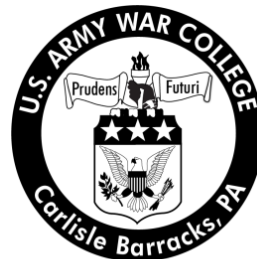


Strategy Research Project International Fellow

Beyond 2014: India's Security Concerns and Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership in Afghanistan

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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PARTNERSHIP IN AFGHANISTAN**

by

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ABSTRACT

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In June 2011 the United States announced its troop withdrawal timetable from Afghanistan from 2011 until 2014 in the belief that Afghanistan would be in a position to manage its own affairs thereafter. In a situation where forces detrimental to regional peace and security could fill the vacuum left by American withdrawal, it is necessary for the international community to strengthen stability in Afghanistan and allow the population of the country to live peacefully. A number of countries of the region are directly affected by the situation in Afghanistan particularly India, Pakistan, Iran, the Central Asian Republics, Russia and China. A conflict of interests among these states precludes a regional solution. As both India and the United States share the vision of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, they could formulate a joint strategy to ensure that Afghanistan does not fall into an abyss and the efforts and sacrifices in the past decade are not nullified. Joint cooperation in political, economic, military and social domains needs to be formulated and implemented while keeping the interests of other regional stakeholders in perspective.

BEYOND 2014: INDIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS AND INDO-U.S. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN AFGHANISTAN

The people of Afghanistan have suffered enough. They deserve to live in peace and decide their future themselves, without outside interference, coercion and intimidation. India will stand by the people of Afghanistan as they prepare to assume their responsibility for their governance and security after the withdrawal of international forces in 2014.¹

—Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India
04 October 11

NATO's decision in 2010 and President Barack Obama's announcement on 22 June 2011 of the United States troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2014 did not come as a bolt from the blue.² Obama's announcement of the phased withdrawal of 10,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2011, which has since been completed, and with a target of removing the rest of the 23,000 surge force by 2012 was a political expediency necessitated by the Presidential elections of 2012. Besides the political necessity, the economic costs amounting to \$113 billion per year of maintaining about 100,000 troops and the military imperatives also played a significant role in the decision to announce the drawdown from Afghanistan.³ While announcing the decision to withdraw, the President of the United States neither declared victory nor did he project a dejected picture of defeat. Even though most policy objectives have been met; Osama Bin Laden is gone, Al Qaida is disrupted, the Bonn Process continues and the Taliban threat still remains. Nonetheless, it was simply a statement to bring *the boys back home* and let the Afghans steer their own destiny.⁴ The United States certainly does not want an indefinite engagement in Afghanistan.

So what is next in Afghanistan? The vacuum left behind by the drawdown is likely to be filled by other regional players as had happened in early 1990s. Pakistan, China, Iran and the Central Asian Republics have considerable strategic interests in the future of Afghanistan. India also has considerable security, economic and political concerns of its own and the direction that Afghanistan takes affects it considerably. Today, Afghanistan is in turmoil and certainly not stable with a governance deficit which can only get worse once the United States pulls out. Major internal and regional players would like to jump in the fray and try to steer the nation in a direction that suits their political and national interests the best. Internally, besides the political parties, radical organizations like the Quetta Shura Taliban and the Haqqani Network based inside Pakistan would like to form or control the government in Kabul.⁵ Pakistan's strategic compulsions makes it support a government in Kabul that it has nurtured in the past and a government that would provide it with the necessary strategic depth vis-à-vis India.⁶

But what suits the rest of the world and particularly the United States? What is ideal to regional peace and political stability? India would certainly be comfortable with the present Karzai government, with which it signed a Strategic Cooperation Pact on 04 October 11.⁷ The best solution is the continuation of the present form of government, remove corruption, and demonstrate a propensity to hold its ground against terror for a smooth transition beyond 2014 to move the country towards stability and progress, administering the country in a manner like other developed or developing countries do. Based on the current indications that is unlikely to happen without assistance for some time to come. In the Bonn Conference of December 2011, President Karzai himself

admitted that it could take about ten years for the Afghan government to sustain itself without external aid which presently stands at \$350 billion a year.⁸

India and the United States share common values like democracy, liberty, economic well being, and pluralism. There is certainly a convergence of political, economic and security interests as well, that both the United States and India share and it is axiomatic to assume that a strategic partnership between the two is possible to restore Afghanistan to its rightful place in the comity of peaceful and progressive nations. While it is easy to identify the common interests that India and the United States share in Afghanistan, the regional political alignments particularly between Pakistan and China and their collective aversion to any joint Indo-U.S. initiative, does make the task complex though by no means impossible.

