



## REGIONAL POLITICS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN

Sunil Dasgupta



UNITED STATES  
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## ABOUT THE REPORT

The United States is planning its withdrawal from Afghanistan as the country faces three interrelated challenges: a weak national state, rising Islamic radicalism based in Pakistan's tribal belt, and zero-sum regional politics. The stage is set for a balance-of-power contest between India and Pakistan played out in Afghanistan that could fuel another civil war in the country. This report details the nature of the tension between India and Pakistan over Afghanistan and outlines steps that the U.S. government can take to avoid another conflict there. The author would like to thank Stephen P. Cohen, Moeed Yusuf, and three anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sunil Dasgupta is director of the University of Maryland Baltimore County's political science program at the Universities at Shady Grove and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. He teaches political science, international affairs, and security studies and writes on military strategy, organization, and operations. He is coauthor of *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernization* and is presently working on a project investigating Chinese and Indian grand strategic approaches.

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### United States Institute of Peace

2301 Constitution Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: 202.457.1700

Fax: 202.429.6063

E-mail: [usip\\_requests@usip.org](mailto:usip_requests@usip.org)

Web: [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

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[If the United States continues its drawdown in Afghanistan without addressing the structural challenges stemming from the India-Pakistan balance-of-power contest, a new civil war is all too likely.]



## Summary

- As the United States plans its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the country faces three interrelated challenges: a weak national state, rising Islamic radicalism based in Pakistan's tribal belt, and zero-sum regional politics. The stage is set for a balance-of-power contest between India and Pakistan played out in Afghanistan that could fuel another civil war in the country.
- India has been offering economic and technical assistance to Afghanistan, as it sees trade and investment as primary drivers of international relations. As India grows as a regional power, a consensus has emerged among policymakers and elites that Afghanistan is of strategic importance and India should not cede influence to Pakistan. However, India is reticent to use military force and likely cannot create a political coalition within Afghanistan that could maintain stability there.
- Pakistan has a deep connection to Afghanistan stemming from its contiguity, shared ethnic groups, and long-standing support of the Taliban. Islamabad has shown great willingness to pursue military options to achieve its security interests. Expectations that Pakistan will not be able to sustain a military campaign in Afghanistan are incorrect. Growing Indian presence in Afghanistan is likely to reduce the differences between radical groups and the Pakistan Army and give them a common cause to reenergize their alliance.
- The U.S. and Afghan governments would prefer to see India and Pakistan work together. India-Pakistan cooperation can be minimal, where India limits its presence to the north while Pakistan has greater influence in the south. But even this minimal cooperation requires sizeable U.S. presence to verify and monitor the activities of the two South Asian rivals in Afghanistan. Maintaining significant U.S. presence in Afghanistan could dampen the India-Pakistan competition in Afghanistan and allow the Kabul government to consolidate.
- If the United States does not maintain a meaningful presence in Afghanistan to enable India-Pakistan cooperation, the next best alternative would be for the Obama administration to seek unilateral disengagement with the Indian and Pakistani governments. To this end, Washington could resume its former policy of "de-hyphenation," whereby the United States and India could pursue long-term bilateral objectives, such as technology transfer, while Pakistan feels more secure with diminished Indian presence in Afghanistan. Unless the conditions underlying the contest between India and Pakistan over Afghanistan change, a new civil war in Afghanistan is all too likely.



## Introduction

As the United States plans its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the country faces three inter-related challenges: a weak national state, rising Islamic radicalism based in Pakistan's tribal belt, and zero-sum regional politics that could fuel another civil war in the country. The first two issues have received considerable political and scholarly attention, but the problems of regional politics remain less explored, in part because of the difficulties involved in drawing the region's governments into a broad grand bargain.

Afghanistan's political problems have always been rooted in regional politics. British and Russian campaigns in the past had to deal with tensions between domestic Afghan and regional politics; regional politics have also shaped the U.S. strategy from the start of its Afghan campaign. U.S. officials' confrontation of the Pakistani government after the attacks of September 11, 2001, carried the implicit threat that the United States could join forces with India against Pakistan. In December 2001, India accused Pakistani groups of planning a terrorist attack on its parliament and threatened military reprisal. Pakistan's army responded in the east, diverting its attention from apprehending Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters escaping from Afghanistan into Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past decade, both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations have sought to rally the region's other governments to help stabilize Afghanistan, but these efforts have come up short. With the United States planning to draw down its troop presence by 2014, the search for a regional settlement has intensified. As the chances of a broadly inclusive political settlement with the Taliban are diminishing, the worsening security situation in Afghanistan risks another civil war that could allow al-Qaeda and other extremists to return and regroup amid the chaos. Most significantly, India and Pakistan would likely take opposing sides in such a conflict, raising the possibility of the civil war metastasizing into a "dirty little cold war,"<sup>2</sup> with consequences reminiscent of the 1990s.

All the state actors involved—Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the United States—have acknowledged that another civil war would be disastrous, but none of them appears able to mitigate the structural conditions in place. The expectation in Pakistan is that the successor to the government of President Hamid Karzai will not survive the challenges of the international drawdown in military and financial assistance. The heavily Tajik and Uzbek composition of the Afghan National Army is likely to exacerbate ethnic tensions and compel Pakistan to support Pashtun groups, including the Taliban. Recognizing Pakistan's inevitable involvement in Afghanistan, India has been cementing its relations with the Karzai government and the Tajik and Uzbek groups with whom it shares a common distrust of Pakistan. This makes for a starkly drawn prisoner's dilemma, with Afghanistan's and the region's future hanging in the balance.

This report investigates the unfolding power contest between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan as regional actors prepare for reduced U.S. presence after 2014. The Central Asian states, Iran, China, and Russia all have important interests in Afghanistan, but the India-Pakistan rivalry is the central tension that any regional solution must address.<sup>3</sup> This report explores three scenarios. The first makes a straight-line prediction from extant structural conditions of a balance-of-power contest after 2014. The second and third scenarios explore the possibilities for altering these structural conditions to change the nature of the contest. The second scenario examines the requirements for India-Pakistan cooperation in Afghanistan, and the third scenario explores the prospect of relieving the regional tensions through unilateral disengagement.

It may turn out to be impossible to prevent another civil war in Afghanistan. But not trying to mitigate the balance-of-power contest in the country would be misguided. The consequences

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***The worsening security situation in Afghanistan risks another civil war that could allow al-Qaeda and other extremists to return and regroup amid the chaos.***

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of intensified rivalry between India and Pakistan would be dramatic, diminishing the prospect of peace in Afghanistan and disrupting broader regional stability.

## Regional Approaches to the Afghan War

When General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's former president, spoke to his people on September 20, 2001, about his decision to abandon the Taliban and work with the United States in fighting terrorism, he had been worried about the possibility of a U.S.-India alliance aimed at Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> Less than two months later, as India mobilized its armed forces in response to the December 13 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, Pakistan redeployed large numbers of troops from the Afghan border to the Indian border, undercutting the objective of cutting off al-Qaeda's escape from Afghanistan into Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> The Pakistan Army's inability to cut off their flight was one of the greatest failures of the Afghan war.<sup>6</sup> The Taliban regrouped in the mountains straddling Afghanistan and Pakistan and have since turned the conflict into America's longest war.

