

***THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH ASIA: CORE INTERESTS AND
POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON REGIONAL COUNTRIES***

Presented to the Conference on
Major Powers and South Asia 11-13 August 2003
The Institute for Regional Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan

Stephen Philip Cohen

Senior Fellow,
The Brookings Institution

July 28, 2003

revised for publication, October 1, 2003

Several developments over the last decade ensure that South Asia will remain a region of concern to the United States for years to come. This paper summarizes America's re-engagement with the region, and explores critical policy choices, especially concerning Pakistan, that America must soon make.

Background

On the eve of September 11, most American observers saw India as "rising," Pakistan floundering, and the Taliban as the dominant force in Afghanistan. The nuclear programs of both India and Pakistan continued apace, and there was little strategic interest in the rest of the region.

India had ridden out the angry storm whipped up by its 1998 nuclear tests and accommodation by the United States was at hand.¹ India's strategic community basked in diplomatic glory. Delhi had resisted the Americans, absorbed the sanctions, and sought, and soon received, tacit U.S. acceptance of its new nuclear status. India's economy continued to grow at a healthy rate, its domestic politics were no more chaotic than one would expect of a country undergoing simultaneous economic, class, caste, and ideological revolutions.

The Bush administration built upon Clinton's "discovery of India" and set out to create a comprehensive and positive relationship with New Delhi. It valued India's expanding political and economic power and its democratic political order. Strategically, New Delhi was viewed as a potential counterweight to a rising China. Like its predecessor, the Bush administration recognized the potential political importance of Indian-Americans, and sought to harmonize its foreign policy goals in South Asia with the desires of this affluent community.

In contrast, Pakistan was widely perceived to be on the verge of failure. The natural comparison with India reinforced this judgment, but Pakistan was doing badly in comparison with peer states like Iran, Turkey, Indonesia, and even Bangladesh.

¹ A forthcoming memoir-history by Strobe Talbott, then Deputy Secretary of State, will describe the process in detail.

Pakistan's official economy was flatlined; its core institutions were in shambles, and in mid-1999 it precipitated the Kargil war, setting in motion the events that led to the removal of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Kargil also saw the United States siding with India against Pakistan openly and firmly for the first time in 50 years, as America applied to South Asia the same rules that it had worked out with the Soviet Union during the Cold War: nuclear weapons states shall not attempt to change borders (or lines of control), by force.

As for the one issue that had bedeviled US-Pakistan relations from 1990 (and earlier), non-proliferation, the Bush administration shifted from preventing India and Pakistan from acquiring nuclear weapons, to one of encouraging them to be more responsible nuclear weapons powers. Overall, South Asia was not considered an area of imminent crisis—but the events of September 11 transformed conventional wisdom.

9/11 and South Asia

When the linkage between the hijackers, al Qaeda, and Afghanistan became clear, the U.S. moved immediately to root out the Taliban regime and track down al Qaeda. Had Pakistan not assisted in this effort, Washington would have turned to India. Given Pakistan's acute economic vulnerability, American fury, and India's strategic availability, General Musharraf did what any other Pakistani leader would have done.

Nearly two years after the terrorist attacks, some of the original U.S. objectives in South Asia have been achieved, notably the total destruction of the Taliban, the eviction of al Qaeda from its Afghan redoubt, and the beginning of a new era for the Afghan people. However, September 11 also brought to the surface some of the fundamental contradictions in America's South Asia policy, it contributed to a major India-Pakistan crisis and created a fluid situation in which the regional states might move towards normalization (and even an agreement on Kashmir), or to still another, perhaps nuclear, crisis. Washington is now just beginning to understand that its own regional role, while motivated primarily by the terrorist threat, impinges on vital Indian and Pakistani national interests.

The United States and India

The attacks of September 11 seemed to validate India's position that terrorism, rather than nuclear proliferation or Kashmir, was the major strategic issue in South Asia. This argument was generally accepted in Washington, but it was also recognized that India's policies in Kashmir were partially responsible for the rise of separatist feelings there. New Delhi has a far more attentive audience in Washington as far as terrorism-related matters are concerned.

Indians were, however, chagrined by Pakistan's overnight transformation from a "failing state" to a "frontline" state, and the recipient of western (especially American), aid, and praise. The United States tried to balance its interests: while there were loans to Islamabad to rescue it from economic catastrophe and some sanctions were lifted, Washington tried to accommodate India by pressing Islamabad to cease its support for its homegrown Islamic radicals and for cross-LOC operations in Kashmir. The Bush administration also assured Indian leaders that the forces based in the region and military and economic assistance provided to Pakistan were designed to assist the war against terrorism, and not directed against New Delhi. So far, this remains true, insofar as Pakistan's requests for advanced military equipment, notably F-16s fighters, have not been approved. Washington wanted to preserve President Bush's "one big idea" that India was the regional power that counted, and that there was an opportunity for long-term U.S.-Indian strategic, economic, and political cooperation between two states that were once characterized as estranged democracies. Thus, Indian-American military cooperation increased dramatically and the first significant new arms sales to India in decades was announced in April 2002.

