
THE CHANGING POLITICAL-MILITARY
ENVIRONMENT: SOUTH ASIA

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The security environment in South Asia has remained relatively unsettled since the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests of May 1998. The Indian government's efforts to publicly emphasize the challenges China posed in the weeks leading up to those tests—after more than a decade of mostly *sotto voce* complaints—served to rupture the ordinarily glacial process of normalizing Sino-Indian relations. This process always possessed a certain fragility in that the gradually decreasing tensions along the Sino-Indian border did not automatically translate into increased trust between Beijing and New Delhi. Even as both sides sought to derive tactical advantages from the confidence-building measures they had negotiated since 1993—for example, the drawdown of forces along the utterly inhospitable LAC in the Himalayas—each ended up pursuing larger grand strategies that effectively undercut the other's interests. Beijing, for example, persisted in covertly assisting the nuclear and missile programs of India's local competitor, Pakistan, while New Delhi sought in response to develop an intermediate-range ballistic missile whose comparative utility lay primarily in targeting China.

The repeated identification of China as a threat to Indian interests by both Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders and other influential Indian elites in the first half of 1998 not only underscored the fragile nature of the Sino-Indian rapprochement but also ruptured the carefully maintained façade of improving relations between the two coun-

tries.¹ When this public finger pointing ultimately gave way to India's resumption of nuclear testing on May 11, 1998 (an event accompanied by the Indian prime minister's explicit claim that those tests were driven by the hostile actions of India's northern neighbor over the years), security competition in South Asia—which usually appears, at least in popular perceptions, as merely a bilateral affair between India and Pakistan—finally revealed itself as the “regional strategic triangle”² it has always been.

This appendix analyzes Indian and Pakistani attitudes toward China in the context of the triangular security competition in South Asia. Taking the 1998 nuclear tests as its point of departure, it assesses how China figures in the grand strategies of the two principal states in the Indian subcontinent and identifies the principal regional geopolitical contingencies for which the United States should prepare over the next decade. Finally, it briefly analyzes the kinds of opportunities the region offers to the USAF as it engages, even as it prepares to hedge against, a rising China.

NUCLEAR TESTING AND THE TRIANGULAR SECURITY COMPETITION IN SOUTH ASIA

Impact of the Nuclear Tests on Sino-Indian Relations

Although Pakistan was directly affected by the Indian nuclear tests, these tests engaged Chinese security interests as well. To begin with, India's decision to resume testing made manifest New Delhi's resentment toward Beijing for its almost two-decade-long assistance to Islamabad's nuclear and missile programs. India's official claim that its resumption of nuclear testing was precipitated at least in part by various Chinese actions (such as the transfer of nuclear weapon designs, short-range ballistic missiles, and assorted technologies intended to enable Islamabad to produce strategic systems indigenously) was meant to signal the fact that India was capable of

¹These early 1998 events have been summarized in Manoj Joshi, “George in the China Shop,” *India Today*, May 18, 1998, pp. 10–16.

²For a good discussion, see Brahma Chellaney, “The Regional Strategic Triangle,” in Brahma Chellaney (ed.), *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999, pp. 313–336.

defending its own security interests—if necessary through unilateral solutions—and that improvement in some aspects of Sino-Indian bilateral relations could not be sustained if it came at the expense of undercutting the core objective of preserving India's safety, integrity, and primacy in South Asia.³

Further, the decision to test and the affirmation that India would develop a nuclear deterrent implied that New Delhi would at some point seek to target China with nuclear weapons. This effort at replacing abject vulnerability with mutual vulnerability—no matter how asymmetrical it might be—suggested that Indian policymakers were unprepared to hang their hopes solely on the peacefulness of Chinese intentions, especially over the long term, given that Beijing's power is expected to grow even further and the relative differential in its strategic capabilities vis-à-vis New Delhi is likely to become even more manifest. India's decision to develop a nuclear deterrent thus suggests that India seeks at a minimum to possess the kinds of deterrent capabilities that will immunize it against possible Chinese nuclear blackmail in the event of a crisis.⁴

Finally, India's decision to resume nuclear testing has also been complemented by an effort to modernize the Indian military—an effort that has encompassed upgrading India's conventional forces, including those elements tasked with defending the mountainous border areas facing both Pakistan and China. This modernization, which slowed down during the 1990s for financial reasons, is likely to gather momentum during the coming decade as Indian security managers increasingly recognize that, irrespective of what happens in the realm of diplomatic relations, maintaining robust conventional capabilities remains not only the best insurance against deterrence breakdown but also a vital precondition for making good on India's public pledge never to use nuclear weapons first.⁵

³This theme is emphasized in J. Mohan Malik, "India Goes Nuclear: Rationale, Benefits, Costs and Implications," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 2, August 1998, pp. 191–215.

⁴The critical importance of deterring blackmail in Indian calculations is highlighted in Jasjit Singh, "Why Nuclear Weapons?" in Jasjit Singh (ed.), *Nuclear India*, New Delhi: Knowledge World, 1998, pp. 9–25.

⁵For more on this calculus, see Tellis (2001).

The Sino-Indian Balance

India's recent decision to conduct nuclear tests, to develop a nuclear deterrent, and to accelerate the oft-postponed modernization of its conventional forces has often engendered the conclusion that New Delhi now views Beijing as a "clear and present danger" to its security. In point of fact, this is not the case. To be sure, the Indian capital would appear to be heavily populated by individuals, think tanks, and associations who vociferously assert the imminence of the Chinese threat. These claims are usually based either on Western revelations about Beijing's assistance to Islamabad's nuclear and missile programs and its murky activities in Burma or, alternatively, on distant fears such as the prospect of a rapidly growing China "returning" to complete its agenda of "national reunification" at a time when it will have dramatically surpassed India in most of the relevant categories of national power.⁶ These challenges, however—while acknowledged both by elected Indian officials and by the higher bureaucracy in New Delhi—have not produced the kinds of reactions Indian commentators have often expected because, put simply, India's state managers have a much better grasp of the Sino-Indian power balance than many analysts give them credit for.

For more than a decade, Indian policymakers have in general pursued a subtle policy toward Beijing. Although the forceful statements of several Indian leaders in the months surrounding the nuclear tests were exceptions to this rule, more recent Indian initiatives vis-à-vis China—including the June 1999 visit of Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh to Beijing—suggest that India's China policy has slowly swung back from the extreme of polemical criticism to a much more centrist effort at realistically managing the complexity and tensions inherent in the Sino-Indian relationship.⁷

The logic of this effort can best be appreciated in the context of understanding the perceptions of senior Indian security managers with

⁶These concerns are summarized in Amitabh Mattoo, "Complacency About Chinese Threat Called Frightening," *India Abroad*, April 5, 1996.

