Jihad Under Nuclear Umbrella: Reversal of Fortune

Srini Sitaraman
Department of Political Science
Clark University
950 Main Street
Worcester, MA 01610, USA

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On 8th June 14, a team of 10 heavily armed and well-equipped Taliban fighters attacked Karachi International Airport in Pakistan. The Taliban attack on the Karachi Airport was eerily similar to the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks on India by the Pakistani intelligence directed Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in which a train station, Jewish prayer house, a popular and trendy restaurant and the landmark Taj hotel was simultaneously attacked by heavily armed gunmen.¹ The Tehreek-e-Talibani’s (TTP) attack on the Karachi Airport points to the growing escalation of conflict with the Pakistani state.² In May 2011, two Pakistani Taliban suicide bombers attacked the Frontier Constabulary Post and killed 80 cadets and injured 120 people in retaliation for the Abbottabad raid on the Bin Laden compound earlier in May.³ This paper examines how the development of Pakistan’s strategy of Jihad Under the Nuclear Umbrella—the promotion of state sponsored and state supported terror proxies—has produced a hydra-headed terror monster that has now turned against Pakistan and is destabilizing the state apparatus and weakened the nominal functioning of the democratic framework. As the former American Ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter put it “If you grow vipers in your backyard, you're going to get bitten.”⁴


² From 2002 to 2014 there have been over 400 incidents of suicide bomb attacks in Pakistan and there have been 55,000 terror related fatalities from 2003 to 2014 (data from South Asian Terrorism Portal).


⁴ A rivalry that threatens the world, The Economist, 19 May 2011 <http://www.economist.com/node/18712274>
Rapid development of nuclear weapons has allowed Pakistan to believe that it could effectively rely on its Jihadi strategy to attack India and Indian interests in Afghanistan and deter counter-attacks because of the threat of tactical and long-range nuclear weapons capability. Supporting and nurturing Jihadi groups under the nuclear cover has become the primary strategy of warfare against India that evolved into an art form during the U.S. aided and Pakistan run anti-Soviet War in Afghanistan. This strategy is also employed against the American forces in Afghanistan. In this paper my intention is attempt to mount an argument that the policy of nurturing and sponsoring terror groups have come back to haunt Pakistan by destabilizing its internal state apparatus, but however there are no signs to suggest that the military-intelligence apparatus in Pakistan is willing to relinquish this strategy. This is because the entire edifice of the Pakistani state is built up on the strategy and the rhetoric of *India as the mortal or existential enemy* motivates the military-intelligence network to sustain itself in the belief that given that India is not in a position to engage in massive conventional retaliation because of the fear that it could easily escalate into nuclear combat (Steve Coll 2006).

The proposed phased withdrawal of U.S. military from Afghanistan starting this year is also likely to impact the complex power-centric relationship among India, Pakistan, United States of America, and China. India-Pakistan conflict needs to be situated within the larger geostrategic context of United States presence and military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the implications of U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan on India-Pakistan relationship. This is because Pakistan’s relationship with the larger external powers is influenced by India’s growing insecurity vis-à-vis China,
which is causing India to expand both its conventional and nuclear forces, but is also inciting Pakistan to rely on low-intensity warfare techniques to unsettle India (Fair 2013). Overt nuclear posture has deterred the ability of both parties to rely on massive conventional use of force strategies in pursuing their objectives, as a consequence India has developed a position of strategic restraint, while Pakistan is continually attempting to alter the status-quo by engaging in what Vipin Narang describes as “asymmetric escalation nuclear posture.” This asymmetric escalation nuclear posture or jihad under the nuclear umbrella has created a vicious circle where extremist organizations based in Pakistan, shielded by Pakistan's aggressive nuclear posture, can target Indian cities with virtual impunity. India is unable to deploy conventional use of force strategies even when it is provoked through cross-border terror attacks because of the threat of nuclear escalation through the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