The 2002 Crisis and America's Response

American interests in India survived the long crisis of 2001-2002. India went to the edge of war and tried to compel Pakistan to cease support for cross-border terrorist *cum* freedom fighters. This compellence strategy also targeted America. Delhi guessed correctly that Pakistan would ignore its demands but it hoped that the United States would take the threat of war more seriously. From Washington's perspective there were a

number of reasons to do so. There was a possibility that the U.S. war on terrorism would be disrupted by an India-Pakistan war, and that conflict in South Asia might even go nuclear, creating a crisis with worldwide implications. Washington was also faced with a demand from a new “natural” ally, a state it viewed as a rising power and a potential balancer of China. Finally, India was taken seriously because it was threatening to do exactly what the United States had accomplished Afghanistan and what Israel was doing (with American support) in the Middle East.

The Indian government thus successfully reframed the South Asian debate over peace and war. Echoing the American and Israeli responses to terrorism, Indian officials argued that the issue facing the international community in South Asia was no longer “Kashmir” but terrorism. India refused to talk about Kashmir until terrorism ended, exactly the same position held by Israel (and backed by the United States). This strategy neutralized Pakistan’s long-standing argument that peace would come to South Asia once India began to negotiate the Kashmir dispute. India ran the risk of being labeled the aggressor because of its open threat of war, but it correctly judged that it had found a way to bring international pressure to bear upon Pakistan.

As in 1999, American intervention proved to be decisive in defusing a crisis. For years, the Indian government had formally resisted the idea of a more active U.S. role in the India-Pakistan conflict, while the Pakistan government eagerly sought the intervention of outside powers. These positions were modified when India accepted a U.S. role in pressuring Pakistan in Kargil. New Delhi’s rigid insistence on bilateralism in its dealing with Pakistan was again bent to give Washington an opportunity to “deliver” Musharraf in 2002.

The 2002 crisis deepened when Pakistani officials stated that they would have no recourse but to use nuclear weapons if India were to invade in large numbers, New Delhi accused Islamabad of “nuclear terrorism” and subtly modified India’s position of “no first use.” The heightened military readiness and ballooning rhetoric on both sides alarmed the United States, which began to put more pressure on Musharraf to halt cross-border infiltration. The turning point in the crisis came when the United States issued a warning to its citizens that they leave India (earlier travel warnings were already in effect for

Pakistan), and airlifted non-essential government personnel and dependent family members back home.

This decision also demonstrated to the Indian government that, while the United States sympathized with Delhi's concern about terrorism, there would be a tangible price to pay if India were to persist in keeping the region in crisis. Washington seemed to be saying publicly that the new U.S.-Indian relationship could not be counted on to provide absolute support under *all* circumstances, especially in a conflict with a state (Pakistan) that was still an important partner in the U.S. war against terrorism.

When Deputy Secretary Armitage extracted a pledge from General Musharraf to “permanently” stop cross-border infiltration, he committed the United States to a more proactive role in resolving the Kashmir dispute (there is no evidence that either commitment has been met). Armitage conveyed Musharraf's pledge to New Delhi, which expressed its satisfaction with Pakistan's actions on the ground, and the crisis was defused.

Each country celebrated a victory of sorts. Pakistan concluded that its diplomacy had finally convinced the United States to pressure India on the Kashmir conflict; India boasted that it had, through the United States, extracted a statement from Pakistan that it would cease support for cross-border terrorism; and, the United States congratulated itself on still another successful spell of crisis diplomacy.

U.S.-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan's re-emergence as an important country was made evident by President George W. Bush's invitation, in June 2003, to Pervaiz Musharraf to spend a day at Camp David. Pakistan is today again situated at the crossroads of many American concerns. These include terrorism, nuclear proliferation, relations with the Islamic world, democratization, and relations with other important Asian states. There is no question that Washington will pay close attention to Pakistan in the short run, and a recently-announced aid package of several billion dollars confirms this interest, but can and should Washington address the deeper problems facing Pakistan? Pakistan's failure alone one or more dimensions could spread waves of political instability, terrorists, and nuclear

technology throughout Asia and the Middle East. This is a prospect that deserves close American interest and a concerted, preventive policy.

