

INDIA'S AF-PAK STRATEGY

SHASHANK JOSHI

Since 2001, India has become Afghanistan's fifth-largest donor, pledging \$1.2 billion in funds. Is this merely an attempt to increase leverage over Pakistan, or could India become part of the regional solution on which Western powers have increasingly pinned their hopes? Shashank Joshi analyses the motivations behind India's own Af-Pak strategy.

2009 was the year that 'Af-Pak' emerged as the neologism for the pivotal theatre of America's war on terrorism – precisely three decades after the region's first spell in the geopolitical sun during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The term, resented in Islamabad and soon to be jettisoned by the Obama administration, denotes both the confluence of parochial militants, international terrorists, and their state sponsors – but also their epicentre, the Durand Line.¹ Yet, for over a decade, it is precisely this conceptual framework with which India has guided its own approach in Central Asia. Now, as the Western-led war fails to quell terrorism and insurgency, India has re-entered the picture in Western capitals as one of the prospective lynchpins of a regional solution.

India considered the ousting of the fundamentalists in 2001 a major success

Three related questions are explored here. First: what motives drive, and what policies comprise, India's own Af-Pak strategy? Second: what are the potential and probable trajectories for India? Third: how does its role interrelate with that of other regional stakeholders, particularly the US and Pakistan, and thereby affect the future of the Afghan nation and state? To address these questions, this analysis is organised into five sections. First, India's strategic perspective in Afghanistan and Pakistan is outlined. Second, Indian regional policy to date is

traced. Third, the emerging Indian debate over the trajectory the country's approach should take is documented. Fourth, the path on which India is most likely to settle is explained. Fifth, and finally, the case is made that current interaction of regional powers in Afghanistan precludes an effective regional solution, and will continue to do so unless there is a deep-rooted re-configuration of interests.

India's Strategic Perspective

India's extensive and growing footprint in Afghanistan has historical pedigree. From the reign of King Zahir Shah between 1933 and 1973, to the largely unrecognised Soviet-backed communist government of Mohammed Najibullah, New Delhi and Kabul have been close. During the Taliban interlude, India, along with Russia and Iran, militarily and financially backed the mostly non-Pashtun array of anti-Taliban fighters, otherwise known as the Northern Alliance.² India considered the ousting of the Taliban fundamentalists in 2001 a major strategic success. It also supported the post-war Bonn Agreement and the presence of US forces, and has emerged as Afghanistan's fifth-largest donor and a key ally of the beleaguered Karzai regime in the aftermath of its disputed election in 2009. Three factors – security, ambition, and energy – inform India's Afghan strategy and its judgment that it requires a coherent Af-Pak strategy.

First, and above all, India has for a long time – and to a far greater extent than the West – perceived its security to be bound up with events in Afghanistan and on its borders.³ The proliferation

of terrorist training camps is only one component of the often symbiotic link between the Taliban, affiliated Pakistani militants, Kashmiri groups, and Al-Qa'ida.⁴ Indeed, one Indian officer has claimed that at the peak of the Taliban's power, 'about 22 per cent of terrorists operating in Jammu and Kashmir were either of Afghan origin or had been trained there'.⁵

India has become Afghanistan's fifth largest donor

A former Indian ambassador to Afghanistan has argued that 'much more serious in Indian eyes [than the Taliban treatment of minorities] were the Taliban pronouncements on Kashmir, the training of Kashmiris, Pakistanis, and foreign militants in camps in Afghanistan' because 'these touched the core of India's vital interests and compelled New Delhi to strengthen its support and assistance to the predominantly non-Pashtun forces led by Burhanuddin Rabbani'.⁶ These connections were underscored in 1999 when a Pakistani group, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, hijacked an aircraft to Kandahar and was subsequently protected by the Taliban, for whom it had previously recruited. This and other principally Pakistani-created jihadi networks, comprising what Ahmed Rashid has called a 'multilayered terrorist cake', found hospitable bases of operation in Taliban-governed Afghanistan and, later, Pakistan's tribal regions and Baluchistan. Though this multiplicity of groups do not



Indian Soldiers assigned to the 9th Battalion of the Sikh Infantry arrive aboard USS *Boxer* to participate in the Malabar exercise in 2006. Photo courtesy of MCSN Joshua Martin/US DoD.

all share objectives, each has abetted the other such that anti-Indian groups have relied heavily on supposedly parochial groups such as the Taliban, and international groups such as Al-Qa'ida.