This paper will examine the historical Afghan realities and the current internal situation. The ability of the present and future Afghan defense forces and its government machinery to function will be analyzed. It is also important to understand the regional players and their interests in Afghanistan, particularly India, Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian republics. Other powers like Russia and China are affected by the developments in Afghanistan and that has also been analyzed in the context of a NATO free Afghanistan. The role of the United States (and its allies) is important time and the steps it should take to ensure a stable Afghanistan that does not go back to the despotic Taliban ways of the nineties. Lastly, if India and the United States share common interests, then forging a partnership that would make it possible to achieve them will be analyzed. This partnership would be defined in the political, economic, and military

framework that would be necessary to enable Afghanistan to become capable of defeating the destabilizing forces.

Afghanistan's Turbulent History

The geo strategic location of Afghanistan has always made it an area for which foreign powers have vied to dominate. In the medieval period it served as a land route to India and the Silk Road passed through it. Afghanistan, a land locked country, shares its boundary with six other countries, with the longest border being with its eastern neighbor, Pakistan. The two are divided by the Durand Line across which the Pashtuns live on either side. Afghanistan's population of 30 million has 80% Sunnis and 19% Shia Muslims with an ethnic mix of 42% Pashtun, 27% Tajik, 9% Hazaras, 9% Uzbeks, 4% Aimak , 3% Turkmen, 2% Baloch, and others comprise 4%.⁹ The political and tribal allegiance of these to their own tribes magnifies the difficulties to bring them together under one common umbrella. Historically no outside power has been able to subjugate Afghanistan for long barring the Magadha Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and his successors who ruled over it in the 4th and 3rd century BCE.¹⁰ Later, many conquerors like Genghis Khan and Timur made forays into Afghanistan and ruled over it for short periods with the support of different tribes.¹¹

Modern Afghanistan was founded by the Durrani in 1747 and they prevailed over it for the whole of the 18th century.¹² The British influence that began in the 19th century led to three wars when Afghanistan became a buffer in the "*Great Game*" between the British and the Russians. The First Anglo-Afghan War (1839 – 1842), which resulted in a crushing defeat for the British where in only one British soldier survived the retreat of Kabul garrison of 16,000.¹³ Second Anglo-Afghan War also left the British defeated again, earning Afghanistan the sobriquet of the "Graveyard of

Empires.” The British began the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919 at the conclusion of which a pact was signed at Rawalpindi on 19 August 1919 that led to the formation of modern Afghanistan, independent of British control over its foreign policy.¹⁴

King Amanullah Khan who led Afghanistan to independence, was the first ruler of the independent country. Later, Zahir Shah ruled over modern Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973, during which time he introduced an era of modernity and democracy. This brief experiment in democracy ended in a 1973 coup by Zahir Shah’s cousin Daoud Khan, who in turn was overthrown in a bloody coup by the communists led by Nur Mohammad Taraki in 1978. In 1979 Hafizullah Amin replaced Taraki in yet another coup, though his rule was short-lived. The Soviets invaded, killed Hafizullah Amin , and backed a counter coup and installed Babrak Kamal in Kabul on 25 December 1979, who in turn was replaced by Najibullah in 1986.¹⁵ The Soviets left in 1989 due to intense resistance by the Mujahideen aided by the West and Pakistan. In 1992 the Afghan government collapsed under the onslaught of the Mujahideen who installed Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik, at Kabul. Meanwhile the Taliban grew from its origins in Kandahar and gradually spread under Mullah Omar, backed by Al Qaida and Pakistan, and it took over Kabul after a bloody strife that led to devastation of the city of Kabul itself.¹⁶ The brutal Taliban regime struck a dangerous bargain with Al Qaida.¹⁷ It allowed Al Qaida to grow and nurture its extremist philosophy that led to 9/11. Since the United States involvement in Afghanistan following 9/11 and its successful dislodgement of the Taliban, and installation of Hamid Karzai as President, a quick campaign has turned into a long struggle to put a semblance of stability in that country.

