



# CANADA-ASIA AGENDA

## Canada-Pakistan Relations: Where to Next?

By Peter Jones

The current level of Canadian engagement with Pakistan is unprecedented. As a member of the NATO coalition fighting in Afghanistan, Canada now has a direct interest in day-to-day events in Pakistan. Despite this sea change, it is difficult to identify any uniquely Canadian contribution that could be the basis of an enhanced strategy to deal with Pakistan. Once Canada's troops withdraw from Pakistan's doorstep, it seems likely that relations will slip back to the pre-September 11, 2001 mode and the intense Canadian interest in Pakistan will be regarded in future as an aberration.

After years of solid, if unspectacular ties, Canada and Pakistan have developed a multi-faceted and mature relationship that has expanded considerably in recent years through Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan. Certainly, there are issues of great interest to both – areas like terrorism/extremism, arms proliferation and economic development. Pakistan is widely regarded as a state on the frontlines of all these issues. Canada and Pakistan also share a significant people-to people relationship through immigration and student inflows. However, one is hard pressed to identify any uniquely Canadian long-term interest that could be the basis of an enhanced bilateral relationship with Pakistan.

The Canada - Pakistan relationship would likely have

remained fairly static had not Afghanistan sheltered those who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. This attack set in motion a chain of events which led to Canada's largest military deployment since the Korean War, right on Pakistan's doorstep. Despite Pakistan's recently acquired significance for Canada, it seems increasingly likely that following Canada's planned 2011 military withdrawal from Afghanistan, the intense Canadian interest in Pakistan will be regarded in future as an aberration in Canadian-Pakistani relations.

### Bilateral Relations

Canada established relations with Pakistan upon the founding of that state in 1947. Although the two have since had a continuous, if bumpy relationship, Canada



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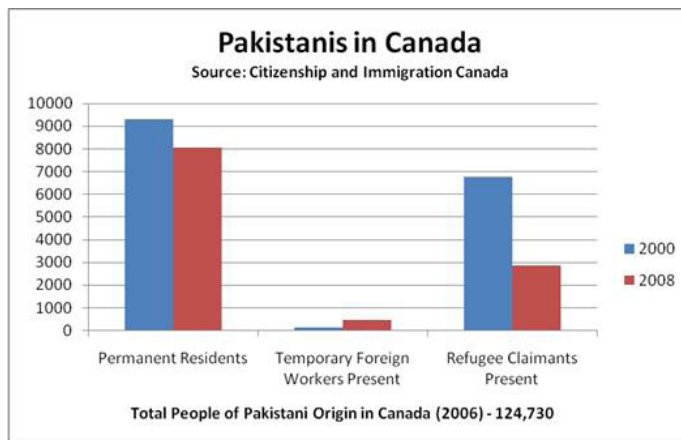
now has a direct interest in the day-to-day events in Pakistan. This interest is unprecedented in the history of the relationship.

The two countries are partners in the Commonwealth, though Canada has supported Pakistan's suspension for periods of time. Canada provided nuclear technology for development purposes that has been implicated in Pakistan's subsequent development of a nuclear weapon. More generally, Canada has expressed concern about such issues as the role of the military and security services in Pakistani politics. With the growing sense in Canada of the importance of South Asia, and particularly India, on the world stage, relations with Pakistan are often viewed through the prism of that country's role in regional terms.

In economic terms, trade between the two countries is valuable, although not a particularly significant economic factor for either. According to Statistics Canada, total bilateral trade last year was around \$650 million, with Canada enjoying a \$158 million surplus. Canadian exports to Pakistan were largely agricultural (primarily oilseeds such as soybeans), with metals, minerals and machinery also featured. Pakistan's exports to Canada were almost 75% textiles, with agricultural and leather goods making up much of the remainder. Canadian direct investment in Pakistan was \$32 million in 2009.

Pakistan is a major source of immigrants to Canada, making the people-to-people relationship one of the most important. According to the 2006 census, some 57,630 people emigrated from Pakistan to Canada between 2001 and 2006, placing Pakistan among in the top five source countries. The exact number of people of Pakistani origin who live in Canada is difficult to ascertain, but is generally reckoned to be in the range of 300,000 to 350,000. It is interesting to note that as a proportion of the overall populations of India and Pakistan, there are more people of Pakistani origin in Canada than there are of Indian origin.

