CHAPTER NINE

South Asia: *Nuclear Geopolitics?*

Will South Asia be dominated by nuclear geopolitics between India and Pakistan? If so, what will be the consequences? Recent nuclear explosions by these countries do not necessarily portend a catastrophe, but they do create major concerns.

Key Trends

Antagonism between India and Pakistan resulted from the partition of British-ruled India in 1947 and has continued since. This is one of three factors that has shaped the South Asian strategic environment.

The second factor is India's determination to be a regional and even international power, and Pakistan's efforts to defend itself against India. This factor has led both countries to develop nuclear weapons and missiles. They are likely to become more dangerous as new nuclear weapons are developed and India's conventional military advantage grows. This could lead to a "hair trigger" mentality, if both believe that they must strike first in a crisis.

The third factor has been economic development and domestic politics in South Asia. Domestic politics in both countries has often been a source of instability, particularly since corruption is a major problem. India's economic prospects are hopeful and will continue to outstrip those of Pakistan, whose social and economic underdevelopment exacerbates public dissatisfaction with politics and domestic crime and violence, and increases support for Islamic groups. America's ability to influence both countries, especially Pakistan, has diminished. This partly reflects the importance the United States places on nonproliferation, including its use of sanctions.

Long-Standing Indian-Pakistani Antagonisms

Political agitation, Indian independence movements, and demands for a Moslem homeland led to British India being partitioned into two new democratic states. The first became the Republic of India with an overwhelmingly Hindu population. The second became Pakistan with an overwhelmingly Muslim population. This partition was bitterly resented by many in India.

Pakistan's founders were also dissatisfied. Even after partition, more Muslims remained in India than Pakistan. Minority communities became widely dispersed throughout India. Nearly a thousand miles of Indian territory lay

Indian and Pakistani Nuclear Facilities

Source: International Atomic Energy Agency.

between East Pakistan, with its Bengali-speaking, Muslim majority, and West Pakistan, with its Urdu-Punjabi, Sindi, Baluch, and Pathan-speaking population. The result was Pakistan's cultural, political, and economic division. This negatively affected national unity and led to civil war two decades later.

Feelings over partition became further embittered when some 12 million refugees fled across borders, and one-half to one million deaths resulted from related political violence. There were also sharp differences over the distribution of British assets between the two states. Most of all, differences arose over India's establishment of Hindu rule over the predominantly Muslim state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Events surrounding India's accession of Jammu and Kashmir have been intensely debated in India and Pakistan and in international forums, including the UN Security Council. Jammu and Kashmir has a complex mixture of minorities, including Buddhists and Hindus. It is also strategically located in the Himalayas, bordered by India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tibet, and China. Pakistan resisted India's takeover of the state in a short but bitter conflict in 1947–48. Jammu and Kashmir was divided in half between the two countries. For Pakistan, this conflict came to represent its national and Islamic obligation to Muslims. Pakistanis believed the latter were unjustly denied membership in their new state. For India, Jammu and Kashmir became an integral part of its state, something Pakistan has never accepted.

Tensions from partition led to wars in 1965 and 1971. Indian forces were dominant in both. An uneasy line of control (LOC) was established in December 1971. This was guarded by forces on both sides and observed by a small UN force (UNMOGIP) that is still in place. It is an alternative to an international border. Both sides have alerted their forces and exchanged artillery fire across the LOC regularly since 1972. They intensified in 1998, with a Pakistani incursion in 1999. However, both sides have avoided escalation into major confrontations. Each side regularly accuses the other of overtly and covertly undermining the internal stability and the integrity of the other. They also periodically accuse each other of preparing for war. The situation has been exacerbated by political tensions within both Pakistan and India. Consequently, the hostility and resentment over the initial partition have never lapsed.

Pakistan was further angered by India's open support for the Bengali revolt against West Pakistani dominance in 1971. This led to brief but bloody fighting in Kashmir and East Bengal, and ultimately defeat of the Pakistani Army. India provided Bangladesh its independence when Pakistan reluctantly accepted the Simla Agreement in 1972. Although the agreement included steps aimed at improving relations, few were implemented. Neither side ever really accepted steps that would ease tensions, increase trade, prevent mutual attacks through state-controlled media, expand communications, or increase tourism and business travel. Since 1972, tensions have waxed and waned. For example, based on strong evidence, India believed Pakistan was training and equipping militant Sikhs seeking independence or greater autonomy for the Indian State of Punjab. After years of violence, civil disorder was eliminated in Punjab by the early 1990s.

The Lahore Agreement

The documents signed in Lahore enumerate four bilateral initiatives and commitments, subject to negotiation, and eight confidence-building measures, including:

- Advance notification of ballistic missile tests
- Notification of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons
- An agreement to prevent incidents at sea
- Cooperation in information technology in general and problems of Y2K in particular
- Consultation on liberalizing visa and travel regimes
- Creation of a committee to resolve issues relating to missing POWs and civilian detainees

Source: Statement by Karl F. Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, before the House International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, March 3, 1999.

In 1989, widespread armed resistance broke out against Indian rule and corruption in Jammu and Kashmir. This began a prolonged and costly confrontation in Indo-Pakistani relations. Kashmiris in the key Kashmir valley demanded independence. Some sought association with Pakistan, while others demanded at least greater autonomy. Civil disorder and kidnappings of prominent individuals increased. India strengthened its civil and paramilitary presence, and casualties mounted rapidly. Pakistan insisted it had a "moral and political" obligation to support several of the groups by providing funds, arms, and training for young Kashmiris in Pakistan-controlled areas. It also helped raise radical Islamic resistance groups modeled after the Afghan resistance. Islamic "volunteers" from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other Moslem states joined these groups. India strengthened its military, paramilitary, and police presence even more and increased military activity, including shelling of villages along the LOC, to which Pakistan responded.