Another issue is that of the Durand Line that divides the Pashtun areas into modern Pakistan and Afghanistan. The boundary came into being as a result of a treaty signed between the British and Afghanistan in 1893 to demarcate the line between Afghanistan and the then colonial British-India. The line cuts through the Pashtun tribal regions, creating an artificial division that remains the focal point of Pakistani-Afghan disputes.¹⁸ Afghanistan never accepted the validity of the Durand Line and in 1949, declared the Durand Line to be invalid and viewed the Pashtun areas of Pakistan to be part of it.¹⁹ Occasional border clashes took place between the two countries in the



Figure1: Map of Afghanistan

1960s as a result of the “Pushtunistan” issue. It is still a complex problem as Kabul refuses to renew the treaty and probably explains one reason why Pakistan wants to ensure there is a friendly government in Afghanistan. As India has an unresolved dispute with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir and both countries have fought four wars over it, a natural convergence of relations between India and Afghanistan ensued as both saw a common problem with Pakistan over a border issue.²⁰

Afghanistan – Present Situation and Capabilities

Today Afghanistan has a government in place in Kabul whose authority is challenged in much of the rest of the country. The governance would be found wanting but for the NATO troops operating under the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mandate. Much of southern Afghanistan is in the throes of militancy and needs counter insurgency (COIN) operations to keep it in check and enable the government to project a modicum of authority. The tribal dispensation in Afghanistan also dictates the levels of control by the government. The Pashtun dominated areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan are the ones in the grip of radical Taliban and where the United States troop deployment is the heaviest. Within the Pashtun Taliban there are many factions that hold control over their tribes and tribal areas. In a recent study it was found that even if the United States struck a deal with the Quetta Shura Taliban it may not be able to end insurgency as in Southern Afghanistan alone more than 1800 groups roam free and carry on with their illegal opium and gun running business and are unlikely to pay heed to any form of government – Karzai or Taliban.²¹ The Tajiks, which are the second largest ethnic group reside in the northern and parts of eastern areas where the Taliban influence is minimal.

Over a period of time, however, Afghanistan has changed and it is not what it used to be a decade ago. It is neither as weak nor as ill administered as it was during the Taliban rule and militants are unable to disrupt government functioning with impunity.²² Modernization and socio economic development has done much to change the nature of the state even though it has been a slow and tedious process. Afghanistan's defense forces, now more than 300,000 strong, and civilian government machinery are slowly firming up their grip on power with 25 percent fewer enemy –

initiated attacks nationwide in the latter part of 2011 as compared to the same period in 2010.²³ The Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Army Air Corps (its air arm with only 2800 men and 46 aircraft) and the Afghan National Police (together called the Afghan National Security Forces or ANSF) are making progress in their training and equipping. As of March 2011 the Afghan National Army had 159,000 troops.²⁴ Of these, approximately 42% are Pashtuns, 40% are Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and the other ethnicities form the rest. The balance of the tribal composition is as per the national averages though the officers are mainly Tajiks.²⁵ In the training domain, though, the ANA needs urgent attention. A 2009 Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan study assessed the performance of the Afghan National Army units and found that only 34 of the 105 Afghan National Army units were capable of operating independently while others still needed guidance and support. Nonetheless that is a big improvement over 2005 when only two such units were found capable of operating independently.²⁶ Three years from now the training figures should look a lot better due to the continued training of ANSF under the ISAF. The Afghan National Army is gaining in confidence, but still needs support in many regions. It is slated to take over the Taliban stronghold of Helmand province in 2012 and that will test its ability to carry out counter insurgency operations without ISAF support.

The security costs of post-2014 Afghanistan are estimated to be about ten billion dollars per year, a difficult proposition for a country whose revenues are in the region of one billion dollars per year. With the continuation of training of Afghan National Army post 2014 by the United States troops to be left behind for the purpose, the Afghan National Army can only get better provided it continues to receive guidance and

assistance and is not put under enormous financial and administrative strain immediately after the withdrawal of the ISAF. The government structure is yet not fully developed and matured and any loss of grip on security and power may lead to a resurgence of Taliban. If the Haqqani Network and the Quetta Shura Taliban are weakened by then, the ANA may be able to handle the low-level insurgencies.

