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PAKISTAN: CHANGE IN MINDSET NEEDED TO COUNTER THREATS FROM WITHIN

Shuichi Igawa

Pakistan is faced with serious threats from within. Terrorism is rapidly spreading beyond the border region with Afghanistan into Swat, Lahore and Islamabad, where a bomb blast hit the Marriott Hotel. Despite such a serious national crisis, Pakistan's army and its intelligence agency, the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), continue to regard India as their main enemy, harboring Islamic extremists and providing them aid as part of their counter-India strategy. To avoid the "Afghanistanization" of Pakistan, a change in the mindset and strategy of the army and the ISI is of crucial importance.

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For Pakistan, which has fought four wars with India – including the 1999 Kargil War – since its independence in 1947, countering threats from India has been the biggest security challenge. For this very purpose, the military and the ISI have been allocated more than one-third of Pakistan's national budget and allowed to intervene as a guardian deity in political affairs. Or, to put it another way, countering India has been their *raison d'être*. It is where they have found their national interest, be it true national interest or not.

Placed in an overwhelmingly inferior position vis-à-vis India in terms of military strength and national power, the Pakistani army and the ISI have been pursuing nuclear deterrence and asymmetric military capability to fill the gap. The efficacy of the asymmetric military capability was well demonstrated when Kashmir extremists, who numbered just several tens of thousands until several years ago, managed to pin down nearly half of the Indian armed forces in their region. Nonetheless, Pakistan still lacks the capability to deploy troops in the hinterlands of Afghanistan. In this regard, supporting the Taliban puppet administration was a necessary measure. Since this is no longer possible, Pakistan urgently needs to prevent a two-front war by hampering the establishment of a pro-India administration in Afghanistan. The Karzai administration is very fragile but pro-India, so it is only natural for Pakistan's army and intelligence agency to rely on asymmetric military capabilities.

However, the situation has grown even more complicated. Some of the extremist groups, which have been tools of the army and the ISI, are leading a rebellion and destabilizing Pakistan's national security. As British Foreign Secretary David Miliband recently noted, the true threat arises not from India but from within. Even so, approximately 70 percent of Pakistan's military still keeps watch to the east. The source of the India threat is the Kashmir dispute. Since there is no prospect of the dispute being resolved in the foreseeable future, the Pakistani military – roughly 70 percent of whose soldiers come from the province of Punjab bordering India and not Afghanistan – will not easily change spontaneously its strategy or its perception of India in the short term.

In any case, the royal road is for the civilian administration backed by popular support to place the army and the ISI under civilian control and have

them pursue not their interests but the interests of the people. However, the future of President Asif Zardari's civil administration remains very precarious while the military is restoring its reputation, which suffered during the Musharraf era, in readiness for a return to power. Although some feel nostalgic about the Musharraf era, we must take to heart that what is important now is to provide full support and assistance to the democratic government. We must also give serious consideration to engaging former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who has been spurned by Western countries due to his alleged links with Muslim organizations but who retains popular support and dislikes military interference in national politics.

The remaining option is to encourage the military and the ISI to change their mindset from the outside. Bringing India further into the mainstream of the international community and thus raising the costs of worsening relations with Pakistan would be important in reducing the relative threat of India for Pakistan. We used to talk about Pakistan in the framework of "India-Pakistan relationship." To change the mindset of the Pakistani military and its intelligence agency, it is crucial for the international community in concert to consciously de-hyphenate Pakistan from India and hyphenate the country with Afghanistan and the other neighboring countries. The Af-Pak concept advocated by Richard Holbrooke, the US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, understands this point in this regard, although his original aim was somewhat different. To give shape to the concept, expanding economic cooperation with the surrounding areas, including Central Asia, is a task of pressing urgency. Several attempts are being made, but they remain little more than sloganeering, with full-fledged progress yet to be seen. We must be cautious about the US plan to newly hyphenate Pakistan-Afghanistan-India, however. From Pakistan's point of view, involving India in regional economic cooperation and the contact group does nothing but heighten the threat from India perceived by the army and ISI in the short term.

Finally, the international community must pay more attention to strengthening the Pakistani police because dealing with internal threats is in principle the task of police, not the military or intelligence agencies. This ultimately comes down to the low salary of police officers. Donor countries tend

to back away from salary assistance but, given that police officers get lower salaries than Taliban elements in the field, this is an issue that should be addressed urgently in light of the gravity of the situation. I think this is also an area to which Japan can contribute. A Pakistan Donors Conference is scheduled in Tokyo for April 17 along with a Friends of Democratic Pakistan Group Ministerial Meeting. I hope Japan as the host country will demonstrate initiative.



Shuichi Igawa is a Japanese specialist on Pakistani affairs.