India has assumed a defensive posture vis-à-vis Pakistan by upgrading its military hardware and technology and increasing the size and strength of the military. But, India does not want to be drawn into a full-blown military conflict with Pakistan because it would jeopardize the hard won economic gains made during the last two decades. India has gradually evolved into this position since the late 70s or early 80s. Since India transformed itself into an emerging a global economy it has become more vigilant about not jeopardizing its economic development and the inflow of foreign direct investment, disturb the torrid pace of construction of an industrial and urban infrastructure, and the development of its burgeoning middle class that is more interested in economic and social welfare than engaging in military conflict with its insecure neighbor. India has also

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become more self-aware and confident of its international stature; even winning the public support of the United States for a permanent seat in the reformed UN Security Council. Because of its growing global stature and position within BRICS, New Delhi has become more circumspect in engaging in dangerous nuclear escalation with Pakistan. Instead, India has sought to reduce the incentives for Pakistan to engage in the promotion of cross-border terrorism by freezing the conflict and instead aimed at focusing its military resources to counter the China threat, while sustaining its economic growth and pursuing its *Look East Policy*.

The People’s Republic of China has made assertive moves into the subcontinent (as it has in other parts of the world) that includes deepening and extending its military partnership with the Himalayan states of Nepal and Bhutan, enhancing its economic and infrastructure partnership with India’s eastern neighbor Bangladesh, and it is emerging as a leading supplier of military hardware to Sri Lanka and Pakistan. China and its South Asian partners view these exchanges as benign and part of the normal relations among sovereign states, but all of this is generating enormous insecurity in New Delhi. India increasingly views China’s moves into the “Indian Sphere of Influence” with a high degree of trepidation and skepticism and does not view them through a benign prism. Deepening of China’s military and security relationship with its smaller South Asian neighbors is described as String of Pearls—a policy of strategic encirclement of India with China friendly countries.  

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6 President Obama made this public pledge during this state visit to India in 2010.

Unresolved and highly tense border dispute, India’s softness or fondness for Tibet and the Dalai Lama, memories of a crushing defeat in high Himalayan war of 1962, armed skirmishes in 1967 and 1987, the issue of repeated border incursions has required enormous counter response effort on the part of India. The accelerating military and security partnership that the Beijing has established with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and the overall economic and strategic competition with Beijing has made the Sino-Indian relations highly volatile and prone periodic ruptures. New Delhi has come to accept the Beijing-Islamabad nexus, which the Prime Minister Pakistan Nawaz Sharif has described as a friendship that is “higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the deepest sea in the world, and sweeter than honey.” What particularly presents a challenge is the growing assertiveness of China vis-à-vis India, importantly in regards to the disputed border areas in the northeast state of Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing claims as Southern Tibet and its decision to needle India in Kashmir by issuing separate visas to Kashmiri residents that is stapled to the back of the passport and not stamped on the passport has given New Delhi serious worries about Chinese intentions. New Delhi has edged closer to Washington, which has welcomed India’s overtures on China, but simultaneously it has sought to maintain strategic autonomy so that it doesn’t prompt an aggressive reaction from Beijing. India is surely looking forward to developing closer military ties and acquiring advanced weapons from the United States, but it also attempting reduce its reliance on a single source and instead has sought to diversify its weapons procurement.

India-Pakistan relationship has always been fragile because Pakistan is a weak state with dysfunctional institutions that is heavily dependent on its military and
intelligence agency to manage its country. Pakistan’s military and its dreaded intelligence agency ISI rely exclusive on hard power—particularly on terror proxies—in an attempt to weaken India’s control of Kashmir that is under India’s control. India on the other hand has increasingly becoming more reliant on soft power to push its foreign policy objectives. In the immediate aftermath of the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, there was enormous pressure to launch reprisal attacks on Pakistan. However, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s government was less than eager to carry out U.S. style raids or air attacks on Pakistani terror camps. After the successful American raid in Abbottabad to execute Bin Laden, Prime Minister Singh remarked that India “is not like the United States.” Suggesting that India had no intention of launching such attacks on Pakistan, neither does it have the capability to mount such a sophisticated operation. But the top brass in the Indian military that believed that they could carry out such an operation, and when they answered in the affirmative, it was immediately met with a stern warning from Pakistan that such action would lead terrible catastrophe. If India were to launch such a cross-border targeted operation, it would surely face sharp reprisals from Pakistan. Since it would be hard to predict the mode of such reprisals that could result increased cross-border terror actions; it would be all together little provocative for a neighboring state to pursue such an action. Intense diplomatic pressure from the United States and lobbying from the Indian business community was instrumental in India pulling back from the brink of military action after the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks and the November 2001 Parliament attacks. The restraint was admirable because considering that there was