Indo-Afghan Relations and India's Concerns

What bothers India, a near but not adjoining neighbor, with Pakistan as a wedge in between? Why is India so concerned about the consequences once the United States moves out and leaves a strategic vacuum in 2014? The Indian concerns range from political to security to economic issues. India has always been a close partner of Afghanistan and affected by its political dispensation as Afghanistan served as a land route to both foreign invaders and traders from across the central Asian region, Persia and even further west.²⁷ India was among the first non-Communist states to recognize the government installed by the Soviet Union after its 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. New Delhi supported successive governments in Kabul until the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. But like most countries, India never recognized the Taliban's assumption of power in 1996 (only Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban regime). Afghans have also generally viewed India positively. India's soft power projections including its soap operas and *Bollywood* films have much to do with the warm people-to-people relations.²⁸

Terrorism has been the foremost concern in India over the last two decades and will remain so, particularly if there is a resurgence of the Taliban. Twenty two percent of terrorists operating in Jammu and Kashmir during the Taliban regime were either Afghans or Afghan trained.²⁹ The Taliban and the Haqqani Network are organizations

that if they come to power are likely to go back to their old ways and would in all probability provide moral, material and logistical support to the terror groups operating from bases inside Afghanistan and Pakistan.³⁰ Of late the situation in Jammu and Kashmir has been stabilized and India would not be comfortable with a slide backwards. It is widely perceived that any government in Kabul which supports terror would be detrimental to India's security interests.

Next is the question of Indo-Pakistani security challenges and the Afghanistan linkage to them. Pakistan perceives a government in Kabul to be a zero sum game between India and Pakistan (i.e., an Afghan government friendly to India would be hostile to Pakistan, and vice versa). Pakistan views an Indian friendly government in Afghanistan to be inimical to its security interests as it would mean that Pakistan needs to be concerned about its western neighbor who would compel it to commit more security forces there and hence be in an inferior position to handle India's military might on its east.³¹ It also assumes that a friendly Afghanistan would give it needed strategic depth against a hostile neighbor on its east. India, on the other hand, views a friendly government in Afghanistan to mean reduced impetus to terrorism and hence improved regional stability that would boost trade and prosperity for the populace of the region. India also has its own boundary disputes with China and it would be better able to address issues with China if it did not have to worry much about unfriendly states to its west.

In the economic domain India has substantial stakes in a stable Afghanistan. India is the sixth-largest bilateral donor to the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan with commitments thus far of \$1.3 billion in support for reconstruction projects and

development aid.³² Consequently, India has upgraded its aid and its total commitments in Afghanistan include a hydropower project at Salma in Herat province, a Parliament building, and a hospital in Kabul. India also constructed the 218 km long Delaram - Zaranj highway in 2009, linking it to the ring road between Herat and Kandahar that would further connect it to Kabul and the Central Asian Republics.³³ On the other end, the Delaram–Zaranj road further connects to the southern Iranian port of Chahbahar, which is also being built by Indian assistance.³⁴ This will reduce India's and Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistani land routes for trade, enabling Afghanistan to have alternate routes to the sea and minimizing frequent disruptions that it faces due to the unstable political and militant situation inside Pakistan.

Afghanistan provides a land bridge not only to the Central Asian Republics but also to and from Caucasus and further on to Russia. India is dependent on its energy needs, particularly the gas that is abundant in the Central Asian Republics, which also provide a market for Indian goods.³⁵ A regime in Kabul that is not friendly with India would affect its trade and hence its economy as well. It is pertinent to mention here that trade relations would perhaps help Afghanistan more than they would help India in terms of its present capacity and size. Afghanistan would benefit in terms of transit fees, a market for its traditional agricultural products and dry fruits in India, besides the reconstruction efforts that India is putting in and would put on in years to come. Growing trade relations between Afghanistan and India may also be in the interest of Pakistan, as it could serve as a major trade and energy corridor between India and Afghanistan and further on to the Central Asian Republics.³⁶

Pakistan's Strategic Dilemma

From the security perspective of Pakistan the strategic depth that Afghanistan provides and the Durand Line are the important issues that drive its policy in Afghanistan. Pakistan has neither given up its Jammu and Kashmir ambitions nor forgotten the 1971 humiliation of the Indo-Pakistan conflict when its eastern arm was severed leading to the creation of Bangladesh. It considers Afghanistan as its backyard and seeks the strategic depth it provides to counter India. Pakistan does not want an unfriendly Afghanistan in the west that has not yet accepted parts of the Pashtun areas allotted to Pakistan across the Durand Line by the British. But if relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are stable as these were during the Taliban rule, the Durand line then forms an acceptable soft border and does not cause any friction between the two neighbors. Pakistan would therefore be uneasy if a strategic partnership emerges between Afghanistan and India.

