



U.S. Security Challenges in South Asia

By Sumit Ganguly and David Stuligross

India

The U.S. has had an uneven relationship with India since the former British colony gained independence in 1947. During the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. looked to India as a large, poor, democratic challenger to large, poor, communist China. In 1956, India was the largest recipient of U.S. economic assistance. The U.S. responded to a widespread famine in 1965-66 both with a food aid program and with technology that supported the controversial chemical-intensive agriculture of the Green Revolution. Yet throughout this period, India, as a founding member of the nonaligned movement, which claimed political independence from both cold war superpowers, was an important voice for developing countries, a role it continues to play today.

Infrequently, the U.S. and India assist one another on security issues. During India's 1962 war with China, the U.S. sent an aircraft carrier to the Bay of Bengal in response to an Indian request. It also provided India

limited military assistance in 1963 (at the cost of alienating Pakistan to some extent). After the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, the U.S. largely lost interest in a subcontinent whose cold war implications were, at best, ambiguous. After 1971, India built a robust relationship of convenience with the Soviet Union: India received military equipment at low prices and the Soviets successfully limited U.S. and Chinese influence in India. However, during the Gulf War in 1991, India allowed U.S. aircraft en route to the conflict zone to refuel in Bombay. Still,

India continues to import aircraft from Russia and maintains a complex relationship with China.

From the U.S. perspective, the most challenging aspect of India's security policy is its longstanding position regarding nuclear weapons. Since well before the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) negotiations concluded in 1968, India has regarded global nuclear disarmament as a paramount common security interest. However, Indian officials have insisted on the right to retain India's nuclear option as long as other countries retain their nuclear armaments. India has viewed U.S. insistence that India unilaterally renounce its right to produce nuclear weapons as hypocritical, and this difference of opinion was magnified after India's nuclear

tests. Since then, India's position has insisted on the right to maintain a "credible minimum nuclear deterrent."

Pakistan

Since its independence in 1947, the government of Pakistan sought to link its regional security concerns to the cold war dynamic. Pakistan and the U.S. reached a bilateral security agreement in 1954 and, together with Iran and Turkey, formed the Central Treaty Organization in 1959. From the Pakistani perspective, the U.S. let it down twice: in 1965, after the second India-Pakistan war, when Washington imposed an arms embargo on both India (which imported little) and Pakistan; and in 1971, when the U.S. voiced only symbolic opposition to Indian involvement in the war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. U.S. assistance to Pakistan remained negligible throughout the 1970s and, in 1979, U.S. aid to Pakistan was suspended for a few months due to suspicions that Pakistan was developing nuclear weapons.

Later in 1999 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, leaving Pakistan on the frontline of U.S. "containment" of the Soviet Union. In 1981, the U.S. and Pakistan signed a \$3.2-billion military and economic assistance agreement and, for the next decade, Pakistan became a funnel for supplies to Afghan resistance fighters. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the U.S. Congress cut assistance in order to punish Pakistan for its continuing nuclear weapons research. During the past decade, Pakistan's chief military collaborator has been China, which has provided ballistic missile and nuclear components to Islamabad.

Kashmir

India-Pakistan tensions since independence have centered on the disputed status of the bordering state of Kashmir. In 1947 Kashmir was a semiautonomous kingdom on the India-Pakistan boundary. At the time of partition, conflict over whether Kashmir would join either country or declare independence resulted in armed conflict between the armies of the new countries. A UN-mediated cease-fire arrangement drew a Line of Control (LoC) through the former kingdom: India controls approximately two-thirds of the area and Pakistan one-third. A 1948 UN resolution called for a plebiscite among Kashmiri citizens to determine the fate of the kingdom; India rejects this proposal. Another resolution called for the Pakistani Army to vacate Pakistan-administered Kashmir prior to the plebiscite; Pakistan rejects this provision.

Key Points

- India seeks to be a global player and has charted a largely autonomous course since it gained independence.
- In the 1980s, Pakistan cultivated and received some U.S. attention as a strategic balance to India and as a conduit for supplies to Afghanistan.
- Since independence, India-Pakistan tensions have centered on the dispute over Kashmir and have been influenced by global strategic shifts, particularly the policies of the USSR (now Russia), the U.S., and China.

Problems With Current U.S. Policy

An amendment to the 1995 U.S. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act automatically triggers severe sanctions against any non-nuclear state that engages in nuclear testing. The 1998 South Asian nuclear tests demonstrated the limited deterrent effect of this amendment: India was not deterred and Pakistan, for regional and domestic political reasons, had no real choice but to respond to India's tests. The Clinton administration's waffling "sanctions policy" has generated precious little for the U.S. in South Asia.