Every aspect of this continuing low-level conflict has been a matter of intense controversy. Pakistan charges that over 700,000 Indian forces are in Jammu and Kashmir. India acknowledges less than half that number. The Pakistanis claim over 60,000 Kashmiris have died, while Indians acknowledge less than half that number. Pakistanis accuse India of grossly violating human rights, a claim international human rights groups support to some degree. India denies these allegations.

Pakistan seeks international mediation of the dispute and insists that the Kashmiris must agree to any settlement through such means as a plebiscite. India argues that the two countries must resolve this issue bilaterally, and international intervention is unacceptable. It further argues that Kashmiris can have free elections but cannot demand separation. India maintains this position, despite recommendations from five permanent members of the Security Council, other major states, and even Nelson Mandela, who convened the 1998 session of the Non-Aligned Movement.

A negotiated resolution that goes beyond just reducing tensions along the LOC is unlikely. Forces on both sides occupy long-held positions on the Siachen glacier, where more troops die from cold than enemy fire. The military on each side acknowledge that these positions have little strategic meaning. Yet, negotiations founder because each country fears that withdrawal would be regarded as a sign of weakness by the military and political opposition.

Prolonged discussions, backed by high-level political support on both sides, may be the only practical option. They could focus on the permanent status of Jammu and Kashmir and on avoiding a dangerous escalation of tensions. They could also seek to resolve other less volatile disputes and to begin to increase economic, social, and political exchange. Privately, many Indians and Pakistanis acknowledge the need for such discussions. Publicly, the prime ministers of both countries met in Lahore, Pakistan, on February 20, 1999, and issued a joint statement pledging mutual work toward better relations. Concerning Kashmir, they said, "We will negotiate sincerely on this and on all other issues." Serious talks could evolve over the next few years if new violence, terrorism, or political shocks do not occur. However, Pakistan's involvement will require political will and leadership, which has been absent. The Pakistani-backed incursion along the LOC in May 1999 shattered faith in the Lahore agreement. It will also require India's commitment to political, economic, and social reforms in Jammu and Kashmir and giving Kashmiris a stronger voice in any eventual agreement. However, these seem unlikely in either India or Pakistan.

India Seeking Status, Pakistan Seeking Security

India's efforts to gain recognition as a major international power, and Pakistan's search for security vis-a-vis India, strongly influence South Asia's strategic environment. These motivations are unlikely to change in the near future.

AP/Wide World Photos

Indian soldiers at test site Shakti 1, where five nuclear devices were tested in May 1998

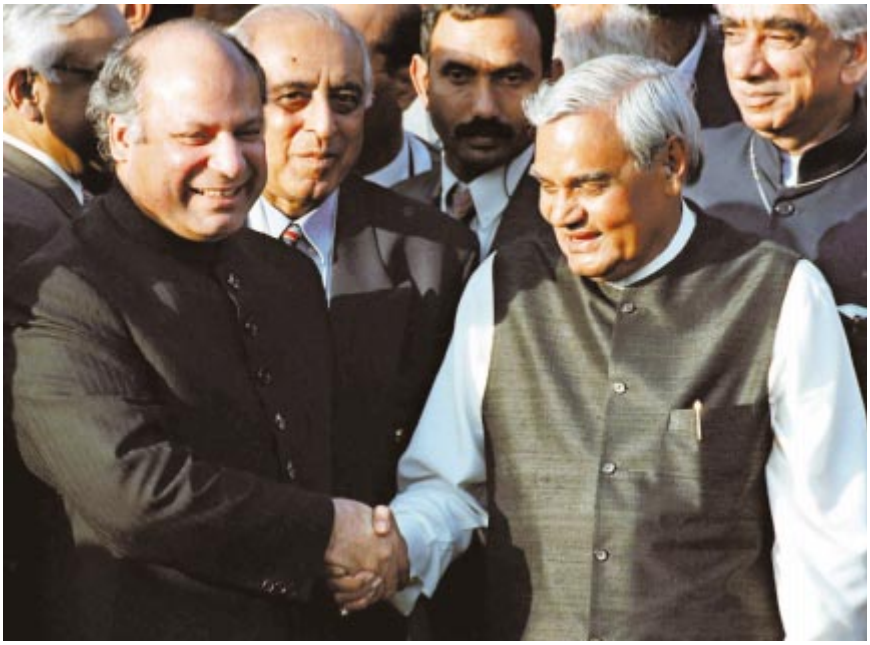
For the last 50 years, India has sought international recognition as a political and moral leader. Mahatma Gandhi was widely admired for his moral leadership that enabled British India to gain independence without violence. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister and preeminent political leader until the early 1960s, largely ensured Indian democracy's stability and led the Non-Aligned Movement, which he hoped would be a counterweight to East-West tensions.

The world's largest democracy, with the world's second-largest population, India has never felt it receives the international respect it deserves from the major powers, particularly the United States. The United States has been perceived as regarding South Asia as a region of secondary importance, except when military threats were posed by China's border war in 1962 and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989.

During the Cold War, the United States saw India and the Non-Aligned Movement loosely linked with the Soviet Union, but not as a Communist ally. Indian criticism of U.S. policies toward China and Vietnam were a constant source of friction—at least until India's own war with China. Pakistan was a link in such U.S. alliances as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the Central Treaty Organization. Except for its value in intelligence collection, the United States never saw Pakistan as the vital security interest Pakistan hoped it would be.

India's national security policies have focused on Pakistan since partition. This focus has shaped the structure and deployment of India's armed forces. However, India's defeat in the 1962 border war with China raised concern about long-term relations between the two countries. The Chinese nuclear test in 1965 caused India to rapidly develop a nuclear capability. Moreover, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China could influence international affairs in ways that were unavailable to India. Additionally, implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970 meant China's inclusion as a nuclear power and India's exclusion from any prospect of becoming a "nuclear weapon state"—unless it defied the NPT regime. Indian policymakers saw this as a matter of national security and pride.

