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Pakistan: What Role for the European Union?

Comments on how Brussels could counteract a
“very radical threat indeed”

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Introduction

These are turbulent times in Pakistan, the latest example of which has been the creeping militancy in the country, a country home to an estimated 100 nuclear weapons. This echoes the “frightening scenario” identified in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), that is “one in which terrorist groups acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD)”.¹ In fact, of the five ‘key threats’ – terrorism, proliferation of WMD, regional conflicts, state failure and organised crime – outlined in the ESS, Pakistan is relevant to all five. Yet in Brussels, there appears to be a blind spot of exactly Pakistan’s shape and size. Therefore this paper will discuss the current response from Brussels to the growing instability in the country, arguing first, that the European Union’s (EU) institutional structure and second, its military capabilities account for the limited response and its marginalisation. Having said that, an examination of Pakistan’s relations with other external actors – three of which stand out, the United States (U.S.), the United Kingdom (UK) and China – illustrates that there is still a role for the EU, a role that is consistent with the EU’s institutional structure and capabilities, as well as complements said relations. Thus, this paper will impart ideas on a consolidated role for the EU in Pakistan, before offering some conclusions.

Pakistan – Relations with Other External Actors

Before contemplating how Europe fits into the Pakistan puzzle, one must first take into consideration Pakistan’s existing relations with other external actors, three of which stand out. The U.S., the UK and China all have distinct, but nonetheless privileged relations with Pakistan. Whereas UK-Pakistan relations are based on a shared colonial history, reflected in the UK’s one million strong Pakistani diaspora, U.S.-Pakistan relations relate to Washington’s position as the world’s pre-eminent power and Islamabad’s innate sense of insecurity and siege from the east. For instance, in Islamabad, strong ties to the U.S. provide a sense of solace and balance relative to its much larger and economically superior eastern neighbour, India,

against which it has fought three wars – 1947-8, 1965 and 1971 – and come close on a further four occasions, the latest being in 2002. Moreover the unresolved issue of Kashmir – the source of two of those wars – continues to keep tensions taut and so necessitates the relationship. For Washington, Pakistan – a nuclear armed state home to some 170 million Muslims – has been of varying, but vital geo-strategic importance, first a frontline state in the Cold War and now the ‘war on terror’. As a result U.S.-Pakistan relations have prioritised cooperation on security, reflected in U.S. aid to Pakistan. Moreover aid has ebbed and flowed relative to U.S. geo-strategic interests in the region and so relations have also run ‘hot and cold’. This has sowed the perception that the U.S. is an unreliable partner, callously exploiting the country for its own gain. Hence a trust deficit burdens the relationship and there is widespread anti-Americanism on the ground. Sino-Pakistan relations have also prioritised cooperation on security. However in this case, China also sees ties as a hedge against India. Therefore China is Pakistan’s largest supplier of military hardware and the only provider of nuclear energy and its related technology to Pakistan. An additional pillar of Beijing’s security cooperation with Islamabad is counter-terrorism. Likewise dealings between London and Islamabad have also prioritised cooperation on security and – given the 1.4 million persons that travel between the two countries each year – counter-terrorism.

Pakistan – Relations with the European Union

The EU is Pakistan’s largest investor and trading partner, having imported 26.8% of the country’s total exports in 2007 (incidentally both the U.S. and China lie in second and fifth, having received 21.6% and 3.4% of Pakistan’s exports respectively), with Pakistan receiving 14.6% of the EU’s total exports (8% and 12.8% from the U.S. and China respectively). For Brussels, as with Washington and London, Pakistan is not only the ‘pivot’ around which revolves the success of European efforts in bordering Afghanistan along with the safety of and supply to some 27,000 European troops taken from 25 of the 27 EU Member States, but also the security of the European continent. Nonetheless Brussels continues to maintain a low-profile in Pakistan, reflected in its limited and technical response to the

¹ See A Secure Europe in a Better World. The European Security Strategy (Brussels, 12 December 2003) pg.4 [<http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>]

growing instability in the country.² This is despite the sum of all its parts posing a “very radical threat indeed”.³ A good example is the European Commission’s new ‘global terrorism measures’ launched in April 2009. For instance, with an indicative budget of €225 million this three year programme under the EU’s ‘Instrument for Stability’ allows the European Community (EC) to respond to the ‘key threats’ outlined in the ESS, in particular through building capacity at a global level with regards to WMD and counter-terrorism capabilities in South Asia and Pakistan/Afghanistan respectively.⁴ In the same month, the Commission also announced that it would contribute a total of €485 million (including €100 million from the European Investment Bank) in aid from now until 2013 to Pakistan,⁵ the first focal area of which is poverty reduction through rural development and natural resource management in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. The aim of which is to promote stability in Pakistan’s sensitive provinces bordering Afghanistan. The second focal area is education and human resource development with the aim of developing a well-trained work force.⁶ Last month the Commission also earmarked €5.5 million for humanitarian assistance to those internally displaced by fighting between government forces and militants in Pakistan’s Swat Valley and surrounding areas.⁷ Moreover there is also no response of note from European capitals, with, of course, the exception of London. For the UK is the only EU Member State (including the EU itself) to have an integrated strategy for Afghanistan

