's parliament he made much of India's impressive $1.5 billion aid schemes,

which have built roads, set up power lines and fostered ties between the two countries. He promised another $500m as he cheered the emerging "strategic" partnership.

A senior Indian government official says India has "no endgame" in Afghanistan; all it wants is a country that is "moderate" and "stable". But even that makes insecure Pakistanis jumpy. Afghanistan has been hostile to Pakistan for much of its history: opposing, alone, Pakistan's membership of the UN, refusing even now to recognise Pakistan's external borders. Separatists in Pakistan, notably the Baluchis and perhaps even Pushtuns, might also grow more active if war ended next door. Pushtuns are a large minority in Pakistan and the biggest ethnic group in Afghanistan. The Afghan government has never recognised the "Durand line", the Afghan-Pakistan border that the British drove through Pushtun tribal lands, and the idea of an independent "Pushtunistan" has never entirely vanished.

Pakistan fears encirclement by India and its ally. The Pakistanis have long accused India, via Iran and Afghanistan, of arming the Baluchi separatists. Suspicion runs deep. An ISI official in Islamabad spins a theory that Indian road-building in Afghanistan is really a cover for shipping enormous quantities of explosives there for use by terrorists inside Pakistan, including, supposedly, the 2008 bombing of the Marriott hotel in Islamabad.

Pakistan therefore wants influence in Afghanistan for the sake of "strategic depth". That variously means having control of territory to which its leaders, soldiers or even nuclear weapons could move in case of war with India, or simply having close Afghan allies across the border, who can help keep Indian meddling at bay. Either way, Pakistan wants Afghanistan weak, divided, or once more ruled (at least in part) by a pliant Pushtun proxy; though some generals say they are less keen on the Taliban, now they have seen what they are like.

Armed and dangerous

To Indians Pakistan's existential fears are exaggerated, blown up by the army to scare the people. India has never been the aggressor, they point out. Even when India intervened to help split Pakistan in two, in 1971, it only did so late, after seeing mass flows of refugees and atrocities on a horrific scale by the army against civilians in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Instead, say Indians, Pakistanis' own paranoia is the root of their instability. M.J. Akbar, an eloquent Indian journalist and author of a new book on Pakistan, sums up the place as dangerous and fragile, a "toxic jelly state". He blames the army, mostly, for ever more desperate decisions to preserve its dominance. "Pakistan is slipping into a set of contradictions that increasingly make rational behaviour hostage to the need for institutions to survive," he says.

Others, including liberal Pakistanis, add that Pakistan cannot shake itself from military men obsessed with India. "We have become delusional, psychotic, fearing how to protect ourselves from the rest of the world," says one. India's most senior security officials say that Pakistan is

still, in essence, a state run by its army. That army, the world's seventh-largest, bleeds the state of about a sixth of all public funds with almost no civilian oversight.

All that is grim enough. Then consider how Pakistan is rapidly expanding its arsenal of nuclear weapons. That programme was born out of the country's humiliating loss of East Pakistan in 1971. Six years earlier, around the time of a previous defeat by India, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, then Pakistan's foreign minister, had declared: "If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass or leaves for a thousand years, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own."

Pakistan may now have between 70 and 120 usable nuclear devices—and may be unusually ready to use them. Some in the West believe Pakistan started preparing nuclear-tipped missiles in the midst of the 1999 Kargil war against India, after Pakistan invaded a remote corner of Kashmir.

Nobody doubts that Pakistan, in the midst of its anxiety over India, is trying hard to get more. Its nuclear warheads use an implosion design with a solid core of about 15-20 kilograms of highly enriched uranium. The country produces about 100 kilograms of that a year, but is rapidly expanding its nuclear infrastructure with Chinese help. And with production long-established, the price of adding weapons has fallen to almost nothing. A nuclear physicist in Pakistan, Pervez Hoodbhoy, now suggests that "you can have a working nuke for about $10m, or the cost of a nice big house in Islamabad."

The new push seems, as ever, to be a response to two developments next door. Pakistan was badly spooked by India's deal on civil nuclear power with America, completed in 2008. This not only binds America and India closely; it also lets India buy uranium on international markets, and probably means it will soon build many more reactors. By one panicky Pakistani estimate, India could eventually be making 280 nuclear weapons a year.

The other change is over doctrine and delivery. India has long held a position of "no first use" of nukes. Pakistan, by contrast, with weaker conventional forces, refuses to rule out the option of starting a nuclear war against India, and is now taking steps that could make such first use more likely. Last month it test-fired a new missile, the Hatf IX, with a range of just 60km and specifically designed for war-fighting. Two missiles are carried in tubes on a transporter and can be fired, accurately, at short notice. The warheads are small, low-yielding devices for destroying large tank formations with relatively little explosive damage or radiation beyond the battlefield.

Pakistan's generals say their new tactical weapons will meet a threat from India's Cold Start doctrine, adopted in 2004, that calls for rapid, punitive, though conventional thrusts against Pakistan. But by rolling out tactical nuclear weapons, Pakistan is stirring fears of instability. Previous efforts to reassure observers that terrorists or rogue army officers could not get hold of nukes rested on the fact that warheads and delivery systems were stored separately and were difficult to fire—and that final authority to launch a strike requires "consensus" within the

National Command Authority, which includes various ministers and the heads of all three services, and is chaired by the prime minister.

But tactical nuclear weapons deployed close to the battlefield pose new risks. Command-and-control protocols are likely to be looser and more delegated. If field officers retreating in the face of a conventional attack by India were forced to decide between using or losing their nuclear weapons, a border incursion could swiftly escalate into something very much bigger and more lethal.

Talking, not shooting

Trouble on the border is not a theoretical problem; it is commonplace. Exchanges of fire between Pakistanis and Indians over the border in Kashmir killed an Indian soldier this weekend. This time it did not escalate, in part because the two countries are in the midst of diplomatic efforts. But India's prime minister, Mr Singh, ordered a review by his security chiefs.

Some in India have been trying to ease tensions with Pakistan. Mr Singh, born before partition in territory that is now Pakistan, is personally eager to do so (though others in his government, and hawkish opposition parties, disagree). He tried "cricket diplomacy" this year, inviting his counterpart, Yusuf Raza Gilani, to watch India play Pakistan in the cricket World Cup. He is the driving force on bilateral talks on trade, water and counter-terrorism, which should culminate in the next few months in a meeting of foreign ministers.

Encouragingly, on Pakistan's side, civilians also seem open to talks. It helps, too, that Kashmir has fallen quiet in recent months, though that may be merely seasonal. Nawaz Sharif, the main opposition leader, who as prime minister in 1999 came close to striking a peace deal with India, dared to suggest on May 16th that Pakistan would make progress only when it stopped treating India as its "biggest enemy". As controversially, he called for a cut in public funds for the army.

Yet suspicion lingers. General Kayani told a diplomat in Islamabad recently that he backs peace efforts with India, but he has done little about it. And the army has an interest in maintaining at least the illusion of an Indian threat to protect its bloated budget and special privileges.

In private, too, many remain gloomy. Talks, let alone a deal, may simply spur the terrorists to another atrocity. General Mahmud Ali Durrani, a former ambassador to America who supports peace talks, feels that the army's insecurity is too big a problem. "I don't think we are flying. The security elements are not so enamoured by the idea. They feel India never accepted Pakistan, and given half a chance [the Indians] would undo it."