China was courted by world leaders, who rarely visited India, including those from the United States. China was allowed to cooperate with the United States on nuclear and space activities that were off limits to India. At some point in the 21st century, many Indians concluded, the two largest Asian powers, India and China, would become rivals not just in Asia but elsewhere. There is little evidence that China shared this perception of future rivalry. However, some Southeast Asian states, particularly Singapore, were privately responsive to Indian concerns. Today, India's relations with China remain a long-term concern.



AP/Wide.World Photos

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, left, with his Indian counterpart, Atal Bihari Vajpayee near Lahore, Pakistan, on February 20, 1999

Growing Nuclear Capabilities

India's test of a "peaceful" nuclear device in 1974 was not followed by further tests, although research intensified. By the early 1990s, India seemed to have the fissile material and technology for a limited nuclear-weapon capability. It had also developed missiles with ranges from 75 to 1,500 miles. India's decision to test warheads in May 1998, debated by successive Indian governments for nearly a decade, had been almost conducted 3 years earlier. Pakistan quickly followed with its own tests.

The size and number of Indian and Pakistani tests are disputed. Officially India claims that one of five tests was thermonuclear; this is questioned by analysts, who collected international seismic data. Two Indian tests appear to have been no more than 15 kilotons. Two other tests produced no seismic data that could be identified by international monitors. The Indian Government stated they tested very small weapons. The four Pakistani devices appear to be 4 to 12 kilotons.

Public opinion in both countries strongly supported the tests, but enthusiasm dropped afterwards. However, public support was sustained in both countries despite the negative world reaction. Both governments knew they would face strong international opposition and sanctions. India estimated the economic cost at one percent of gross domestic product (GDP) growth, but assumed sanctions would not last more than a year and that India could weather the cost. The damage to Pakistan's economy caused by sanctions is more serious. It has exacerbated other economic problems and civil disorders.

India's official rationale for the tests was to provide a minimum nuclear deterrent against Pakistan and China. It believed that this had to be achieved before India was internationally confronted with joining or killing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). India's quest for international status and recognition was a major factor in its decision to test. The United States offered Pakistan substantial economic and military assistance if it did not follow India's lead. However, domestic political pressures and concerns over its security compelled Pakistan to demonstrate it had the same capability.

Both governments declared (separately and at the Lahore meeting) that no further tests were planned. Both will almost certainly sign the CTBT, although they argue strongly that sanctions should be lifted in exchange. Both agreed not to export nuclear or missile technology and to work with the United States to strengthen existing export control systems. They also agreed to negotiations on an international cutoff treaty for fissile material. However, they will clearly insist on increasing their own stockpiles until such a treaty is completed, or until an interim multicountry agreement exists that includes China, Russia, and the United States. Neither will roll back its capabilities and join the NPT, as South Africa, Argentina, and Brazil did. They will probably eschew limits on weaponizing or deploying weapons. Pakistan will watch India, while India watches China and Pakistan.

Both countries know they face complex and potentially costly problems regarding nuclear weapons. These include ensuring weapons security, command, and control, integration of nuclear weapons into military doctrine, early warning intelligence requirements, and other considerations. How either country will deal with these issues is uncertain. Both claim they seek only a "minimum credible deterrent." Neither country appears to regard nuclear weapons as employable in conflict. This is reflected in India's "no first use" policy. However, Pakistan's military officers and politicians are reluctant to commit to "no first use," fearing India's conventional military power. They have considered nuclear weapons as an "Armageddon" threat in a conventional war that could break up Pakistan.

Has the risk of nuclear war increased? Those arguing against it say a semblance of peace has existed for over 25 years. During this time, India and Pakistan have seemingly assumed each has a limited nuclear capability. Moreover, international attention is now focused on India and Pakistan. International powers will likely act swiftly and decisively to prevent war, if it seems likely.

The contrary argument points, first, to the current availability to Pakistan of ballistic missiles and to tested warheads in India for aircraft delivery. Further acquisition of nuclear weapons capability by both sides is inevitable. Second, in both countries there are great political frailties, short response times if conflict occurs, and ambiguities regarding capabilities of delivery systems. Third, the military balance between both countries has steadily deteriorated, leaving Pakistan increasingly dependent upon nuclear weapons and missiles. Additionally, terrorism in either country could jeopardize nuclear stockpiles, particularly in unstable domestic environments. The risk of nuclear conflict has increased, even though it may be by a small degree.

This danger could increase over the next decade, if both countries continue to develop and deploy nuclear-capable missiles and aircraft. The greatest danger of nuclear conflict comes from vulnerable forces and the two countries' close proximity. Little warning time is available. This engenders a "use them or lose them" mentality. The risk of accidental conflict, along with rapid, preemptive use of nuclear weapons, is aggravated by the uncertain capabilities of Indian and Pakistani intelligence agencies. Both have been prone to distortion, exaggeration, and other mistakes. The fact that both countries also have inadequate early-warning systems further compounds intelligence problems. Their relative lack of sophistication can contribute to accidents.

On the other hand, Pakistan and India have avoided conflict for almost three decades, despite considerable violence, mutual provocation, and some close calls. They may ameliorate nuclear danger by developing effective command and control systems, mutual early warning, and other confidence-building measures. They may accomplish this bilaterally, or with other governments' assistance.

The United States leads an international effort to stabilize the nuclear equation, prevent or at least minimize development and deployment of missiles, curtail further production of fissile material, and strengthen confidence-building and safety measures. Some progress has resulted in loosening sanctions unilaterally imposed by the United States and with others on access to the IBRD and IMF.

Clearly, the framework of the nonproliferation regime has been fundamentally altered. Revising the NPT, which currently allows five nuclear powers, does not seem feasible. The United States and much of the international community is likely to oppose strongly a new class of "nuclear weapon states." This might encourage and legitimize other states' nuclear efforts. Nevertheless, the international community will have to come to terms with this issue. It will have to acknowledge the existence of these two new nuclear weapons states and end the sanctions against them, as the United States began to do in November 1998.