² For a similar analysis see Daniel Korski, Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations

³ See [Fn.1 pg.5]

⁴ See Instrument for Stability – The EU’s response to some of today’s global threats. (Brussels, 17 April 2009)

[\[http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/164&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en\]](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/164&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

⁵ See European Commission underpins its substantial assistance to Pakistan. (Brussels, 17 April 2009)

[\[http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/ferreiro-waldner/speeches/index_en.htm#17_04_2009\]](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/ferreiro-waldner/speeches/index_en.htm#17_04_2009)

⁶ See Pakistan-European Community. Country Strategy Paper 2009-2013

[\[http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/pakistan/csp/07_13_en.pdf\]](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/pakistan/csp/07_13_en.pdf)

⁷ See Pakistan: European Commission earmarks €5.5 million for immediate humanitarian assistance to internal conflict victims (Brussels, 14 May 2009)

[\[http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/769&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en\]](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/769&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

and Pakistan,⁸ even though other Member State’s – France and Germany along with the EU itself – have appointed a Special Envoy to the region *a la* Richard Holbrooke. Two main reasons arguably account for the EU’s limited and technical response, first, the institutional structure in Brussels and second, in view of Pakistan’s thirst for parity with antagonist India, limited capabilities in the military field.

Reasons for the EU’s Limited Response

The EU comprises of 27 Member States, all of which have historical and geographical diversity, which is woven into a distinct national identity as well as diverging national interests and priorities. As tacit or explicit agreement of all is required for Brussels to act internationally, choosing foreign policy objectives and then devising policies to achieve them is rather difficult. Therefore European foreign policy represents the lowest common denominator, or what the most reluctant Member State would accept. Arguably agreement among the ‘big three’ – France, Germany and the UK – is most crucial. For when they disagree there can be no common policy (e.g. the Iraq war in 2003), yet when they agree on an issue (e.g. the ongoing Iranian nuclear issue) then other Member States follow their lead. Hence, more often than not it falls to one of the ‘big three’ to take the initiative and bring an issue to the fore, like Berlin did with Central Asia in 2006.

European foreign policy capabilities are also limited to those which do not offend national sensitivities or contradict national interests and priorities. As a result, Brussels is weakest in the military field. Therefore in view of Pakistan’s hunger for military hardware and thirst for parity with neighbouring India, the EU’s lack thereof, translates into little influence in Islamabad despite being Pakistan’s largest investor and trading partner. This is because parity with India takes precedence. For as former Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto stated, “If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass or leaves, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own.”⁹ Therefore this explains the converse level of influence of both Washington and Bei-

⁸ See UK policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan: the way forward. (London, April 2009) pg.16-17

[\[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/204173/afghanistan_pakistan.pdf\]](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/204173/afghanistan_pakistan.pdf)

⁹ See Who has the bomb? Time (New York, 03 June 1985)

[\[http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,957761-7,00.html\]](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,957761-7,00.html)

jing in Islamabad. Hence on trade issues, Islamabad looks to Brussels, but for foreign and security policy – its bread and butter – it either turns to Washington, Beijing or European capitals, in particular London.

What Role for the EU?

Nonetheless, despite these obstacles there is still a role for Brussels, a role that is consistent with the EU's institutional structure and capabilities, as well as complements Pakistan's existing relations with the U.S., the UK, and China. For instance, said relations have all prioritised cooperation on security and counter-terrorism, which the EU's lack thereof serves only to reinforce. Nonetheless, as the protagonists of international relations theory – Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism – agree, states not only seek power and security, but also welfare. Therefore while the U.S., the UK and China have all prioritised cooperation on security, they have, to varying degrees overlooked the softer side of their respective relationships with Pakistan, which the latter's calculations and concern for India has only served to reinforce. Of course, this looks set to change; the Kerry-Lugar bill – which triples U.S. civilian aid to Pakistan to \$7.5 billion over five years – is a good example. Still, as Pakistan's largest investor and trading partner, Brussels should look to consolidate its hand.