The Taliban themselves have expressed condemnation of India's support for the communist government overthrown in 1992 (and the subsequent Northern Alliance). In a 1998 statement, they reportedly insisted that by backing 'the puppet Communist regime ... India lost all sympathies of the majority of the Afghan people and it appears rather difficult to forget all that', adding that 'we obviously support the jihad in Kashmir'.⁷ Hakimullah Mehsud, leader of the Pakistani Taliban, promised in 2009 that 'if we get [an Islamic state], then we will go to the borders and help fight the Indians'.⁸ India therefore naturally opposes the panoply of terrorist and insurgent groups. It resists making a distinction between irreconcilable and 'moderate' Taliban and opposes the latter's incorporation into an Afghan government, while also denying suggestions that the US should withdraw from Afghanistan and simply focus on Al-Qa'ida. Most of all, it opposes

the prevailing Pakistani stance that the Quetta-based Afghan Taliban are a strategic asset.

Arguments that India seeks to counter Pakistani influence are technically true, but misunderstand the causality.⁹ India opposes Pakistan's influence *not* primarily on the realist grounds that the accretion of influence to a rival state presents a threat, but on the more specific basis that 'Pakistan is supporting both sides in Afghanistan'¹⁰ through its extensive 'clandestine backing for proxy terrorist groups', including the core Afghan Taliban, and affiliates such as Jalaluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.¹¹ Ashley Tellis, a former senior US policy-maker at the State Department and on the National Security Council, has argued that 'by traditional American standards, Pakistan remains a state sponsor of terrorism, because organs of the Pakistani government – primarily the army and intelligence services – continue to either actively support various armed groups that conduct murderous attacks on civilians in India and Afghanistan, or acquiesce to their activities'.¹²

Christine Fair, a Georgetown University professor and former UN official in Kabul, told the US legislature that 'Pakistan has relied upon non-state actors ... arguably since its inception in 1947 when it backed a tribal lashkar to invade Kashmir', and that 'from at least 1973 onward, Pakistan began a policy of instrumentalising Islamist Pashtun militias to prosecute its foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan', producing 'battle-hardened jihadis and a sprawling infrastructure to produce jihadis',¹³ often given the euphemism of 'strategic depth'.¹⁴

It is those jihadis and that infrastructure on which Indian strategy has its long-term focus, rather than the Pakistani role *per se*; in periods when Pakistan's involvement has differed, such as the period preceding 1973, India has not sought as extensive a strategy. When Ahmed Rashid argues that 'India backed Kabul simply because of Pakistani support to the Taliban', he leaves the picture incomplete.¹⁵

In addition to these specific security motivations, India now simply looks further afield than it once did, bolstered

by the resources and self-confidence generated by its economic liberalisation and nuclear tests.¹⁶ Where its sphere of interest was once deemed to span from the 'Middle East to Malacca', Indian activities now also stretch along the vertical axis from 'Dushanbe to Diego Garcia'. Where Pakistan once presented a psychological and physical barrier to the north-west, Central Asia is now a cauldron of diplomatic activity for India.¹⁷

In Tajikistan, India has maintained a medical centre at Farkhor, only 2 km from the Afghan border. It was there that wounded Northern Alliance members were treated during the Afghan Civil War, including the dying Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, assassinated only days before 9/11. India also acquired its only foreign military facility at Farkhor, affording short supply lines into Afghanistan and presumably allowing the Indian Air Force (IAF) an alternative route by which it might reach targets inside Pakistani territory.¹⁸ India may also possess military access further north at a long-dormant airfield in Ayni, where it has reportedly built three hangars and may station aircraft.¹⁹ Concurrently, India has expanded ties with other regional powers, for instance becoming an active observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Finally, Afghanistan is both a symbolic and literal stepping stone for flows of goods and resources. The International Energy Agency projects that India's net oil imports will triple by 2030. At present, the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) supply over a third of India's oil imports and all of its regularly contracted natural gas.²⁰ In the interests of diversification, and wary of greater Chinese penetration into the Central Asian market, India has prioritised the region. Iran, in particular, connects India to Afghanistan (albeit circuitously), which is vital in enabling India to circumvent the overland route blocked by Pakistan. India is also desirous of Tajikistan's uranium and natural gas, has invested in Uzbek production facilities, and retains interest in a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan. Afghanistan furnishes a diplomatic and logistical foothold in the heart of the region.²¹ India's aid in nation- and state-building

there is therefore both a symptom and enabler of this expansion in strategic and commercial horizons.