To deal with the Indian threat, Pakistan over a period of time has developed a “*strategic triad*.” The first leg of this *triad* is the conventional army, the second is the nuclear weapons arsenal which it developed after 1998, and the third leg of the *triad* is comprised of the irregular forces that it has used over a long period of time against India.³⁷ Militarily, Pakistan is unable to match India, so it has over the years adopted this low cost-high benefit option (i.e. the terror groups nurtured by its Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate or ISI) as well as the nuclear arsenal which it has built over a period of time. Afghanistan remains important as it provides the strategic depth as well as the training ground for the Jihadist activities. Pakistan has also viewed India's aid to Afghanistan with suspicion and feels its growing influence there to be threatening to its security interests. When India opened its consulates in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif,

Jalalabad, and Kandahar, Pakistan felt that these consulates would strengthen India's position and provide cover for its intelligence agencies to run covert operations against Pakistan, as well as foment separatism in Pakistan's Baluchistan province.³⁸ Pakistan would possibly do anything to keep India out of Afghanistan's reconstruction process.³⁹ Hence its efforts in this direction are entirely in keeping with its strategic philosophy. Its best bet therefore is to enable it to have a friendly Taliban regime in Afghanistan that is also hostile to India.

Role of Iran, Central Asian Republics, Russia and China

Another country that can play an important role in Afghanistan is Iran, with which Islamabad and Kabul had frosty relations during the Taliban regime. Iran was a supporter of the Northern Alliance just as India and the United States were in 2001.⁴⁰ Iran provides considerable options in economic development in Afghanistan even though its political influence is primarily limited in the western provinces of Herat, Farah, Nimruz, Helmand and Kandahar. Its trade relations with Afghanistan amount to \$ 700m per year and this would be useful to maintain the Afghan economy.⁴¹ It also provides an alternative land route to the Persian Gulf that can boost trade with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics. But its standoff with the rest of the world, particularly the West, makes working relationship with Iran difficult for Afghanistan to maintain. Its relations with the Karzai government have been good and its initial investments heavy until the Western sponsored sanctions against the Islamic regime came into play in 2010.⁴² For India, because Pakistan denies access routes for trade under the Afghanistan – Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA) of 2010, Iran is the gateway to Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics.⁴³

The Central Asian Republics, China and Russia also play a significant role in Afghanistan. As all these states are affected by Afghanistan's security, economic and narcotic challenges, they have considerable anxiety over the future of Afghanistan. The Central Asian Republics, China and Russia are particularly concerned about narcotics and the export of radical Islam should the Taliban come to power. The Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011 estimated potential opium production in 2011 at 5,800 tons, a 61% increase compared to 2010 and valued at \$ 1,407 million in Afghanistan, which is roughly 9% of its GDP.⁴⁴ Besides the drugs menace, Russia with its past ties is also affected by fundamentalism emanating from Afghanistan. Russia has committed to Kabul its willingness in training the ANP in tackling the illicit drug trade.⁴⁵ Likewise, China would view the future of Afghanistan from the security perspective to ensure that its Xinjiang province remains isolated from the fundamentalists and from an economic perspective to ensure that its investments are secured. China has been a surprise omission as a major bilateral donor, but has made huge investments particularly with \$3.5billion at the Aynak mines, which is the single largest economic investment in Afghanistan.⁴⁶ China would be watching any Afghan Taliban linkage with the Uyghurs in Xinjiang province, but its concerns will however remain centered around the possible rise of Indian influence, and a long-term presence of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan.⁴⁷

The United States Interests in Afghanistan

However, the foremost country that merits a study is the United States, which has been immensely involved in the Afghanistan imbroglio since 2001. Its current deployment stands at 97,000 troops, which would reduce to 65,000 by 2013. By 2014 the United States would withdraw its combat troops fully, leaving behind unspecified number of security advisers and trainers. The question remains what would the United

States want in Afghanistan once it leaves in 2014? The answer lies in the United States' policies and its strategic interests in Afghanistan. Foremost is to ensure that another 9/11 does not happen again. It also wants to leave with its credibility as a world power intact. Other interests include a peaceful and stable Afghanistan that is able to defeat the designs of terror organizations inimical to the United States interests. It would also want to see development in the region and sustainment of the democratic process previously initiated. The United States is also keen to secure its security interests in the region to counter any imbalance with China's emergence in future.⁴⁸

The U.S. relationship with the current regime in Afghanistan is generally friendly and there is convergence of views and approach in dealing with the Al Qaida and Taliban there. However the Afghan regime is ineffective in large swathes of the country in dealing with the security and economic situation on its own, as discussed earlier in the paper. As the December 2011 Bonn Conference suggested, Afghanistan needs economic assistance and military support until 2024 at least for it to be able to govern itself effectively on its own.