To mitigate the consequences of the zero-sum nature of regional politics, the Bush administration pursued a policy of "de-hyphenation," so called because the United States saw the region mainly through the lens of the India-Pakistan rivalry and was seeking to put its bilateral ties with each country on separate tracks to minimize the effects of their mutual animosity toward U.S. foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> Thus President Bush extended military and economic assistance to Pakistan and designated that country a major non-NATO ally. At the same time, he boosted India as a rising power in Asia, calling it a natural ally of the United States. The U.S. ambassador in New Delhi openly referred to India as a potential balance to China.<sup>8</sup> India took the opportunity to escape its longstanding strategic parity with Pakistan, welcomed the notion of equivalence with China, and secured a civilian nuclear deal that legitimized India as a nuclear power. Meanwhile, though the Pakistan government under Musharraf acquiesced to the United States after September 11, supporting the U.S. war effort with transit access, logistics, and intelligence cooperation, there has been a continuous deficit of trust ever since—in part because Washington has implicitly threatened to ally more closely with New Delhi if Pakistan does not cooperate.

Nonetheless, de-hyphenation encouraged India-Pakistan détente. Under U.S. (and Western) pressure to show itself as credible partner in countering Islamic terrorism, Islamabad reduced its support for the Kashmir insurgency and redirected its military resources to fighting growing radicalism at home as a new movement of indigenous Taliban was emerging to threaten the state. Competition between India and Pakistan to sway U.S. support was reduced as the United States set its relations with each country on separate tracks. For a number of years thereafter, India-Pakistan relations improved, and the two sides almost reached a peace deal ending the Kashmir dispute in 2007.<sup>9</sup>

The de-hyphenation policy also overcame key U.S. differences with India and Pakistan. The United States saw—or hoped to see—reform-minded Pakistanis as willing and able to carry the fight to radical Islamists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the United States depended on the Pakistan Army (President Musharraf was also its chief) to support the Afghan war and perhaps transform Pakistan itself. When Musharraf proved unable to win over the radicals and alienated Pakistan's general populace, Washington placed similar hope in Benazir Bhutto. After her assassination, the new government under her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, agreed to do what she had promised, and Washington kept in place a foreign aid package designed to strengthen Zardari and his allies.



In the Indian view, however, the Pakistan Army and the country's elite more generally were responsible for the region's problems with Islamic radicalism. When Pakistan was able to install an aligned regime in Afghanistan in the 1990s, that country became the epicenter of international terrorism. The Pakistan-backed Taliban allowed terrorist groups—not only al-Qaeda but also anti-Indian outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba—to openly expand training camps in the country. Indian armed forces saw a rise in the number of Afghan-trained terrorists in Kashmir. In 1999, terrorists hijacked an Indian Airlines flight with 178 passengers to Kandahar. Taliban protection for the hijackers precluded an Indian special forces rescue, and New Delhi was forced to free three jailed terrorists—including Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, who was later accused of killing *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in Pakistan—to secure the release of the aircraft and its passengers. To Indians, preventing Afghanistan from becoming a terrorist state once again meant preventing Pakistan from dominating Afghan politics. Most of India's strategic community still sees no difference between the two objectives.

Pakistan has remained ambivalent in its support for U.S. goals in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) given its concerns about the long-term prospects of ties with the United States. Most Pakistanis believe that the United States will walk away from Pakistan once the Afghan war is over, just as it did in 1965, 1971, and 1990. All three times, the United States left Pakistan in the lurch—in 1965 and 1971, in the middle of wars with India, and in 1990, holding the bag on Afghanistan. In the past decade, Pakistanis have generally viewed the U.S. de-hyphenation policy, and especially the U.S.-India nuclear deal, as evidence of Washington's real preferences in South Asia, where Pakistan is an ally of convenience in the war against al-Qaeda and expendable thereafter, while India is the true friend of the future. In response, Pakistan reportedly has expanded its fissile material production, seeking a nuclear offset against India's conventional superiority.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan's security establishment also has held the view that radical groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, are effective instruments to coerce India and any unfriendly Afghan government.<sup>11</sup> Steve Coll, the author of *Ghost Wars*, has argued that the Pakistani security services began to turn away from radical groups after the Lal Masjid siege in 2007 but concludes that there is still “no one view” about their utility.<sup>12</sup> Pakistan's security establishment has distinguished between “good” and “bad” Islamists by targeting, for example, the Pakistani Taliban but not the Taliban groups fighting in Afghanistan. Lashkar-e-Taiba remains unfettered even after it was implicated in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack and is now known to be sending fighters to the Taliban's aid in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

De-hyphenation was the first serious regional approach to the Afghan problem during the U.S. epoch in the country. The policy allowed the United States to fight the Afghan war with reasonable cooperation from Pakistan by seeking to alter the nature of the India-Pakistan relationship. India was conspicuously absent in formal political negotiations, such as the Bonn Conference, despite its strong interest in preventing Pakistan from installing another allied regime in Afghanistan. In choosing to work quietly, New Delhi was being mindful of Pakistani sensitivities and the complications it could cause for the United States. The de-hyphenation policy finally ran aground after the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008. Where the policy had sought to keep the two countries separate and allow détente to emerge, the attacks brought the two countries right back to distrust and hostility. The Pakistani government even admitted the involvement of Lashkar-e-Taiba in the attacks.<sup>14</sup> India captured one of the attackers and was able to track down telephone conversations between the attackers in Mumbai and their handlers in Pakistan. The United States later arrested a U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin who had scouted the attack locations. The Pakistani state had long tolerated

Lashkar-e-Taiba. The only question then was the degree to which Pakistani intelligence agents were actively involved in the attacks.

By the time Obama became president in January 2009, the situation in Afghanistan had deteriorated considerably. The Taliban had been making a comeback in Afghanistan since 2005. The Karzai government, significantly dependent on the cooperation of regional warlords, seemed unable to prevent—or, many argue, was complicit in—the country slipping into corruption and violence. Meanwhile, the Taliban enjoyed safe havens among Pashtun tribes on the Pakistani side of the border with Afghanistan. Starting in 2004, following a punitive foray into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in 2003 and assassination attempts against President Musharraf, the Pakistan Army made several peace deals with Pashtun tribes that allowed Afghan Taliban to find shelter in the FATA population. These deals distinguished between the local Taliban and “foreign fighters,” the mostly al-Qaeda militants from outside the region. Redirecting state priorities away from conflict with the Taliban effectively meant that those who were ideologically predisposed had some leeway to support the Taliban once again. Since the 2007 Lal Masjid siege in Islamabad, the Pakistan Army has further distinguished between the Afghan Taliban, who have been left undisturbed, and the Pakistani Taliban and other radical groups that have broken away from the state, who it continues to target.<sup>15</sup> This distinction has increasingly infuriated U.S. officials and led to the concerted campaign of drone strikes inside Pakistan that began in 2007, which has further soured U.S.-Pakistan relations.