India's Policy to Date

India has prosecuted its own strategy primarily using two policy levers: economic aid, and military capacity-building. Even as India remains a major recipient of official development assistance itself, it has become Afghanistan's fifth-largest donor, pledging \$1.2 billion since 2001 in 'simple but targeted forms of assistance'.²² The noted Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid has called India's reconstruction strategy 'one of the best planned from any country'.²³

India constructed Afghanistan's new \$25 million parliament building and trained its legislators – both gestures rich with symbolism. It also donated three Airbus planes to the moribund Afghan national airline, and 600 vehicles.²⁴ This aid reinforced pre-existing ties with senior members of the government such as Hamid Karzai, who had been educated in India and had visited New Delhi a half dozen times by 2009.²⁵

One of the most strategically significant projects, evincing the triad of motives outlined above, is the Indian Border Roads Organisation's (BRO) construction of a \$136 million road that spans the 215 km from Zaranj, on the Iranian border, to Delaram, a town in Herat province. Delaram is also on Afghanistan's arterial highway, connecting Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Kunduz.²⁶ Coupled with a prospective rail link from the Iranian port of Chabahar, this will enable India to transport goods by sea to Iran, and northwards to Afghanistan and Central Asia, with at least three consequences. First, it will likely amplify the trading relationship between India and Afghanistan. India is the largest single destination for Afghan exports, but Afghanistan receives only 5 per cent of its imports from there, as opposed to nearly 37 per cent from Pakistan.²⁷ The consequent state revenues and economic activity would have long-term benefits. Second, it should lessen Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistani ports (both Karachi and the Chinese-developed Gwadar) and thereby reduce Pakistan's leverage.²⁸ Third, it will create new and

viable supply lines into Afghanistan that could strengthen the Western negotiating position *vis-à-vis* Pakistan,²⁹ and increase India's ability to assist anti-Taliban forces in the event of an American withdrawal or a loss of governmental control.

At a lower level, India has contributed to education, health, communications, power and other infrastructure, all of which has greatly reinforced its soft power. A Gallup survey of November 2009 revealed that a majority of Afghans surveyed (56 per cent) recognised India's role in reconstruction more than any other single group, including the UN (51 per cent) and NATO (44 per cent). Significantly, 59 per cent felt this was a role India ought to play. In contrast, only a third of Afghans saw Pakistan as playing a role in reconstruction – although more expressed a desire for a Pakistani role – and the same proportion saw Pakistan as supporting the Taliban leadership.³⁰ A separate survey from the International Republican Institute (IRI) saw India top the list of countries perceived to have good relations with Afghanistan; almost a quarter of Afghans named India, above the US (19 per cent), Iran (17 per cent), Tajikistan (12 per cent) and Pakistan (5 per cent). The same poll showed 72 per cent of Afghans had a negative view of Pakistan, more so than even the Taliban (67 per cent). Although figures were not available for negative views towards India, the balance of evidence suggests it would be considerably less.³¹

India's role in Afghanistan's security extends to its having 'supported anti-Taliban attacks from [both] Tajikistan and Uzbekistan', in addition to its provision of high-altitude (mountain) warfare equipment worth \$8 million, high-ranking military advisers, and helicopter technicians from the clandestine arm of its foreign intelligence service.³² In the post-Taliban period, India has contributed to the training of the embryonic Afghan National Army (ANA) by accepting its officers at a range of Indian defence institutions, such as the National Defence Academy. The Afghan army chief, General Bismillah Khan, has expressed a desire to send greater numbers of combat units to Indian counter-insurgency schools.³³ Indian pilots already train their Afghan counterparts to operate Mi-35 Hind

helicopter gunships, and source supplies for Soviet-era platforms. In 2008, Afghanistan's defence minister Abdul Rahim Wardak visited India to explore avenues of co-operation, pointedly stopping in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir. India also has around a thousand paramilitary personnel in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, although these largely guard reconstruction activities rather than engage in counter-insurgency or other active combat.³⁴

India's Debate

Three factors have catalysed an Indian debate over the future of its engagement with Afghanistan.