An important segment of the people-to-people contacts are Pakistanis who apply to study in Canada. Between 1998 and 2007, Pakistan was between the 10th and 16th largest source of foreign students in Canada. Significantly, the overall visa rejection rate during this time was quite high (averaging 40% to 60% annually in this period) in comparison with similar rates in Europe and the US (which were approximately 5% during the same period). Unless, for some unexplained reason, a



significantly higher proportion of undesirable students apply to study in Canada than in the US or Europe, this is an area where expansion of the relationship is possible.

Pakistan is one of the world's poorest countries and has been a major recipient of Canadian aid for more than forty years. In 2009, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) placed Pakistan on its list of twenty "countries of focus." In 2007-2009, CIDA reports that total aid was \$64.5 million, with \$44.6 million being bilateral aid and \$19.9 million aid funnelled through multilateral organizations. Canadian aid has focused largely on thematic areas such as educational reform, children and youth, and combating gender discrimination.

The Canadian government-funded International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has also been active in Pakistan since 1977. Since that time, the IDRC has supported 57 projects in or involving Pakistan, for a total allocation of \$19.9 million. IDRC's areas of focus have included efforts to make IT (and especially the internet) more accessible in remote areas; studies on how agricultural practices might be improved, especially through conservation; and the development of indigenous analytical capacity of the effects of national economic policy-making on development.

### The Afghan Conflict and the Region

The relationship between Pakistan and the former Taliban government of Afghanistan was close and complex. Islamabad regards Afghanistan as "strategic depth" in its ongoing confrontation with India and seeks to minimize Indian influence there. The Taliban movement was

fostered during the 1990s by Pakistan's powerful Inter-services Intelligence Directorate in a move to foster greater Pakistani influence in Afghanistan. During the years of the Taliban government, Pakistan was one of only three countries to give diplomatic recognition to the Taliban.<sup>1</sup> That said, Pakistan was also wary of the Taliban lest it achieve too great a degree of influence over fractious Pashtun tribes in the border areas of Pakistan.

More generally, the NATO coalition members have pressed Pakistan to confront extremist elements in the country and to extend the rule of the central government to the areas bordering Afghanistan. Both are difficult for Pakistan to do and the effort has cost Islamabad. There is also a nagging doubt as to whether all elements of the Pakistani government are fully engaged in the fight, with some sectors perhaps hedging bets against the return of the Taliban to power.



Source: CIA World Factbook

It was thus with a degree of ambivalence that Pakistan watched the US and its allies remove the Taliban from power. In the ensuing insurgency the Taliban and other opponents of the current Afghan government move back and forth across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border with US forces occasionally following without Pakistani permission. The coalition fighting in Afghanistan has pressed Pakistan to “do more” to confront the Taliban and other extremists using its territory. This has contributed to sometimes tense exchanges between Islamabad and the coalition members, including Canada.<sup>2</sup> In March 2010, the G8 Foreign Ministers announced the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative, an economic, trade and infrastructure development initiative.

These various conflicts have taken place against the backdrop of significant changes in Pakistani politics. A civilian government is now in power after many years of military rule, though the extent to which the civilian leadership exercises control, particularly over the security and defence sectors, is unclear.



Source: Canadian Forces Image Gallery

Construction engineers with the Canadian Forces Disaster Assistance Response Team help repair water pipes following the 2005 earthquake.

In broader regional terms, Pakistan officially continues to take the view that the confrontation with India remains the country's primary security concern. The bulk of the Pakistani military remains devoted to the perceived danger of a possible attack from India, not to the effort to fight internal security threats. Pakistan's ostensible reason for maintaining a nuclear deterrent, at great cost, is the fear of an existential threat from India. Meanwhile, India strongly believes that Pakistan's security services maintain links with extremist elements in Kashmir, including those who launched the deadly attacks in Mumbai in November 2008.

This attack led to the suspension of what had been a slow, but promising peace process between India and Pakistan. Although dialogue has recently resumed, it has yet to return to the level which existed before the Mumbai bombings. In the longer term, however, India appears to recognize that it has no choice but to try to develop a new approach to regional relations, both for its own sake and also as part of India's effort to cement its place as a global power. (For a full examination of the role of Afghanistan in India's regional ties, see *India's Role in Post-2011 Afghanistan -- Can Canada & India Collaborate?* in the April 28, 2010 issue of Canada - Asia Agenda.

