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U.S. Prepares for a Curtailed Relationship with Pakistan

By ERIC SCHMITT
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With the United States facing the reality that its broad security partnership with Pakistan is over, American officials are seeking to salvage a more limited counterterrorism alliance that they acknowledge will complicate their ability to launch attacks against extremists and move supplies into [Afghanistan](#).

The United States will be forced to restrict drone strikes, limit the number of its spies and soldiers on the ground and spend more to transport supplies through Pakistan to allied troops in Afghanistan, American and Pakistani officials said. United States aid to Pakistan will also be reduced sharply, they said.

“We’ve closed the chapter on the post-9/11 period,” said a senior United States official, who requested anonymity to avoid antagonizing Pakistani officials. “Pakistan has told us very clearly that they are re-evaluating the entire relationship.”

American officials say that the relationship will endure in some form, but that the contours will not be clear until Pakistan completes its wide-ranging review in the coming weeks.

The Obama administration got a taste of the new terms immediately after an American airstrike killed 26 Pakistani soldiers near the Afghan border last month. Pakistan closed the supply routes into Afghanistan, boycotted a conference in Germany on the future of Afghanistan and forced the United States to shut its drone operations at a base in southwestern Pakistan.

Mushahid Hussain Sayed, the secretary general of the [Pakistan Muslim League-Q](#), an opposition political party, summed up the anger that he said many harbored: “We feel like the U.S. treats Pakistan like a rainy-day girlfriend.”

Whatever emerges will be a shadow of the sweeping strategic relationship that Richard C. Holbrooke, President Obama’s special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, championed before [his death a year ago](#). Officials from both countries filled more than a dozen committees to work on issues like health, the rule of law and economic development.

All of that has been abandoned and will most likely be replaced by a much narrower set of agreements on core priorities — countering terrorists, stabilizing Afghanistan and ensuring the safety of Pakistan’s arsenal of more than 100 nuclear weapons — that Pakistan will want spelled out in writing and agreed to in advance.

With American diplomats essentially waiting quietly and Central Intelligence Agency drone strikes on hold since Nov. 16 — the longest pause since 2008 — Pakistan’s government is drawing up what Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani called “red lines” for a new relationship that protects his country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Said an American official: “Both countries recognize the benefits of partnering against common threats, but those must be balanced against national interests as well. The balancing is a continuous process.”

First, officials said, will likely be a series of step-by-step agreements on military cooperation, intelligence sharing and counterterrorism operations, including revamped “kill boxes,” the term for flight zones over Pakistan’s largely ungoverned borderlands where C.I.A. drones will be allowed to hunt a shrinking number of Al Qaeda leaders and other militants.

The C.I.A. has conducted 64 missile attacks in Pakistan using drones this year, compared with 117 last year and 53 in 2009, according to [The Long War Journal](#), a Web site that tracks the strikes.

In one of the most visible signs of rising anti-American sentiment in this country, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Lahore and Peshawar this month. And on Sunday in Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city, at least 100,000 people rallied to support Imran Khan, a cricket celebrity and rising opposition politician who is outspoken in his criticism of the drone strikes and ties with the United States.

Some Pakistani officers talk openly about shooting down any American drones that violate Pakistani sovereignty. "Nothing is happening on counterterrorism right now," said a senior Pakistani security official. "It will never go back to the way it was."

Any new security framework will also require increased transit fees for the thousands of trucks that supply NATO troops in Afghanistan, a bill that allied officials say could run into the tens of millions of dollars.

Officials from Pakistan and the United States anticipate steep reductions in American security aid, including the continued suspension of more than \$1 billion in military assistance and equipment, frozen since the American raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in May.

The number of American military officers, enlisted troops and contractors in Pakistan has dropped to about 100, from about 400 more than a year ago, including scores of American trainers who have all been sent home. Pakistan is also restricting visas to dozens of other embassy personnel, from spies to aid workers.

Of the nearly two dozen American, Western and Pakistani officials interviewed for this article, a few sought to put the best face on a worsening situation. With Pakistan taking a seat on the United Nations Security Council for two years beginning next month, these officials argued that too much was at stake to rupture ties completely. "It is better to have a predictable, more focused relationship than an incredibly ambitious out-of-control relationship," said one Western official.

But another Western diplomat put it more bluntly: "It's a fairly gloomy picture."

Just two months ago, a visit here by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; David H. Petraeus, the C.I.A. director; and Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, seemed to begin to thaw relations that had been nearly frozen since Raymond Davis, a C.I.A. security contractor, shot and killed two Pakistanis in Lahore in January and Navy Seals killed Bin Laden in May.

Pakistani manufacturers of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, a component of homemade bombs used against American soldiers in Afghanistan, tentatively agreed to dye it for easier tracing, American officials said. Interior Ministry officials pledged to track large, unexplained purchases of the substance.

At the same time, Pakistani officials indicated that they would help rein in attacks by the Haqqani network, an insurgent group that is the main killer of allied troops in Afghanistan, and there were hints that Pakistan would pave the way for peace talks with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

But the fatal airstrike on Nov. 26 erased that preliminary progress, dealing the most serious blow to reconciliation talks involving Pakistan. “It’s not happening,” said Aftab Ahmed Sherpao, a former interior minister.

All of this comes as the Pakistani economy is in a free fall, civilian and military leaders are clashing over purported coup plots, and 150,000 Pakistani troops are stuck in a stalemate fighting a witches’ brew of militants along the Afghan border.

“These people are stuck there very badly,” said Javed Ashraf Qazi, a retired lieutenant general and a former head of the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, Pakistan’s main spy agency.

The number of attacks from homemade bombs throughout the country, but mostly focused in the border areas, skyrocketed to 1,036 through November this year, compared with 413 for all of 2007, according to the Pakistani military. More than 3,500 Pakistani soldiers and police have been killed since 2002.

The Obama administration is desperately trying to preserve the critical pieces of the relationship. General Dempsey asked the Pakistani Army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, in a phone call on Wednesday if the relationship could be repaired, a person briefed on the conversation said. General Kayani said that he thought it could, but that Pakistan needed some space.

The State Department this month quietly dispatched a senior diplomat and South Asia specialist, Robin Raphel, to canvass a wide spectrum of Pakistanis. She returned with a sober assessment and the view that many Pakistanis will not move forward without a formal apology from President Obama for the airstrike, which White House aides say is not in the offing.

Still, administration officials held out hope. “We’ve been very forthright in acknowledging that this is a relationship that needs to work,” a State Department spokesman, Mark Toner, said on Friday.