First, Pakistan has charged that the Indian role constitutes 'encirclement', that Indian consulates have been used as bases for fomenting separatism in Pakistan's Baluchistan province (where an insurgency has sporadically raged for three decades), and that India seeks to use Afghanistan as a platform for subverting Pakistan. Ahmed Rashid has also claimed that Pakistan's foreign intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, 'generated enormous misinformation on India's role' such as inflating the number of Indian agents and consulates in Afghanistan, propaganda that still finds enormous purchase in mainstream Pakistani accounts of international politics.³⁵ But the important reaction from Pakistan was violent rather than verbal, as shown when American officials documented 'intercepted communication between Pakistani intelligence officers and militants who carried out the [2008] attack [on India's embassy in Kabul]', emphasising both the 'direct support' and that 'the ISI officers had not been renegades'. Although this was painted as 'the clearest evidence to date that Pakistani intelligence officers are actively undermining American efforts to combat militants in the region', the episode also presented direct proof of Pakistan's proxy war against India.³⁶ One Indian journalist argued that 'India is rapidly becoming one of the most highly favoured targets of terrorists in that country'.³⁷ India is loath to fold in the face of pressure, and will be required to adequately protect its economic activities.

Second, President Obama's recent decision to specify a troop drawdown beginning in July 2011 was carefully calibrated to simultaneously subdue domestic opposition, send a signal of sufficient resolve to the Taliban, and pressure the Karzai regime to make reforms and concessions. But it is the prospect of an eroding Afghan government and consequent political vacuum that amplifies incentives for the Pakistani military to connive with the Afghan Taliban and other groups. Domestic American debates overlook the effects of an over-rigid 'exit strategy' on Indo-Pakistani relations. In fact both countries are wary of a hasty US withdrawal. Afghanistan will be forced to seek Indian help both as the US draws back and as Pakistan reactivates dormant ties to militants, and India will worry that the absence of US forces will engender conditions in which anti-Indian groups can consolidate and flourish.

Pakistan has charged that the Indian role constitutes 'encirclement'

Third, the Mumbai attacks of 2008 generated enormous domestic pressure on India to take punitive or deterrent action against Pakistan, where the group Lashkar-e-Taiba originated with the state's help, and is still based. But then, as in the crisis of 2001-02, India was militarily impotent for fear of inviting nuclear retaliation and facing considerable diplomatic (and, in 2002, commercial) pressure from the US to remain restrained.³⁸ Although violence in Kashmir has declined over the last year, the salience of the Mumbai attacks highlighted both the danger of terrorism, but also the absence of viable policy responses. Conversely, supporting the Afghan state and, by extension, indirectly curbing militancy on its periphery are both policies within India's control – regardless of their efficacy.

Some Indian voices have called for an escalation. Amir Taheri has written that a military commitment is 'surprisingly popular in India'. A retired diplomat, M K

Bhadrakumar, has noted that 'influential sections of Indian opinion are stridently calling for an outright Indian intervention in Afghanistan without awaiting the niceties of an American invitation letter'. In 2008, an editor of a realist Indian strategic affairs journal made the case that 'military involvement ... will shift the battleground away from Kashmir and the Indian mainland'.³⁹ A year later, that journal invoked the notion of 'force fungibility' to argue that 'since it is not feasible for Indian troops to directly attack Pakistan's military-jihadi complex, India should ensure that US troops do so' by 'reliev[ing] US troops of duties in areas where they are not actually fighting the Taliban – especially in Western and Northern Afghanistan'.⁴⁰ It should be stressed though that these are hitherto marginal arguments, and the dissenting case has been made strongly.

A deployment of Indian troops therefore remains unlikely. The Indian defence minister, A K Anthony, insisted in October 2009 that 'I am categorically stating that there is no question of Indian military involvement in Afghanistan ... not now, not in the future'.⁴¹ Vikram Sood, a former head of India's foreign intelligence service, the Research and Intelligence Wing (RAW), has written that 'sending troops ... is not an option'.⁴²

First, any deployment would be inevitably redolent of India's ill-fated peacekeeping mission to Sri Lanka of 1987-90, during which it suffered 1,200 casualties. In General Stanley McChrystal's September 2009 report, he argued that 'while Indian activities largely benefit the Afghan people, increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is likely to exacerbate regional tensions and encourage Pakistani countermeasures in Afghanistan or India'.⁴³ Some of the proxies for those countermeasures have likely eluded Pakistan's direct control in recent years, and both the Kabul embassy bombings and the attacks borne on Indian reconstruction projects indicate the potential costs of escalation. Even moderate casualties would be hard to sustain in India's coalition-based politics, where local parties often hold parochial interests. Although the government's 2009 election victory shored up its parliamentary base, the significant

domestic opposition to the civil nuclear agreement with the US reveals the obstacles to major foreign policy initiatives. The ruling Congress Party is also focused on consolidating India's economic development, and would be averse to expending such political capital.