Imbalanced Conventional Capabilities

Since 1947, Indian strategists have hoped to assert Indian naval power throughout the Indian Ocean. The navy remains the weakest service and has been given development priority. Over the next 20 years, the Indians hope to build a combination of nuclear and conventional submarines, one and possibly two aircraft carriers, and a variety of new missile-equipped surface ships. This fleet is intended to operate not only in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, but would also respond to potential naval challenges from China in or beyond Southeast Asia. Meeting these goals will be difficult, and the probability is that India will not be a significant naval power for the next 20 years.

Seventy percent of India's weapons are manufactured under Russian license either in India or abroad. This arrangement began in the 1960s. Russian weapons are cheap and available, and the technology permits them to be built in India. This relationship continued after the Soviet Union's demise. Although India has developed some indigenous weapons, these have rarely matched Western or Russian standards. India's weak industrial infrastructure makes significant improvement unlikely in the next decade. The exception will be in the area of missiles, satellites, and information technology, where India could make significant strides. Russia will be the primary source for new aircraft, armored equipment, and submarines. Some contribution will come from French, British, and German sources. During the last decade, India

The Taliban

To defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the United States and others supported Pakistan's decisions to aid the mujahideen who were Islamic in character and from the Pathan ethnic majority. The Soviet withdrawal and the overthrow of their puppet regime left a vacuum. For almost a decade, ethnic factions and several warlords fought bitterly but inconclusively over power. Gradually, a new political force emerged in the mid-1990s, calling itself Taliban. Led by Afghans, the Taliban had been trained in religious schools in Pakistan. With strong support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the Taliban defeated its opponents by 1998, except in a few areas outside Kabul.

The Taliban is committed to unifying Afghanistan under Pathan leadership, restoring order, ending corruption, and observing strict Islamic Shariat rules. However, Afghanistan's neighbors increasingly see the Taliban as posing new threats—ethnic migration, narcotics, and politico-religious agitation. The United States and Western countries condemn Taliban's restrictive policies toward women.

The Taliban's rigid policies limit international development and relief programs. Despite its moral opposition to narcotics, the Taliban found enormous financial benefit in the opium-heroin trade, upon which many farmers relied. Drug proceeds were used to purchase arms and ammunition. The Taliban's potential threat and treatment of Afghanistan's Shia ethnic minority have aggravated Iran, itself a radical Islamic state. Iran has supported the Taliban's opposition with weapons, as well as mobilized its forces and conducted maneuvers along the border. Central Asian states, especially Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, are concerned about Taliban's potential to provoke unrest in their countries. Russia is also concerned and has joined Iran and Central Asian states in supporting the Taliban's opposition. All hold Pakistan responsible for Taliban's success; this has seriously eroded relations with Pakistan. Even China suspiciously views Pakistan's support for Taliban, fearing its influence upon Moslems in Xinjiang.

The Taliban shelters the Bin Laden terrorists involved in the U.S. embassy bombing in Kenya and Tanzania. This led to U.S. missile strikes in August 1998 against Afghan training camps used by Bin Laden and other groups engaged in Kashmir, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. Some groups supported by Bin Laden are affiliated with Kashmiri rebel organizations supported by Pakistan's Interservices Intelligence Directorate.

Pakistan has provided valuable assistance to the United States in capturing terrorists. These include Amir Kansi, who killed CIA officials, and Ramzi Yousef, who participated in the World Trade Center bombing. Pakistan also helped identify and apprehend Osama Bin Laden's accomplices. However, its relationship with terrorist groups in Afghanistan contributes to Pakistan's near and long-term difficulties. The Taliban and some terrorist groups have relationships with radical sectarian groups in Pakistan.

Few options exist regarding Afghanistan. Fundamental differences make it difficult for the United States to deal with the Kabul regime as a normal government, unless its policies change dramatically. The United States has little leverage, even if it did engage the Taliban. Few states can seemingly influence the Taliban; its shelter for Bin Laden has alienated Saudi Arabia. By late 1998, even Pakistan's influence was uncertain.

The U.S. actively supports the UN-led "Six-plus-Two" consultative group; this includes Afghanistan's neighbors, plus the United States and Russia. The United States has tried to minimize suspicions that it was behind Taliban and cooperate with Iran, Russia, and others in pursing a political settlement in Afghanistan. The United States has only been partially successful. Despite the diplomatic skills of UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi, and the "Six-plus-Two" group's efforts, an intra-Afghan political agreement is not yet feasible.

has explored procuring military and dual-use technologies from the United States, but nuclear tests set this initiative back. Constraints on some American exports may be gradually relaxed over the next decade, but the United States is unlikely to become a major source of military equipment or technology for India in the future.

Pakistan's military equipment comes from several sources—American, French, Eastern European, Chinese, and British. Pakistan's capabilities are less than half those of India's. The U.S. Congress passed the Pressler Amendment sanctions in 1990 which seriously set back modern conventional capabilities for Pakistan. Aside from small equipment, Pakistan's own weapons production is limited and unlikely to improve. Its ability to modernize is constrained by increasing budgetary pressures.

Today, India's active military forces number 1.2 million troops and include 39 division-equivalents and 840 combat aircraft. Pakistan has 587,000 troops, to include 25 divisions and 410 combat aircraft. Both countries are well armed. Together, they could wage a major conventional war in which WMD systems could affect the outcome.

Strategic Considerations

Some in India have always viewed the entire subcontinent as an Indian sphere of influence. Ethnic, religious, and cultural interaction between the populations of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and India have often led to tensions. India did not hesitate to use military force to help dissidents separate Bangladesh from Pakistan. It also unsuccessfully tried to assist the Sri Lankan Government to suppress a Tamil separatist movement which Indian intelligence services had earlier

helped to create. India has primarily used economic and political pressure to resolve these issues, to include dissuading Sri Lanka and Nepal from purchasing military equipment. Relations have improved in recent years, and Indian policymakers are increasingly discreet in their regional diplomacy. India's prospects for good political and economic relations among South Asian states are probably better than ever.