India's decision to test nuclear weapons was shaped both by domestic politics and by its desire to make a significant political statement and to take a step toward nuclear weaponization before agreeing to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). At present, especially after the U.S. Senate decision not to ratify the CTBT, neither India nor Pakistan feels much pressure (much less obligation) to sign this treaty. Both countries have expressed a willingness to consider entering the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty but only as recognized nuclear powers. The U.S., given its longstanding opposition to enlarging the "nuclear club," considers this position a nonstarter.

The U.S. softened its post-test sanctions against India, because they seemed to be having no effect on Indian policy. U.S. officials were also responding to increasingly vocal U.S. business interests. In short, the U.S. tried and failed to change India's nuclear policy. The Clinton administration weakened the sanctions against Pakistan because, ironically, the sanctions were "working." Pakistan's already weak economy, far more intimately linked to the U.S. than India's economy, was placed under additional strain. However, the U.S. was concerned that the sanctions would exacerbate an already tenuous domestic political landscape without necessarily effecting the desired changes in Pakistan's nuclear policy. By 1999, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had, by constitutional and less-than-constitutional means, severely weakened the influence of the Pakistani presidency and judiciary. He then established special courts that quickly convicted many opposition leaders. Yet, even as he was gaining unprecedented civilian control over the Pakistani government, his regime was losing control of Pakistan's rapidly dwindling economy and its increasingly polarized society.

Following terrorist attacks against U.S. interests in the mid-1990s, the Clinton administration made the eradication of terrorism a top priority. Militant Islamic groups in Pakistan were developing closer relations with terrorist groups around the world, including Saudi businessman Osama bin Laden, who is accused by the U.S. of masterminding the bombings of American embassies in East Africa (among other terrorist plots) and who resides just across the border in Afghanistan. These relationships have had the support of some provincial political leaders and military commanders. Pakistan's sanctions-induced economic decline was perceived to be strengthening the hand of these provincial actors. So Washington insisted that Pakistan's prime minister take a strong antiterrorist stand to thank the U.S. for softening economic sanctions.

To be sure, Prime Minister Sharif did attempt to weaken the links between his army officers and terrorist organizations by

hindering arms flows and transferring officers. The resulting resistance of these military commanders was one of many factors that triggered the October 12, 1999, military coup in Pakistan. Since the coup, the U.S. has weighed in with mixed criticism of the new "undemocratic" regime and has continued to demand that Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf break the links between his government and terrorist organizations in the region. In particular, the U.S. has repeatedly urged Musharraf to use his close relationship with the fundamentalist Taliban government in Afghanistan to force the extradition of Osama bin Laden. To date, Musharraf has shown neither the interest nor the ability to hamper the activities of organizations that are supported by important segments of his fellow officer corps. Both Indian and Pakistani press reports suggest that army-terrorist links have grown stronger since the coup.

In reality, Osama bin Laden is not the primary terrorist challenge in the region. That dubious honor belongs to terrorist groups in Kashmir, many of which receive support from Pakistan. These organizations gained world attention in December 1999, when an Indian Airlines plane was hijacked in Nepal, refueled in India, and flown to Afghanistan. On New Year's Eve, India released three Kashmiri prisoners in exchange for the 156 hostages aboard the aircraft. All three prisoners have since found their way to Pakistan. Despite the Pakistani government's professed attempts to stifle them, all three have held rallies and have made anti-India and Kashmir-separatist statements.

India has sought to link the hijack incident, terrorist camps in Afghanistan, and alleged Pakistani involvement in terrorism to the security issue on the top of the Indian agenda:

Kashmir. During the summer of 1999, a variety of insurgent organizations closely coordinated and supported by the Pakistani Army crossed over Kashmir's Line of Control. India suffered some 3,000 casualties before it regained control. For the first time, U.S. leaders of all political orientations shifted from an "even-handed" approach to laying the blame for the conflict firmly at the feet of the Pakistani Army. Since then, and especially since the new year, Kashmiri violence between "independent" military groups (many with Pakistani Army support), the Indian Army, and the Pakistani Army has been reported on a weekly basis.

Although many in these groups are truly thugs, India's repressive military policy is not matched by any attempt at meaningful engagement with nonterrorist opposition groups in Kashmir. Only 31% of the Kashmiri electorate participated in the 1999 parliamentary elections (compared to India's national average of 60%), illustrating broad-based dissatisfaction. India's repression has fueled terrorism in the absence of broader political spaces for the expression of dissent.