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8 Basharat Peer, “The Hawks of South Asia,” 31 May 2011, Foreign Policy.com
significant pressure on the Indian government for a strong military reprisal immediately after the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001.

India’s posture of strategic restraint could be easily upset if another Mumbai style attack were to occur because domestic pressure to launch counter strikes against Pakistan would be overwhelming. If India were to launch surgical strikes against terrorist camps it would surely invite strong counter attack from Pakistan, which would escalate into full-scale military conflict. War between India and Pakistan would be devastating to the region and it would completely alter the dynamics of United States military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, there is always the fear that any military conflagration could very easily escalate into a full-blown nuclear exchange that would not be in the interest of the international community.

Possibility of peace between India-Pakistan depends to a large extent on the success of American operations in Afghanistan and on the American ability to convince Pakistan to give up on terror as a strategy both against India and against the United States in Afghanistan, and put-together counterterrorism strategies to tackle increasing incidents of domestic terrorism that is challenging the foundations of the Pakistani state. Although large scale cross-border terror operations since the 2008 terror attacks has declined, Pakistan’s preparation for a post-American Afghanistan where it is seeking to assert power by using the Pakistani Taliban as a proxy to weaken the post-Karzai government could lead to an increase in cross-border infiltrations into India for the purposes of terror and social disturbance. If such a situation were to prevail with the departure of American forces in Afghanistan in 2014, and if the post-Karzai Afghan government were to collapse or fail to consolidate some of the gains made during the thirteen year American
occupation and rebuilding of Afghanistan then it would bode very poorly for India-Pakistan relationship and more broadly for regional stability. Re-emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan after 2014 would essentially return India-Pakistan relationship to the pre-9/11 situation during which the frequency of attacks launched on Indian targets increased dramatically quadrupling the probability of militarized conflict.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the security architecture of South Asia dramatically changed. Prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, India-Pakistan security competition was unhinged from any immediate external factors. Both United States and the former Soviet Union quickly exited the Aft-Pak theater of operations in 1989 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union allowing Pakistan both with challenges and opportunities. Pakistan filled the security vacuum with Taliban in Afghanistan and it developed a set of proxy forces to launch significant attacks on Indian targets both in Kashmir and in other parts of India and in Afghanistan, and re-ignite a mass insurgency against India in Kashmir.

Pakistani sponsored insurgency and terrorism only fueled the emergence of right-wing Hindu nationalist power in India in the later half of 1990s and it decided to secretly test a nuclear weapon to solidify its political power. The Indian nuclear tests of 1998 and the retaliatory nuclear tests by Pakistan shattered all illusions of peace in the region and it has demonstrated how dangerous the neighborhood had become. A year later the Kargil war in the high mountains of Kashmir in the summer of 1999 elevated global tensions to an extraordinary level drawing the United States back into the South Asian theater decisively nearly a decade after it hastily exited the region. Few months after the Kargil War, General Pervez Musharaff took power in Pakistan in a bloodless coup and declared
a state of emergency and shortly thereafter an Indian Airlines flight IC-814 *en route* from Kathmandu, Nepal to New Delhi, India was hijacked by *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen* (HuJ) by a Pakistan-based terror group on 24 December 1999. The plane eventually landed in Kandahar, Afghanistan; at the airport Taliban fighters ringed the plane forming a protective barrier. The passengers in the Indian Airlines flight were freed only after negotiations that compelled India to release three dreaded terrorists from Indian prisons. One of the terrorists released in this exchange was—Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh—who is heavily implicated in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States and in the kidnapping and execution of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in 2002.