American Interests in Pakistan

In the 1980s American ambassadors to Islamabad liked to tick off the many important American interests that they were pursuing with President Zia and Pakistan's leaders. These included support for the Afghan mujahiddin, containing the Pakistani nuclear program, edging Zia towards a more democratic political order, averting an India-Pakistan crisis, and working with Pakistan to slow the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan and Pakistan. When difficult decisions had to be made the first policy—maintaining Pakistan's cooperation in the war against the Soviet Union—trumped all others. Washington was mild in its language regarding democratization, it underestimated the chances of an India-Pakistan crisis, and it managed to avert its eyes from the Pakistani nuclear program. About the only policy (other than containing the Soviets) that was successful involved working with Pakistan to slow the flow of narcotics.

However, several developments went unrecognized or were disregarded by the Reagan administration and its successors. These included Pakistan's uneven economic development, its crumbling educational system, and the growth of Islamic extremism. One could also add to the list Pakistan's attempt to dominate Afghanistan, leading to the Taliban's takeover.

These two lists show that the urgent often drives out the important, and that America, like other states, may fail to grasp the importance of the long-term. The Reagan administration was uninterested in the consequences of supporting extremist Islamic fighters and the Clinton administration was focused solely on nuclear issues. No American administration thought it important to ask why Pakistan's educational system was collapsing and why Islamic schools were replacing them. The latter were "soft" issues, but are now correctly seen as critically important for Pakistan's future.

With America again assuming the role of Pakistan's chief outside supporter, there is an opportunity to correct old mistakes. Getting the new relationship right might just bring Pakistan into the category of stable and relatively free states, and could positively

affect its relations with India and its nuclear programs; getting Pakistan wrong could accelerate its movement towards authoritarianism, radical Islam, regional breakaway, renewed war with India, or some grim combination thereof. American policy will have to balance competing interests, take account of the long *and* the short run, recognize the difficulty of fostering change in another state's fundamental institutions, while preparing for worst-case futures.

What Pakistan-related interests are important for the United States today?

First, *terrorism* has zoomed to the top of the American agenda in Pakistan, but this is an interest compounded of two different concerns. One is security-related: Pakistan's cooperation against known threats to the United States, notably Al Qaeda (and to a lesser degree, the Taliban). A second terrorist-related interest is very complex: Pakistan itself produces terrorists and it allows its territory to be used by non-Pakistani groups. Thus, "terrorism" as an issue has a short-term alliance-like quality about it, but also a long-term "prevention" dimension. Washington must work with Islamabad over the next few years to round up al Qaeda operatives who have targeted Washington, but it must also view Pakistan as a potential problem; twice it almost made it to the list of "terrorist-sponsoring" states.²

Second, Islamabad's *nuclear program* is an old concern, but given recent revelations about the movement of nuclear and missile technology to and from Pakistan, it remains an important American interest. Not only is Pakistan in a dangerous nuclear arms race with India, it is potentially a destabilizing factor in disputes in other regions, notably Northeast Asia (with its support for North Korea), and the Gulf area (with its ties to Saudi Arabia).

Third, the *democratization* of Pakistan remains an American interest, although it is far more consequential than it was in the 1980s. Then, democratization was seen as a threat to a stable military regime led by President Zia, who was pressed only lightly to civilianize his government. Today, the Musharraf government and its American

² Officials note that there are no hard and fast criteria for inclusion on the list; Pakistan's support for various terrorist groups was evident in the 1990s, but it was not put on the list for fear of further strengthening the hands of extremists and weakening that of the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif.

supporters argue that democratization could mean that radical Islamic groups will come to power. Thus, democratization also has long and short-term dimensions. In the long-term a democratic Pakistan is seen as desirable, but getting there might disrupt the state in the short-term, with worse consequences than the continuation of an oligarchic establishment led by the military. Americans are divided sharply on this issue, as are Pakistanis.

Fourth, Pakistan's *hostile relationship with India* impinges on short and long-term American interests. Besides a concern about preventing a new India-Pakistan crisis and a war, Washington now has excellent relationship with India and thus, for the first time in decades America has good relations with both South Asian powers. Can the United States have close ties with two states that are hostile to each other, and are repeatedly on the brink of crisis? Washington managed to do this for many years in the case of Greece and Turkey, but these states were each part of a larger alliance framework, they did not have nuclear weapons, and had not fought a real war with each other for many years. There is no overarching American strategic framework for South Asia—and “terrorism” does not provide one.