### Implications for Canada

As a member of the coalition in Afghanistan, and as one of the relatively few countries actively engaged in fighting, Canada has a greater interest in Pakistan than it ever has before. Canada's troops are located in Kandahar, the homeland of the Taliban not far from the border with Pakistan. Canada has thus joined a strong international chorus calling for far greater efforts from Islamabad to confront extremist elements within that country, and to deny the Afghan insurgents the use of Pakistani territory as a sanctuary.

Beyond its military commitment to Afghanistan, Canada has quietly sought to improve the situation on the ground between Pakistan and Afghanistan with initiatives such as the "Dubai Process." This is an effort, sponsored and facilitated by Canada, to encourage Afghanistan and Pakistan to develop practical means to exercise greater control over their border.<sup>3</sup>

More generally, Canada has a variety of ongoing interests in Pakistan, which will continue whatever the outcome of the conflict in Afghanistan. The large and

#### *The Dubai Process*

*The Dubai Process is a series of workshops initiated in 2007 and facilitated by Canada with the goal of improving cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan in their volatile border region. Discussions have focused on customs, narcotics, migration, law enforcement, and social and economic development. The recently announced G8 Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative is meant to build on the work of the Dubai Process to encourage economic and social development by enhancing trade and infrastructure.*

growing Pakistani community in Canada assures that events in Pakistan will resonate with an urban voting bloc in Canada. As a champion of disarmament (though a somewhat less active champion in recent years), Canada will continue to regard Pakistan's nuclear program with concern, especially as it has proven to be one of the more proliferation-prone of such programs. Canada plans to maintain its weapons embargo to Pakistan, put in place following mid-1990s nuclear testing. Finally, in broader regional terms, Canada, like most other countries, recognizes that India is poised to play a more significant international role in years to come. Canada has thus joined many countries in encouraging the India-Pakistan peace process as a means to help stabilize the region as a whole. Indeed, Canada-Pakistan relations must be considered in tandem with Canada's wider goals in South Asia and especially increased relations with India.

### Conclusion: Future Directions

It is difficult to see a Canadian interest or message concerning Pakistan that is appreciably different to that of the other likeminded international actors. One is left to wonder what the level of Canada's interest in Pakistan will be once Canada's troops leave Afghanistan in

2011. While there will likely be an ongoing aid and development role for Canada in Afghanistan, and there have been hints of a more modest ongoing commitment to training law enforcement officials (though the Canadian government resolutely rejects any continuing direct military role), one can imagine relations with Pakistan gradually slipping back into a pattern similar to that which existed before September 11, 2001.

The opportunities for Canada to contribute to real change in Pakistan are limited. Ottawa does not have the tools or the influence to push things in any particular direction but there may be opportunities at the margins. For example, as the Dubai Process may show, Canada may retain an ability to assist in quiet dialogues, either official or unofficial, aimed at lessening tensions in the region. Though India has

traditionally been wary of such outside involvement in its bilateral relationship with Pakistan, dialogue efforts and encouragement of functional cooperation can be useful if done quietly and well. But it would be naive to expect that Canada could by itself play a decisive role in fostering regional rapprochement.

In looking ahead, one thus wonders if the intense interest in Pakistan that has arisen in Canada during the long and difficult military mission in Afghanistan will be regarded in future as having been an aberration in Canada-Pakistan relations, notwithstanding the significant people-to-people ties. Still, there is the need for Canada to pay more attention to Pakistan than in the past as geostrategic issues important to Canada's regional and global interests necessitate Ottawa's positive engagement with Islamabad.

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<sup>1</sup> Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also gave diplomatic recognition to the Taliban.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in January 2007, former Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay visited Pakistan, where he intended to have "blunt talk" with President Musharraf over the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. This face-to-face meeting never transpired as Minister MacKay was only able to meet with his Pakistani counterpart.

<sup>3</sup> As part of Canada's aid allocation to the region, it has committed \$32 million until 2011 to support Pakistan-Afghanistan border management and training.

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