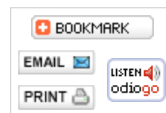


[Home](#) :: [News](#)

Despite Taliban, Pakistan focused on India

By [Leo Shane III](#), Stars and Stripes

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WASHINGTON — When a Pakistani military delegation sat down with Washington policy researchers this week, their focus was clear: The country needs more help to secure the country's eastern border from a potential Indian threat.

Rand Corporation political scientist Christine Fair, said she expected to hear some long-term military extension of Pakistani leaders' decision this week to send thousands of soldiers into the country's Buner district, just 60 miles from the capital, Islamabad, after a new Taliban offensive took control of villages there. They offered none.

"I laughed and told them they needed to get new talking points," said Fair.

"They want more money for F-16s and aren't looking at all for (counterinsurgency) funds. They're continuing to defer their own national security due to an exaggerated threat from the east.

"I don't know what's going to be a wake-up call for them."

Despite U.S. officials continued pleas for Pakistani officials to focus more on their internal threat from the Taliban, analysts say that Pakistani military planners still see India as the primary threat.

Defense and State Department officials conceded as much to lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee on Thursday. Michele Flournoy, undersecretary of defense for policy, said the India-Pakistan rift remains a major stumbling block in efforts to stabilize the region, because Pakistani officials are still committing most of the military resources toward monitoring their eastern neighbor.

Meanwhile, "the insurgency along Pakistan's western border has been steadily expanding," she said. "In the Swat Valley, extremists already exercise effective control."

State Department officials called it a clear sign to the central government of the threat the extremists pose, and a swift response to that threat. Vice Adm. James Winnefeld, director of strategic plans for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers he believes that additional training and funding will help encourage the Pakistanis to further pursue the Taliban.

"We believe increased capabilities will bring an increased will to fight," he said. "This (Pakistani response in Buner) is a real test right now."

But outside experts doubted that, saying public opinion in Pakistan still regards the Taliban as an American problem, not a local one.

"I don't see this as anything more than another sporadic raid," said Malou Innocent, foreign policy analyst with the Cato Institute. "They still have 80 percent of their troops stationed on the border with India, not Afghanistan. Until they shift to the western border, I'm not seeing any real change."

In February, the Pakistani government agreed to let the Taliban impose Islamic law in the Swat Valley in northwest Pakistan as part of a cease-fire deal, much to the chagrin of U.S. officials.

Karin Von Hippel, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the Pakistani government is too weak to mount any sustained campaign against the Taliban, especially with the number of sympathizers in their own armed forces.

Also, she said, the more U.S. officials tell their Pakistani counterparts to focus on the Taliban, the less likely they are to do it.

"We need to start having a bigger conversation with the Pakistani people about the dangers posed by the Taliban," she said. "They don't think it's their fight. They think it's America's."

But working with humanitarian organizations, providing better counterinsurgency training for Pakistani troops, and subtly improving America's image there could have a much more dramatic and positive effect, Hippel said.

Both the State and Defense Departments are pushing for that, and asked Congress to approve legislation that would give Gen. David Petraeus, head of U.S. Central Command, a free hand with funding for Pakistan, allowing quicker purchase of equipment and