Fifth, Pakistan's role as a *moderate Islamic* or Muslim state has been transformed. In the past this role was confined to speeches, Pakistan's relations with Turkey and the Shah's Iran, and its role as a military mentor to several small Gulf states. Now, Pakistan's radical Islamists are strengthened after fifteen years of foreign support and almost thirty years of patronage from Pakistan's intelligence services. Further, America has a military presence in Pakistan and its neighbor, Afghanistan, where it has an interest in preserving a liberal regime. Can a Pakistan under great domestic political stress afford to cooperate with the United States, let alone provide troops to Iraq in support of the American effort to rebuild that country?

Finally, American policy-makers have invented the category of *rogue state*, and the enemy is now defined as a state that seeks weapons of mass destruction and supports terrorism. Despite the 2003 aid package, Pakistani policy makers are privately concerned

that Islamabad might become America's next target when this new partnership ends.³ American policymakers must devise a strategy that looks beyond al Qaeda to troubling developments within Pakistan and allow for the possibility that Pakistan, a nominal ally, might become a threat.

Policy Alternatives

How can these different interests be maximized? The current relationship is best described as a *partnership* of uncertain duration, implying a joint objective, presumably the round-up of al Qaeda and Taliban cadres, without the legal and strategic implications of an alliance. If the partnership remains limited, the exchange will be simple and straightforward: Pakistani cooperation in intelligence and military operations against terrorists would bring a quantity of economic and possibly military assistance. A broader partnership would be similar to what Anatol Lieven terms a "management" strategy, in which Washington works with and through Pakistani governments in whatever form they take, seeking to shape their domestic as well as their foreign policies.⁴ Lieven argues that the United States cannot contemplate using force against Pakistan, nor can it escape the fact that Islamabad is central to the war against terrorism, so it must work with whatever Pakistani government comes to power. "In South Asia the melancholy fact is that whatever the ties of sentiment linking the US and India, it is the Pakistani state which is the vital ally in the war against terrorism, because the threats to the US (and to the US position in Afghanistan) stem from Pakistani society, which only a Pakistani state can control."⁵

Most Pakistanis and some Americans believe that the present policy of partnership/engagement will give way to the historic default option: *ignoring* Pakistan. For part of the 1960s, much of the 1970s, and during the first half of the 1990s, Washington had no Pakistan policy to speak of, either ignoring the country or focusing

³ As a leading British paper put it, behind the bravado lurks a worry that Washington's interest in its traditional regional ally is starting to wane. "Musharraf Stands up and hopes to be Counted," *Financial Times*, June 19, 2003.

⁴ Anatol Lieven, "Managing Pakistan," in *The State of Pakistan* (Washington: School of Advanced International Studies, South Asia program, 2003), p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*

on a single issue, nuclear proliferation. One could imagine several reasons for a return to such a policy: the war on terrorism may go well, and Pakistan's assistance may not be required; second, Pakistan might deteriorate very quickly, creating a chaotic and unpredictable situation; third, Washington's attention may be diverted elsewhere, as a result of a new crises or opportunities, relegating Pakistan to a lower level of interest; finally, the United States may not be able to agree upon a consistent policy towards Pakistan, or Congress may not be willing to vote the \$3.2 billion aid package, or place such conditions on the aid that Pakistan will decide not to accept it. Some or all of these things could happen, nevertheless it now seems unlikely that America will soon lose interest in Pakistan.

Finally, one could foresee policies of *containing* or even of *opposing* Pakistan. A containment strategy, modeled after America's cold war policy vis a vis the Soviet Union, would counter Pakistan's support for extremist groups, including terrorists, while trying to change its internal order. Such a policy would best be carried out in conjunction with India and perhaps Afghanistan, as the Indian strategist, C. Raja Mohan, has advocated.

As for opposition, there might be circumstances—such as a civil war, or the existence of loose nuclear weapons—where active opposition was the lesser danger. Other scenarios can also be projected: an Indian decision to achieve the military defeat of Pakistan might tempt an American government to side with India to keep the war short and to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, or their transfer to terrorists and other non-state groups. A policy of uncritical alliance, or one of outright hostility, does not do justice to the range of important American interests embedded in the relationship.

On balance, the optimal policy for the United States, other important countries, and Pakistan itself, should be to look beyond short-term assistance to a policy of preventing the emergence of the more frightening scenarios.

A Comprehensive Policy

In the June 2003 summit at Camp David with Pervaiz Musharraf, President Bush set out three major goals of American policy towards Pakistan: keeping it as a partner in

the war against terrorism, constraining the spread of nuclear weapons, and democratization. The first two are urgent policy priorities, the third a hope, since the prospects of full democratization are limited.

While American policy must be effective in the short term, it needs to be in harmony with important medium and long-term goals. The short-run goals are easy to set forth, but strategies that seek to protect the full range of American interests, not just for the next year or two, but for the rest of the decade, have to be developed and implemented. The following list of American interests and policies is presented in order of short-run to long-run, but *all are important and should receive close attention by American policymakers*. The first group of interests and policies are those clustered around Pakistan itself, a second group addresses Pakistan's environment.

