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Summary

The advent of two nuclear powers in the region, discoveries of nuclear trafficking, and insurgencies and terrorism that threaten important U.S. interests and objectives directly have transformed South Asia into a primary theater of concern for the United States. The United States, to a great extent free of the restrictions of earlier sanction regimes and attentive to the region's central role in the global war on terrorism, has engaged the states of South Asia aggressively with a wide variety of policy initiatives. Despite the diversity of policy instruments, few are very powerful; indeed, only the U.S. military seems to offer many options for Washington to intensify further its security cooperation and influence in the region.

This monograph highlights key factors in the region that imperil U.S. interests and suggests how and where the U.S. military might play an expanded, influential role. The monograph notes that the current U.S. military force posture, disposition, and lines of command may not be optimal, given South Asia's new status in the U.S. strategic calculus, and suggests seven key steps the military might take to improve its ability to advance and defend U.S. interests, not only in South Asia, but beyond it, including the Middle East and Asia at large. The key steps include the following:

- **Consider South Asia's challenges as major transformation drivers.** The military requirements necessary to manage trouble arising from the region should be treated as important design points for the transformation of U.S. military forces (p. 83).

- **Modify the Unified Command Plan.** Currently, the Unified Command Plan (UCP) divides South Asia, part of it lying within U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), and the rest within U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM). The Department of Defense should consider creating a new combatant command for South Asia, assigning the region to either USCENTCOM or USPACOM, or enhancing coordination between the two existing commands (p. 84).
- **Fund intensified U.S. security cooperation in South Asia.** Initiatives such as the U.S.-India Defense Policy Group and the U.S.-Pakistan Defense Consultative Group offer the best chances for enhanced U.S. leverage with their governments, but only if adequately financed. Military exercise series such as COPE INDIA and BALANCE IROQUOIS offer the potential for enhanced political-military influence with participating states, but only if these activities can be sustained in the face of a demanding personnel and operations tempo in other areas (p. 84).
- **Reconsider contingency plans for South Asia.** The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff, and theater planners should reconsider the various U.S. military actions that might be desirable under the variety of crises and noncrisis circumstances the future may hold and craft contingency plans to address them. Counterterrorism, counterproliferation contingencies, and weapons of mass destruction contingencies merit special attention in terms of the likely time demands on U.S. responses and the number, type, and size of U.S. forces necessary for successful operations (pp. 84–85).
- **Intensify intelligence production on the region.** Intelligence production should anticipate the need to support a wide range of military activities and contingencies. In a part of their efforts to improve their situational awareness within South Asia and to enrich their understanding of potentially important clan, tribal, and other social phenomena in the area, the military services should expand their foreign area officer expertise in the region, especially through language training (p. 85).

- **Review special operations forces requirements for the region.** In creating a new unified command for the region, the services should consider creating a new Special Operations Forces (SOF) component command to enhance U.S. capabilities for these and similar contingencies. Again, the driver is the salience of SOF for counterinsurgency operations, counterterrorism operations, and direct action against future nuclear trafficking. An enhanced SOF presence could also be part of developing a richer understanding of the region, as well as military contacts that might prove influential in future crises (p. 85).
- **Further develop power projection capabilities into the region.** Terrorist movements and nuclear trafficking may present only fleeting targets, yet a permanent U.S. military presence would be unwelcome for many of the states in the region. Thus, the United States should develop its basing infrastructure on the periphery of the region where it can develop and refine its power projection capabilities to allow it to enter the region quickly, act, and loiter or retire as necessary in response to fast-breaking events. The United States might, in particular, consider selectively expanding its basing infrastructure in Afghanistan to support power projection operations and scheduling longer-duration cruises for carrier battle groups in the Indian Ocean (p. 85–86).

Beyond the specifics, however, the broader message arising from this analysis is straightforward: The region's salience for U.S. policy interests has increased dramatically. It is therefore prudent to intensify Washington's involvement in the region and to devote the resources necessary to become more influential with the governments within the region. Given the area's potential for violence, it is also prudent to shape a part of the U.S. military to meet the potential crises emanating from South Asia, just as the United States once shaped its military presence in Western Europe for the contingencies of the Cold War (pp. 83–86).