⁷A good description of the complexity of Sino-Indian relations can be found in Surjit Mansingh, "Sino-Indian Relations in the Post-Cold War Era," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 3, March 1994, pp. 285–300.

respect to China.⁸ All official Indian assessments of China are grounded in the recognition that while China is certainly a great power located on India's borders, it is by no means a "hegemonic" power in the international system. This means that Chinese capabilities, while significant and often superior to India's in many areas, are still regarded as insufficient to the task of bestowing on Beijing the kind of preeminence in global decisionmaking that would force India to acquiesce to Chinese preferences and actions when they undercut India's interests.

Indian policymakers certainly recognize that China is a rapidly growing economic entity, but they still see Chinese national power—on balance—as hobbled by significant domestic and external constraints. This rather sober assessment of Chinese strength is colored first by continuing uncertainty over whether China can sustain its high growth rates of the past two decades and second by the recognition that even if these growth rates were sustained, siphoning off resources for power-political purposes is unlikely to be either easy or effortless given the vast domestic development demands Beijing will have to service before it can lay claim to a managerial role at the core of the global system.⁹

These twin considerations led New Delhi to conclude that, while China may well be superior to India in power-political terms, India is by no means an "easy mark." Rather, the relative difference in power capabilities between India and China—being much less than, say, those between China and many of the smaller states along its southern periphery—provides New Delhi with a large margin within which to maneuver, thereby enabling India to respond to the growth of Chinese power with much more equanimity than is sometimes presumed justified by observers both inside and outside the country.

In fact, it is often inadequately recognized that, as far as basic security is concerned, India is actually relatively well-off vis-à-vis

⁸I am deeply grateful to several senior officials in the Indian Ministries of External Affairs and Defence, the Prime Minister's Office, and the headquarters of the three Indian armed services for their insights on this issue.

⁹The premises beneath this conclusion are summarized in *India: Analyst Skeptical of PRC Becoming Superpower*, FBIS-NES-97-210, July 29, 1997.

China.¹⁰ The Himalayan mountain ranges that divide the two countries, for example, provide a natural defensive shield against any easy Chinese aggression, and these benefits of nature have only been reinforced by Indian artifice since the disastrous border war of 1962. Today, India's conventional forces enjoy a comfortable superiority over their Chinese counterparts in the Himalayan theater; the Indian Army has superior firepower, better-trained soldiers, carefully prepared defenses, and more reliable logistics. Similarly, the Indian Air Force has better aircraft, superior pilots, and excellent infrastructure and would most likely gain tactical superiority over the battlefield within a matter of days if not hours in the event of renewed Sino-Indian hostilities. And, while the Indian Navy is not directly relevant to any Himalayan border conflict, the fact remains that it is superior to the Chinese Navy in technology, training, and war-fighting proficiency and would have little difficulty enforcing effective surface and subsurface barrier control should any Chinese naval units seek to break out into and operate within the Andaman Sea. Only in the realm of nuclear capabilities does China currently have an overwhelming, uncontested superiority over India. Here again, however, this superiority is attenuated by two simple realities: First, the political disputes between China and India are too small to warrant any recourse to nuclear weaponry on either side; and second, the development of India's own nuclear deterrent over time will provide New Delhi with a modest means of deterring all but the most extreme Chinese threats.

All things considered, therefore, India's relative economic weakness vis-à-vis China does not by any means place it in a hopeless strategic situation as far as its northern rival is concerned. There is, in fact, a good chance that India could do as well as China economically so long as New Delhi stays the course with respect to the economic liberalization program it began in 1991. If this program continues, India could sustain average GNP growth rates in excess of 6 percent per annum over the next two decades and, moreover, could sustain such growth through the enlargement of its internal market alone. In-

¹⁰This discussion is based on Ashley J. Tellis, Chung Min Lee, James Mulvenon, Courtney Purrington, and Michael D. Swaine, "Sources of Conflict in Asia," in Zalmay Khalilzad and Ian O. Lesser (eds.), *Sources of Conflict in the 21st Century: Regional Futures and U.S. Strategy*, Santa Monica: RAND, MR-897-AF, 1998, pp. 157-158.

deed, by many key measures—such as savings rates, population composition, the durability and effectiveness of its institutions, and investments in key technologies—India’s performance already compares favorably with that of China even if it does not always surpass its rival.¹¹

Indian Policy Toward China

Given these considerations, Indian policymakers view the growth of Chinese power as a phenomenon that, while necessitating careful monitoring, need not warrant any panic. Since the uninterrupted growth of Chinese capabilities is by no means assured, policymakers do not believe that drastic changes are warranted in India’s own grand strategy—a strategy that has focused consciously on the steady and autonomous acquisition of great-power capabilities ever since the country’s independence in 1947. This autonomous quest for great-power capabilities traditionally manifested itself in two forms: in an economic policy that focused on autarkic industrialization carried out by a huge state-managed economy, and in a foreign policy centering on “nonalignment” that sought to steer clear of all competing alliances throughout the Cold War.

The autarkic, state-managed domestic economic policy has slowly given way to a more liberal economic order, since it is now widely acknowledged that state control only impedes growth and restrains innovation. To that degree, India’s traditional grand strategy has thus changed.¹² Yet the desire to pursue an autonomous course in international politics remains the bedrock of New Delhi’s grand strategy, based as it is on the belief that a country of India’s size, heritage, power, and overall potential cannot flourish as an appendage of any ideological or power bloc. Although the demise of the bipolar order implies that the specific circumstances which gave rise to nonalignment have long disappeared, the intrinsic logic of pursuing

¹¹For a good comparative analysis of Indian and Chinese economic performance, see Amartya Sen, *Economic Development and Social Change: India and China in Comparative Perspectives*, London: London School of Economics, STICERD Discussion Paper Series DEP-67, 1995; and A. S. Bhalla, *Uneven Development in the Third World: A Study of China and India*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995.

¹²For further discussion, see Ashley J. Tellis, “South Asia,” in Zalmay Khalilzad (ed.), *Strategic Appraisal 1996*, Santa Monica: RAND, MR-543-AF, 1996, pp. 283–307.

an independent foreign policy—at least to the degree that one can do so within the constraints of a capabilities-driven global power-political system—remains in place in New Delhi. Thus, even in the present unipolar order, New Delhi intends neither to ally itself permanently with the United States nor to permanently oppose it. Instead, it envisages creating the requisite political space within which its national capabilities can increase and its stature can be universally recognized. To the degree that creating this space—wherein India can flourish in the safety that enables it to develop, maintain, and prosper—requires coordination with Washington, New Delhi is prepared to countenance and, indeed, even pursue such coordination even as it continuously affirms its right to choose a course of action that may deviate from U.S. preferences, especially on issues perceived to be central to India's quest for greater security, standing, and autonomy.¹³

The implications of this grand strategic preference for autonomy are profound, especially where coping with China is concerned. Put simply, India would prefer to deal even with a powerful China independently—that is, without becoming part of any formal multinational balancing coalition that may arise as a result of the enlargement of Chinese power. Toward that end, India has sought to pursue a subtle, multidimensional strategy vis-à-vis China that has several different and sometimes competing components.