The scheduled EU-Pakistan summit – the first ever – in June 2009 is a positive first step.¹⁰ Brussels should use this opportunity as a spring board to strengthen political dialogue with Islamabad and consolidate trade and investment. For this is the source of European leverage and would facilitate greater access to Islamabad. Enhancing economic opportunities could also help curb militant violence and reduce the threat emanating from Pakistan.¹¹ For instance, the EU should continue to restore trade relations and consider ways of including Pakistan in its Generalised System of Preference Plus (GSP+) scheme – which has the support of the European Parliament – as well as

greater access for Pakistan's exports, which could, in time, lead to talks on a Free Trade Agreement, both long coveted in Islamabad and (with regard to the latter) championed in London. This would strengthen the EU's hand and so talks could be conditional, in addition to those conditions coupled with GSP+ status. Besides Islamabad and London, this move would also be welcomed in Washington, as the United States is currently closed on the trade front and the administration-backed 'Afghanistan and Pakistan Reconstruction Opportunity Zones Act' of 2009 looks like a dead letter.¹² The EU should also look to increase existing efforts in improving the health and education of Pakistan's work force as well as increase investment in infrastructure, both essential if goods are to be competitive and economic growth sustained. This will also win favourable perceptions from those on the ground. The sectors in most need are water, irrigation, power and transport. An example is the new deep water port at Gwadar, which has the potential to unlock the riches of Central Asia. Nonetheless, Gwadar – for the most part funded and built by Beijing – is also a warning from the future and of further marginalisation.

A boost in trade and investment is not possible without a stable, sincere polity as well as sound state security. For as the ESS (and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy Supremo Javier Solana) advocates "security is a precondition of development".¹³ Therefore Brussels should also live up to its billing as an international security actor and combine consolidated trade and investment with a role in reforming Pakistan's security sector. Hence Brussels should consider how its experience and expertise in reforming the security sectors in Central and South Eastern Europe as well as the Western Balkans could be specifically applied to Pakistan.¹⁴ Security sector reform would not only be a spur to economic development, but also promote good governance and democratisation, objectives tantamount to European foreign policy. Moreover this would consolidate the civilian government (and complement the EU's own 2008 Election Observation Mission) as "elected representatives will be held accountable if citizens continue to see the [Pakistani]

¹⁰ Please note, at the time of publication the Summit had passed. For details see European Commission, External Relations, Pakistan at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/pakistan/index_en.htm

¹¹ See Jayshree Bajoria. Stabilizing Pakistan: Boosting its Private Sector. Council on Foreign Relations (New York, April 2009) http://www.cfr.org/publication/19260/business_of_helping_pakistan.html

¹² See [Fn.11]

And Jayshree Bajoria. A New Kind of Aid for Pakistan. Council on Foreign Relations (New York, April 2009) http://www.cfr.org/publication/19059/new_kind_of_aid_for_pakistan.html

¹³ See [Fn.1 pg.2]

¹⁴ For a similar suggestion see Shada Islam, Senior Programme Executive at the European Policy Centre

police – the public face of the government – as brutal and corrupt. The democratic transition could also falter if deteriorating security gives the military a new opportunity to intervene, using – as it has in the past – the pretext of national security to justify derailing the democratic process on the grounds of good governance.”¹⁵

Not surprisingly both the U.S and the UK are already working with Pakistan’s security forces. For instance, as part of a ‘Security Development Plan’ there are 23 British military advisors on the ground, which are engaged in training (including on counter-insurgency) and liaison with the Pakistani army and for the most part with the Frontier Corps. London is set to lead efforts in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the NWFP and Baluchistan.¹⁶ London is also cooperating with Pakistan’s police forces on counter-terrorism. This encompasses strategic alignment, operational cooperation, capacity building and the sharing of good practise. For instance, in December 2008, Downing Street announced a bilateral programme of counter-terrorism support and capacity building, worth £10 million for the year 2008-2009. This includes developing the skills of the police and other law enforcement agencies to bring violent extremists to justice, training and assistance in evidence collection, and training in countering improvised explosive devices, forensics, bomb scene management, protecting key infrastructure and tackling terrorist financing.¹⁷ London is also set to increase the (already large) MI6 presence in Pakistan. MI5 is also working in the

country investigating links to suspected terrorist attackers based in the UK.¹⁸ Hence, to start with the European Commission could finance an expansion of London’s existing efforts, exploiting the UK’s existing contacts and intimate understanding of the country. The EU could also support the UK’s intelligence presence in Pakistan and add value through facilitating greater cooperation on a European level. At present however, London – because of historical ties and the strength of its diaspora – is reluctant to bring the issue of Pakistan to Brussels, for it is sensitive to outside interference in what it perceives as a domestic political issue as well as charges of neo-colonialism. Therefore while London is reluctant to take the lead European foreign policy to Pakistan will remain limited, technical and marginalized. Hence it falls to Berlin – who knows not what to do – and Paris – for whom Pakistan is only a secondary problem – to impress upon London the benefits of doing so. For if the ‘big three’ were to take the initiative, other Member States would follow.