In terms of strategic interests, Pakistan has consistently sought support from more powerful states to balance India and to develop a nuclear capability to deter India. Pakistan has been disappointed in bilateral security relations with the United States, in membership in three U.S.-sponsored regional security instruments in the 1950s and 1960s (the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, in the Baghdad Pact, and the Central Treaty Organization), and in its close involvement with the United States during the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. Pakistan provided valuable intelligence bases for the United States in the Cold War and received military assistance and substantial economic aid. However, Pakistan felt it never was treated as a reliable partner or received the help it desired.

Pakistan shared U.S. concerns about Soviet expansionism, but its primary adversary was India. Despite ambiguous hints to the contrary, the United States never provided credible security assurances. Moreover, U.S. military assistance was often suddenly interrupted. It was cut off during the 1965 and 1971 wars with India. During the Afghan war, the United States turned a blind eye to Pakistan's nuclear program. However, in 1990, U.S. legislation barred all economic and military assistance, because the Bush administration could no longer certify Pakistan's inability to produce a nuclear device. The delivery of 71 F–16s was halted after Pakistan had paid some $658 million. Subsequent U.S. efforts to resolve the issue by selling the planes to another country came to naught in 1998. This badly limited Pakistan's conventional capabilities vis-a-vis India, along with cancellation of such advanced U.S. weapons systems as helicopters and P–3s and the inability to acquire replacements from other countries. Pakistan was forced to turn increasingly to ballistic missiles and nuclear weapon development for deterrence and defense. In the early 1990s, China supplied M–11 missiles and technology which have a 300-kilometer range. In the late 1990s, North Korea supplied the 1,500-kilometer range No Dong, which Pakistan named the Taliban Ghauri. These missiles are capable of delivering nuclear warheads that Pakistan seemingly can produce.

In the early 1960s, Pakistan turned to China for political and technological support. China's tensions with the Soviet Union and India and concern over its southwest borders made Pakistan an attractive geopolitical balance. China provided Pakistan with low-cost conventional arms. More importantly, China became a source of technology for Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs. By the 1990s, these bonds had weakened. Sino-U.S. relations had improved. The Soviet threat had ended. U.S. pressures to halt missile and nuclear technology transfers overcame China's interests in helping Pakistan, although mutual friendship and defense cooperation continued. China also sought to minimize tensions with India. Chinese technology assistance to Pakistan increasingly lagged behind that which India obtained from Russia and France. North Korea replaced China in providing Pakistan with longer range, more modern missiles. This relationship will likely continue, so long as India pursues its own longer range and solid-fuel missiles.

Pakistan's relations with the Muslim world are driven partly by common religious bonds, but also by a need for political and economic support. Pakistani laborers working throughout the Persian Gulf have sent remittances home for years; this has become a major source of income, equal to or exceeding Pakistan's cotton and textile exports. Islamic support for Pakistan was critical during Zia al Haq's military rule, when relations with the United States were strained, and especially after the USSR invaded Afghanistan. Pakistan feared being caught between India and the Soviets in Afghanistan. Pakistan also relies on Islamic support when the issue of Kashmir arises in international forums. Pakistan has reciprocated by supporting Arab causes, particularly against Israel. However, support from Islamic countries was more rhetorical than real, except during confrontations with the Soviets in Afghanistan.

India's Domestic Uncertainty

Democratic politics are India's great strength and weakness. India's constitution is modeled after that of the United States. However, it is nearly 300 pages long and has been amended 75 times. During India's first 30 years, the Congress Party was dominant. The last 20 years have seen an explosion of parties reflecting the complexity of India's nearly one billion people, dozens of languages and dialects, and

AP/Wide World Photo

Pakistani paramilitary troops near Indian border

hundreds of social caste and community divisions. Government by coalition in New Delhi and state governments is routine. This has complicated consensus building and slowed decisionmaking at every level.

In the February 1998 national elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became the largest single Indian party, with 25 percent of the electorate and 179 legislative seats. The Congress Party received almost the same number of votes. Political parties with mostly local constituencies won enough seats to force a coalition with the BJP. The BJP, the political wing of a social and religious group linked to several institutions, is deeply committed to a Hindu national and religious heartland in India. It is rallying many Indians seeking a strong India. It is also potentially dividing India's religious groups.

The coalition formed by the BJP in March 1998 had a relatively small majority. The BJP is also divided within its ranks and among coalition partners on many economic, social, and political issues. However, the party platform demanded nuclear testing, which was widely supported. The BJP, therefore, moved quickly to demonstrate a willingness and ability to act. The party also seeks to modernize and strengthen India's conventional forces. Its economic policies focus on supporting Indian business, but are ambiguous about foreign capital's role and the spread of consumerism in India.

The BJP government coalition collapsed in spring 1999 and continues in caretaker status. The Congress Party, however, has taken full advantage of BJP difficulties.

In the last few decades, the number of Indians living below the poverty level has gradually declined, but Indian studies differ widely over the degree of improvement. Clearly, the gap between rich and poor has grown and likely will continue growing. The rapid spread of communications is making Indians aware of modernization and the gap between them and the West.

Inadequate law and order has been a growing problem for years seriously affecting every Indian state. This problem is a consequence of poverty, corruption, tensions between castes competing for political power and jobs, and tribal groups separatist demands in India's border areas. The problem is exasperated by a growing awareness of the gap between India's "haves" and "have-nots."

Growing law and order problems have led to an increase in lightly equipped Central Government paramilitary forces. They number 1.5 million, nearly 60 percent larger than the regular army. They deal with major insurrections and prolonged challenges like those in Jammu and Kashmir, or in northeastern India's tribal areas. This paramilitary force does not include local or state police. This internal security focus will likely continue even with increasing expenditures for conventional and missile programs.

Pakistan's Domestic Uncertainty

Pakistan's domestic political stability is fragile and has often been disrupted. Its 1971–72 civil war led to East Pakistan's break-away and the establishment of Bangladesh. While Karachi became Pakistan's largest city and its financial center over the last two decades, it had the world's highest crime in 1998. This is largely the result of tensions between postpartition immigrants, the native population, and sectarian gangs with powerful political backing. Small Shia and Sunni Muslim groups violently clash in the Punjab. Bandits and young Islamic fanatics increasingly threaten ordinary citizens, even in Islamabad, the capital. Tribal chiefs largely control Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier, where a very strong Islamist, pro-Taliban presence is also felt. Government rule greatly depends on the consent of these tribal chiefs.