The attacks on U.S. targets on 11 September 2001 by 19 hijackers trained in Afghanistan by *Al Qaida* and sponsored by terror facilitators in Pakistan decisively drew the United States back into the region. United States re-entry into the South Asian sphere was a game changer in the India-Pakistan conflict dynamics because this time around gradually the United States came to concur that Pakistan had indeed become the official purveyor of international terrorism and that it trains, funds, harbors, and utilizes terror groups as shock troops to advance its policy objectives. Pakistan has relied on an array of terror groups (or *jihadi* outfits) to target to U.S./ISAF positions and Indian embassies and medical charities in Afghanistan, attack NATO supply conveys that meander through the heart of Pakistani territory, and launch attacks on other Western assets in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The strategy that Pakistan has employed against the United States and the ISAF is no different from the strategy that it has pursued against India the last several decades starting in the mid-eighties.
What we see in Pakistan currently is growing radicalization that some refer to as the Talibanization of Pakistan (See Ahmed Rashid, Descent into Chaos). This extremism has seeped into the daily life of Pakistani, radicalized its youth lacking in opportunities and them turned against its own people in launching brutal terror attacks and have started to destabilize Pakistani society. Pakistan’s terror habit has become its crutch, its go-to strategy for exercising power outside its territorial domain. The over-reliance on terror proxies is not only aimed at counter-balancing India and seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan, but terrorism and its nuclear arsenal have become a survival strategy for this country with widening income inequality and growing social fissures and increasing socioeconomic divides. Terror proxies and its nuclear arsenal have become tools for the Pakistan military to extract resources and checkmate external actors particularly the United States, challenge neighbors especially India, and hold together an increasingly fragmenting state. Although the collapse of the Pakistani state maybe highly exaggerated, growing instability, extremism, and high levels of unemployment and income inequality has catapulted Pakistan to the top ten in the Foreign Policy Magazine’s Failed State Index.

Intelligence and the military establishment in Pakistan have always differentiated between pro-Pakistan anti-India terror groups. Support is always readily available to anti-India groups, however anti-Pakistan terror outfits, especially such as those that occupied the Lal Masjid in Pakistan are immediately routed, but not without consequences. Nevertheless, the anti-India terror groups and all most all of the anti-Pakistan terror groups share a common sentiment in that they are uniformly anti-American. They have no qualms about launching attacks on NATO supply lines, ambushing American outposts along the Afghan borders, launching brazen suicide attacks on heavily fortified garrisons.
Pakistan is more than willing to wipeout the anti-Pakistan terror groups that also happen to be anti-American, but it less willing to wipeout anti-India terror groups that maybe also anti-American and anti-Kabul. Pakistan’s complex balancing strategy is starting to misfire at several levels. The worrisome trend is that there is a growing collusion between anti-Kabul Pashtun groups and anti-Islamabad Punjabi group, which is starting to upend some of Pakistan’s terror balancing strategy because both of them seem to be turning against their master. Islamabad still seems confident that it can manipulate the different jihadi groups to achieve its strategic objectives, but the escalation and frequency of terrorist violence within Pakistan suggests that Islamabad may not be fully in charge of every militant agency.

United States is fighting its own war along the frontier lands of Afghanistan-Pakistan border largely aided by unmanned drones. Pakistan for its part seems to fighting a losing battle against growing insurgency and domestic terrorism. But the links between groups that Pakistan is fighting against and those that the United States is fighting against are increasing. India is watching all of this from the sidelines, unwilling to be drawn into the battle against anti-India groups operating from Azad Kashmir and the federated tribal areas in Pakistan. If India were to directly enter into this conflict with the intent of going after the anti-India terror groups operating out of Pakistan (hot pursuit), it would enormously complicate American efforts in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. So India has adopted the posture of strategic restraint and bracing itself itself for the consequences of American withdrawal.