This would be in London’s interest, as not only would a competent Pakistani police force reduce the terrorist threat to the UK (along with the European continent) – for of the most serious plots investigated in the UK, three quarters have links back to Pakistan – but also European support would provide London with considerable political cover and so soften charges of neo-colonialism. For instance, “through ‘laundering’, the EU whole emerges as greater than the sum of its parts and provides value added in terms of the capacities of the Member States to intervene in international security affairs. This is particularly true in dealings with the developing world, where, though individual Member States may carry considerable baggage, collectively they represent more of a new beginning, and their claim to neutrality carries more weight.”¹⁹ The EU’s perceived neutrality would also provide better protection to British forces on the ground. The U.S. would welcome this move, as besides repeatedly calling for European allies to assume a greater share in upholding international security, widespread anti-Americanism presently circumscribes a U.S. presence in Pakistan. Therefore the EU, preaching the same values, but with a much softer tone would be a welcome deputy, as was the case with EUBAM in the Palestinian Territories of 2005.

¹⁵ See Reforming Pakistan’s Police. International Crisis Group. Asia Report No.157 (Brussels, 14 July 2008)

[<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/getfile.cfm?id=3516&tid=5570&type=pdf&l=1>]

¹⁶ See [Fn.8 pg.16-17]

And Britain steps up anti-terror aid to Pakistan. The Guardian (London, 04 May 2009)

[<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/04/pakistan-terrorism-military-mi5-mi6>]

And British forces train Pakistan’s Frontier Corps to fight al-Qaeda. The Times (London, 21 March 2009)

[<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5946916.ece>]

¹⁷ See [Fn.8 pg.24-25]

And Pursue Prevent Protect and Prepare: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism. (London, March 2009) pg. 100-101

[http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-publications/publication-search/general/HO_Contest_strategy.pdf?view=Binary]

And PM announces new anti-terror pact. (London, 14 December 2008) [<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page17777>]

¹⁸ See [Fn.8]

¹⁹ See Anand Menon. Empowering Paradise? The ESDP at Ten. International Affairs 85:2 (2009) pg.240

In time, this could be integrated into a civilian European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission, similar to the German Police Project Office of 2002 before it became EUPOL Afghanistan five years later. Although the latter is seen as ‘too little, too late’, the difference here would be that Brussels would already have a stake in Pakistan prior to a potential worsening of the situation or escalation of the threat. And so be in a better position to respond. London could assume the role of ‘framework nation’, like France has done in Africa (e.g. Operation Artemis), a continent that poses similar sensitivities for Paris, as the Indian subcontinent does London. Allowing for the institutional structure in Brussels, a civilian ESDP mission would also be politically easier as it would avoid disagreement over whether or not to run the operation under ‘Berlin Plus Agreements’ and over jurisdiction as NATO does not do civilian missions. An ESDP mission would therefore have the added bonus of bringing the UK – an ardent Atlanticist – closer to Europeanists on issues of security and defence. Of course, this would be a high profile mission, riddled with the prospect of failure. Nonetheless starting slow and steadily building up to an ESDP mission would provide Brussels with an intimate understanding of the challenges that would lie ahead and allow for thorough preparation. In anticipation therefore, the EU should look to raise its standing on the ground in order to provide better protection if and when a mission came to pass. Additional aid for the some 2 million persons currently internally displaced by fighting between government forces and militants in Pakistan’s Swat Valley and surrounding areas would be a good place to start. As a result Brussels would gain greater access to Islamabad, as a positive presence in Pakistan could cultivate a pro-Europeanism on the ground. Therefore the EU would not suffer the same fate as the U.S., making Brussels a more ‘politically’ acceptable partner, which the UK could also look to exploit. Hence Brussels could at long last have a voice in U.S. and UK policy making in Pakistan.

Conclusion

In sum, The European Union should raise its profile in Pakistan, a country around which so much of late revolves. Though institutional structure and military capabilities limit its response, an examination of Pakistan’s relations with other external actors – the U.S., the UK and China – illustrates that there is still a role

for the EU, a role consistent with its institutional structure and capabilities, as well as complements said relations. In this regard, a number of options are open to Brussels. For instance, it could strengthen political dialogue and consolidate existing trade relations with Pakistan. Further, the EU could also consolidate current efforts in improving the health and education of Pakistan’s work force as well as look to increase investment in infrastructure, both essential if goods are to be competitive and economic growth sustained. In order to make Pakistan more conducive to a boost in trade and investment, the EU could also consider how it could improve the security situation in Pakistan. In particular, how its experience and expertise in reforming the security sectors in Central and South Eastern Europe as well as the Western Balkans could be applied. The EU could also support the expansion of the UK’s existing efforts on the ground, which includes training and working with Pakistan’s police on counter-terrorism. In time, and with a worsening of the situation and escalation of the threat, the EU would be in a better position to consider a civilian ESDP mission. In anticipation therefore, the EU should, last but not least, improve its standing on the ground.