Pakistan – a Difficult U.S. Partner in Afghanistan

Pakistan has always been a transactional ally. During the Cold War, the United States was supportive of Pakistan, which was a member of CENTO (Central Treaty Organization - dissolved in 1979). After the Soviet invasion in 1979, the United States funneled funds through Pakistan to support the Mujahedeen against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Pakistan was declared a Major Non - NATO Ally in March 2004 for its support and cooperation in the Global War on Terror (GWOT).⁴⁹ For the United States and its NATO partners that are fighting and operating outside their areas, Iran or the Central Asian Republics or Pakistan are necessary as they control the supply

routes into and out of Afghanistan. The current standoff with Iran and the limited capacity of the land routes from the Central Asian Republics make these two routes less preferred. That leaves Pakistan as the key player and explains the U.S. dependence on it. But now the United States is caught in a cleft. As the withdrawal of US troops becomes a certainty, the Quetta Shura Taliban and the Haqqani Network are beginning to assert themselves with covert support from Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI). The United States seems to be increasingly tired of Pakistan's double game of its relationship with the United States and Karzai government on one hand and its support of the Quetta Shura Taliban and the Haqqani Network on the other.⁵⁰

The relations between the United States and Pakistan have been steadily deteriorating. Beginning with the Raymond Davis affair, the killing of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, and the killing of 24 Pakistan troops by NATO on 01 December 11, relations have steadily declined leading Pakistan to boycott the Bonn Conference held in December 2011. To make matters worse, in December 2011, the U.S. Congress slashed the aid program to Pakistan by \$700 million which will only be reinstated when the ISAF Commander certifies that Pakistan is indeed sincere in its efforts against the Haqqani Network.⁵¹

The United States is aware of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and it has tried to tread carefully while dealing with it. Its compulsions to keep Pakistan and its powerful army in good humor make sense. Firstly, as the situation in Afghanistan gets better and the drawdown approaches, Pakistan holds the aces due to its proximity and support to the Quetta Shura Taliban and the Haqqani Network.⁵² These ISI-controlled organizations give Pakistan some power over Afghanistan and may make possible its

eventual takeover by the Taliban, or another protégé. Secondly, Pakistan remains the principal route to Afghanistan for the sustainment of NATO troops in Afghanistan. Thirdly, Pakistan has become a hub of international terror organizations that threaten regional and global security. Lastly, Pakistan has nuclear weapons capability that could become unsafe should there be an internal political upheaval there. The United States is thus walking the tightrope while dealing with Pakistan and it remains an uncomfortable ally of the United States in Afghanistan. However, the United States needs to keep Pakistan engaged and hope to leverage it into “better behavior”.

U.S. – India Strategic Partnership in Afghanistan

A strengthened U.S.-India strategic partnership is imperative in this new era. The United States should work with India to identify further potential contributions, taking into consideration other regional sensitivities, to the international effort in Afghanistan.⁵³

Richard L. Armitage, R. Nicholas Burns and Richard Fontaine
Center for a New American Security October 2010

NATO’s withdrawal in 2014 will certainly leave a vacuum and it would be prudent to fill the space by powers friendly to the Afghan cause. With the continuing deteriorating relations and conflicting interests of both the United States and Pakistan, it is desirable for the United States to look for alternate options and build a separate regional partnership as a counter-balance to destabilizing factors. Indo–U.S. relations were earlier beset with problems owing to the Cold War calculus, but of late the two have come closer. According to former US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot, the Indo-U.S. relationship has been a victim of incompatible obsessions: India’s with Pakistan and America’s with the Soviet Union. Both were guilty of being on good terms with the other’s principal enemy.⁵⁴ However, lately there has been a growing sense of

realization in the United States of India's importance as a regional and global actor and there are many reasons for a closer relationship between the two:

1. India is the largest democracy in the world and has been one for many years now. This is one value that the United States has been propagating and desirous of achieving, as true democracies are less likely to go to war or provide shelter to terrorism.⁵⁵
2. The concept of liberty in its entirety in India and the United States is similar. Concepts of civil, economic and religious liberties are common and prevail overwhelmingly in both countries.⁵⁶
3. India has faced more than 4100 terror attacks since 1970 and, like the United States, it wants to see an end to this negative inhibiting factor of peace.⁵⁷
4. The United States and India also share common security concerns as regards China in Asia. China's economic growth and competitiveness is not as threatening as its concurrent growth of its military. India can provide a stabilizing counter weight to China's growth and influence in the region.
5. Economic opportunities and growth between the United States and India would also be mutually beneficial. In the year 2010 the trade between the two countries totaled over \$40 billion and is likely to grow as the two economies forge closer ties.
6. India is the regional power in South Asia wherein it accounts for 75% of the total population, GDP and military expenditure. It has 65% of the total area in the region and its armed forces exceed the combined strength of all others.⁵⁸ Closer defense relations will be of mutual interest to both India and the United States.