First, India has sought to avoid picking fights with China—be those fights rhetorical, political, or military—to the maximum degree possible.¹⁴ Consistent with this goal, New Delhi has negotiated a variety of confidence-building measures with Beijing: It has persisted in negotiations relating to the Sino-Indian border dispute even in the face of sluggish progress resulting from Chinese prevarication; it has accepted, in accordance with Chinese preferences, the principle that intractable issues be put on the back burner so that they do not be-

¹³The critical importance of the desire for autonomy in Indian grand strategy is explored in detail in Kanti Bajpai, "India: Modified Structuralism," in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Practice, Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 157–197.

¹⁴For a good survey see Sujit Dutta, "Sino-Indian Diplomatic Negotiations: A Preliminary Assessment," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 22, No. 12, March 1999, pp. 1821–1834.

come impediments to improving relations; and it has attempted to assuage core Chinese concerns on important sovereignty disputes over Taiwan and Tibet essentially by accepting Beijing's claims on these issues even as it has sustained a tacit dialogue with the Taiwanese and provided asylum to thousands of Tibetan refugees. Even on issues that directly threaten India's security—such as the transfer of Chinese nuclear and missile technology to Pakistan and the Chinese targeting of India with nuclear weapons—Indian policymakers have traditionally been reticent to challenge Chinese actions publicly. Instead, they have responded either by politely complaining to the United States or by obliquely articulating objections to various Chinese counterparts during bilateral meetings.

Second, India has sought to improve relations with China in those issue areas where rapid improvement is possible. The most critical area of convergence is economic relations, particularly in the realm of cross-border trade.¹⁵ India has made concerted efforts to increase the volume and composition of its trade with Beijing and has sought to enlarge the number of border outposts through which local, cross-Himalayan trade is conducted. Outside of trade issues, however, Chinese and Indian interests also converge with respect to the fight against terrorism; the threat of Islamic fundamentalism; Western pressures for human rights; fears of American intervention in sensitive domestic political questions; and a gamut of international problems such as the environment, intellectual property rights, and restrictive technology control regimes. Although India has not gone out of its way to seek or express solidarity with Chinese positions on these issues, Indian policymakers clearly recognize that the potential exists for convergent political action on many of these questions—and hence they have been careful not to foreclose any possibilities related to coordinated action should they become necessary in the future.

Third, even as India has sought to minimize the potential for discord with China, it has attempted to protect itself against the worst possible outcomes should Sino-Indian relations truly deteriorate. India's

¹⁵“Indo-China Border Trade: Trading on Top of the World,” *India Today*, Vol. 17, No. 18, September 30, 1992, p. 64; Raman A. Thothathri, “Indo-Chinese Trade: A Change for the Better,” *Business India*, No. 399, June 21, 1993, p. 34; and “Hindi-Chini Buy,” *Business India*, No. 490, December 16, 1996, p. 77.

decision to test its nuclear capabilities and develop a modest deterrent offers the best example of such an insurance policy. Other examples include India's determination to continue its long-postponed conventional force modernization either through domestic production or foreign acquisition and to pursue a variety of research-and-development efforts in the realm of traditional strategic technologies as well as in leading-edge areas such as information technology, biotechnology, aviation, and advanced materials and manufacturing. The pursuit of these insurance policies suggests that, while New Delhi seeks to improve relations with Beijing, it is by no means blind to the ways in which Chinese power could undercut its interests. Therefore, a continued commitment to maintaining India's defensive capabilities, primarily through domesticating the best military technologies available to India on the international market, remains at the heart of Indian security policy.¹⁶

Fourth, the prospect of having to cope with a powerful China in the future has stimulated India to revitalize its relations with all the peripheral Asian states. Indeed, Southeast Asia and East Asia—long neglected by Indian diplomacy—now form the core of India's extraregional economic and political outreach, leading one prominent Western analyst to conclude that India's efforts at joining regional organizations like ARF and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) implicitly suggests a new "look East"¹⁷ thrust in its overall grand strategy. This effort to reach out to other states that may one day feel threatened by Chinese actions represents an ingenious attempt on India's part to add its geopolitical weight to the evolving regional balance of power without in any way compromising its long-cherished desire to maintain its freedom of action. Even as it has reached out to the Asian rimlands in this way, however, India has managed to salvage its previously disrupted military supply relationship with Russia while forging significant new relations with second-tier suppliers such as France and Israel and continuing to make

¹⁶For a good survey of some of these issues, see Kapil Kak, "India's Conventional Defence: Problems and Prospects," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 22, No. 11, February 1999, pp. 1639–1665.

¹⁷V. Jayanthi, "India's 'Look East' Policy," *The Hindu*, April 2, 1998. For a systematic analysis of this policy shift, see Sandy Gordon, *India's Rise to Power*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, pp. 290–317.

gradual improvements in its relations with the most important power in the international system, the United States.

All in all, this subtle and multifaceted strategy of engaging China even as it hedges against the worst consequences of emerging Chinese power implies that New Delhi believes that *the future of Sino-Indian relations is much more open-ended than most commentators usually assert*. Predictions that Sino-Indian relations are doomed to antagonism, strife and rivalry—often derived from simple “billiard-ball” models of competitive international politics—are viewed by Indian policymakers as premature at best. This is mainly because policymakers recognize that both China and India are still subordinate states in the international system and that whether Sino-Indian relations turn out to be malignantly rivalrous hinges largely on the future intentions, capabilities, and actions of many other actors, including the United States. Thus, even as they remain conscious of growing Chinese power, Indian state managers continue to seek as best they can to avoid getting locked into a relationship with China that is destined to be contentious. They believe that the best antidote to the persistently competitive and even threatening dimensions of Chinese power lies in *the complete and permanent revitalization of the Indian economy*—an arena in which the United States is seen to play a special role.

Although economic contributions in the form of increased American investments, trade, and technology transfers are important, the value of the United States to Indian grand strategy is not merely economic but also political in that it is fundamentally related to the manner in which India seeks to promote its own future as a great power. Because this is the only solution that enables India to manage the rise of China without compromising its own desire for geopolitical independence, the thrust of its engagement efforts vis-à-vis the United States centers on efforts to persuade the latter to accept New Delhi’s independent foreign policy and India’s own emergence as a regional hegemon as ultimately beneficial to American global interests. Toward that end, New Delhi has attempted to persuade Washington to:

- loosen the restrictive technology control regimes the United States manages so that India can enjoy greater access to sophisticated civilian, dual-use, and military technologies;

- recognize India as a great power both regionally and globally so as to allow New Delhi to secure all the benefits in capabilities, prestige, and status that would enable it to contain Pakistan's repeated challenges and deal with Beijing on an equal footing; and
- increase Indian access to the best American military technology, weapon systems, and doctrine and training so as to enable India's military-industrial complex and armed forces to further improve both through selective technology and weapons acquisitions and through greater military-to-military cooperation.

