

Pakistan May Pose the Most Difficult Choices

Since 9/11 the United States has been at war in Afghanistan. After vanquishing Al Qaeda from their mountainous redoubts, America and its NATO allies identified the Taliban as the foe to defeat.

Regardless of the wisdom of that decision, when the United States declared war against the Taliban, it also unwittingly declared a proxy war against Pakistan. The Taliban have been and remain Pakistan's best instrument to ensure that India will be kept out of Afghanistan's Pashtun-dominated southern and eastern provinces. Pakistan has long [feared](#) that India will use any presence in those provinces to foment unrest in Pakistan's restive Balochistan and tribal areas that abut Afghanistan.

If that were not enough, Pakistan continues to use [other Islamist terrorists](#), like Jamaat ud Dawa and Lashkar-e-Taiba, as tools of foreign policy in India as well as in Afghanistan.

To ensure that the international community will consider Pakistan too dangerous to fail, it has vigorously worked to acquire tactical nuclear weapons that are vulnerable to theft and exacerbate the possibility of escalation in the event of an Indo-Pakistan crisis.

Because the United States has been so focused on the war effort in Afghanistan, Washington has frequently turned blind eyes to the dangerous actions of its not-so-allied ally, Pakistan.

Since 2002 Pakistan has received more than \$25 billion, of which \$17 billion was defense assistance to reward its ostensible cooperation in the war on terror. Yet, Pakistan continued to support the Taliban and associated terrorist groups, like the [Haqqani](#) network, who are responsible for the deaths of U.S. personnel and their allies, as well as other groups that Washington has proscribed as foreign terrorist organizations.

With the drawdown in Afghanistan, Washington has an opportunity to attenuate its tendency to endure Pakistani malfeasance with equanimity.

How would Senator Hagel help reorient U.S. policy toward Pakistan to persuade it to abandon its long-standing policy tool of using Islamist militants under its ever-expanding nuclear umbrella? Would he persist in trying to change Pakistani behavior with positive inducements? Or would he conclude that the only way to achieve U.S. security objectives in the region would be to attempt to contain the Islamist terrorist and nuclear proliferation threats that Pakistan insists upon posing.

Long after the Afghan war winds down to its inevitable miserable conclusion, Pakistan will remain the single most important security threat in South Asia and beyond. How would he see beyond the imperatives of 2014 and aggressively work to address the recalcitrant Pakistan problem?

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