7. The fear of acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by extreme fundamentalists in the region is of concern to both India and the United States. A repeat of the AQ Khan network that flourished in the 1990s would be equally disastrous. Pakistan's volatile political instability with a possibility of extremist parties coming to power in the future with control over the nuclear arsenal is something the world will be better off without.⁵⁹

The converging interests between India and the United States led both Presidents Bush and Obama to call India a natural ally of the United States. President Obama has said India is a leading partner of the United States in the 21st century. India's long term stability, robust economic growth, fight against terror and role in maintaining the balance of power in the region suggest the United States' current policy to be strategically closer to India makes sense. America's vision for the 21st century has at its heart an Asia-Pacific partnership built on security, prosperity and dignity for all nations and people. This vision will be impossible without a strong American partnership with a rising India.⁶⁰ There are some opinions forming in the United States regarding forging close ties with India rather than Pakistan, in order to meet the challenges of Afghanistan. Senator Mark Kirk of Illinois felt that the United States should move closer to India rather than Pakistan, as India is in a position to contribute to a stable Afghanistan due to its military and economic capabilities and as a counter-balance to a growing China.⁶¹ However, a joint approach in Afghanistan would be a difficult one and will be viewed by both Pakistan and China as threatening to their interests. Notwithstanding the above, a joint partnership between India and the United States could provide many payoffs in Afghanistan after 2014 such as:

1. A close democratic tradition can help usher in and promote democracy in Afghanistan. India cannot enforce either the American or the Indian model of democracy on Afghanistan, still India's experience with multi ethnic federalism could prove useful. India has long experience with election processes and its Election Commission office is like a Global Gold Standard.⁶² Its expertise matched with that of the United States could be pivotal in promoting and building and sustaining democratic structures within Afghanistan.
2. Afghanistan is in the midst of a financial crisis and needs about \$10 billion per year to sustain its weak government structure. It needs investments in infrastructure, education, health, industries and communication. It needs money and expertise to build upon social development projects and essential services like water and electricity. A joint approach by India and the United States could help stabilize the socio economic edifice, also.
3. Afghanistan's capacity building of its Afghan National Army and its police is limited. The United States is already committed to leaving troops behind to help build the Afghan National Army. India has also signed an agreement with Afghanistan to do the same. The efforts could be joined and the process hastened so that it can face the security challenges after 2014.

Militarily, India could possibly contribute in three different ways in close coordination with the Afghan National Army and the United States Special Forces and advisors that are to stay behind. It could put boots on the ground, it could provide military hardware, and it could help sustain and train the Afghan National Army.

Sending Indian troops to Afghanistan to help the Afghan National Army to contain the insurgency there has several implications. As part of its long term goal of becoming a regional and global power, India is more comfortable with UN-mandated Chapter VI peacekeeping missions rather than Chapter VII missions.⁶³ Domestic political factors of alienating the large Muslim electorate who may see this as an alignment of India and the United States against the Muslims is another issue that the political leadership has to face. India has also not had a good experience in Sri Lanka when it sent the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) there to fight the Tamil Tigers in the 1980s. The difficulty in operating abroad and losing troops for a foreign cause was politically not viable and the IPKF had to be withdrawn in 1988. Internal opposition and strife followed, culminating in the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by a suicide bomber of LTTE.⁶⁴ It is true that prolonged deployments in counter insurgency and anti-terror operations have already blunted the edges of the Indian Army, and its further commitment in Afghanistan with no end in sight may go against this idea. Increasing the Indian military footprint would certainly be seen by Pakistan as an attempt to encircle it and that may lead to considerable opposition from Pakistanis.