The pursuit of these objectives implies in turn that Indian security managers believe that *the best insurance against assertive Chinese power lies not in participating in any evolving anti-China alliance but rather in emerging as a strong and independent power center on China's periphery*. To the degree that the United States can help India do so, New Delhi would be able to immunize itself against the worst Chinese threats imaginable without suffering any diminution in its own cherished desire for autonomy. In pursuit of this aim, India has also sought—albeit with varying degrees of success—to deepen the quality of its engagement with other critical regional actors, including Russia, Japan, and the smaller countries of Southeast Asia.

In any case, Indian policymakers are convinced that the challenges of guaranteeing Indian security, status, and autonomy require that the country play an active and responsible role abroad even as it continues to dismantle the burdensome vestiges of *étatisme* at home. Where dealing with China is concerned, this does not require any significant shift in India's traditional preference for nonalignment and certainly does not require moving in the direction of fostering or supporting any regional anti-Chinese coalition to contain Beijing right now. In fact, even if growing fears of Chinese assertiveness were to provoke such a coalition in the future, New Delhi's intuitive preference would be to assert its strategic independence even more forcefully. Short of the most extreme threats to its security and independence, India would prefer to deal with Beijing independently, from a position of strength.

All this implies that, while future Sino-Indian relations may be competitive, they need not necessarily be antagonistic in the way that U.S.-Soviet relations were during the Cold War or Indo-Pakistani re-

lations have remained throughout most of the postindependence period. Indeed, most of the actions India is likely to take in its pursuit of great-power capabilities—economic and technological modernization—are guided by a logic that transcends concerns about China even though they will, if successful, affect the Sino-Indian power balance over the long term. And even in those areas where Indian actions are motivated by concerns about China—e.g., conventional force improvements and nuclear modernization—the consequences of New Delhi's choices are likely to be less burdensome to Beijing than is often imagined. Indian conventional modernization will only reinforce, not change, the existing status quo—New Delhi's conventional superiority in the theater. There is no reason Beijing would view the consolidation of this existing reality as suddenly threatening to its security interests given the fact that, even if India allocates substantial resources to upgrading its military capabilities along the Himalayan border, it will still be unable to alter the predominantly defense-dominant orientation of its current posture.

Even where New Delhi's nuclear modernization is concerned, there is good reason for optimism with respect to the arms-race stability of the Sino-Indian strategic balance. This is because China already possesses a substantial nuclear arsenal (at least in relation to India) and is already capable of inflicting unacceptable punishment on New Delhi if it so chooses without any fear for the survivability of its own nuclear forces. Indian nuclear efforts over the next few decades will thus be oriented primarily toward playing catch-up. India will acquire the capabilities to hold at risk major Chinese population centers and some military targets, but it will still be weaker than China in terms of the overall nuclear balance and will remain unable to threaten the elimination of China's nuclear forces in a way that might lead to first-strike instability. The Sino-Indian nuclear interaction is thus unlikely to be violently unstable, as India will probably develop only a relatively small and mostly land-based deterrent force that will nonetheless be immune to a disarming strike by virtue of its mobility, sheer opacity, and covertness. Because the development and deployment of these capabilities will not take place simultaneously or interactively—as seems to be the case in Indo-Pakistani interactions—and because both India and China are large land powers with less asymmetry in their power relations (compared, once

again, to the Indo-Pakistani case), the worst effects of a future Sino-Indian nuclear competition can arguably be eluded.

Impact of the Nuclear Tests on Pakistani-Indian Relations

The resumption of nuclear testing by India challenged Pakistan to demonstrate its nuclear capabilities even though such an action, as was clearly understood in both New Delhi and Islamabad, would be disproportionately harmful to Pakistan's well-being. New Delhi's nuclear tests thus appeared to be part of a "competitive strategy": Although intended primarily to validate India's own nuclear weapon designs from both a technical and a political perspective, they nonetheless served to ensnare Pakistan in a dilemma. If Pakistan declined to test its own weaponry, the credibility of its covert capabilities would always be suspect both in India's eyes and in the eyes of its own populace (not to mention its other target audiences, such as the Islamic world and the assorted insurgents in Kashmir who draw solace and support from Pakistan's ability to sustain them in their war with India). By contrast, if Pakistan followed New Delhi's example and proceeded with testing, it could demonstrate its nuclear capabilities, but only at the expense of making itself vulnerable to various international sanctions that, by virtue of Islamabad's precarious domestic circumstances, would hurt Pakistan more than they would India.¹⁸

If India gained relative to Pakistan in the short run, however, the same judgment would not necessarily apply to the longer-term Indo-Pakistani security competition, which could well be far more troublesome than its Sino-Indian counterpart. India's decision to test its nuclear weapons in May 1998 not only provoked a Pakistani decision to follow suit but, more problematically, appears to have accelerated Islamabad's efforts at weaponization: Pakistan's decision to declare itself a nuclear power has provided its scientific community with the latitude to pursue their developmental efforts far more vigorously than might have been the case when their weapon program was for-

¹⁸For more on the pressures that compelled Pakistan to test, see Samina Ahmed, "The (Nuclear) Testing of Pakistan," *Current History*, Vol. 97, No. 623, December 1998, pp. 407-411.

mally nonexistent and their understanding of Indian capabilities largely unclear.

After the nuclear tests of May 1998, India's repeated claims about its technical capabilities, although made primarily for domestic political reasons, have had the undesirable effect of disconcerting Pakistan's strategic managers. The Indian scientific community's assertions that India could now confidently produce simple-fission, boosted-fission, thermonuclear, and enhanced radiation weapons may not be convincing in all their details but have nonetheless had the effect of spurring Pakistan's weaponization efforts and reinforcing Islamabad's fears of its own vulnerability. The draft Indian nuclear doctrine released by the National Security Advisory Board seems only to have magnified these Pakistani fears. At the very least, therefore, the Indian subcontinent is now faced with the prospect that Islamabad, believing itself to lag behind New Delhi in terms of its strategic capabilities, could finally end up with a larger and more diversified nuclear arsenal than is really necessary for its security.