India is less sanguine about negotiating with a fissiparous state on key and pivotal matters, namely Kashmir, and it is absolutely unwilling to settle on Kashmir in a way that
it cedes any more territory to Pakistan. In the wake of 2008 Mumbai attacks, India has not attempted serious normalization of relations with Pakistan so that Pakistan is no longer tempted to launch cross-border terror attacks. Besides the newly elected Modi government in India does not seem to be in any concessionary mood as India was during the heyday of peace breakthroughs achieved during the Vajpayee-Musharaff era, when the respective leaders were able to punch through domestic opposition in search of grand bargains. Indian population regards Pakistan as jealous, duplicitous, conniving, and extremist and there is very little sympathy or goodwill towards Pakistan. The situation is rather precarious; the U.S. objective has been one that convinces Pakistan to give up on terror both as a tactic and strategy against Afghanistan and against India; establish a stable government in Kabul that can defend itself, and bring India and Pakistan to the negotiating table. However, there is no indication that such moves are forthcoming and there and tentative attempts at peace talks promoted by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been very quickly squelched by the military-intelligence bodies.

**Origins of India-Pakistan Conflict**

India-Pakistan conflict started from period prior to the birth of both states in 1947, when the idea of Pakistan was born during the anti-colonial struggle against the British rule. The first (1948), second (1965), and the third (1971) India-Pakistan war, and the India-China (1962) border solidified the hostile dynamics of the regional conflict. In addition, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan altered the geopolitics in the region and destabilized Pakistan, and by extension aggravated the situation in Kashmir and the consequent India-Pakistan conflict. The India-Pakistan conflict had geostrategic
implications right from the beginning and it got exacerbated during the Cold War and has sustained itself with additional intensity since the end of the Cold War.

The dynamics of the India-Pakistan conflict changed during the ten-year long Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989). In particular or cross-border terror attacks using *jihadis*—a strategy honed against the Soviets in Afghanistan—was effectively used against India, especially targeting key locales in Kashmir, and gradually other parts in India, such as during the Sikh insurgency in India during the 1980s. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the U.S. led covert warfare carried out with Pakistani assistance and led to the creation of *Taliban* and it subsequently established strong links with its symbiotic cousin *Al Qaeda*. Cross-border terror attacks and the escalation of the political and military tensions between India and Pakistan, including the retaliatory nuclear tests in May 1998, the Kargil War in 1999, hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight IC-814 to Kabul, and the 2001 Parliament attacks effectively broke the public trust.

After the 9/11 terror attacks the politics and the nature of power competition in the South Asian subcontinent was radically altered. The U.S. operations in Afghanistan that began in October 2003, which directly involved Pakistan, changed the nature of conflict between India and Pakistan. From the Indian perspective the expectation was that American presence in Pakistan and Afghanistan would dampen Pakistan’s ability to launch terror attacks on India. In other words, India expected that the United States would do what it was unable or willing to do, i.e., military engage with the terror groups in Pakistan. If India were to militarily engage with Pakistan based terror group there is always the real danger that it would provoke a full-scale retaliation from Pakistan, which could quickly morph into a nuclear exchange. India’s expectation was that American
presence in the Af-Pak region would dampen Pakistan’s ability to export terror or reduce its willingness to stage terror attacks from its territory on India. However, this was not necessarily the case. Although there were several tactical shifts, with a slight decline in the frequency of attacks decreased, the number of spectacular terror attacks on India increased with the American presence in the region. There was some recognition on the part of the United States that it would be nearly impossible for it compel Pakistan to fully reduce its dependence on terror proxies and that the United States should pursue a more narrower strategic path that would guarantee peace in Afghanistan and facilitate a smooth American exit from the region. However, American officials have increasingly become highly attuned to the complexity of the linkages among criminal gangs, terror groups, intelligence agencies, and the military establishment.