Second, although India has six decades of counter-insurgency experience and large reserves of troops on UN missions, the state faces multiple and intensifying insurgencies at home. India's prime minister, Manmohan Singh, famously claimed that the Naxalite-Maoist insurrection was 'the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country', adding in 2009 that the country was 'losing the battle against the ... rebels'.⁴⁴ In prior years, scores of Indian troops have been embroiled with small numbers of insurgents in Punjab, Kashmir, and elsewhere. Nor have the US and British examples been encouraging, and it is not clear whether the level of the Indian Army's airlift capacity is better than that which has afflicted British operations.

Third, although attacks on Indian soil have sharpened the debate about a deployment, the prospect of more attacks may serve as a deterrent rather than catalyst. Deployed troops would have no more practical retaliatory capacity than the thousands of troops already on the Indo-Pakistani border. Yet, their very presence, and their inevitable infliction of collateral damage, would both encourage local and India-centric militant groups to target Indian interests, and would jeopardise the favourable local reputation India has established through its economic footprint.

India's Likely Path

The most probable trajectory of India's strategy is greater use of existing policy levers. In January 2010, it was reported that the US and Britain were 'exploring ways to boost India's role in Afghanistan, including a controversial proposal for it to train the Afghan National Police'. India's then National Security Adviser, M K Narayanan, acknowledged that 'we've spent quite a lot of time now talking with the Americans ... and we're willing to do even more. We have the best institution for training the civilian police, and the

paramilitary ... if you want a civilian police with a little bit of strength to the elbow'.⁴⁵

The Indian strategist C Raja Mohan has argued that 'the best contribution India could make might be in the areas of combat training and creating capacities in logistics and communications'.⁴⁶ Extant training has laid the ground for interoperability and Afghan forces broadly trust their Indian counterparts (as compared to the Pakistani military, which has been complicit in subverting non-Taliban government).⁴⁷ The army would welcome opportunities to fulfil its institutional ambition, much as the Indian Navy has embraced new tasks in the Indian Ocean region commensurate with its strength, with one retired admiral claiming that India is 'the best secular model of an Asian army'.⁴⁸ Although the Karzai regime's reliance on India will naturally rise as American influence wanes, India will also continue its reconstruction and development projects, which produce political effects surpassing their expense.

'Pakistan will remain the single greatest source of Afghan instability so long as the border sanctuaries remain'

The Regional Implications

This all has regional implications. Consider, first, the intersection of the Indian and American roles. India's strategy, policies, and their likely trajectories are all in substantial harmony with the overhauled American approach of December 2009, in which 'success hinges on developing Afghan security forces that can control the country on their own'.⁴⁹ First, the latent possibility of Indian assistance affords the US much-needed leverage to coerce Pakistan into adjusting its Afghanistan policy. Second, both states recognise the importance of strengthening the ANA: for the US, it is to expedite its drawdown, and for India because a capable Afghan state is deemed to be the only suitable, if

imperfect, vehicle for the attrition of the terrorist infrastructure.⁵⁰

Third, the bulk of India's strategy is economic, and thereby accords with the third pillar of the now famous dictum, popularised by General David Petraeus' Field Manual 3-24 on Counterinsurgency, 'clear, hold, build'. India's reconstruction and development is a modest but crucial complement to the clearing and holding that the US anticipates its reinforcements will achieve. This is important because in numbers, the Indian contribution is larger than the so-called US 'civilian surge', and India's regional stature suggests that its presence will not be transient.