This situation also holds the potential to engender greater instability at other levels. On the one hand, for example, Islamabad could become emboldened to pursue even riskier strategies vis-à-vis New Delhi were it suddenly to discover that its nuclear capabilities are far more effective than it gave itself credit for. On the other hand, New Delhi could be provoked into a substantial acceleration of its own weaponization efforts were it suddenly to discover that Pakistan's strategic capabilities were far more sophisticated than was previously believed. The former outcome would ensure that the "ugly stability"¹⁹ currently prevailing in South Asia would be replaced by even uglier versions of the same, whereas the latter outcome could provoke a destabilizing arms race that would undermine the interest both sides currently express in deploying relatively small and finite nuclear deterrents.

Whether a destabilizing arms race would actually materialize is, however, hard to say, because Indian state managers appear at least at the moment to be unconcerned about Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. Convinced of their own superior nuclear prowess as well as

¹⁹Both the logic and the structure of "ugly stability" are detailed in Ashley J. Tellis, *Stability in South Asia*, Santa Monica: RAND, DB-185-A, 1997, pp. 30-33.

Pakistan's stark geophysical vulnerability (which its acquisition of more sophisticated strategic capabilities will not change), Indian policymakers have shown no sign of accelerating their own strategic development efforts. To the contrary, these efforts appear to be proceeding at roughly the same pace that has characterized all past activity relating to Indian strategic development programs. Despite substantial increases in the nuclear, space, and defense research and development budgets since the May 1998 tests, it is therefore hard to uncover any evidence that India has embarked on a "crash" program to expand its nuclear capabilities in particular and its strategic development programs in general.

The Future Course of Pakistani Policy Toward India

If there is reason for optimism about avoiding a high-octane nuclear arms race in South Asia, the evidence thus far does not support any expectation that Pakistan's risk-taking propensities are likely to be reduced as a result of the new nuclear capabilities demonstrated by both subcontinental states. Pakistan's willingness to continue baiting India is rooted in structural constraints that are ultimately personified by two simple realities. First, Pakistan remains the "anti-status quo"²⁰ state in South Asia. This phrase is not meant to convey any normative stance but is merely a description of Pakistan's circumstances: Islamabad today is not satisfied with the existing territorial order primarily because of its long-standing claims to the former princely kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir, significant portions of which are currently governed by India. Second, Pakistan is not only weaker than India but probably growing weaker in absolute terms as well. This implies that Islamabad simply lacks the resources to secure its claims over Jammu and Kashmir by force. The military solution has in fact been tried on several occasions in the past and has in all instances been unsuccessful.

The interaction of these two realities leaves Pakistan in an unenviable situation—one in which it lacks the power to resolve the dispute it feels most passionately about. Moreover, India—the stronger entity—has not only gained all the benefits that accrue from long and

²⁰Neil Joeck, "Pakistani Security and Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4, December 1985, p. 80.

established control over the area most desired by Islamabad but can sustain its political control over Jammu and Kashmir indefinitely at minimal cost to its body politic. Consequently, India does not feel compelled either to change its current stance with respect to the disputed state or to enter into any negotiations with those entities committed to altering the status quo through violence.

Confronted with such a situation, Pakistan is left with only three choices:

- to negotiate with India on what will essentially be Indian terms;
- to attempt to inveigle the international community into resolving the Kashmir issue on behalf of Islamabad; or
- to conduct a low-intensity war with India in the hope of wearing down the latter and forcing it to negotiate a settlement that offers some advantages to Pakistan.

None of these individual alternatives would appear to be satisfactory.

Islamabad has never consistently pursued the alternative of negotiating with India because it has long concluded that the latter has never exhibited a sincere commitment to resolving the Kashmir issue through negotiations.²¹ Thus, while both Islamabad and New Delhi have conducted several episodic discussions over the years, all these parleys have essentially deadlocked on the issue of Kashmir because both sides have been unable to move much beyond their opening gambits. Pakistan's demand for the implementation of a plebiscite in Kashmir, for example—as mandated by the U.N. resolutions of 1948—is usually met squarely by New Delhi's claim that the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to the Indian Union is effectively nonnegotiable. While India appears to be prepared to negotiate a settlement that would more or less legitimize the current realities "on the ground," Pakistan's desire to reopen the issue of Kashmir *de novo* is dismissed as an unreal exercise that is not worth any investment of New Delhi's time, energy, and resources.

²¹See, for example, the remarks of Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar in "India Not Interested in Talks: Sattar," *Dawn*, February 4, 2000.

The second alternative—inveigling the international community into pressing India to negotiate the Kashmir issue—has not worked satisfactorily either, as most of the great powers have failed to demonstrate any serious interest in enforcing the existing U.N. resolutions on Kashmir given that the issue has been far removed from their vital interests. Moreover, the great powers' abiding respect for India's greater geopolitical weight, the lack of clarity about the equities of the issue after several decades of complicated regional developments, and Pakistan's own relatively poor standing in international politics have combined to make the Kashmir problem the orphan of international causes. Pakistan's early efforts at resolving the Kashmir problem by invoking U.S. assistance through the Cold War alliance system also failed conclusively, and today even Pakistan's closest ally, China, has moved a great distance away from Islamabad's position on Kashmir.

The third alternative—distracting India and possibly wearing it down through the support of low-intensity conflict—thus remains Islamabad's best hope for leveling the scales with New Delhi and bringing the latter back to the negotiating table. In the past, this alternative of "strategic diversion" was not available to Pakistan in that, Islamabad's claims notwithstanding, the Kashmiri population did not aspire to integration with Pakistan for most of the postindependence period. The popular uprising in 1989, however, reinvigorated Pakistan's commitment to changing the status quo in Kashmir as a substantial portion of the state's Muslim population appeared willing—arguably for the first time since 1947—to pursue the same goal.²² It is important to recognize, however, that the Kashmiris are by no means universally desirous of joining Pakistan; although some of the more fervent Islamic groups would prefer to integrate the state with Pakistan, most would opt instead for some vague and undefined version of independence (*azadi*). In any case, Pakistan's longstanding claims on the territory, once combined with new opportunities presented by Kashmiri resentment against Indian misrule after 1989, led Pakistan to attempt to make the Himalayan king-

²²For details, see Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997.

dom the newest locale for enervating Indian strength through low-intensity war, since the other alternatives—negotiations and international intervention—had both resoundingly failed thus far.

These structural conditions thus ensure that Pakistan's formal anti-status quo orientation will episodically manifest itself in a variety of efforts aimed at weakening what it perceives to be its great threat: an asymmetrically stronger India. In the early postindependence years, these efforts focused solely on recovering disputed territories such as Kashmir. After Pakistan's humiliating defeat in 1971, however, it has often appeared as if enfeebling India has become an objective that Pakistan views as worthy of pursuit for its own sake. Irrespective of what the motivations are, these efforts tend to challenge India's grand strategic objective—maintaining a stable multiethnic state with claims to greatness—and consequently guarantee that security competition between India and Pakistan will remain a fact of life well into the future even if it is expressed only through subconventional violence.