One of the positive outcomes—although this was not sustained—of the United States intervention in the Af-Pak region was that it produced some good faith efforts towards negotiating peace between the former Indian Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee and former Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf, which ended with the Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008. Otherwise, the United States presence in the region has not enormously aided Pakistan in terms of weapons or strategic political alliance nor has it altered the fundamental structure of the India-Pakistan conflict, but it has pushed India closer to the United States and Pakistan further away from the United States and made Pakistan the epicenter of the American led global war on terror.

This however has led to the development of a dependent relationship between the United States and Pakistan mimicking the 1980s when Pakistani President General Zia-ul-Haq and the American President Ronald Reagan operating in concert evicted the
Soviet Union from Afghanistan that eventually caused the downfall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The United States reinvigorated this relationship after the 9/11 terror attacks by applying a combination of carrot and stick policies to gain access to Afghanistan to transport weapons, materials, and personnel and temporarily convinced General Musharraf to crack down on various terror groups inside Pakistan, but General Musharraf negotiated this tricky terrain by separating out the anti-India terror groups from other terror groups that were seen as antithetical to the American objectives. General Musharraf’s intention was to appear as cooperating with the United States to leverage this newly re-established strategic relationship against India and procure advanced military hardware from the United States to balance against India.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan emerged as the new battleground in the India-Pakistan power competition. India has sought to balance against Pakistan by attempting to establish a bridgehead in Afghanistan and Pakistan has countered this by seeking to dislodge India from Afghanistan by relying on terror-proxies and by applying political pressure on the U.S and other international actors to reign in India and even potentially remove India from major donor conferences. Both India and Pakistan are trying to position themselves for a post-American Afghanistan and attempting to out-maneuver the other party. This impact of this new “great game” on the American ability to rebuild Afghanistan and leave behind a functional government and military that is able to prevent it from becoming a haven for terror once again remains to be seen.

Pakistan’s oft-repeated argument is that it is unable to fully cooperate with the United States on the war on terror by cracking down on terror groups operating in its country or lend its support fully to the Afghan government in Kabul because it is
concerned about the threat posed by India. The Pakistani government and intelligentsia have successfully portrayed India as the “existential threat,” a bigger threat than militants operating within its country and those who threaten to destabilize Pakistan and seek to reverse the progress made in Afghanistan. This argument that has been more or less bought by the Americans; hence, interestingly there is more pressure placed on India to shift its troops out of the western region of India and not do anything to provoke Pakistan in Afghanistan. By pushing this argument vociferously Pakistan has sought to balance against the demands posed by the United States to crack down on terror groups by continuing to covertly support and nurture certain terror groups that provide Pakistan with the necessary strategic wedge to counter India and resist American pressure on multiple fronts. Pakistan’s continued unwillingness to fully disengage from the various terror groups is viewed as double-dealing by the United States and this has provided India the opportunity to promote its “I-told-you-so” argument. In the latest Pentagon report to the U.S. Congress titled “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan,” states that

Afghan- and Indian-focused militants continue to operate from Pakistan territory to the detriment of Afghan and regional stability. Pakistan uses these proxy forces to hedge against the loss of influence in Afghanistan and to counter India’s superior military. These relationships run counter to Pakistan’s public commitment to support Afghan-led reconciliation. Such groups continue to act as the primary irritant in Afghan-Pakistan bilateral relations.9

This report also questions Pakistan’s commitment to securing Afghanistan because of it self-interested objectives.

Pakistan also seeks sufficient Pashtun representation in the Afghan government to prevent Pashtun discontent along the Afghan-Pakistan border and limit India’s influence. Pakistan made some progress on interdicting and disrupting the production of IED components, but still falls short despite greater engagement

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9 p. 95-96
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and recent cooperation. A significant portion of the materials, which perpetuate the conflict, continue to emanate from or transit through Pakistan. Cross-border incidents and lingering mistrust remain points of tension in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Both countries continue to question each other’s commitment to advancing a political settlement in Afghanistan. The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan continues to pose a significant challenge to the stability of the region. During this reporting period, there have been several border incidents that have heightened tensions, to include; artillery shelling, Pakistani construction of trenches, the arrest of Pakistani nationals in Afghanistan, and increased rhetoric from national leaders on both sides.