Yet, there is no Indo-US Af-Pak strategy because India's contribution presents a 'risk to ongoing [American] cooperative ventures with Pakistan'.⁵¹ Pakistan possesses the longest border with Afghanistan, allows for and protects the land supply of the Western forces there through southern and eastern points of access, and is engaged in military operations against the Pakistani Taliban. In the aftermath of 9/11, Pakistan demanded that 'the campaign not involve the Indian government or the Indian military'.⁵² The populace, who have borne enormous costs from terrorism and the government's military offensives,⁵³ are angered by claims the country is not doing enough and the media, encouraged by the army, widely reports that India – along with Israel and the US – is responsible for a spate of bombings inflicted by Pakistani groups.⁵⁴

This reflects the intensely dysfunctional nature of the US-Pakistani alliance. The former US ambassador in Kabul wrote, in a secret November 2009 telegram to Washington, that 'Pakistan will remain the single greatest source of Afghan instability so long as the border sanctuaries remain'. He asked that the US look into 'the prospects for the Pakistani security services putting meaningful pressure against the Afghan Taliban, the insurgent sanctuaries and leadership, and Al-Qa'ida'.⁵⁵ Other scholars have documented 'consistent reports that sympathetic elements of the [Pakistani] Frontier Corps have been helping the Taliban', and argue that 'Islamabad continues to distinguish among militant groups ... and to use the

tribal areas for proxy groups destined for Afghanistan or India', adding 'some [such groups] are even backed by elements in the ISI, Frontier Corps, and military'.⁵⁶ The backing includes 'money, military supplies and strategic guidance to Taliban commanders', and is compounded by 'evidence that ISI operatives met regularly with Taliban commanders to discuss whether to intensify or scale back violence before the Afghan elections' of 2009.⁵⁷ One former Taliban minister and Guantánamo Bay detainee has argued in a recent book: 'The ISI extended its roots deep into Afghanistan like a cancer puts down roots into a human body', suggesting Pakistani manipulation has even induced considerable resistance from militants.⁵⁸ This degree of state sponsorship of terrorism in multiple countries is, needless to say, unusual in a 'major non-NATO ally' of the US.

For at least six reasons, the US has previously judged that Pakistan's connivance with Afghan and India-centric militants is tolerable.

First, the 'primary objective of American efforts ... remains the elimination of Al Qa'ida-associated sanctuaries',⁵⁹ and although there is an ongoing debate about the relationship between that group and others whose aims are perceived to be less threatening to American interests, policy has prioritised Osama Bin Laden's organisation.

Second, Pakistan is deemed to have taken sufficient action against Pakistan-centric groups – it is thought in Washington that any more pressure will both risk popular support for this action, and empower elements of the Pakistani military who seek accommodation with anti-state actors.

Third, Pakistan retains leverage over the US. As Daniel Markey argues, 'if Islamabad believes Washington is ignoring its concerns, it can manipulate [its] supply routes to demonstrate its strategic value' – or worse.⁶⁰ Aptly, one journalist has invoked 'a bad marriage in which both spouses have long stopped trusting each other, but would never think of breaking up because they have become so mutually dependent'.⁶¹

Fourth, this leverage has been enhanced by a gradual shift in attention

to Pakistan's internal stability and its nuclear weapons. The emasculation of civilian government, atrophy of political institutions, and cultivation of religious extremist centres of political and educational power are all deemed to have reduced American policy options to the point where Pakistan, like the financial institutions, is 'too big to fail', requiring 'bailouts' on putative pain of an implosion that would only succeed in creating safe havens for terrorists and radicalising new segments of the population. This image of acute vulnerability and looming chaos has been assiduously cultivated by the military (though never in relation to the security of nuclear weapons), and American policy has adapted minimally. The severe casualties borne by the frontline Pakistani security forces have obscured this pattern of military rent-seeking.

Fifth, India is not in possession of supply lines or local intelligence of equal value, and its influence with Afghanistan is less than that of Pakistan, although few attempts have been made to explore means by which India and other regional actors could reduce US dependence on Pakistan.

Sixth, and finally, a 'working assumption' has been that 'Pakistan's role is not determinative to the conflict in Afghanistan' and hence not worthy of a coercive effort to transform, drone attacks notwithstanding.⁶²

In this context, the US response has been unsurprising, repeatedly if implicitly warning against Indian military involvement,⁶³ and America has remained reticent about emphasising India's role. India has in turn responded with caution, and not sought to publicly or intensively transform many of these six factors.