Transforming this “ugly stability” will require, at the very least, an acceptance on Pakistan's part that the status quo in Kashmir is unlikely to change significantly no matter what means are brought into play.²³ This in turn implies that both Pakistan and India would have to commit themselves to a comprehensive dialogue that would take place despite the *ex ante* impossibility of any significant transformation in the current political and territorial configuration in Kashmir. If such a dialogue is successful, a variety of alterations in the current arrangements might occur *ex post*, but the demand for radical alterations could not become either a precondition or a presumption were New Delhi to be expected to engage in serious discussions with Islamabad on Kashmir.

²³Alternatively, it would require that India recognize that its current strategy in Kashmir has reached the limits of its success and therefore requires some negotiations with Pakistan that would eventually result in significant changes to the status quo. Since this possibility is highly unlikely given India's current stand and its continued willingness (and ability) to expend resources in maintaining the status quo, the only alternative left remains a change in the current Pakistani strategy of distracting India.

There is no evidence, however, that Pakistan is willing to engage in a serious dialogue with India under such conditions.²⁴ In fact, Pakistan's behavior since the 1998 nuclear tests suggests that Islamabad is quite willing to exploit its newly demonstrated nuclear capabilities for the strategic cover they provide in its challenges to India. The misadventure at Kargil remains a case in point. Even if other limited wars are avoided in the future, the fact that Pakistan views itself as a legitimate party to the Kashmir dispute implies that it has no other alternative but to support the Kashmiri militancy through diplomatic, moral, and material means even if such assistance ultimately fails to change the territorial status quo in any significant way. In such circumstances, the best Islamabad can hope for is that its support will keep the hope of some Kashmiri groups for *azadi* alive—and to the degree that these dreams invite greater Indian repression, they might open the door to more international attention on Kashmir and, by implication, to some external pressure that could force India into negotiating a reasonable settlement. Unfortunately for Pakistan, however, even increased international attention is by no means certain, because New Delhi has resources other than simply repression for dealing with Kashmiri aspirations.

Yet hopes for increased international pressure on New Delhi may be all that is available to Islamabad at this juncture. If so, this is likely to be poor consolation, since it implies a perpetuation of the same situation—continued Indian rule over the most attractive parts of the Himalayan state indefinitely—that Pakistan has continuously struggled against since its founding in 1947. Indeed, this is where being a weak state hurts considerably: Pakistan's poor relative capabilities imply that it has no choice but to play the only weak cards it has even though this policy may not yield either spectacular or permanent advantages. Not surprisingly, then, Pakistan will continue to support the armed struggle in Kashmir and possibly elsewhere as a means of increasing political pressure on New Delhi and wearing down its otherwise-superior adversary—in effect exploiting the protection offered by nuclear weapons against total war to wage a subconven-

²⁴This judgment is underscored most clearly in a recent interview given by General Pervez Musharraf. See Malini Pathasarathy, "The Core Issue of Kashmir Must Be Addressed: Musharraf," *The Hindu*, January 17, 2000.

tional war against India. The apparent strategic necessity for such action is reinforced by other considerations:

- the desire to be seen as responsive to the disenchantment of the Indian Kashmiris because of its potential for enhancing legitimacy, good public order, and national unity domestically;
- the opportunity to provide gainful employment to some of the Islamist mercenaries in Pakistan by committing them to a battleground some distance away from the mainland; and
- the need to channel the abhorrence felt by the Pakistani military and intelligence services toward India in a way that harms a despised adversary even as it confirms the autonomy of the armed forces within the political life of the state.

These factors combine in different ways to compel Pakistan to pursue a variety of revisionist strategies with respect to Kashmir and elsewhere. The tactics adopted in this regard have, however, changed over time. Indeed, even the agencies that “take the point” in overseeing these efforts have varied; sometimes key initiatives are led by the Pakistan Army, at other times by the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, and at still other times by civilian governments. Yet in all instances, the general objective has remained the same: *to raise the costs of maintaining the status quo in Kashmir in order to force New Delhi into negotiating an outcome more favorable to Pakistan or, failing that, to wear India down so as to prevent it from being able to apply the full quantum of its political resources externally against Pakistan.*

Since this strategy is likely to continue in many variants well into the future and may even materialize in more vicious forms if Pakistan continues to decay economically and politically, the Indian state will continue to treat the possibility of conventional conflict with Pakistan as its most serious near-term external security threat. India will thus continue to maintain the large military establishment necessary to defend a vast defensive perimeter; conduct combat operations along two widely separated fronts if necessary; undertake significant internal peace operations; and retain adequate theater reserves to enable the Indian armed forces to sustain their training, maintenance, and redeployment cycles. The size, quality, and orientation of this force will in turn continue to remain a source of concern to

Pakistan. Given the conflict-ridden relations between the two states, Islamabad must reckon with the possibility that India could respond to its efforts at strategic baiting—if it has not done so already—by engaging in various cross-border operations in a crisis. This fear further reinforces Pakistan’s traditional obsession with national defense—and it is in this context that Islamabad’s relations with China become critical to its grand strategy.

Sino-Pakistani Relations

Pakistan’s relationship with China goes back to the Sino-Indian war of 1962.²⁵ The rupture in Sino-Indian diplomatic relations caused by this war opened the door to a convergence of Sino-Pakistani interests that centered principally on the containment of Indian “hegemonism” in South Asia. This convergence was by no means automatic, however, because even as Beijing and Islamabad perceived new opportunities for collaborating against India after 1962, Pakistan remained a member of the U.S.-led anti-communist alliances, which were directed against both the Soviet Union and China. Nonetheless, Sino-Pakistani relations gradually developed and, in 1966, took the form of defense collaboration when China agreed to assist Pakistan in establishing an ordnance factory for the manufacture of Chinese small arms.

The constraints that inhibited the full flowering of the Sino-Pakistani relationship in the 1960s rapidly disappeared following Pakistan’s defeat in the 1971 war. Perceiving itself as having been abandoned by the United States and its Middle Eastern allies during successive conflicts with India, Islamabad gradually shifted to a “look within” strategy that focused on a reliance on its own internal resources for national survival.²⁶ In practical terms, this meant that Pakistan continued to sustain high defense burdens to ensure the priority of military needs and continued to preserve strong bureaucratic organs of rule even as it experimented with new efforts at participatory democracy. Because these ingredients were deemed to be necessary but not sufficient to Pakistan’s survival, Islamabad also embarked

²⁵For a good review of this relationship, see Yaacov Vertzberger, *The Enduring Entente: Sino-Pakistani Relations, 1960-1980*, New York: Praeger, 1983.

²⁶This strategy is described in greater detail in Tellis (1997).

clandestinely on the development of a nuclear weapon program in efforts to procure the ultimate trump in its quest for enduring security. Simultaneously, however, it accelerated the process of deepening its relationship with China, a state that had by now become a confirmed adversary of India.

