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Between the Lines, an Expansion in Pakistan

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WASHINGTON — [President Obama](#) focused his speech on Afghanistan. He left much unsaid about [Pakistan](#), where the main terrorists he is targeting are located, but where he can send no troops.

Mr. Obama could not be very specific about his Pakistan strategy, his advisers conceded on Monday evening. American operations there are classified, most run by the [Central Intelligence Agency](#). Any overt American presence would only fuel anti-Americanism in a country that reacts sharply to every missile strike against extremists that kills civilians as well, and that fears the United States is plotting to run its government and seize its [nuclear weapons](#).

Yet quietly, Mr. Obama has authorized an expansion of the war in Pakistan as well — if only he can get a weak, divided, suspicious Pakistani government to agree to the terms.

In recent months, in addition to providing White House officials with classified assessments about Afghanistan, the C.I.A. delivered a plan for widening the campaign of strikes against militants by [drone aircraft](#) in Pakistan, sending additional spies there and securing a White House commitment to bulk up the C.I.A.'s budget for operations inside the country.

The expanded operations could include drone strikes in the southern province of Baluchistan, where senior Afghan [Taliban](#) leaders are believed to be hiding, officials said. It is from there that they direct many of the attacks on American troops, attacks that are likely to increase as more Americans pour into Afghanistan.

“The president endorsed an intensification of the campaign against [Al Qaeda](#) and its violent allies, including even more operations targeting terrorism safe havens,” said one American official. “More people, more places, more operations.”

That was the message delivered in recent weeks to Pakistani officials by Gen. [James L. Jones](#), the national security adviser. But the Pakistanis, suspicious of Mr. Obama's intentions and his staying power, have not yet agreed.

General Jones was one of a series of American officials who arrived in Pakistan in recent weeks with the same message: no matter how many troops the president commits to Afghanistan, the strategy will founder unless the safe haven inside Pakistan is dealt with.

However, the United States does not have much leverage and is counting on a new attitude and a huge acceleration of efforts from a weak government. Making matters worse, the president, [Asif Ali Zardari](#), is often at odds with the nation's powerful military and intelligence establishment.

The question about Mr. Obama's Pakistan strategy is whether the new commitment of troops and resources can ultimately make America safer at a time of an evolving terrorist threat. Mr. Obama insisted that was his central focus.

"This is the epicenter of the violent extremism practiced by Al Qaeda," he said to the cadets at [West Point](#), speaking of both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the murky border area between the two that offers refuge to extremists of many stripes. The region was the birthplace of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, he said, and "it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak." Many times in the speech he returned to that threat, saying it was what made this war different from Vietnam.

And he referenced another threat, one that focuses the attention of Mr. Obama's national security team daily, but which it speaks about rarely.

"The stakes are even higher within a nuclear-armed Pakistan, because we know that Al Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that they would use them," he said.

Mr. Obama's decision to raise the nuclear specter was notable because a succession of American officials have publicly stated recently that the Pakistani arsenal is secure. In private, however, they have commissioned new intelligence studies on how vulnerable Pakistani warheads and laboratories would be if insurgents made greater inroads, with one official saying recently, "It is the scenario we spend the most time thinking about."

Even if Mr. Obama is successful in lessening the terrorist threat in the region, many analysts say that Al Qaeda has changed into a transnational movement beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"There is no direct impact on stopping terrorists around the world because we are or are not in Afghanistan," said Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, the former C.I.A. officer who was sent into Pakistan after 9/11 to determine if [Osama bin Laden](#) had access to the country's nuclear technology. The nature of modern terrorism, Mr. Mowatt-Larssen, now at Harvard, argued, is that a safe haven can be moved to many different states, and the bigger threat exists in cells, including in Europe and the United States.

Even [Janet Napolitano](#), the secretary of homeland security, acknowledged in an interview this evening that the steps announced by the president would not address Al Qaeda cells in Africa or the Middle East, or even homegrown extremists. But she argued that he had to begin somewhere.

"Can you totally eliminate the threat from Al Qaeda or Al Qaeda types in Yemen or Somalia? No," she said. "But what you have done is taken a major action to limit their ability out of this major theater, from which their leaders and major actions emanate."

Making the Pakistan plan even more complex was Mr. Obama's effort to reconcile two seemingly contradictory messages on Tuesday evening. He had to convince the Pakistanis that he was not planning to leave the region — as the United States did 20 years ago, after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan — while reassuring American citizens that after an 18-month buildup, he would begin to head for the exits.

The United States, he said, simply could not afford an open-ended war. Unlike President Bush, he suggested, he would not set "goals that are beyond what we can achieve at a reasonable cost, and what we need to

achieve to secure our interests.”

Mark Mazzetti contributed reporting.

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