Apart from its historical antipathy with Pakistan that has resulted in several wars, India has a history of using military force and flexing its economic and military muscle to compel the smaller neighbouring South Asian states around it to do its bidding. In 1987 the Indian Air Force penetrated Sri Lankan airspace by airlifting vital food items into the northern provinces that were under siege by the Sri Lankan forces operating against the Tamil militant groups. In 1988, India deployed a parachute battalion to put down a coup in the Maldives.10 Besides these overt actions, “noticeable overtones of hierarchy” in Indian dealings within the region especially in opposition to regional relationships with China, “excessive insistence upon Indian bilateralism,” “overbearing attitude of some Indian representatives” and “excessive insistence upon reciprocity” has made smaller South Asian countries in the region to regard India as an overbearing regional bully.11 But there is also contrary evidence to suggest that India has acted as a relatively magnanimous power within the region. In Operation Sukoon the Indian Navy evacuated 2,280 Indian, Sri Lankan and Nepalese civilians from Lebanon ahead of the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon War and in the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami the Indian Navy was employed

to evacuate casualties and provide emergency assistance in Maldives and Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{12} India has also been deeply engaged in the post conflict reconstruction in Sri Lanka by spearheading a construction project of 50,000 houses for the internally displaced persons (IDP’s) affected by the three decade long civil war.

Judging by this pattern, Indian foreign policy “appears to vacillate between appeasement and aggression.”\textsuperscript{13} This policy is a manifestation of what David Brewster refers to as the “Indian Monroe Doctrine” adopted from the time of independence that dictated that India would prevent the intervention of any external power in India’s immediate neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{14} The reason for such a strategy is possibly explained by Shivshankar Menon’s statement that India’s socio-economic development is contingent on a “peaceful and prosperous periphery.”\textsuperscript{15} The combination of carrots and sticks used by India in its dealings with its neighbours to achieve this “peaceful and prosperous periphery” could potentially support the assertion that India seeks to be more of a “consensual leader rather than a military or economic power intent on dominating neighbours.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Hegemonic Perceptions}

Much of India’s reputation as an emerging regional power could be primarily attributed to the growth of its economy. From the mid-1990s’ onwards, India’s economy

\textsuperscript{12} Ladwig III, 2010, \textit{op.cit.}


\textsuperscript{14} Brewster, David. 2010 “An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean”, \textit{Security Challenges}, Vol.6, No. 3 (Spring), p. 15.


\textsuperscript{16} Ray, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 407.
has expanded “nearly twenty fold” in US dollar terms as a result of an annual economic growth of more than seven percent annually since 1997.\(^\text{17}\) Considering India’s recent growth figures Goldman Sachs projected that in 30 years India’s economy could supersede all other economies apart from the United States and China. According to this report among BRIC countries, India is most likely to experience the fastest growth in the next few decades.\(^\text{18}\) Unlike most other Asian countries, India’s market share of service exports, which quadrupled from 1995 and 2010, drove economic growth.\(^\text{19}\)

India has transformed itself from a porcupine to a tiger.\(^\text{20}\) India’s economically dominant position within the South Asian region is reflected in it constituting eighty percent of the region’s GDP. This is particularly striking when compared to the ten percent of the region’s GDP that Pakistan accounts for, six percent that Bangladesh contributes, the two percent that Sri Lanka generates, and rest of the South Asian states account for the remaining two percent.\(^\text{21}\) This disproportionately large economy further strengthens the perception that India is a regional hegemonic power intent on dominating its neighbors.\(^\text{22}\)

**India’s growth and regional economic and military security**

Clearly the Indian economy has enabled India to play a more influential role in South Asia and allowed it to enhance its military capabilities. An IMF working paper


\(^{19}\) Ding, 2012 op.cit., p. 5.


exploring “India’s Growth Spillovers to South Asia” explains how since 1995, India’s growth has been instrumental in the growth of South Asia’s regional GDP especially as a result of India’s official financial flows in the region.\(^2\) Seventy percent of the budgetary grants provided to Bhutan are from India. Maldives owes nearly twenty percent of its outstanding debt to India. Afghanistan is one of India’s largest aid recipients. India has committed USD 650-750 million for development and health related projects in Afghanistan. For Bangladesh, India has extended a line of credit of billion dollars for certain eligible goods and services.\(^3\) All of these suggest that India’s economic power has indeed aided the economic stability of the surrounding South Asian states. This also indicates that India policymakers clearly believe that the stability in the region is required for India’s continued economic expansion.