Key Problems

- Nuclear Weapons: The U.S. has limited its post-test punishment of India and Pakistan, seeking instead to manage the threat to U.S. interests posed by these nuclear powers.
 - Terrorism: Press reports suggest that army-terrorist links have grown stronger since the coup.
 - Kashmir: Pakistani aggressiveness has brought the U.S. closer to the Indian position, but this has furthered neither U.S. interests nor regional peace.
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Toward a New Foreign Policy

The U.S. administration would do well to take far greater cognizance of how U.S. global interests mesh with South Asian regional ones. For example, pressure to sign the CTBT simply underscores South Asian perceptions of U.S. hypocrisy. Until the U.S. first ratifies the CTBT and

pursues a more robust arms control agenda, India will not come on board. And, the interests of a vocal intellectual minority notwithstanding, Pakistan will not sign the CTBT until its large neighbor has done so.

Clinton should urge both India and Pakistan to develop more extensive confidence building mechanisms as well as contain the further weaponization of their extant nuclear weapons capabilities. Delicate and determined leadership is required, and the Clinton administration could provide the impetus for negotiations in this direction. No action in this

regard was taken during the Clinton state visit, yet continuing talks create some room for optimism.

Terrorism is one area that the Clinton administration has clearly identified as a point of access to South Asian foreign policy. During his state visit, President Clinton linked Kashmiri terrorism with global terrorism issues and clearly supported the Indian position that many Kashmiri terrorist groups receive Pakistani support. Clinton also created a forum for greater anti-terrorist cooperation. This shift in the U.S. view toward one that incorporates South Asian regional concerns into a global policy is all to the good.

Unfortunately, Clinton did not make productive use of his visit to Pakistan. Since Clinton did choose to visit Pakistan and thereby enhance the legitimacy of the Musharraf regime, his administration would be well advised to engage the Pakistani administration with more than the strident rhetoric Clinton used during his visit. Pakistani Chief Executive Musharraf was offered neither inducements nor threats; he was simply told to change his ways. Predictably, Pakistan took no initiatives on the terrorist front in the immediate aftermath of the Clinton visit.

The U.S. should insist on more concrete steps by the Musharraf government, and it should not underestimate its influence in the region. For example, Washington should insist that Musharraf explicitly reject state sponsorship of terrorism and take measurable steps to break existing

links between the Pakistani state and terrorists in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. In exchange, the U.S. could provide financial resources for such antiterrorist initiatives. This approach is more likely to address U.S. global terrorism concerns such as Osama bin Laden because, troublingly to be sure, it would enhance the stability of Pakistan's current military government. Trade and aid both strengthen central governments, and both U.S. and multilateral assistance are critical to Pakistan's stability. The Clinton administration must ensure that any such assistance is doled out slowly and only after measurable progress on each of the principal U.S. concerns: nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and democracy.

Regarding democracy, the U.S. should not push for a rapid return to elected civilian rule in Pakistan. Instead, the U.S. should devote political and financial resources to promoting respect for basic human rights, monitoring progress on the Musharraf government's timetable for a return to democratic rule, and supporting the construction of the state institutions necessary to make elected civilian rule function more democratically, such as an effective tax system and an independent judicial apparatus.

In addition to financial inducements, the U.S. should use its increasingly well-honed Kashmir stick against Pakistan. Clinton should regularly remind Pakistan that if it does not move against supporters of terrorists in Afghanistan and Kashmir, Washington will lend support to the position that the LoC in Kashmir should be considered a *de jure* international border.

The risk associated with such a proactive, pro-India Kashmir policy is that Pakistan might prefer war to a peace under conditions dictated by India. The U.S. position has come to reflect India's regarding terrorism, bilateral negotiations, and the Line of Control. This change in U.S. views enables India to negotiate with Pakistan from a position of strength. The U.S. should watch carefully and respond if India uses its new support irresponsibly. The U.S. must insist that India respect the basic human rights of Kashmiris living in the area it controls and move to craft institutions that provide meaningful political representation to currently disaffected citizens in this troubled state.

Washington also should pressure India to drop its demand for Pakistani withdrawal from the areas of Kashmir it occupies as a precondition for bilateral negotiations and it should urge India to desist from its current demand that all of Kashmir be returned to Indian control.

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Key Recommendations

- **Nuclear Weapons:** The U.S. must lead by example and take concrete steps regarding nuclear arms control if India and Pakistan are to sign the CTBT.
- **Terrorism:** Washington should continue to incorporate South Asia regional concerns about terrorism into its global policy, but in doing so it should not give India carte blanche in Kashmir.
- **Kashmir:** The U.S. must encourage India's leadership in negotiations over Kashmir while ensuring respect for human rights in that state.

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