

**American Policy and Pakistan: Testimony of Dr. Stephen P. Cohen before the Senate
Committee on Foreign Relations, July 25, 2007**

Senator Kerry, members of the Committee, I am honored to again be asked to share my expertise with you. Writing about Pakistan since the mid 1960s, and visiting it regularly since 1977, I am the author of two books on Pakistan: *The Pakistan Army* (1985) and *The Idea of Pakistan* (2004), and dealt with Pakistan during my two years as a member of Secretary Schultz's Policy Planning Staff in the Department of State.

A short paper summarizing my understanding of Pakistan and its future is appended, as is an op ed piece that recently appeared in the *Washington Post*. I ask permission to attach these to my testimony. I have divided my remarks into six observations about the present situation in Pakistan followed by seven policy recommendations.

Pakistan used to be an important state because of its assets, but it is now just as important because of its problems. Pakistan was once truly a moderate Muslim country, the radical Islamists were marginal and it had a democratic tradition even when the military ruled. In recent years virtually all segments of Pakistani opinion have turned anti-American. President Musharraf has not moved towards restoring real democracy, Pakistan has been the worst proliferator of advanced nuclear and missile technology, and the country continues to harbor—partially involuntarily—extremists and terrorists whose dedicated mission is to attack the United States and Pakistan's neighbors.

Recent events show that while Pakistanis may be at times incapable of operating a democracy, they want one. The Supreme Court's reversal of the suspension of the Chief Justice, the restraint of moderate politicians, the courageous actions of the Pakistani press and electronic media, and the outpouring of support for democracy among Pakistani professionals and elites are all convincing evidence that the US was wrong to tolerate Musharraf's contempt for democracy. One more or less free election will not fix the problem, however, and building a workable democracy will take time.

Musharraf is personally moderate but is strategically indecisive and is in political decline. He has led Pakistan by exiling the leading political opposition, co-opting some of the most corrupt elements of Pakistani society and aligning with the Islamists. His survival strategy was to meet external pressure from the US, China, and India with minimal concessions. However, in the last year or so he has systematically alienated most segments of Pakistani society and infuriated his friends, both at home and abroad.

Musharraf will stay on only if he allies with the centrist political forces in Pakistan. If he continues to stumble, mass protests will make his rule impossible. Severe riots in Lahore and other Punjabi cities will likely turn the army against him. If he accommodates the centrist opposition parties he should be able to stay on, albeit without his uniform. While Musharraf has a low opinion of civilian leaders, especially exiled former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, other generals understand that their dilemma is that they cannot alone govern a complex society such as Pakistan. The time has come to move Pakistan towards a workable civil-military balance.

We do not have to worry overmuch about Musharraf's successor, or a civil-military coalition. However, unless real reform is taken now, the government that follows that may be cause for worry. In theory Musharraf is capable of initiating such reform, but in practice he has been reluctant to do it.

A final observation is that Pakistan's domestic politics remain shaped by its security and foreign policy concerns. To the east there is a continuing threat from India, whose army has now adopted a policy that amounts to attacking in force across the border in retaliation for the next terrorist incident. Fortunately, this may not be the Indian government's policy. Continuing hostility with India ensures that the Pakistan army will indefinitely remain at the center of Pakistani politics. Looking west, the army remains concerned about India's encircling influence in Afghanistan, and there are strong tribal ties between Pakistani and Afghan Pushtuns. This means that American policy has to deal with both sides of the border if it wants to stabilize Afghanistan.

With these observations in mind, I would make the following recommendations.

- **Washington cannot again abandon Pakistan, but it needs to change the nature of the relationship with a state whose collapse would be devastating to American interests.** The Bush administration was correct in lifting the many sanctions that were imposed on Pakistan, but it was lax in holding the Pakistani government to a high standard of governance, and to President Musharraf's own stated goals and objectives.
- **The United States needs to make it absolutely clear to the Pakistani leadership what our highest priorities are, and be prepared to withdraw or reduce our assistance if there is no effective cooperation from Islamabad.** The US has provided between ten and twenty-five billion dollars to Pakistan. Yet we ask Pakistan to a) round up al Qaeda terrorists, b) suppress the Taliban, c) stop future proliferation, d) move towards democracy, e) clamp down on radical *madrassas*, f) normalize relations with India, g) work with Afghanistan, and h) maintain civil liberties and a free press. Pakistanis look at this wish list and offer us what they think would be minimally acceptable. The various United States agencies and department must work out amongst themselves what is desirable and what is essential, and what Pakistan can deliver. Our lack of expertise on Pakistan hampers us in this regard. Pakistanis know how to deal with Americans better than we know how to deal with them.
- **Our contacts with Pakistan must be broadened.** We made a strategic mistake in basing our entire Pakistan policy on President Musharraf. He, like his military predecessors, knows how to work the American "account." We hurt ourselves by cutting off our contacts with Pakistani civil society, with leading politicians, and with a timid public diplomacy. One bright light has been an expanded Fulbright program, which is educating a new generation of Pakistani academics. Such contacts and programs need to be greatly expanded, even at the cost of some military assistance. They represent an enduring contribution to Pakistan's growth as modern, moderate state.

- **While the U.S. should not do anything to undercut President Musharraf's position, it should do everything we can to ensure that he broadens his base.** In 1985, I wrote that the army needed a strategy of strategic retreat from politics, but that this could only take place as civilian leaders and institutions developed competence. This remains true. While we should push for elections, they are meaningless unless there are politicians who can govern. Pakistani politics is mostly issue-free: it is about patronage and money. Our officials, scholars and NGOs should concentrate on strengthening civilian competence, and if the opportunity arises, help broker an understanding between the army and centrist political forces in Pakistan. We need to invest in the long-term stability of Pakistan.
- **Any American military operations in Pakistan against the Taliban should be conducted jointly with the Pakistan army.** The sovereignty issue runs as deep in Pakistan as it does in the United States and most other countries. We should not risk further alienation by unilateral military action. These are in any case difficult, and the removal of a few terrorist leaders, no matter how satisfying, is less important than preventing the radicalization of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of educated and professionally adept Pakistanis. The issue is not just whether unilateral American military action would lead to Musharraf's departure, but whether it would alienate virtually all Pakistanis—it would do both.
- **In the case of the Taliban, which is openly tolerated by Pakistan and based in urban centers such as Quetta, our aid should be conditional.** Pakistan uses the Taliban to balance supposed Indian dominance (via the Northern Alliance) in Afghanistan. We are not “losing” Afghanistan, although progress could be better. We would be better off attempting to limit the presence of all outside powers and their proxies in Afghanistan. This applies to Russia, China, India, and Iran, as well as Pakistan.
- **With the US-India nuclear agreement completed, Washington should talk to New Delhi (and Beijing) about how to normalize Pakistani politics.** A successful settlement on Kashmir with Musharraf or another leader would go a long way toward reducing the military pressure on Pakistan, allowing it to concentrate more resources on counterinsurgency in the Northwest Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Binding the tribal areas to Pakistan proper will take years, and is bound to be disruptive and a major undertaking. Pakistan cannot take it on while preparing to fight a full scale war against India. Some in India will be tempted to “bleed” Pakistan the way Islamabad bled India for years via its surrogates, but that would be shortsighted, and increases the risk of still another India-Pakistan war. Washington, with its good ties to both countries, ought to propose a new strategic deal whereby the issues of the past are settled, enabling both countries to deal with the problems of the future.