President Obama’s first move in the region was to refocus U.S. attention on the Afghan war. He saw Pakistan as central to the war in Afghanistan, creating the moniker “Af-Pak” to capture the inseparability of the Taliban across the Durand Line, the formally disputed border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The president’s designated new special representative, the late Richard Holbrooke, took this logic further when he argued that a political settlement from Pakistan’s perspective required Indian concessions in Kashmir.<sup>16</sup>

India rejected this out of hand, leaving Holbrooke with no option but to narrow the regional approach to Pakistan alone. In 2009, Obama decided to send thirty thousand more troops to Afghanistan and pushed Karzai to reform his administration, root out corruption, and deliver services. Most important, he announced that the United States would begin the process of withdrawing from Afghanistan in July 2011, though he kept open the possibility of continued U.S. military presence in the country if necessary and at the request of the Afghan government.

With Pakistan, Obama has emphasized counterterrorism while backing strategic dialogue and supporting the Kerry-Lugar-Berman foreign aid package. He vastly expanded the drone program inside Pakistan, and his efforts to find Osama bin Laden finally bore fruit in May 2011. But U.S.-Pakistan relations, already under pressure from the drone strikes and intelligence-gathering efforts, have plummeted since the Abbottabad raid. Following a November 2011 border incident in which twenty-four Pakistani troops died in U.S. fire, Pakistan suspended NATO resupply convoys from the port city of Karachi going to Afghanistan. The supply routes were reopened after a great deal of bargaining, but U.S. officials now openly accuse Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of helping the Haqqani Network, a Taliban army operating out of Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan. Recently, U.S. counterterrorism experts have been calling for the containment of Pakistan, with Indian help if necessary.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than turning Pakistanis against radicalism, the Obama strategy has increasingly put many Pakistanis on edge. According to cross-national polling by Pew and others, Pakistan remains one of the countries most hostile towards the United States. The rank and file of the Pakistan Army appears to be more enraged at the United States—and failures of its own politi-

cal and military leaders—over the Abbottabad attack than they are about bin Laden’s presence in their country and the possibility that parts of the Pakistani state may have been complicit. The doctor who assisted the United States in finding bin Laden is being tried for treason against Pakistan, as if he had done anything but follow the explicit statements of his country’s leaders to fight against terrorists.

Although a negotiated end to the Afghan war may be possible, publicly available reporting on the political process is pessimistic about the chances of bringing to power a reconciliation government in Kabul at this point. Although the Obama administration has attempted to establish a negotiating channel with the Taliban, Ryan C. Crocker, who as the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan was one of the officials tasked with pushing for talks, has spoken against inviting the Taliban back into power. “[If the] Taliban get back, stand by for al-Qaeda,” he told an audience at a Washington think tank in September 2012 after he returned home from his post.<sup>18</sup>

The strongest of the Afghan factions—among the Taliban as well as Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara groups—have not been willing to compromise. To the Taliban, Karzai and his allies are corrupt and incompetent collaborators of the West who can be swept away quickly once foreign troops depart. Karzai himself is term-limited to 2014, and the political contest over who will become part of the new government could destabilize the ruling coalition itself, though it also presents an opportunity to accommodate the warring parties.

In a September 2012 Carnegie report, Gilles Dorronsoro predicted that the Taliban will launch a full-scale offensive in the Kabul region and to the east of the country as early as spring 2013.<sup>19</sup> In November 2012, Ismail Khan, a Herati warlord, broke publicly from the ranks of the ruling coalition supporting Karzai by asking his followers to rearm for another war.<sup>20</sup> “If the Afghan security forces are not able to wage this war, then call upon the mujahedeen,” First Vice President Mohammed Fahim, himself a powerful Tajik warlord, is reported to have said.<sup>21</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense reported in December 2012 that the number of insurgent attacks did not fall in 2012, after an appreciable decline in 2011. Instead, a rise in so-called “green-on-blue” attacks, in which Afghan security forces have opened fire on their international trainers, has become a concern, in some cases forcing the U.S. military to reduce training activities for the Afghan forces.

Pakistan has taken limited steps to support U.S. efforts to engage the Taliban, recently releasing Taliban prisoners so they can participate in settlement talks. Though many Taliban leaders live in Pakistan, holding talks in the country has proven impossible. According to some reports, Taliban leaders in Pakistan willing to talk to U.S. officials have been detained and, in some cases, killed. The United States itself has not met one of the Taliban’s key demands regarding the release of prisoners from the Guantanamo Bay facility.

The pressure of the 2014 pullout has prompted renewed efforts toward a regional solution. There have been growing calls for increased Indian involvement in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk of RAND have argued that the United States should encourage India to develop even closer ties with Afghanistan, as India’s goals of denying safe havens to terrorists, projecting power in South and Central Asia, and securing access to new trade and energy resources in Afghanistan are consistent with Washington’s objectives and superior to Pakistan’s narrow security-related goals.<sup>23</sup> On a visit to New Delhi in June 2012, former defense secretary Leon Panetta urged “India’s leaders to continue with additional support to Afghanistan through trade and investment, reconstruction and help for Afghan security forces.”<sup>24</sup>

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## Scenario 1: A Balance-of-Power Contest in Afghanistan

India and Pakistan are both poised for a balance-of-power competition in Afghanistan. Indians have responded to calls for greater participation in Afghanistan with enthusiasm.<sup>25</sup> Even as India stayed away from the post-Taliban political process in Afghanistan, it quietly offered economic and technical assistance almost as soon as Karzai assumed leadership of the country in 2001. Karzai had ties in India; he attended university there. Key members of his government were Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara leaders who had been part of the Northern Alliance,<sup>26</sup> which India supported during the 1990s civil war that brought the Taliban to power. The new Afghan government was suspicious of Pakistan for its support to the Taliban, and India had an interest in checking the return of Islamabad's influence in Kabul.

The Indian government has persisted in Afghanistan despite being targeted by the Taliban. In 2005, the Taliban kidnapped and killed an Indian official, which led New Delhi to send two hundred armed police to provide perimeter security to Indian missions in Afghanistan. In 2007, one police officer died in a grenade attack in Jalalabad. In July 2008, a suicide car bomber struck the Indian embassy in Kabul, killing fifty-five people, including senior Indian officials, though most of the casualties were Afghan. Indian, Afghan, and U.S. officials have said that the ISI was complicit in these attacks, but Islamabad has denied involvement.

Indian diplomacy intensified further following Obama's announcement of a definitive U.S. drawdown. In October 2011, New Delhi signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Karzai government, opening the door for security cooperation between the two countries. By 2012 India had spent \$1.5 billion, pledged another \$500 million, and sent nearly three thousand people to Afghanistan to help build roads, railways, power lines, schools, and hospitals. In the summer of 2012, an Indian consortium of private and state-owned companies bid \$6 billion for mining rights in Afghanistan. New Delhi has expressed interest in reviving the natural gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to India and sponsored Afghanistan for membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). India also has proposed an alternate trade route to Afghanistan through Iran, causing consternation in Pakistan and the United States.