By the mid-1970s, China had become a critical source of conventional military technology for Pakistan.²⁷ Even more important, however, it was seen to be a font of political and diplomatic support, since both countries continued to view India and its ally, the Soviet Union, as potential threats to their common security. As the U.S. security relationship with Pakistan gradually atrophied after the 1971 war, Pakistan's link with China came to be seen more and more in Islamabad as the single best external guarantee against Indian aggression. This by no means implied that China had become a formal guarantor of Pakistan's security, however; consistent with its insular foreign policy, Beijing had never expressed any interest in playing such a role and carefully avoided making any commitments to Islamabad that would have entailed such obligations.

Indeed, this posture had already become clear during the 1971 war, when China vociferously criticized Indian actions but astutely chose not to intervene militarily on Islamabad's behalf despite desperate Pakistani entreaties to that effect. This restraint clearly signaled the sharp limits of Beijing's support for Islamabad and identified the leitmotif of Sino-Pakistani security relations. In short, China would extend Pakistan every form of diplomatic and moral support that it believed to be justified in any given circumstances and would even be willing to provide Islamabad with the military instruments necessary to preserve its security and autonomy—but it would neither provide Pakistan with any formal guarantees of security nor make any efforts at extending deterrence or preparing joint defenses that implied coordinated military action vis-à-vis India. These factors suggest that China has pursued a subtle partnership with Pakistan: It appears willing to do the minimum necessary to preserve Pakistani

²⁷For details, see Mushahid Hussain, "Pakistan-China Defense Cooperation," *International Defense Review*, 2/1993, pp. 108–111.

security from a distance but has sought to avoid all overt entanglements in Islamabad's challenges to Indian primacy in South Asia.²⁸

The assistance China has extended Pakistan over the past two decades—including the transfer of nuclear and missile technologies—has in fact been entirely consistent with this premise. From Beijing's point of view, this assistance was a low-cost investment that had the potential to increase Islamabad's capability to defend itself independently but involved no public obligations or open-ended commitments on China's part to transfer technology, to make no mention of any commitment to come to Islamabad's defense.

Even as the fruits of this assistance have been exploited by Pakistan over the years, China has moved explicitly to distance itself from those Pakistani actions which could undermine stability in South Asia. Thus, for example, China has moved away from its previously unqualified support of Pakistan's position on Kashmir and has become increasingly and even visibly uncomfortable with Islamabad's support of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Beijing's unique, low-cost, low-key commitment to Pakistani security has therefore failed to translate into support for Pakistani revisionism.²⁹

Beijing has deliberately imposed these subtle limits on its relationship with Islamabad because China does not view India today as its principal long-term threat. Because India could turn out to be a power that is troublesome to China over the long haul, it is seen as meriting prudent scrutiny and limited efforts at local containment.³⁰ The strategic assistance offered by China to Pakistan serves this purpose admirably: It keeps New Delhi focused on Islamabad, limits India's freedom of action in South Asia, and helps minimize the possibility that India will emerge as a rival to China on the larger Asian theater. While these considerations no doubt cause concern in

²⁸This critical point is correctly emphasized in Leo E. Rose, *India and China: Forging a New Relationship*, in Shalendra D. Sharma (ed.), *The Asia-Pacific in the New Millennium: Geopolitics, Security, and Foreign Policy*, Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2000.

²⁹Swaran Singh, "Sino-South Asian Ties: Problems and Prospects," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 24, No. 1, April 2000, pp. 31–49.

³⁰Gary Klintworth, "Chinese Perspectives on India as a Great Power," in Ross Babbage and Sandy Gordon (eds.), *India's Strategic Future*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1992, p. 96.

New Delhi, Beijing views its assistance to Pakistan (as well as to the smaller South Asian states) as relatively small prudential investments that are justified mainly by continuing uncertainty about India's long-term capabilities and intentions.

Pakistan, in contrast, would prefer a good deal more from its relations with China. As the weaker partner in that relationship, it desires more than China has either offered to or can give. In the areas of strategic technology, Pakistan would prefer a Chinese commitment to ongoing assistance in its nuclear and missile programs. This assistance is required mainly to help Pakistani technologists overcome specific problems that currently obstruct their progress in these areas. The intention here is not to have Beijing play the role of a supplier of the completed systems; Pakistan's sorry experience with past dependence on foreign technologies has led it to be wary of all supplier relationships. Instead, Pakistan would prefer assistance in resolving certain technical problems so as to become more or less self-sufficient in the production of key strategic technologies—technologies that, in the end, remain the country's only hope for ensuring the success of its “look within” strategy.

In the area of conventional arms, Pakistan already has access to the best Chinese military technologies available. Pakistan recognizes that in most instances Chinese conventional weapons lag considerably behind their Western counterparts, but their easy availability, relatively low cost, and simpler maintenance requirements continue to make them valuable for Pakistan's defense needs. These weapons have therefore been acquired in relatively significant numbers in order to beef up the “low” end of the “high-low” mix of capabilities Pakistan has maintained in its order of battle vis-à-vis India. Given the value of these capabilities for producing “bulk” firepower, Islamabad will continue to remain an important customer for Chinese weaponry, and the Chinese military-industrial complex will likely become Pakistan's most important collaborator with respect to future product improvements, joint production ventures, and exports of low-end conventional weapons.

Aside from assistance with strategic technologies, however, what Pakistan would like most from its relationship with China is emphatic and perhaps public support for Pakistani objectives on key political issues. These include confronting Indian hegemony in

South Asia, recovering the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, and pacifying Afghanistan by means of complete Taliban control. China's commitment to supporting Islamabad's objectives in these areas would boost Pakistan's strategic fortunes considerably and imply a thorough endorsement of Islamabad's current grand strategy in all its details. Thus far, however, China has refused to provide either support or endorsement on any of these points. The evidence of Chinese behavior toward Pakistan and the smaller South Asian states suggests, to the contrary, that Beijing has already recognized the reality of Indian hegemony *within* South Asia, and while it has attempted to assist India's smaller neighbors in preserving their security, it has shown no interest whatsoever in leading any anti-Indian coalition of the sort that hard-liners in Islamabad would prefer. Similarly, Beijing has publicly advocated—much to Islamabad's chagrin—that the resolution of the Kashmir conflict be deferred indefinitely, and it has continued to support, albeit reluctantly, international efforts at penalizing the Taliban's brand of Islamist rule currently manifested in Afghanistan. Even as China has distanced itself from Pakistani interests in these areas, however, it has been careful to do so quietly and indirectly whenever possible. This sensitivity to Pakistani sentiments has always been appreciated by policymakers in Islamabad, who often contrast the “respect” accorded them by the Chinese—even when they disagree—with the hectoring attitude often adopted by the United States.