While Pakistan is considered a democracy, political power lies in the hands of a few clans and families that dominate the political structure. The Bhuttos and Sharifs, for example, control the two major political parties. Challengers

to these parties come from similar social-political backgrounds. Corruption has been high in most Pakistani governments, including the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) administrations. They have been in power for the last 30 years, except when the army was in control from 1977 to 1985. Feeble attempts to punish corrupt individuals are unlikely to change soon.

Pakistan's political system is unlikely to change fundamentally. The army is not inclined to return to power but influences politics behind-the-scenes. Military rule would be a possibility, although an unlikely one, if economic and social unrest could not be controlled by ordinary means. Violence in Karachi reached this level in October 1998. Prime Minister Sharif dismissed the elected government and imposed governor's rule. However, martial law was avoided, based on army and civilian preferences.

Islamic political parties have never been successful in elections, failing to produce strong candidates. Additionally, most Pakistanis do not want the mullahs to rule and have consistently rejected candidates from the Islamic political parties. However, Islamists have been able to mobilize street demonstrations and provoke extensive sectarian violence.

The Taliban experience in Afghanistan could change public attitudes. Many Pakistanis are frustrated with the existing political structure. By comparison, the Taliban has reduced crime, ended corruption, collected weapons, and protected the "common man." Islamist appeal is such that even Osama Bin Laden enjoys strong public support, even though government officials decry his links to sectarian violence in Pakistan as well as to international terrorism. Some think this experience might cause a surge in support for an Islamic party, particularly if it produces a charismatic leader. While it may be unlikely, the emergence of a more Islamic government in Pakistan opposite a more ideological Hindu government in India could generate greater tensions than South Asia has seen in half a century.

Mixed Economic Prospects

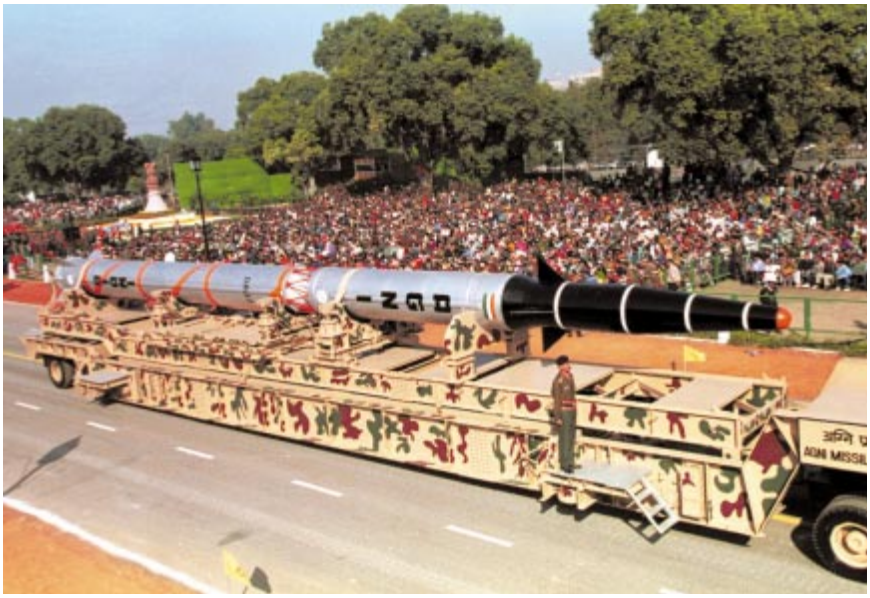
Economic development, trade, and investment are shaping the strategic environment in South Asia. India's prospects are better than Pakistan's in the long term. India's development strategy has emphasized government planning for the economy. This has meant tight control of the private sector. Pakistan started with a more pro-business approach. However, within 10 years, Pakistan turned to a more planned economy. Neither India nor Pakistan has received significant U.S. investments. The United States provided economic and technical assistance to both countries and strongly encouraged private business with India. However, economic relations have been negligible: they represent less than 0.5 percent of U.S. trade, and investment is even lower.

In the 1980s, Pakistan initiated economic reforms designed to reduce government control over investment. Faced with a growing financial crisis in 1991, India announced its own plans for economic reform that were intended to reduce government controls and encourage foreign investment. The Indian market's potential attracted the attention of the United States and other nations. The GDP rose from 4 to 5 percent in the preceding decade to 6 to 7 percent during the 1993–96 period. International corporations initiated investments, and over $12 billion in foreign capital flowed into India in the mid-1990s. U.S. oil companies considered building pipelines and refineries in Pakistan. This would enable Central Asian oil and gas to reach the Arabian Sea and potentially the Indian market without going through Iran or the Gulf. Infrastructure development promised tens of billions of dollars in new investment for both India and Pakistan.

These plans were derailed by continuing civil war, growth of heroin trafficking, the Taliban's socio-religious policies, and tensions between Afghanistan and its neighbors. Pakistan's vision of being the commercial corridor between Central Asia and the outside world faded.

The Clinton administration saw India as one of the new emerging markets that would transform U.S. international economic relations. Hundreds of U.S. corporations that had never been connected with the region opened offices, factories, and joint ventures. By 1998, India had become a key software provider for thousands of U.S. companies. However, India lags significantly in developing a diversified economy. Its economy ranks at the bottom of international assessments.

India has major deficiencies in its infrastructure, particularly electrical power, ports, telecommunications, and transportation. These are major constraints, yet they provide opportunities for the United States to resume major economic relations with India. At the same time, such growth faces some major challenges. These include systemic problems in mobilizing domestic capital,



AP/Wide World Photos

India's Agni nuclear missile has a range of 1,550 miles

unresolved issues in government decision-making, and major differences over foreign capital's role. Moreover, it will be difficult to overcome many of India's cultural and social constraints, such as reliance on family and caste connections in business management, employment restrictions, expectations that government will resolve problems and meet needs, and suspicion of foreign influence. U.S. involvement remains small for these reasons.