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### *The New Delhi Consensus*

The general thrust of Indian policy toward Afghanistan has remained unchanged since the U.S. war in Afghanistan began in 2001. This policy continuity is the outcome of an Indian consensus, which Shekhar Gupta, the editor of the *Indian Express*, has described below:

Today, everybody seems to be accepting the idea that Afghanistan is of great strategic significance to India, and we can neither cede it to Pakistan, nor leave them to fill the power vacuum that the Americans will leave behind. Similarly, that this is the Great Game country, and we are back to the Great Game, somehow inheriting the mantle of the British power in the 19th century, except that we might have to deal with an additional distraction called Pakistan. Further, that Afghanistan is a resource (mineral)-rich land where we have future commercial stakes, and is a gateway to Central Asia, making transit rights of such paramount importance for us.<sup>27</sup>

Gupta rejects the consensus, but it is worth exploring the breadth and scope of Indian agreement on Afghanistan policy. First, Indian desire for a more assertive foreign policy in Afghanistan is surprising, as it breaks from the doctrine of strategic restraint that has driven the country's foreign policy since its independence in 1947.<sup>28</sup> The nuclear tests, a new strategic

partnership with the United States, and rapid economic growth raised the prospect of New Delhi moving toward a more assertive foreign policy, but India's leaders have held off from becoming too ambitious in the region. Indian thinking on Pakistan, the country's most urgent security concern, is highly divided, ranging from unilateral accommodation to the destruction of Pakistan, with deterrence as the median policy position in the strategic community.<sup>29</sup>

Second, the military strategic reasons for India's foreign policy activism in Afghanistan seem self-evident. India does not want to see Afghanistan return to the 1990s, when the Pakistan-backed Taliban regime turned the country into a haven for anti-India terrorist groups—quite apart from al-Qaeda. To the extent that Pakistan seeks to push its influence in Afghanistan, India has incentive to preclude Pakistan's ability to sway outcomes in Kabul. Further, if Indian presence in and assistance to Afghanistan keeps Pakistan focused on the west, including keeping a large number of its forces on the Afghan border, then Islamabad will have fewer troops to use on the Indian border.

Third, the most ambitious Indian analysts see in Afghanistan an opportunity for New Delhi to begin behaving like a great power—that is, breaking out of its decades-long strategic parity with Pakistan and projecting power in the region, eventually to counter growing Chinese influence there.<sup>30</sup> They argue that India must advocate its own doctrine of regional hegemony, similar to the Monroe Doctrine that the United States espoused in the nineteenth century. Afghanistan's abundance of natural resources and the longstanding promise of an oil and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India—called the TAPI—are reasons to hold Indian interest, especially since China is also interested in Afghan mining treasures and Central Asian energy.

Lastly, the consensus goes beyond the realist case; the power behind the consensus has come from Indian liberals who have been in power for a decade. Indian liberals, especially in the upper echelons of the Congress Party, remain fundamentally Nehruvian in character: They are liberals with strong beliefs in national sovereignty.<sup>31</sup> They see trade, investment, energy, and access not only as primary drivers of international relations but also as activities that countries have the right to pursue without opposition from third countries. They find offensive and illegitimate the Pakistani view that Indian economic and technical assistance to Afghanistan is of itself threatening, and they attribute it not to the Pakistani public but to a self-serving security establishment in Pakistan wanting to preserve its position of privilege using the bogey of an Indian threat.

Indian liberals would have no problem including Pakistan as part of Indian projects in Afghanistan. In addition to the TAPI, which would run through Pakistan, another Indian project proposes that India build a railroad network connecting Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> Since these projects would help Pakistan as well, Indian liberals cannot understand or accept Pakistani objections to India-Afghanistan relations. Mani Shankar Aiyar, an outspokenly liberal Indian member of parliament and onetime minister of petroleum, has forcefully argued that the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India would bring about regional peace.<sup>33</sup>

The New Delhi consensus suggests that India will not cede Afghanistan to Pakistan without a fight, especially when Kabul is reciprocating. The Karzai government clearly sees India as a friend and Pakistan as a threat. Karzai has already made a concerted effort to secure Indian support to offset Pakistan pressure. Recently, Shaida Mohammed Abdali, a former national security official and one of Karzai's closest advisers, became ambassador in New Delhi. Following up from the 2011 strategic partnership agreement, Karzai himself visited New Delhi to sign agreements on military training and mining rights in November 2012.



The New Delhi consensus may be broad, but it is also shallow. Hanauer and Chalk have argued that India's larger goals in Afghanistan—embedding the nation in the regional economy, consolidating the state in Afghanistan, and marginalizing the Taliban—are superior to Pakistan's narrow security objectives,<sup>34</sup> but the disparity also implies that Islamabad is more motivated than New Delhi to prevail. India's liberals have supported a forward policy in Afghanistan but are also the strongest advocates of the country's strategic restraint, the great Indian hesitation to use force in pursuit of political goals.<sup>35</sup> Indian leaders have avoided loose talk about the possibility of using military force in Afghanistan. Not even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the right-wing nationalist political party, has suggested that an Indian military campaign in Afghanistan is feasible. The Indian armed forces do not appear to be reorganizing for a mission outside the national borders. The military and police training programs in the India-Afghanistan strategic partnership agreement envision training in India, not in Afghanistan. Whatever training India might do will be limited to relatively small numbers, not comparable to the scope of the current U.S. effort to stand up an army in Afghanistan. India is sending a clear signal regarding its hesitation to use military force.

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By limiting its options in Afghanistan to the use of soft power, India can only hope to influence Afghan domestic politics marginally.<sup>36</sup> Although India has close ties with the Tajiks in the north and good relations with a few Pashtun groups as well—especially the Karzai faction—New Delhi does not have the means to build a larger political coalition that can hold power in Kabul. India may be able to put together a military coalition led by Tajik militias, but the Tajiks do not operate in southern and eastern Afghanistan, which means realistically that India must limit its Afghan involvement to the safe areas of the north and the west, provoking the Pashtuns and their Pakistani backers. In reality, for India to realize the strategic value in Afghanistan, the Indian government would have to send troops to “the graveyard of empires,” as Afghanistan has been called so often; and afterward, New Delhi would find it hard to limit the ensuing conflict to its own terms.

New Delhi may still choose to expand its presence in Afghanistan, knowing that its options are limited but hoping that it is better to try stanching or drawing out Pakistan than giving up now. This argument is a recipe for civil war because there is an implicit belief that India's growing soft power can match Pakistan's demonstrated ability to defend its interests in Afghanistan militarily. It generates false hope in India's ability to influence outcomes in Afghanistan, when in fact this approach is viable only if Pakistan does not put up a fight.

### ***Pakistan Is Not a Failing State***

The strongest argument for a greater role for India in Afghanistan is predicated on a declining Pakistan not being able to sustain another round of competition after 2014. To think about what might happen in Afghanistan, therefore, we need to examine the health of the Pakistani state and society.