Terrorism

The new American relationship with Pakistan derives primarily from the latter state's importance in combating al Qaeda and (to a lesser extent) the Taliban. al Qaeda's terrorism is explicitly aimed at America, the Taliban were accessories, in that they permitted Afghanistan to be used by al Qaeda as a massive safe-haven in which training and planning took place, and cadres sent out on terror missions. American and Pakistan interests diverged on the Taliban, Pakistan seeing the Taliban as the first friendly Afghan government in recent history. Pakistan has been cooperative in rounding up al Qaeda cadres, but less enthusiastic about the Taliban, which receives significant support from Pakistani Pushtuns and some of the Islamist parties. Further, a few al Qaeda leaders found shelter with Jama'at-i-Islami leaders in several Pakistani cities.

If Afghan-related terrorism that impinges upon America can be termed "Type I," then Type II is Pakistan's direct and indirect support for Kashmiri-related groups that have attacked innocent civilians. A few such groups seem to be intent upon precipitating a war between Delhi and Islamabad and oppose the latter government because it abandoned the Taliban and reversed course on Afghanistan.

If, from Pakistan's perspective Type I and II terrorism look outward, "Type III" terrorism has a domestic dimension. Many of Pakistan's terrorists are sectarian, and some

have links to one or another group operating in Kashmir/India and Afghanistan. A number of these groups have links to various Pakistani political parties, Islamabad's intelligence services, or the army, as they have been used in the past by the state for domestic purposes.

Should American policy ignore Type's II and III terrorism, and only focus on US-related terrorists? Obviously, such a policy is and morally and practically unsustainable, and all three types of terrorism are important. Pakistan is less likely to cooperate in Types II and III, but here there are compelling American interests involved. America should focus on three strategies.

First, there should be continued support to improve the professionalism of Pakistan's police forces. In the long run this is more important for the security and stability of Pakistan than money spent on advanced weapons and military hardware.

Second, since the army remains politically important, Washington should link the quantity and quality of *military assistance* to good performance in countering all three kinds of terrorist groups, beginning, obviously, with the first category, but eventually including the second and third. Many steps have been discussed between American and Pakistani officials in this regard, including greater control over the madrassas, closer surveillance of suspect groups, closing terrorist training camps, improving surveillance along the LOC, and countering extremist propaganda. If Pakistan demonstrates vigor and competence in such matters, military aid and cooperation could be *increased*.

Finally, Pakistan's movement against terrorists operating in Kashmir will have to be linked to progress in a peace process (see below) since Pakistan will not want to unilaterally strip itself of vital policy instrument. To summarize, nothing will happen if America only demands an end to Pakistani support for terrorist groups without offering positive inducements in the form of additional aid and political support for a dialogue with India.

The Economy

Despite success at the macro-economic level, Pakistan still has a large international debt, and unemployment and underemployment remain high. America

should continue to support the economy with macro-level assistance, and should revisit the question of textile quotas for Pakistan, but continued (and even expanded) economic aid should be linked to several key policy changes.

One is that the Pakistani people must see tangible evidence that its government's tilt in favor of the United States brings significant benefits to all social-economic strata. Most aid is invisible; without being obtrusive or boasting, the message should be that America is vitally concerned about Pakistani economic progress and wants to see Pakistan's economy adapt to a fast changing world. Specific projects in the arena of high technology, improving indigenous manufacturing and R and D capabilities would demonstrate that a globally competitive Pakistan is in America's interest.⁶ Pakistan's textile industry is one of its most advanced sectors, but even it will face stiff competition from China in a few years.

Washington should also pursue the initiative announced by President Bush at the 2003 summit: that American companies be encouraged to invest in Pakistan. Japan should be closely consulted on economic matters regarding Pakistan, as it is the country's largest foreign investor and aid donor, and has major economic investments in India and other regional states.

Finally, economic assistance accountability is vital. The essential principle that American aid administrators must keep in mind is that aid is not merely a payoff to a regime; its purpose, in this case, is to help that regime make the structural changes; an important warning sign would be Pakistan's refusal to accept accountability for the significant amounts of aid headed in its direction. Pakistan is at the very top of Transparency International's corruption list, and the United States and other donors have every right to link economic assistance with assurances that the money is being properly spent.

⁶ For excellent studies of Pakistan's economic plight, with a discussion of American policy options, see Amb. Teresita C. Schaffer, "Reviving Pakistan's Economy: A Report from the CSIS Project," (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2002).