India could also offer military hardware to the Afghan National Army, probably a better option that fulfils the Afghan National Army's legitimate security needs. India does have a surplus of aging Russian equipment whose life can be extended by special repairs and upgrades. Lastly, the option of India sending trainers and military advisers, like the United States has done, appears the most acceptable contribution to the building of the Afghan National Army. India has vast experience in capacity building, as it has helped African countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, and Zambia establish

training missions and military academies.⁶⁵ It also continues to run and operate the IMTRAT (Indian Military Training Team) in Bhutan.⁶⁶ India already trains a large number of Afghan cadets and officers and this program can easily be expanded further. Indian trainers and military advisors could also be based in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan to help in training, maintenance and in advisory capacity until the Afghans are able to do it themselves (which may take up to ten years). Indian and U.S. troops are already undergoing joint training (since 2004) and coordinating training of the Afghan National Army should be possible despite opposition from the Pakistan government.⁶⁷

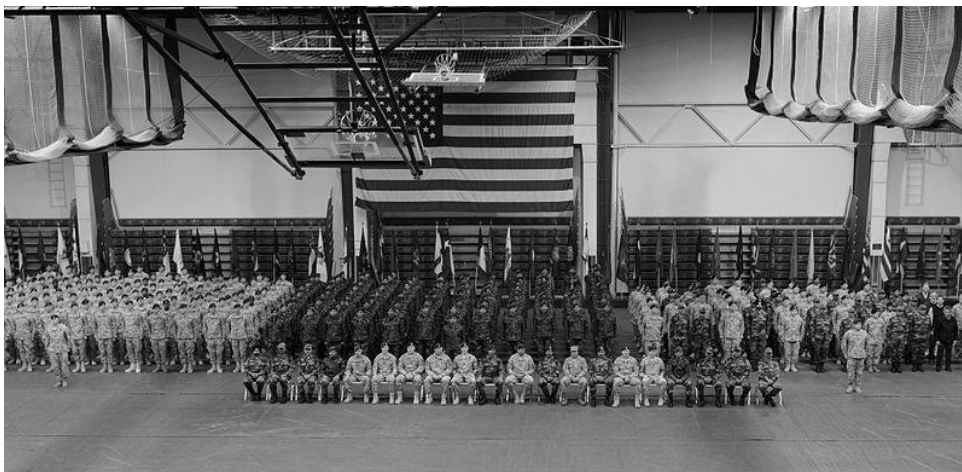


Figure 2: U.S. and Indian Army soldiers at the start of 2010 Ex Yudh Abhyas (Battle Drills) at Alaska

Conclusion

The United States has tried to convince the Pakistani government and its military that it needs to focus more on internal strife rather than on its insecurity with India, which has led Pakistan historically to a policy of using irregular warfare in Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan.⁶⁸ The Pakistani military that controls the Afghanistan policy wants to preserve Pakistan as a garrison state, protect its institutional and economic

privileges, and sustain a competitive relationship with Afghanistan and India, thereby justifying its continued supremacy in Pakistan's political life.⁶⁹ A long-lasting peace in the region would perhaps go against the Pakistani military's interests. Therefore, to go along with its wishes either in Afghanistan or elsewhere may not lead the international community to any solution. The right way ahead has to be followed in spite of Pakistan's objections or reservations. Conceding Pakistan's primacy in Afghanistan and holding it responsible thereafter for all terror emanating from there is not a solution, as neither has Pakistan shown responsible conduct so far nor will the other regional powers accept this formula.⁷⁰

However, India and Pakistan certainly need to sit down across the table to settle the issues of terrorism emanating from Pakistan, the status of Jammu and Kashmir, and trade to build confidence and reduce tensions. Progress in relations between India and Pakistan would indirectly help reduce Pakistan's obsession in Afghanistan. The bottom line is that Afghanistan must return to normal in a reasonable time frame and should not once again become host to Al Qaida or any other terror organization that destabilizes the region or conducts sensational terror attacks elsewhere in the world. This is very much possible if the Taliban resurgence is not allowed. Any talk of a moderate Taliban is fraught with danger and may be a face-saving exit formula for the United States, but it might not be long before the same moderate Taliban is overtaken by the extreme elements and the region slips back to anarchy and a policy of state sponsored terrorism flourishes again.⁷¹

India's concerns in Afghanistan are driven by its security, economic, and socio-political compulsions. A good relationship with Afghanistan does not imply squeezing

Pakistan from the west. India would be keen to have a government in Afghanistan that is not anti-India and that does not support or promote terrorism in India, and helps promote economic relations with it and the Central Asian Republics. With its traditional good relations with Afghanistan, India can contribute significantly in the reconstruction efforts. India and the United States share common values and interests and it is possible to put a lid on the violence and instability with a joint approach in Afghanistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, may find this inconvenient and would perhaps push closer to China, with whom it shares common interests, to contain the Indo-U.S. influence in Afghanistan. It is now time to realize this emerging relationship and the security calculus in the region and make a new beginning.

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