Ahmed Rashid writes that the twin embarrassments of Osama bin Laden living secretly in a garrison town and U.S. special forces breaching national defenses—heaped on the accumulation of misgovernance, illegitimacy, defensiveness, extremism, violence, ethnic separatism, external interference, and war in Pakistan—have brought the country to the very edge.<sup>37</sup> The long-term trends appear tragic: Pakistan has a rapidly expanding population with little means of supporting this growth. The country is running out of water, food, and land. Only 57 percent

of the population can read and write, and half of its children do not go to school, in a country where 37 percent of the population is below the age of fifteen.<sup>38</sup>

The Afghan war has generated some real setbacks for Pakistan. The rise of the Pakistani Taliban has spread the extremist challenge to well beyond the Pashtun parts of the country and into the Punjabi heartland, becoming the most serious threat to the polity since the 1971 civil war that ended in the secession of East Pakistan as Bangladesh. Ashley Tellis of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace predicts that “every foreseeable ending to the Afghan war today—continued conflict with the Taliban, restoration of Taliban control in the southern and eastern provinces, or a nationwide civil war—portends nothing but serious perils for Islamabad.”<sup>39</sup>

Most external predictions about Pakistan, including those from India, do not see the full picture of an extraordinarily diverse and variegated society. Those who visit Pakistan consistently report that on most days it is a normal functioning society. Karachi is a difficult city to live in, with political violence a recurrent threat, but in most respects it is not unlike other developing-country megacities. The war against terrorism is often distant, confined to FATA, Balochistan, and sometimes Peshawar. The state has pushed back energetically against terrorism, especially since the 2007 Lal Masjid siege in the middle of official Islamabad. Terrorism pierces the humdrum but narrowly targets symbols of Western power and local collaboration.

Even the picture of the formal state teetering from one crisis to another is not quite true. Pakistan’s formal institutions of governance have performed poorly in many areas but have done well in others. The current national assembly has passed more laws than in past sessions, in particular those protecting women and human rights. It also has passed constitutional amendments devolving power to the provinces, a longstanding demand. An independent election commission effectively vets electoral rolls in many parts of the country. The State Bank of Pakistan, the country’s central bank, functions with independence in setting monetary policy. The Motorway Police in Pakistan is widely seen as a model police force in the developing world. Certainly, the Pakistani press has been a robust check on the malfunctioning of government: The victory of the lawyers’ group protesting Musharraf’s suspension of Judge Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in 2007 would not have been possible without an oppositional media. Perhaps most important, Pakistan’s economy grew at 7 percent a year between 2003 and 2007, suggesting that the economic downturn since 2008 has more to do with the decline in the international economy rather than any endogenous weakness.

British journalist Anatol Lieven correctly argues that Pakistan looks very much like its counterpoint, India: “If Pakistan was an Indian state, then in terms of development, order, and per capita income it would find itself somewhere in the middle, considerably below Karnataka but considerably above Bihar.”<sup>40</sup> Pakistan’s literacy rate has been rising roughly at the same pace as India’s for a few decades (though India’s literacy rate is higher at 74 percent).<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the youth bulge in Pakistan is not a recent phenomenon.

More generally, Pakistan’s ability to support the Taliban and provide drinking water might be associated but are not directly correlated. Scholars of Pakistani civil-military relations have argued that the country’s many domestic failures stem from the diversion of resources from development to defense.<sup>42</sup> If that is the case, then Pakistan’s domestic failures have allowed the country to enjoy external success, especially in defending its strategic parity with India for more than six decades. Both Rashid and Lieven report that the Pakistan Army’s counterinsurgency operations in Swat were reasons for hope.

Whether Pakistanis should feel threatened by India is beside the point. Pakistan’s military says it feels insecure and has reacted in ways that are entirely consistent with the predictions of the predominant school of international relations thinking. Realist theory places greater

salience on security imperatives than on less urgent drivers, including economic development and institution building. The theory also prioritizes immediate over long-term security threats. By that measure, Pakistan has responded as expected and with relative effectiveness. In this view, Pakistan's narrow and security-related interests in Afghanistan should overmatch India's broad and diffuse interests. Pakistan may be a weak state by some measures, but it is not about to fail and will remain capable of mounting a military campaign.

The real problem in Pakistan is not state failure but the balance in the relationship between the state and civil society. Since Max Weber, the state has been defined by its ability to impose itself on society, but the modern state has had to combat pluralism, which decries the grand autonomy of the state in exercising its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Pluralism demands that this monopoly be earned and remain contingent on the state providing public goods. In Pakistan, the state is pluralistic—or at least oligopolistic—and decisions about public goods are made outside the Weberian hierarchy of the state, both in society and the factions within the state apparatus.

The clearest example is Pakistan's informal economy, which has continued to grow even as the official economy has hit the skids. The informal economy has been estimated to be as large as 50 percent of the official GDP, employing three times as many workers as the formal sector. In 2011, while the official economy grew at a sluggish 2.4 percent, demand for cars, cement, and other goods sharply increased, indicating sources of demand outside the documented economy.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, Pakistan's tax collections languish at less than 9 percent of its GDP, and no more than one million people pay income taxes.

The Pakistan Army has been called the state within the state,<sup>44</sup> but it is not so much a hidden government as it is a part of a fragmented and variegated structure of power and authority that spans the country's political system. Civil society groups and government agencies can make and pursue their own policies, leaving the formal hierarchy of the state to follow, justify, and sometimes recant their actions. While outsiders despair at the country's dismal civil-military relations record, Pakistanis see the army as another political party, somewhat more honest than the civilian parties but also heavy-handed. When the military has failed, Pakistanis have protested that failure in the same way that they have protested the failures of the Pakistan Muslim League and the People's Party of Pakistan.

No regime in Pakistan, not even its military, has been able to impose broad state control over society. Unlike the South American military dictatorships, Pakistan's episodic military rulers have never been able to slip into totalitarianism, capable of shutting down all dissent. The chilling quietness of Pinochet's Santiago that Gabriel García Márquez describes in *Clandestine in Chile* is impossible to find in Pakistan.<sup>45</sup> The Pakistani media's extraordinary position can only be understood in the context of a robust civil society that the state has not been able to repress. The final triumph of illiberalism occurs when opposition becomes quiescent without the government needing to shed blood. Saleem Shehzad, a Pakistani journalist whose reporting had cut too close to heart of the ISI's relationship with radicals, was murdered because he could not be silenced.<sup>46</sup> Shehzad's murder resulted in even greater protests and the pursuit of the causes of his death, not the firming up of lines journalists could not cross.<sup>47</sup>

When cohesion does not come from the state, it comes from society. Lieven writes of Pakistan's weak government but strong civil society. The imbalance in state-society relations in Pakistan has meant that the state cannot consolidate, but the prospect of state failure is less significant in a country where the government is less central to the health and functioning of the society. The country may be unable to achieve goals that only states can—legiti-

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***While outsiders despair at the country's dismal civil-military relations record, Pakistanis see the army as another political party, somewhat more honest than the civilian parties but also heavy-handed.***

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mate the leviathan, for example—but the absence of the state has allowed Pakistani society to develop privately.