Education

Washington and Islamabad are aware of the collapse of Pakistan's educational system, but tend to look at different aspects of the problem. Washington focuses on the madrassas, seeing them as schools for terrorism, and President Bush asked Musharraf about progress in this area (his answer was: not as good as we would like). Islamabad would prefer to emphasize advanced technical education, and has started another scheme to massively train scientists and technicians. Pakistan's leadership sees the problem in technocratic terms, producing scientists and engineers who are politically apathetic but technically adept, and who might help Pakistan compete with India and other rivals. Their model is the military-educational-industrial complex already in place. However, this is an educational vision appropriate for a totalitarian state, not for a country that aspires to democracy. Pakistan needs to accelerate the pace of educational reform, if necessary bringing in foreign teachers, sending their own out on a crash program to train MA and PhDs, and even sending students to neighboring countries, including India. The educational sector should be privatized rapidly, since the public educational system cannot move quickly enough to produce the teachers and administrators necessary for rapid growth with quality. American aid should be highly conditional; the danger to avoid is that too much money is poured into an educational system that does not have the capacity to absorb it. Nothing contributes more to corruption than the feeling that present budgets must be spent. To reiterate, the essential principle to bear in mind is that this aid is not being given for its own sake, but to achieve permanent and positive change in Pakistan.

Civil Society and Democratization

"Democratization" was one of the three benchmarks set forth by Washington when it announced the 2003 aid package. Washington should press Pakistan hard to allow its mainstream parties and their leadership to compete in future elections on a fair basis, and a timetable be developed for the restoration of democracy—even if the latter was publicly rejected by President Musharraf during his 2003 visit. These are important goals, and American leverage will be enhanced if it adjusts the size and schedule of the package according to Pakistani performance. It will be difficult to persuade the present Pakistani

government that such steps are in its own interest. The military are afraid that a return to complete civilian government means a return to policies inimicable to the army's conception of "the national interest," because civilians simply do not understand what that interest is, and that Pakistan cannot afford another spell of incompetent democracy. Additionally, the Pakistani establishment argues that democratization might bring Islamic radicals into power, and they cite the case of the NWFP and Balochistan.

The army's hostility towards politicians cannot be erased overnight, yet democratization is in Pakistan's own interest. As I wrote in 1985, there needs to be a "staged" withdrawal of the army from politics, staged in both meanings of the word. Ironically, the chief obstacle to democracy is the army, which is also the principal barrier to political extremism. The generals cannot govern Pakistan, but they will not let anyone else govern it. The army should be encouraged to develop an informal timetable, and stick to it. This timetable may last for several years, but there is no better opportunity than now to restore the civil-military balance in Pakistan to something resembling normalcy.

While democracy in Pakistan will always be problematic, the best way for the United States to forestall the rise of radical Islam, to safeguard a modicum of civil liberties, and pre-empt separatist movements, is to insist as a condition of aid, that the Pakistan government allow the broad-based political parties (such as Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League), to function freely. The goal should be a spectrum of moderate parties, Islamic and otherwise, who are willing to operate within a parliamentary and peaceful context, and who are tolerant of sectarian and other minorities. The Pakistan government must be accountable for its toleration of Islamist groups, parties and leaders that have practiced and preached violence within Pakistan and across its borders in India and Afghanistan.

Military Training Programs

One area where America should be unambiguously supportive, is in military training programs that bring officers to the United States, and send Americans to Pakistan. These programs were expanded after 9/11, and should be maintained indefinitely and at high levels, insulated from sanctions. Should Islamabad pursue

policies inimicable to the United States, Washington might want to reduce or eliminate military and even economic aid, but the training programs provide a channel to Pakistan's most important institution, and no administration (or Congress) should touch them. They are not a reward for good behavior; they provide unique access to the Pakistan army; terminating them would hurt America more than Pakistan. Washington should not limit these programs to military subjects; they can be expanded to include fellowships for Pakistani officers to join American universities and research centers as was done during the Zia years; the paramilitary forces and police should also receive high-quality professional training in the United States.

A Friendlier Neighborhood

Pakistan's future will depend in large part upon its relations with its neighbors, especially India and Afghanistan. The India relationship shapes Pakistani politics because it places the army front and center, and makes national security a disproportionately large influence on Pakistan's economy, politics, and social structure. Nevertheless, despite high defense spending for years, and two major wars, Pakistan is less secure today than it was fifty years ago—and the same can be said of India. The cautious optimism regarding normalization has dissipated, replaced by narratives of nuclear holocaust, civilizational war, and terrorism.