Demand for change is growing. It is being facilitated by the flood of information reaching every corner of India. In principle, India's democratic institutions provide a framework for change, but it may not always happen in ways that the United States likes. India's long-term economic prospects are essentially good. In the 21st century, India is likely to become an increasingly important economic partner for the United States and other developed countries.

Prospects in Pakistan are less promising. Weaknesses in the entire political-economic system have undercut reforms intended to reduce the role of state-owned enterprises and promote a free market. Debt payment and defense expenditures are 80 percent of the budget and have been for over a decade. Under 3 percent goes for education, health, and social programs combined. The quality of services is low and often does not reach the poorest sectors. Agriculture is generally stagnant. Investment and savings have declined. Inflation remains in double digits. Foreign investment is moribund, discouraged by violence in such areas as Karachi. The banking system has been damaged by bad loans often made for political reasons. Finally, foreign debt has left the country on the verge of default.

Infrastructure development has been undercut by corrupt managing agencies, poor project choices, bitter political infighting, and disillusionment after plans for oil and gas pipelines were cancelled. The economy remains heavily dependent on cotton and cotton cloth exports and lacks significant diversification. In the agricultural sector, large landowners are often indifferent to long-term consequences of land use. Pakistan does not have a strong industrial base. Its literacy rate is below 40 percent. The overwhelming majority of women are excluded from all but the most menial work. Pakistan's infrastructure is weak, particularly in the areas of railroads, roads, ports, and telecommunications.

The 1998 census indicates that population growth has begun to slow. Pakistan's 130 million population was six million lower than anticipated. However, few resources will be available to correct developmental weakness in the foreseeable future. Pakistan's society is more conservative than India's. In a decade, social change is unlikely to have progressed much beyond today's levels, particularly in rural areas. Unless there is a breakthrough in the oil and gas sector, there is a low likelihood of improvements in Pakistan's economy, as well as in economic relations with the United States.

U.S. Interests

Limited, But Growing

During the 1990s, the United States has had four interests in South Asia. First, it seeks to reduce the risk of conventional and nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan. Second, it seeks to encourage better relations between the two. Third, it wants to engage India and Pakistan in international regimes on nonproliferation, environmental protection, antiterrorism, and other global issues. Fourth, it has an interest in strengthening both countries' economic and political structures and broadening economic relationships through investment and trade. Nonproliferation has been the paramount U.S. concern, pursued at the cost of the others. This was especially the case after India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests.

Recently, U.S. interests in South Asia have been growing, because nuclear proliferation could not only destabilize the region but also have larger damaging consequences.

Dim Prospects

Regional tensions are deep-rooted in geopolitical and historical issues. Yet, dialogues exist among all regional countries. These need to be encouraged by all parties, including the United States. These dialogues are the means of discussing and resolving these issues. U.S. influence in the region is limited. It is difficult for the United States to influence one country without adversely affecting relations with others. At some time, the United States may be more able directly to ease tensions caused by these issues, but such circumstances are unlikely to develop soon.

India seeks primarily to enhance its regional and global status. Pakistan's predominant concern is its security with respect to India and its internal stability. This latter concern is affected by Pakistan's socioeconomic structure and by developments in Afghanistan. The Taliban which, ironically, was created by Pakistan, now threatens its economic interests, as well as its domestic political stability.

In the past, both India and Pakistan have opposed specific U.S. policies. Additionally, Pakistan has close ties with some Muslim states the United States regards as rogues. However, neither is likely to join a coalition hostile to the United States or to pursue national policies explicitly threatening the United States

Over the next 5 years, several trends are likely in South Asia. Political tension is likely to continue just short of major conflict. Moderate economic growth can be expected, approximately 6 percent annually for India and less for Pakistan. While both countries have weak governments, Pakistan has a greater risk of political instability than does India. Neither country is likely to risk large-scale conventional war or allow escalation to nuclear confrontation. Nevertheless, a "hair trigger" situation could develop. Both might conclude that they do not have assured second-strike capability; this would be further aggravated by the perception that the other side was about to attack first. Even short of nuclear war, accelerating WMD proliferation in South Asia and elsewhere endangers U.S. strategic interests.

Controlling WMD Proliferation: The Key Interest

After Indian and Pakistani nuclear testing, the most important U.S. interests in South Asia are: preventing the dissemination of nuclear weapons and technology to rogue states and terrorists; reducing the nuclear arms race and chances of a nuclear conflict; and suppressing radical groups which might possess nuclear weapons.

Inherent in preserving these interests is the continuation of a relative peace between India and Pakistan. They also imply that the United States will persuade India and Pakistan not to weaponize and deploy their nuclear capability. Another war would endanger the region. However, it would not directly affect vital U.S. national interests, unless India or Pakistan lost control of their nuclear weapons, or such a war led to nuclear conflict; this would dangerously affect the global environment as well as the regional strategic balance.

The United States has an interest in halting the flow of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technology to the region. This includes China's provision of nuclear-related technology as well North Korea's delivery of missile technology to Pakistan. It also means controlling Russia's supply of missile-related technology and advanced conventional weaponry to India and minimizing Chinese and North Korean involvement in the region. This includes reducing Sino-Indian tensions and halting delivery of nuclear weapon-related supplies or missiles to Pakistan. India's development of a navy with nuclear submarines and ballistic missiles, along with aggressive claims to the Indian Ocean, would negatively affect U.S. interests.

Indian support for dissidents in Tibet, or expansion of Chinese military involvement in Burma, could significantly increase Sino-Indian tensions. Chinese initiation of a long-envisaged railroad to Lhasa would also arouse Indian concerns about the potential for enhancing Chinese military capabilities and represent a major destabilizing factor.