The fragmented political system, rooted in the state-society imbalance, allows contradictory policies to coexist in parallel even on national security issues. It is not surprising that Pakistan fights terrorism and supports radical groups at the same time. The country can react with outrage at the attack on Malala Yousafzai but also allow the structure of extremism to continue to exist and believe that it exists mainly to fight against external threats. The simultaneous occurrence of the Lahore Declaration and Kargil War preparations are a case in point.<sup>48</sup> Today, there are those who have pushed for open trade with India, a major step in India-Pakistan rapprochement, but there are others who fear active Indian presence in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is neither about to collapse nor is it likely to be amenable to the kind of containment strategy being proposed against it. Pakistan's foreign policy masters have demonstrated great ability to outmaneuver external pressure—unlike the leaders of North Korea and Iran, who have had greater difficulty in managing foreign demands. As a country, Pakistan is integrated in the international system in a way North Korea never has been. Millions of Pakistanis live outside the country, especially in the Persian Gulf, and unlike most expatriate Iranians or Iraqis from Saddam Hussein's regime before 2003, most Pakistanis on foreign soil are not disaffected exiles with minimal ties back home but strong nationalists with continuing ties inside Pakistan.<sup>49</sup>

In the mid-1990s, the United States backed Pakistani assistance for the Taliban campaign in Afghanistan, and Pakistan had the support of the moneyed Saudi government.<sup>50</sup> This time Pakistan is more isolated. This loss of external support is at the bottom of the direst predictions of state collapse in Pakistan. But even as the United States, Saudi Arabia, and others stand apart from Pakistan, they are unlikely to abandon the country entirely or be in a position to restrain reenergized anti-India radicalism. The lessons of abandonment from the 1990s are still vivid. Pakistan today has nuclear weapons, which must be secured above all else, and there is no serious expectation that Pakistan can be changed from outside. It also is unrealistic to expect that Pakistan's army will surrender what it thinks are its national interests by accommodating India's objectives in Afghanistan. Pakistan has a clear military advantage in Afghanistan through its relationship with the Taliban. It could strike Indian interests there almost at will. If these attacks occur, India will not have any real means to defend its interests, especially with U.S. capacity to provide security diminishing after 2014.

In effect, India can only hope to stretch Pakistan's commitment in Afghanistan, perhaps pulling Islamabad further into Afghanistan. The New Delhi consensus and the continued viability of Pakistan's security apparatus suggest a balance-of-power contest between the two countries and carry the risk of igniting the civil war in Afghanistan that all parties want to avoid. As Shekhar Gupta writes, contesting Afghanistan will put India “permanently and, inevitably, violently at odds with the Pakistanis.”<sup>51</sup> With Afghanistan as the new point of acute India-Pakistan competition, the proxy war might widen. The Pakistan Army could decide to respond by renewing support to Kashmir separatists. The result could be increased cross-border shelling and perhaps another nuclear crisis. An Indian threat could also bring the radicals and the Pakistan Army back together after some years of a frayed relationship.

## Scenario 2: A Regional Peace Plan

Though current developments point toward an India-Pakistan balance-of-power contest, the resulting proxy war is not desirable for any of the players. From the perspectives of Washington

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***It also is unrealistic to expect that Pakistan's army will surrender what it thinks are its national interests by accommodating India's objectives in Afghanistan.***

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and the Afghan government, the most preferred outcome is for India and Pakistan to cooperate in Afghanistan.

Potentially, India-Pakistan cooperation could range from the maximalist—the two states working together to bring peace and development—to the minimalist—a limited agreement not to foment another proxy war directly. At the maximalist end stands a project like TAPI. At the minimalist end, India could consult with Pakistan on its economic and technical assistance programs in Afghanistan, and Pakistan might agree to refrain from planning and assisting in attacks on Indian facilities in Afghanistan. In between are a number of cooperation opportunities: joint training of Afghan military and police, India limiting its Afghan engagement to the Northern Tajik and Uzbek areas, nonsecurity assistance, or transparent cash assistance programs, while Pakistan provides verifiable assurances on security.

The trouble with India-Pakistan cooperation, however, is that the minimalist opportunities are no more likely than the maximalist ones. Without some form of verifiable security assurances from Pakistan, the Indian government is unlikely to want to limit its current level of engagement, especially since the Afghan and U.S. governments have been encouraging greater Indian involvement in Afghanistan. On the Pakistani side, accepting increased Indian presence in Afghanistan without a compensating improvement in its long-term security and political concerns is tantamount to surrender. Even if a Pakistani government were willing to accept this loss, key factions in the society and the state might not be willing to do so, especially if it hurts their parochial interests.

The history of India-Pakistan peace efforts shows that incremental steps to build trust, such as bus and train transport links or Pakistan according most-favored nation status to India, have not accumulated. The few instances of progress have come from breakthroughs at the top—no one else seems to have the authority to conclude meaningful agreements—but these high-profile initiatives have been vulnerable to violence on both sides of the border. The Kargil War and the Mumbai attacks were dramatic examples of how India-Pakistan peace processes could be derailed. In Pakistan, the continued problems in Kashmir and Gujarat have fed beliefs about India as an anti-Muslim Hindu state that must be fought.

India and Pakistan could agree on a degree of cooperation only if the United States decided to remain in Afghanistan with numbers of troops large enough to mitigate the stark prisoner's dilemma game unfolding in the region. Significant numbers of U.S. troops remaining in Afghanistan well into the future would tamp down regional competition in Afghanistan, give the Afghan government time to consolidate, and allow India and Pakistan to restart their peace process. The U.S.-Afghanistan strategic agreement holds open the possibility of continued U.S. military presence, but the United States is war weary. Anything more than a token presence after 2014 will be hard to justify absent a major reversal.

Obama and Karzai met in Washington in January 2013 to discuss a residual U.S. troop presence, but no announcement has been forthcoming. Politically, the 2012 presidential campaigns showed bipartisan support for bringing the troops back home by 2014, although some professional foreign policy and military circles appear to favor staying on.<sup>52</sup> Kimberly Kagan and Frederick W. Kagan argue that the United States should keep as many as thirty thousand troops in Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup> General John Allen, the departing Afghanistan theater commander, proposed three scenarios with a maximum of twenty thousand troops.<sup>54</sup> General David Barno (a former U.S. commander in Afghanistan) and Matthew Irvine have written that the United States could protect its interests with ten thousand troops or less.<sup>55</sup> In his 2013 State of the Union address, Obama said that another thirty-four thousand troops will

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***Significant numbers of U.S. troops remaining in Afghanistan well into the future would tamp down regional competition in Afghanistan, give the Afghan government time to consolidate, and allow India and Pakistan to restart their peace process.***

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leave Afghanistan in February 2013 but made no mention of how many troops are likely to remain behind. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have reported independently that the Pentagon is now considering eight thousand troops, but the White House is thinking of numbers as low as three thousand, dropping to one thousand by 2017.<sup>56</sup>

Continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan is probably the best outcome for India and, arguably, for Pakistan as well. U.S. presence would provide the security umbrella under which New Delhi could continue to pursue its relations with Kabul without having to worry about confronting Pakistan directly. India's return to Afghanistan in 2002, and the subsequent expansion of Indian diplomacy in Afghanistan, occurred under the protection of U.S. military presence. Pakistan would favor continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan if it could get Washington to curtail the drone strikes to the targets it wants and the re-priminations about ISI support for the Haqqani Network. Ideally, for Pakistan, continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan would spare it the security burden of fighting radicalism. In a post-U.S. Afghanistan, if the Taliban consolidated itself, Pakistan would be the next target for radicalism. Perhaps the Afghan government itself would see the most benefits from continued U.S. presence; whether or not this might change Karzai's willingness to accommodate challengers, it would certainly mean a smoother succession in Kabul, reducing the likelihood of Karzai following Najibullah to the end.