Indian economic development has improved its military strength. From 2007 to 2011, India was the world’s largest arms importer. The Indian Navy intends to accumulate as many as 155 warships and plans are afoot to introduce three aircraft carriers and three nuclear powered submarines to patrol all three seas around the Indian subcontinent.\(^4\) Primary purpose of the Indian Navy is to deter any “external power” from asserting itself in the Indian Ocean, it will also provide India with the capacity to more effectively “police the global commons nearby, respond to humanitarian disasters and play a more responsible role in the region and beyond.”\(^5\) The Indian Navy played a

\(^2\) Ibid., p.8.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 9.
crucial role in aiding Sri Lanka and Maldives in the aftermath of the Asian Tsunami in 2004.^{27}

**Sino-Indian-Pakistani Border Issues**

Former Indian National Security Advisor, Shivshankar Menon, visited Beijing in December 2012 to hold talks on developing a framework to settle the boundary dispute relating to the territories of Aksai Chin (occupied by China) and the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh that is being gradually encroached upon by China. The 2005 round of talks produced an agreement on a set of “guiding principles for boundary settlement.”^{28} However, it seems unlikely that a final solution to the boundary dispute is likely to be reached anytime soon because of strong differences on the current status of border demarcation.^{29} The 1947-48 India-Pakistan war and the 1962 Sino-Indian war splintered Kashmir among the three contestants. Although India has displayed some signs that it would be willing to accept the Line of Control (LOC) as the de facto border, Pakistan has refused citing that the predominantly Muslim part of the Kashmir Valley would fall within India’s jurisdiction.^{30} India has since dismissed the possibility of holding a plebiscite to determine whether Kashmir should join India or Pakistan as initially endorsed by the United Nations in the late 1940s because India believes that the time for this has long disappeared and it is in no mood to compromise with Pakistan. Both India

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and Pakistan don’t favor an independent state of Kashmir for the fear that such aspirations would certainly produce a chain reaction leading to the Balkanization of several countries in South Asia. Kashmir is heavily militarized and the Indian armed forces have been permanently stationed to quell the insurgency aided by Pakistan. By one estimate, more than 60,000 people are estimated to have perished during the insurgency.\textsuperscript{31} Heavy shelling across the heavily militarized Line of Control has also added to the unyielding tenor of relationship. The leaking of the State Human Rights Commission’s report—\textit{The Enquiry Report of Unmarked Graves in North Kashmir}—claimed that thousands of bullet-ridden bodies were found buried in Kashmir has further alienated the Kashmiri residents from the idea of sustaining the union with India.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Conclusion}

American interest in the India-Pakistan regional security conflict is two-fold: the primary concern prevent the military escalation of the rivalry leading to a potential nuclear exchange, and (2) the secondary concern is in stabilizing the Af-Pak region so that it does not become a haven for global terrorism and regional instability. Both these concerns are shared by United States and India, but simultaneously both of them have other bilateral and multilateral concerns that feed into the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan security dynamics. Withdrawal of ISAF troops from the Af-Pak theater is ripe with implications for India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the overall regional dynamics with


China, and of course for the war on terrorism. How can the United States continue to deter terror attacks on U.S. interests and regional allies and thwart future terror attacks emanating from the Af-Pak region after it exits a highly critical theater of operations? The major concern for India is that Afghanistan might revert back to Taliban control, which would imply a greater strategic partnership with Pakistan and a return to the old ways. This outcome would not also bode well for the many of the neighboring Central Asian countries and for the restive western region of China.