There are at least five reasons for the exacerbation of Pakistan's relations with India.⁷ They are 1) the pathological nature of India-Pakistan relations, where each side feels threatened and insecure, 2) the power disparity between the two countries, 3) the introduction of nuclear weapons into their arsenals, which makes the region notorious, not peaceful, 4) the rise of groups that are beyond state control, including separatists, and radical Islamic (and Hindu) movements, and 5) the disinterest of outside powers, especially the United States, in long-term solutions. What can the United States do to reduce these obstacles to a more normal India-Pakistan relationship?

⁷ For an extended discussion see Stephen Philip Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington: Brookings, 2001), Chapter Seven, "India and Pakistan."

First, while the psychological cold war between India and Pakistan cannot be influenced directly by American officials, many indirect steps are important. Washington should continue to encourage unofficial dialogues on Kashmir, nuclear issues, and areas of cooperation and conflict management. Private foundations should be encouraged to support such programs, and to arrange meetings of parliamentarians, supporting educational programs that brought younger Indians and Pakistanis together. One notable example is the summer and winter schools for the “next generation” of Indian and Pakistani journalists, academics, and junior officials to discuss regional security issues, including non-military sources of conflict.

Second, the disparity in power between India and Pakistan *is* something that the United States can influence. Washington is again in the position of having its finger on the balance-scales via its sale of military equipment and technology to both India and Pakistan. The right kind of equipment given at the right time might make it easier for India and Pakistan to negotiate, but the wrong kind of military and dual-use assistance could trigger a regional arms race. In this regard, it would be useful for an objective assessment of the actual conventional and nuclear balances, edging India and Pakistan towards some kind of understanding of the parameters of military acquisition. It may be that the region can be encouraged to move to a defensive-oriented military structure, and to acquire systems that are less provocative, and enhance stability and reliability in the nuclear area.

Third, the conventional balance must be complemented by policies that will help India and Pakistan manage their nuclear weapons in a safe and secure fashion, without encouraging them to go to more and more advanced systems. Indian Muslims do not, as Jinnah once thought they would, regard themselves as hostages to a Hindu population still resident in Pakistan, but they have ironically become hostages to a nuclear Pakistan that threatens them with annihilation. The risks of nuclear theft and seizure in Pakistan have been exaggerated, the army is unlikely to lose its control over Pakistan’s nuclear assets; however, Pakistan has allowed its nuclear scientists to roam the world, and the provision of military aid should be tightly linked to the utmost in nuclear restraint. Indeed, the issue is so important that Washington should consider the most devastating

sanction of all—should Pakistan continue to leak technology to states hostile to Washington, then the proper American response would be to strengthen India’s strategic and nuclear capacities.

Fourth, the rise of radical ethnic and religious groups has followed parallel trajectories in India and Pakistan, and extremist Hindu and Muslim groups have interacted with each other for over seventy years. With new mass media recording their provocations, the extremists in green are virtually indistinguishable from those in saffron. There is little that Washington can or should do directly regarding such groups, but it is important that American officials speak out against outrages, and that American private foundations and think tanks monitor the excesses of these groups. There are many India and Pakistan groups already doing this, and they deserve outside support and encouragement.

Finally, the United States must go beyond mere lip service and promote a peace process between the two countries, perhaps with the cooperation of like-minded democracies.⁸ The Bush administration loathes the term, but it is self-evident that India and Pakistan have reached a point where they cannot move forward without outside “facilitation” and they stand a good chance of stumbling into still another crisis or war.⁹ American support for such a process—even if it was called something else—would do much to undercut the Islamic extremists on the Kashmir issue, it would make the army less central to Pakistan’s future; and, in the long run, it would also be in India’s interest. Starting and sustaining such a process should be a major American activity. Disputes

⁸ Japan should be closely associated with America’s policies in Pakistan, and it is remarkable that no recent administration has bothered to do so. Japan is Pakistan’s largest aid donor, it is very much concerned about the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and there are no cultural or political obstacles to a more important Japanese role in Pakistan—or for that matter, India. Indeed, Japan should be associated with any attempt to sustain a peace process between India and Pakistan, and it is very likely that Japanese officials would join in, if asked.

⁹ American officials vehemently rejected “facilitation” at one point but now accept it as a legitimate and useful American role; Ambassador Robert Blackwill insisted on Indian television that the United States would facilitate two-party talks between India and Pakistan, but that it would not provide substance, a road map, or a blueprint. Press Trust of India, June 28, 2003.

such as Kashmir, Cyprus, Bosnia, and Palestine-Israel are regarded as beyond a definitive solution, they are, in Haass' term, "conflicts unending."¹⁰ However, the formula to deal with them is not to wait until they are "ripe" for resolution, or to turn away, or to search for a definitive solution when none is available, but management. The goal should be slow movement towards a stable relationship. Dealing with these conflicts involves a very long journey, and patient nurturing.