These dynamics are of more than local significance. As the Western politico-military strategy flounders, there have emerged calls for a 'regional solution' – a notion often invoked but rarely elaborated, roughly pertaining to some sort of agreement between the Western coalition and regional parties as to the future status of Afghanistan.⁶⁴ Numerous observers have argued that the road to Kabul lies through Kashmir, and that Indo-Pakistani peace would end Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism and insurgency

and allow troops on their eastern frontier to re-deploy to the Durand Line. David Miliband has advocated a 'regional stabilisation council' to include Pakistan, India and Afghanistan.⁶⁵ Prem Shankar Jha has suggested a 'neighbour's initiative' that could furnish a 'core of military power for the new regime to deal with likely challenges to its authority', including neighbouring states but also Turkey and India.⁶⁶ The proximity of these states, and the engagement of their vital interests, makes this a superficially attractive formula. But the precise content of those interests and their interaction point away from a co-operative equilibrium. There are four principal obstacles.

First, not all regional actors share Western objectives. Although Iran's support for the Taliban is likely a short-term policy to wear down American forces,⁶⁷ it reveals the limits to which the Afghan state is the focal point of regional interests. Regional states (India included) have often exacerbated ethnic fractionalisation by aligning with particular groups to retain channels of influence at the expense of central authority.⁶⁸ Additionally, each state, aware of the centrality of Afghanistan to US strategy, is likely to seek concessions in exchange for greater co-operation.

Second, India's policies are carefully calibrated. Its government is not prepared to commit troops, and it is unclear what coercive measures it could or would take against anti-state actors in the event of an American withdrawal.

Third, Pakistan's resistance to an Indian role has increased over time and so would not countenance its institutionalisation.⁶⁹ There is every reason to suppose their recourse to non-state anti-Indian and anti-Afghanistan proxies would intensify in the event of an American withdrawal.

Fourth, and most importantly, there is no *viable* path by which Pakistan, and principally its military establishment, might be assuaged. Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, two of the most experienced observers of Afghanistan, have argued that 'pressuring or giving aid to Pakistan, without any effort to address the sources of its insecurity, cannot yield a positive outcome'. They consequently recommend 'addressing the legitimate

sources of Pakistan's insecurity while increasing the opposition to its disruptive actions'.⁷⁰ This basic argument is a core element of Pakistan's public diplomacy, and has been advanced by senior American figures such as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen,⁷¹ and President Barack Obama, who wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that 'if Pakistan can look towards the east with confidence, it will be less likely to believe its interests are best advanced through cooperation with the Taliban'.⁷² Yet the notion of assuagement is both unrealistic, and a *non sequitur* that misunderstands the complexity of Pakistani motives.

There are a number of arguments that undermine this received wisdom. Christine Fair argues that 'as India sees itself as an extra-regional actor and an emerging global power, [it] is unlikely to take steps that, from its optic, would reward Pakistan for using terrorism'.⁷³ As its power grows, so too will its capacity to resist a forced settlement: akin to the way in which the recurrence of terrorism reinforces the domestic unwillingness to make concessions. In the short term, India remains unwilling to negotiate with a disenfranchised civilian government in Pakistan and state actors that continue to abet anti-Indian militants.

Counter-insurgency expert Andrew Exum has argued that:⁷⁴

[M]any US analysts of Pakistan have ... internalized the Pakistani narrative that Indian activity is driving Pakistani behaviour toward Afghanistan and its insurgent groups ... [but the military] has much invested in its conflict with India and would lose political and economic clout if India no longer presents a serious threat to the state.

The military, as an autonomous institution with commercial interests and a dominant political status, has deep organisational motives in reinforcing the image of a grave conventional military threat. Indeed, 'the Kashmir impasse is symptomatic, not causal, of the deep distrust that exists between the two states'.⁷⁵

Furthermore, ideology matters alongside interest. Selig Harrison of the Center for International Policy has argued

that 'the reason for Pakistani support of the Taliban and jihadi forces in Kashmir is that its military and intelligence agencies are riddled with Islamists'.⁷⁶ One journal has argued that 'Islamists infiltrated the Pakistani military-intelligence establishment's ranks repeatedly, and still other existing servicemen have adopted their radical views' – a process likely limited in scope but now three decades old.⁷⁷

Finally, Ashley Tellis argues – correctly – that 'Pakistan has interests in Afghanistan that transcend its problems with India'.⁷⁸ No government in Kabul has ever recognised the legitimacy of the Durand Line, and Pakistani leaders have always perceived a threat from Pashtun secessionism.⁷⁹ In 1960, Afghan President Mohammed Daud Khan deployed troops to Pakistan's Bajaur province but was repelled.⁸⁰ India is unrelated to this irredentist threat, which will continue to determine Pakistan's relationship with non-state actors.