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***In a post-U.S. Afghanistan, if the Taliban consolidated itself, Pakistan would be the next target for radicalism.***

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### Scenario 3: Could India Stay Out of Afghanistan?

If the United States does not stay on, the prospect of a balance-of-power contest and possibly a proxy war similar to that of the 1990s rises.<sup>57</sup> The only option left under these conditions might be to ask India to stay out of Afghanistan in an effort to assuage Pakistan's security concerns and bring it into a peace process that allows a modicum of peaceful withdrawal for the United States while altering the nature of the India-Pakistan rivalry.

New Delhi wants to be involved in Afghanistan precisely to undermine Pakistani influence and thereby break out of its rivalry with Pakistan. Pakistan impedes India's access to Central Asian energy sources, since any pipeline must pass through that country, and the only other route for the gas—through Iran and then shipped in container ships to India—is subject to U.S. sanctions on foreign investment in Iran. That India has benign goals in Afghanistan, therefore, should hardly matter to Pakistan. If the consequence of India's policy in Afghanistan is to mitigate Pakistani influence in that country, no matter what the intent, why should Islamabad support the effort?

Gupta argues that Afghanistan is strategically more important for Pakistan than for India. Pakistan has a long and troubled border with Afghanistan. The movement of refugees and goods as well as drugs and guns makes the region restless where the Pakistan Army is fighting a full-on counterinsurgency campaign. In contrast, he writes, Afghanistan is not an important trade partner of India. Afghanistan has never sent terrorists to India. No Afghan ethnic group has mounted an attack on India, nor has the Pashtun belt in Afghanistan and Pakistan been used to plan any attack on India.<sup>58</sup>

As the United States withdraws, and in the absence of any regional understanding, India's aid projects in Afghanistan will become vulnerable to attack by Pakistan-backed Taliban. New Delhi has deployed small numbers of paramilitary forces purely for perimeter defense of a few key installations in Afghanistan, but there are no indications that the Indian government will send more troops to the country.

India's withdrawal from Afghanistan would not be without risk. It would embolden the Taliban and, more important to India, embolden Pakistan, potentially encouraging Pakistan to pursue aggressive gains. The greatest danger for the United States is the return of the Taliban, bringing al-Qaeda in its wake; for India, the Taliban's return to power, with or without al-Qaeda, is cause for concern given the Lashkar-e-Taiba's reported ties with the Taliban.<sup>59</sup> Inside Afghanistan, Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara political leaders are likely to object violently to the return of the Taliban on Pakistan's back, potentially resulting in the civil war that, again, all actors want to avoid.

Some of the risks are unavoidable or no worse than what the current trajectory suggests, but India withdrawing from the situation in Afghanistan could alter a key structural condition in Afghanistan. If Pakistan's Afghan policy is refracted through its India lens, then Islamabad should welcome removing the prism. The Pakistan Army then may not want the Taliban to take power in Afghanistan, fearing the emboldening effect it might have on the Pakistani Taliban.<sup>60</sup> Conversely, growing Indian presence in a post-U.S. Afghanistan would offer the Pakistan Army and radical groups another cause to energize their alliance.

Pakistan's direct interest, relations, and leverage in Afghanistan surpass that of every other country except the United States. With U.S. troops withdrawing, Pakistan is poised to be the most powerful external actor in Afghanistan. Pakistan has now won three victories against the former Soviet Union, the Iran-Russia-India combination backing the Northern Alliance, and now, the United States. These victories have come at a tremendous cost. Pakistan itself has become more violent and less stable, though not to the point of failure. Pakistan's rivalry with India has remained largely in place as past peace efforts have failed. These structural imperatives are unlikely to change soon, but as Afghanistan slides into another civil war and India-Pakistan relations worsen as a result of their competition there, the possibility of an Indian withdrawal should be considered as one way of defusing the rising tensions.

As New Delhi is likely to resist a policy of surrender to Pakistan, the United States should return to its de-hyphenation policy from the mid-2000s that emphasized Indian acquisition of U.S. technology. The U.S. Defense Department has been working with the Indian government to develop closer ties, but the initiative requires presidential and congressional guidance, especially on export controls, about which India is particularly sensitive. An emphasis on codevelopment of new weapons systems could reduce the effects of the technology export controls. A significant part of the problem lies in India, where broken military research and development and procurement systems stymie progress.

For their part, the Afghans are likely to resist being left to Pakistan. Karzai has assiduously cultivated a relationship with India, and New Delhi has close ties to Tajik leaders, who are unlikely to see intervention against India's engagement in benign terms. However, if Pakistan can be convinced of an Indian withdrawal or even limited disengagement, it could be the best hope that the Taliban will not receive direct ISI assistance should it launch offensives northward. The different groups within Afghanistan might be more well balanced in that case, and with the benefit of continued Western financial assistance, the Afghan government can have some hope of outmatching the resources available to the spoilers.

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***If Pakistan can be convinced of an Indian withdrawal, it could be the best hope that the Taliban will not receive direct ISI assistance should it launch offensives northward.***

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## Conclusion

If the United States continues its drawdown in Afghanistan without addressing the structural challenges stemming from the India-Pakistan balance-of-power contest, a new civil war is

all too likely. There are generally two ways to alter this structural reality: Pakistan could agree to expanded Indian presence in Afghanistan as part of a regional peace plan, or India could withdraw from Afghanistan to assuage Pakistan's security concerns. There are other variations on these two themes, but any real effort to resolve the problem must embrace the logic of one of the two choices.

The possibility of a regional peace plan currently looks slight but potentially promising in the context of the debate over how many U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan after 2014. If Washington and Kabul agree on a relatively larger troop presence, India and Pakistan would have more time to build on their own bilateral peace process, which could include an arrangement on Afghanistan. One possibility is that India could restrict itself to the Northern non-Pashtun areas, leaving southern and eastern Pashtun regions as a Pakistani sphere of influence. In this scheme, Kabul, secured by an international force, could serve as a buffer. If Washington and Kabul agree on keeping only a small contingent of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, we should expect minimal cooperation.

The problem is that the chances of the United States agreeing to have its troops stay on in significant numbers are diminishing. Though there is growing belief among professional foreign policy and military experts that the United States may have to remain longer in Afghanistan, Obama seems politically and personally committed to bringing home all but a handful of troops. Public opinion polling on the subject widely backs withdrawal. The polling numbers may change if U.S. leaders make the case that the situation has changed and a longer stay is warranted, but such appeals have been rare. The dissolution of the "Af-Pak" office will present additional bureaucratic challenges as the State Department absorbs its functions. With responsibility for India and Pakistan in the Defense Department separated into the Pacific and Central Commands, policy coordination will be difficult to maintain.