If immediate U.S. concerns ease regarding regional conflict and nuclear weapons control, then substantial longer term objectives could be pursued. One goal is to reconcile Indian and Pakistani nuclear regimes with the NPT, removing this obstacle to better U.S. relations. The United States has an interest in both countries viewing themselves in a much broader, regional context, rather than focusing on the last 50 years

of bilateral tension. Both countries would benefit from Central Asia's energy reserves. A cooperative effort to gain access would reduce friction and forge a common approach to stabilizing Afghanistan and working with Iran. Opening Central Asia would also serve U.S. interests.

Other long-term U.S. interests are furthering Indian economic reform and development and encouraging U.S. trade and investment. These have been hampered by preoccupation with nuclear issues and regional tensions. Achieving these interests will depend on India's access to U.S. technology and removing impediments to it. Aiding Pakistan's economy is also a U.S. interest, provided Pakistan seeks cooperation with the West.

Consequences for U.S. Policy

The United States has only intermittently viewed India and Pakistan as a high priority in its overall foreign policy. This high priority was the result of such Cold War events as the Sino-Indian War and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, rather than an inherent interest in the subcontinent. Previously, the United States has sought even-handed dealings with both India and Pakistan. However, the United States has made clear a greater interest in India than Pakistan, based on its continued sanctions against Pakistan and its determination that India is a new, emerging market. In the long term, India's political and military potential is greater. This could create an asymmetry in U.S. interests with Pakistan and India, which should be recognized. However, both India and the United States would be seriously affected if Pakistan were to be destabilized or succumb to Islamist pressure.

Pursuing a Dialogue

In 1998, a close dialogue developed over nuclear policy between Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, special Indian representative Jaswant Singh, and Pakistan Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed Khan. It is a model for future dialogues between these nations even though it is probably too narrowly focused on nonproliferation. This dialogue was private, strongly supported at the highest political levels, focused on important issues, and conducted by individuals able to establish a strong personal rapport and trust. Such dialogue is not unique in U.S. foreign relations, but it has been less common in subcontinent relations. It will take time and continued effort to succeed.

Following the imposition of bilateral and multilateral sanctions (as a result of Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests), political pressure and persuasion, along with this dialogue, have caused both countries to move closer to CTBT adherence and negotiating a global cutoff of fissile material production. This pressure and persuasion have come from the UN Security Council, G–7 countries, the European Union, China, Australia, South Africa, Argentina, and Brazil. Neither country has rushed to weaponize or deploy more missiles. Both seem to be seriously concerned about nuclear dangers. This concern has led to a series of bilateral talks on such issues as Kashmir, nuclear and missile restraint regimes, confidence-building measures, and easing trade and travel restrictions. The meeting of the two prime ministers in Lahore on February 21–22, 1999, is an unprecedented effort to move the process forward. However, the outcome will depend on the sustained political will of leadership in New Delhi and Islamabad, public reactions, and sustained interest by other countries. Above all, it will depend on continued, active U.S. involvement.

Dealing with Proliferation

India and Pakistan are likely to weaponize and deploy their nuclear capabilities, but on a limited scale. These weapons will be difficult to monitor, no matter what restraint regime might be negotiated. Some estimate that over the next decade India could produce as many as 500 weapons and that Pakistan could produce about 100 weapons. However, neither country is likely to produce and deploy such large numbers of weapons in the next 5 to 10 years or engage in a nuclear arms race. They also will not abandon their nuclear and missile capabilities or join the NPT unless it is amended.

This outlook sets the stage for developing U.S. policy that can live with India's and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities, provided they behave responsibly regarding their deployment and nonproliferation. It means gradually moving away from rigid sanctions and nonproliferation as the dominant U.S. policy issue. This would allow the United States to improve its relations with both countries, and better help them exercise restraint and reduce tensions. It would also enable economic cooperation and development to be placed ahead of politico-military priorities, especially in Pakistan, and encourage both countries to adopt a regional, rather than bilateral approach.

The United States has no regional infrastructure for major military operations in South Asia. Should such operations be required, U.S. air forces could operate from distant bases in Diego Garcia, Guam, or the continental United States Additionally, U.S. Navy and Marine Expeditionary Forces in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean might be deployed to indicate willingness to protect U.S. interests. U.S. carriers would probably be available with sufficient notice, but global requirements are a constraint on deploying U.S. forces to the region for extended periods. It is unlikely that U.S. force deployments could effectively forestall a nuclear crisis, although some technologies might be made available that could contribute to this objective.

Reactions to War

If a South Asian nuclear war occurs, who uses nuclear weapons first makes little difference to U.S. policy. The other side's retaliation would almost be certain. The only question is whether the targets would be military or civilian. U.S. nuclear authorities estimate that a single 12-kiloton weapon detonated over any major South Asian population center would immediately cause over half-a-million casualties, and eventually up to 12 million casualties.

Intervention by other nuclear powers in an Indo-Pakistani war, with or without nuclear weapons, is remote but cannot be discounted. Certainly U.S. relief efforts would be requested and would involve significant U.S. air and naval deployments. The United States would press other states to limit the damage to the rest of the region and the global environment.

Once international pressures from nuclear tests have ebbed, a U.S. dialogue with India and Pakistan will be critical. While previous dialogues focused on nuclear testing consequences, they should be broadened to include regular and systematic exchanges on regional security issues and the U.S. role regarding them. The U.S. Government approved the restoration of military training and exchange programs in February 1999. They should be implemented rapidly. Regional conferences organized by the United States, with senior Indian and Pakistani military officers participating, should also be revived. Ultimately, the key issues to be resolved are those affecting Indo-Pakistani relations and perceptions of mutual security.

Net Assessment

Recent nuclear tests have moved South Asian security closer to the international center stage. Proliferation of WMD does not necessarily mean nuclear war in South Asia, but it does negatively affect the outlook for a subcontinent that already had ample problems. WMD proliferation also means the United States has increasing interests in the region. The challenge confronting U.S. policy is to deal with new, unsettled, regional geopolitics.