None of these three arguments are comprehensive explanations for Pakistani behaviour, but together they suggest that the policy is driven more by durable institutional and ideological interests than specific Indian 'provocations'. The withdrawal of 30,000 Indian troops from the Line of Control, a quarter of the total, has not produced an apparent shift in Pakistani policy. Nor has India's restraint in 2008 after the Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Taiba, whose leader remains free in Lahore, attacked Mumbai. The Indian government has also entertained a working group's report on autonomy for Kashmir.⁸¹ In this context, arguments that pin Central Asian peace on a transformation of India's strategy are unpersuasive and, in all likelihood, utopian.

Pakistan's cultivation of militants has not and will not change in the foreseeable future

The parameters that govern each state's calculus have been revealed as rigid, not fluid. The US has shown little willingness to alter the conditions under which it

remains reliant on Pakistan and, in some ways, beholden to the Pakistani military establishment's priorities. Apparent strategic failure, and overwhelming evidence that Pakistan's interests are grossly misaligned, has not resulted in meaningful recalibration of US or even Western policy. India is loath to appear to appease the use of terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy, and deems its interests in Afghanistan to be significant. It will not lighten its footprint. Nor will it unconditionally back the reintegration of Taliban elements into a national unity government.⁸² Forcing a political solution on Afghanistan that India deems to be unduly beneficial to the Taliban is unlikely to have immediately destabilising consequences, but may provoke India (as well as Russia, Iran and other powers) to take measures that more intensely secure its influence.

Arguments that pin Central Asian peace on a transformation of India's strategy are unpersuasive

Above all, and barring genuinely transformative regime change, Pakistan's selective cultivation of militants has not, and will not, change in the foreseeable future, even if India were to bestow concessions in Kashmir by resuming dialogue or in Afghanistan by closing consulates. Amazingly, the enormous costs borne by the Pakistani population at the hands of militants has altered only the selectivity of the cultivation, rather than the overarching policy.

Stephen P Cohen has discussed two options for America. First, he speculates about 'bring[ing] in the Indians to "balance" Pakistan by providing an alternative land route to Afghanistan' so as 'to demonstrate that Pakistani threats to cut off the supply lines there can be circumvented'. Second, Cohen invokes 'a comprehensive policy that would place India at the centre of South Asia, with the US working in partnership in New Delhi to 'fix' Afghanistan and Pakistan, 'once and for all'. Both are caricatures (and the latter preposterous), but Cohen poses precisely

the right question: 'has [anyone] asked the Indians whether they want the job?'⁸³ The answer is that they would not, though they correctly fear the consequences of allowing undue space for Taliban legitimisation and institutionalisation. Co-opting India to the degree envisioned would require a radical realignment of US policy entailing an alteration of the balance between inducement and coercion of Pakistan, and greater support for India on regional issues such as the border dispute with China. It is precisely such a bargain (in reverse) that Pakistan itself proposed in January 2010, claiming that it was 'ready to facilitate talks to end the Afghanistan conflict – and, implicitly, reduce its support of militancy – in return for greater US backing in its competition with India for regional influence'.⁸⁴

The London Conference on Afghanistan in January 2010 produced

an apparent consensus on reintegration and rehabilitation of former militants: essentially a large scale bribing of the so-called 'good Taliban'.⁸⁵ Pakistan and the European NATO states were delighted with the result, which accorded with and legitimised the latter's preannounced withdrawal plans and enhanced the former's influence. India's begrudging acceptance of the outcome reflects both the limited nature of its options and the cautiousness of its diplomacy. But its public statements conceal unqualified and unabated hostility towards the Taliban, acute consciousness of the nexus of militancy that may harden as a result, and, perhaps, a latent willingness to widen and deepen its extant approach to ensure the Afghan state remains consonant with the Indian strategic objectives outlined earlier.

Presently, the confluence of regional interests produces a perverse equilibrium, and chimerical grand bargains between all the stakeholders are highly unlikely to bear fruit. Afghanistan's problems extend far beyond this narrow set of issues, but if the Karzai government were to collapse in the medium term, a partial renewal of the quasi-proxy civil war of the 1990s is a real prospect – perhaps the one thing worse than a Taliban takeover. ■

Shashank Joshi is a doctoral student of international relations in the Department of Government, Harvard University. His research interests are in security studies, military effectiveness, strategic culture, and Indian foreign and defence policy. He is an economics and politics graduate of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge University.

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