A reduced U.S. presence and lack of India-Pakistan agreement will require a significant shift in thinking in Washington and New Delhi. An attempt to balance India's and Pakistan's engagement in Afghanistan is not likely to lead to peace, because there is no balance: India has superiority in soft power, and Pakistan has clear military advantage. A direct confrontation between soft and hard power results in only one outcome—military victory—which is why advocates of soft power see it as working in the background, as an embedded rather than instrumental capacity.<sup>61</sup>

The Indian consensus on Afghanistan is limited; there is no mainstream support for Indian military intervention in the country. Without military force—in the absence of U.S.-provided security—the Indian presence in Afghanistan remains vulnerable to Pakistan-backed Taliban attacks. India's Afghan allies might be able to provide some security, and New Delhi may boost these efforts by supplying weapons, but this leads to the civil war no one wants. The United States taking the lead in developing a new Afghan policy, however, is tantamount to a U.S. return, which the American public does not want. Without continued American support, though, the Indian position in Afghanistan is tenuous.

A clearer vision in Washington could change the situation. The problem in Afghanistan has changed. Al-Qaeda, as an organization, has transformed from a centrally controlled unit to a networked enterprise with different groups aligning themselves to it from time to time. Its members no longer seek to congregate in Afghanistan; al-Qaeda has a center of gravity—it is in Pakistan.<sup>62</sup>

The United States is shifting its focus from Afghanistan to Pakistan, but without resolving the structural conditions in Afghanistan, it is likely to have to return. Today, the situation in Pakistan is the most difficult foreign policy challenge a U.S. president has faced since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis because external actors—the United States, the United Nations, Europe, Saudi Arabia, China, Israel, and certainly India—have very little leverage in the country. Outsiders can get Pakistan to deliver on short-term objectives, such as allowing NATO convoys to transit, but only Pakistanis can bring about long-term change in the nature of the state and national identity—and Pakistanis, for their own and sometimes understandable reasons, do not want to do it yet.



## Notes

1. There are other reasons for Osama bin Laden's escape from Tora Bora into Pakistan. U.S. military commanders have been criticized for using Afghan militias in the battle of Tora Bora, as the militias have been accused of incompetence and corruption. See "Tora Bora Revisited: How We Failed to Get Bin Laden and Why It Matters Today: A Report to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate," 111th Congress, November 30, 2009, available at [www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Tora\\_Bora\\_Report.pdf](http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Tora_Bora_Report.pdf) (accessed March 10, 2013).
2. The term is from Shekhar Gupta, "Get Out, Leave Af to Pak," *Indian Express*, November 21, 2011, available at [www.indianexpress.com/news/get-out-leave-af-to-pak/877841/0](http://www.indianexpress.com/news/get-out-leave-af-to-pak/877841/0) (accessed March 10, 2013).
3. Other regional approaches include the Istanbul Process led by Turkey, the New Silk Road Initiative launched by the United States under the leadership of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and a proposed Six Power Dialogue, which would include Pakistan, India, Iran, China, Russia, and the United States. Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN secretary-general's special representative to Afghanistan and one of the key architects of the Bonn Conference in December 2001 that chose Hamid Karzai as the new leader of Afghanistan, has emphasized repeatedly the importance of regional approaches to stabilizing Afghanistan.
4. Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 203. See also Associated Press, "Musharraf's Book Says Pakistan Faced U.S. 'Onslaught' If It Didn't Back Terror War," *USA Today*, September 26, 2006, available at [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-09-25-pakistan-memoir\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-09-25-pakistan-memoir_x.htm) (accessed March 10, 2013).
5. Polly Nayar, "Reducing Collateral Damage to Indo-Pakistani Relations from the War on Terrorism," Policy Brief no. 107, The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, September 2002, available at [www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2002/09/southasia-nayar](http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2002/09/southasia-nayar) (accessed March 10, 2013).
6. See "Tora Bora Revisited."
7. See Ashley J. Tellis, "The Merits of Dehyphenation: Explaining U.S. Success in Engaging India and Pakistan," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2008), 21–42, available at <http://csis.org/files/publication/twq08autumntellis.pdf> (accessed March 10, 2013). President Clinton initially began the process of decoupling U.S. relations with India and Pakistan in 1998; see Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).
8. Robert D. Blackwill, "Why is India America's Natural Ally?" *The National Interest*, December 3, 2004, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/why-is-india-americas-natural-ally-2764> (accessed March 10, 2013).
9. The chronology here is collapsed for the purposes of this report, but the India-Pakistan rapprochement occurred between 2004 and 2007, and it was only after the Lal Masjid siege in July 2007 that the Pakistan government finally became serious about fighting radicalism at home. However, the planners of the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 did not stop. On India-Pakistan rapprochement and its failure, see Steve Coll, "The Back Channel," *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2009. On Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts, see John Schmidt, *The Unraveling: Pakistan in the Age of Jihad* (New York: Picador, 2012).
10. Shakil Sheikh, "Pakistan Vows to Maintain Credible N-Deterrence," *The News*, April 13, 2006.
11. See Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), chapter 3.
12. See interview with Steve Coll by *Indian Express* editor-in-chief Shekhar Gupta on NDTV 24x7's *Walk the Talk*, May 17, 2012, available at [www.indianexpress.com/olympics/news/-india-s-security-problems-are-graver-than-america-s-in-relation-to-jehadi-terrorism-/573089/1](http://www.indianexpress.com/olympics/news/-india-s-security-problems-are-graver-than-america-s-in-relation-to-jehadi-terrorism-/573089/1) (accessed March 10, 2013).
13. Tankel, *Storming the World Stage*, chapters 8 and 9.
14. The Pakistani government has charged seven persons, including the Lashkar operations commander, Zaki-ur Rahman Lakhvi, for the Mumbai attacks, but the judicial process remains stalled.
15. Coll interview, May 17, 2012.
16. Holbrooke's logic is evident in Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid's argument that Pakistan's Afghan and Kashmir border problems had to be tackled together. See Rubin and Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2008), available at [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64604/barnett-r-rubin-and-ahmed-rashid/from-great-game-to-grand-bargain?page=show](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64604/barnett-r-rubin-and-ahmed-rashid/from-great-game-to-grand-bargain?page=show) (accessed March 10, 2013).
17. Bruce Riedel, "A New Pakistan Policy: Containment," *New York Times*, October 14, 2011, available at [www.nytimes.com/2011/10/15/opinion/a-new-pakistan-policy-containment.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/15/opinion/a-new-pakistan-policy-containment.html) (accessed March 10, 2013).
18. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker's speech on Afghanistan at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, September 17, 2012, available at [www.carnegieendowment.org/files/091712\\_transcript\\_crocker1.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/091712_transcript_crocker1.pdf) (accessed March 10, 2013).

19. See Gilles Dorronsoro, *Waiting for the Taliban in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2012), available at [www.carnegieendowment.org/files/waiting\\_for\\_taliban2.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/waiting_for_taliban2.pdf) (accessed March 10, 2013).
20. Graham Bowley, "Afghan Warlord's Call to Arms Rattles Officials," *New York Times*, November 12, 2012, available at [www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/world/asia/ismail-khan-powerful-afghan-stokes-concern-in-kabul.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/world/asia/ismail-khan-powerful-afghan-stokes-concern-in-kabul.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) (accessed March 10, 2013).
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62. Yemen and Mali are other countries in which the United States believes al-Qaeda members are congregating.





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