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The U.S., Pakistan and the Law of Unintended Consequences

By **Sreeram Chaulia**

With Pervez Musharraf on the way out, and on the heels of news that the Bush Administration is diverting funds from counterterrorism operations to upgrade Pakistan's F-16s, Pakistan's role in U.S. national security policy is again in question. Sreeram Chaulia argues that U.S. military assistance to Islamabad has come at the expense of India — which has had the unintended consequence of benefiting China.

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Historically, there is a direct correlation between Pakistan's level of military confidence and tensions with India.

One should therefore expect that the U.S. military aid given to Pakistan will embolden Islamabad to take a more assertive approach vis-à-vis New Delhi in the coming years.

Contradictory policies

The greatest beneficiary of Quixotic U.S. policy is China, which has an interest in seeing India boxed in through competition with Pakistan.

While the stated U.S. policy on Kashmir and other bilateral disputes bedeviling India-Pakistan relations is that they should be resolved amicably through dialogue and confidence-building, the Bush Administration's military aid policies are in contradiction to this aspiration.

Apart from restarting a dangerous arms race in South Asia, U.S. military supplies to Pakistan also undermine Washington's ambitions of checking China's rise as a global challenger.

The Bush Doctrine of 2002 advocated "dissuading adversaries from surpassing or equaling the power of the United States," the innuendo being unmistakably about China.

Using India to contain China

One obvious way for Washington to contain China's aggressive military and economic growth is to promote India as a democratic counter-balance. Unfortunately, the Bush

Administration's profligacy in aiding Pakistan purportedly for counter-terrorism has resurrected a past balancing ghost.

Over the last seven years, Washington has provided Islamabad with over \$10 billion in military aid as reward for President Pervez Musharraf's support in the "war on terrorism."

Counter-productive policy

Most recently, the Bush Administration's plan to shift \$230 million of aid to Pakistan from counter-terrorism programs to upgrading the country's F-16 attack planes is but the latest manifestation of a counter-productive U.S. policy towards South Asia.

F-16s have been a prized possession in Pakistan's arsenal for matching conventionally stronger India and were first delivered to Islamabad by Washington in the 1980s in gratitude for the anti-Soviet jihad.

Instead of India being strengthened to balance China, U.S. military assistance to Islamabad has created a redux of Pakistan balancing India. This is a throwback to the Cold War-era, when the United States was wedded to the principle of a balance of power in South Asia so that pro-Soviet India did not outgrow pro-American Pakistan.

U.S. military supplies to Pakistan undermine Washington's ambitions of checking China's rise as a global challenger.

Unintended consequences

Today, in the disguise of the "war on terror," Washington has basically been tying down India once again by profusely aiding Pakistan.

Ironically, the greatest beneficiary of this Quixotic U.S. policy is China, which has an abiding interest in seeing India boxed in through competition with Pakistan. The longer India's force posturing, military preparedness and national security orientation remain Pakistan-centric, the better it is for Beijing to emerge as the unchallenged hegemon of Asia.

Benefiting China

Strategic affairs scholar Brahma Chellaney has cogently argued that the United

States' blueprint is for a multipolar Asia and a unipolar world, while China's preference is for a unipolar Asia and a multipolar world.

Historically, there is a direct correlation between Pakistan's level of military confidence and tensions with India.

By consistently arming Pakistan, despite knowing that this has in no way abated the scourge of the Taliban and Al Qaeda from Pakistan or Afghanistan, Washington is oddly allowing China's envisaged configuration of power to come true.

For a while, policymakers in Washington have been singing paeans to "dehyphenation" of the U.S. relationships with India and Pakistan. To the extent that the India-U.S. civilian nuclear agreement is unique and lacks a parallel deal with Pakistan, the concept can claim to be consistent with Washington's long-term aim of helping India match China in economic

growth.

Rethinking policy toward Pakistan

However, the considerable U.S. military assistance to Pakistan more than compensates for the marginal energy-generation and technology transfer benefits to India that might accrue from the nuclear deal.

Objections in the U.S. Congress to military aid to Pakistan have thus far been leveled on the basis of financial impropriety and lack of deliverables from General Musharraf on the counter-terrorism front.

If one adds the disastrous geostrategic consequences of balancing Pakistan against India, there is all the more reason to call for an immediate reversal of direction once Bush leaves office.

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