A peace process between India and Pakistan, which had as a major component the well-being of the Kashmiri people would remove one of the causes of radical Islamists. This will be difficult to achieve, but it should be one of the primary goals of American policy.

Afghanistan

Any comprehensive American policy towards Pakistan must also address the latter's relationship with Afghanistan. While the U.S., Afghanistan, and Pakistan now have a tripartite security committee to monitor the progress against al Qaeda and Taliban, many in Islamabad still regard Afghanistan as a potential client state, and most fear the intrusion of Indian and Iranian power into Afghanistan. On paper, Pakistani statements regarding Afghanistan are reassuring, but given the opportunity some Pakistanis would again interfere in Afghan affairs. Islamabad has legitimate interests in Afghanistan, not least of which is preventing a classic Kautilyan encirclement movement. The best American policy is prevention—assuring that Afghanistan does not collapse into chaos and that Pakistan remains supportive of the Karzai regime, or something like it, and allows the effective neutralization of Afghanistan. Afghanistan needs substantial and permanent outside assistance to help manage its own security and Washington should actively support the process in the knowledge that the greatest danger of an Afghan collapse might be the radicalization of large parts of Pakistan.¹¹

¹⁰ Richard Haass, *Conflicts Unending* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹¹ A new \$1 billion American commitment to Kabul was announced at the time of writing (July 27, 2003).

Conclusions

In Pakistan's case, America must go beyond a policy of cooperation and encompass a strong dose of prevention. The cost of such a policy would be minimal, but it would have to go beyond a dollop of military equipment and debt relief. It would be comprised of assistance to Pakistan's weakened civilian institutions, especially education, and the revival of technical and other assistance schemes that helped Pakistan become a candidate-member for middle income status fifteen years ago. A policy of prevention will involve working closely with other states and would be welcomed by those Indians who also see a reasonably liberal, moderate Pakistan to be in India's interests. This policy would also mean engagement with the idea of Pakistan; Washington has, once again, come to view Pakistan as a "moderate Muslim state," envisioned as a role model for other Muslim states. But the idea of a "moderate Muslim state" must have content. If the end goal is a liberal, modern state, functioning in the global system at peace with its neighbors, then there is a very long road ahead.

For the United States, Pakistan is an ally in the war against terrorism, but it is also a potential source of Islamic radicalism, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and even a participant in a nuclear war. This could happen during this administration's watch, or the next. Washington has no option but to work with Pakistan in the short run, cajoling Islamabad to adopt policies that go beyond its short term cooperation in the war against terrorism. However, America should be concerned about the deeper causes of Pakistan's malaise, lest the country become the kind of nuclear-armed monster state that its critics already think it is.

For *any* policy to succeed, the American policy community will also have to understand Pakistani and Indian views towards America. These include a belief that America is a fickle and unreliable state, that Washington typically uses regional powers and then discards them, that Congress is dominated by a pro-India (or pro-Pakistani) lobby, and that Washington is insensitive in dealing with Indian/Pakistani leaders.

In Pakistan there is a fear that Washington will choose New Delhi over Islamabad, and Pakistanis see the warmer U.S.-India ties with alarm. Pakistanis are expert at appealing to American fears in the hope of establishing a relationship of mutual

dependency in which Pakistani obligations are minimal while American ones are substantial. In dealing with Pakistan, America must also recognize that while Islamabad will claim that it is constrained by public opinion, Pakistan's security and foreign policy establishment is not accountable to parliament, and it has powerful ways of shaping public opinion to its will.

In dealing with New Delhi, Americans will have to bear in mind the strongly self-centric world view of Indian elites, who see their country as rightly one of the five or six great "civilizational" powers, historically underappreciated by Washington. Many Indians regard the current revived U.S.-Pakistan relationship as aimed against them. Yet, Indians also recognize that they cannot move forward without American support: they ride the American bus, but will jump off when their interests lead them in other directions. Nevertheless, a democratic and stable India, could be an important partner for the United States throughout Asia and elsewhere. However, this partnership will be circumscribed by Delhi's insistence that the United States uncritically support it in its disputes with Pakistan, and by India's own tradition of righteous independence.

Finally, Americans must remember that Pakistan and India will pursue their own vital interests as they see them, regardless of Washington's wishes; both were able to do this with their nuclear programs, India with its self-defeating autarkic economic policy, and Pakistan with its provocative policies in Kargil and its support for the Taliban. Leaders in both states believe that Washington regularly pursues damaging policies towards their country; like all leaderships, they find it easier to blame each other, or the United States or some other power, for their own problems. American interests will in the long term, be advanced by straight talk rather than euphemisms and clichés.

October 1, 2003