Islamabad's desire to preserve a close relationship with Beijing, no matter what the disagreements of the hour may be, is ultimately rooted in a simple fact of geopolitics: China, a neighboring great power, remains the only state likely to make common cause with Pakistan on the most important issue affecting its security: India. Given the asymmetry in resources between China and Pakistan, Islamabad's steadfast loyalty to Beijing—despite their divergence on many issues—should not be surprising in that even modest Chinese assistance appears indispensable from Islamabad's perspective. This gratitude is particularly justified thanks to China's past assistance in the realm of strategic technologies; not only do these instruments guarantee Pakistan's defense and allow it to whittle down India's advantages, but the mode of their transfer also enables Islamabad to claim credit for those very achievements.

In light of these realities, Pakistan is likely to remain loyal to China over the long term. The prospect of a rising China pleases Pakistan because it presages the availability of an even more powerful ally than Beijing currently represents. Given all the potential benefits that would accrue from such a possibility, Pakistan is unlikely to support any attempts at constraining China irrespective of where these may emerge. If any U.S.-led efforts materialize in this regard, they would certainly place Pakistan in a difficult position because Islamabad still seeks as best it can to retain America's friendship, support, and assistance even as it maintains its critical strategic links with China. Therefore, Pakistan will not support any hedging strategies directed against Beijing. Unlike India, which may be sympathetic to such efforts even if it does not formally participate in them, Pakistan will simply be opposed to all such solutions both in principle and in execution. If anything, Islamabad will seek to play the role of a peacemaker—i.e., a state that uses its good offices with both countries, as it did once before in 1971, to minimize differences and improve relations rather than support any efforts at coalition building vis-à-vis China. If despite its best preferences Pakistan is forced to take sides, however, Islamabad would settle for remaining loyal to Beijing. When all is said and done, this political choice would be driven primarily by Pakistan's conviction that whatever the differences between Beijing and Islamabad may be, China has always been a fair, reliable, and committed friend—in contrast to the United States, which for all its power has invariably turned out, in Pakistan's view, to be unfaithful, unreliable, and ungrateful.

MAJOR GEOPOLITICAL CONTINGENCIES

Given the broad trends described in the last section, five major geopolitical contingencies should concern the United States during the next decade.

Major Subcontinental War

A major conflict between India and Pakistan occasioned by miscalculations over Kashmir remains the most important geopolitical contingency that could emerge in South Asia today. Such a war would not, however, arise because of premeditated actions on either side. Despite what Islamabad may believe, New

Delhi today simply has no interest in pursuing any military solutions aimed at destroying, occupying, or fractionating Pakistan. And whatever Pakistan's desires may be, it simply does not possess the capabilities to pursue any of these three courses of action vis-à-vis India. Consequently, a major subcontinental war, were one to emerge, would be the unintended result of limited actions undertaken by various parties.

The key choices here remain the future of Pakistani support for the Kashmiri insurgency *and* Indian decisions about continuing its past policies of dealing with domestic militancy through purely internal counterinsurgency operations (as opposed to cross-border penetrations, which could include joint operations of limited aims). Thus far, both sides have been careful to avoid provoking the other to the point where escalation to conventional war became inevitable even though cross-border artillery exchanges, infiltration across the line of control, and terrorist acts of various sorts have been the staple of polemical accusations by both sides over the years. The recent actions at Kargil, where the Pakistan Army attempted to seize disputed territory by force, represent a new detour in the traditional pattern of Indo-Pakistani security competition. If actions such as these come to represent the norm, the likelihood of a major conflict in South Asia—which could include the brandishing of nuclear weapons—will greatly increase.

In such a situation, the kinds of demands leveled on USAF assets would depend largely on the diplomatic position the U.S. government adopts toward the conflict. At the very least, however, it is reasonable to conclude that the contingency of a regional war represents the highest levels of demand on USAF resources that could be imagined in the South Asian theater. In the run-up to a conflict as well as both during and after it, space-based assets for nuclear and conventional force monitoring and command, control, and communication (C³), as well as CONUS-based air-breathing assets for sampling, telemetry, and electronic intelligence (ELINT) operations would be in greatest demand.

Should the U.S. government mandate the evacuation of American and foreign visitors in the region, USAF lift capabilities will be the instrument of choice. The demand for these assets both for non-combatant evacuations and for humanitarian and disaster relief will

essentially come on a short-notice or no-notice basis, since traditionally the South Asian region has not been a priority area for American foreign policy. Responding to such needs would not impose structural burdens on the USAF because the lack of basing in close proximity to the region—the chief constraint on any operations involving the use of short-legged tactical assets, especially in a non-permissive environment—would not hamper the use of strategic intelligence, national communications, and intertheater transport assets. The ready availability of these resources, however, could be constrained by competing demands that may enjoy greater priority depending on the geopolitical situation. Consequently, adjusting planning and availability factors to accommodate such circumstances may be a prudent response as far as planning for such contingencies is concerned.

Stagnation and State Failure in Pakistan

The possibility of a gradually deteriorating Pakistan that culminates in some form of state failure represents the second most serious, albeit long-term, geopolitical contingency the United States might confront in South Asia. Since the beginning of its creation in 1947, Pakistan has constantly been racked by the interaction of political, economic, social, and ideological failures. While the country has been lucky enough to muddle through a succession of crises in the past, the possibility of failure today appears more real than has ever been the case, even as the price of failure itself has become exorbitant. This threat of failure is driven primarily by decreasing state capacity in Pakistan. Islamabad's continued competition with India, which requires an overly burdensome defense economy, has become increasingly difficult to sustain because successive Pakistani regimes have been unable to increase the quantum of state revenues required to support this strategy. Unlike the Cold War era, when foreign economic and military aid was plentiful, Pakistan's mounting budgetary deficits cannot be compensated for in similar ways today. The net result has been growing external indebtedness, reduced national investments, and poor social indicators. Coupled with political failures such as misgovernance, troubled civil-military relations, and sharp interprovincial inequities, Pakistan's economic deterioration has led to increasing Islamist radicalization of domestic politics, which has in turn created growing fears about the long-term stability of impor-

tant Pakistani institutions. The disconcerting aspect of decay in Pakistan is that, being essentially slow, multidimensional, and corrosive, its catastrophic effects could eventually become manifest in any number of troublesome ways. The outcomes that most observers currently fear include a sharp increase in sectarian violence in key provinces; an upsurge of potentially secessionist movements, perhaps aided from abroad; the cleaving of key institutions, including the military, on ideological grounds; and, in the most extreme scenario imaginable, a general breakdown of civil order caused by the intersection of economic failure, a chronic refugee problem, a growing drug and gun culture, and increasing mercenary violence.

Although most of these outcomes do not directly affect U.S. security, they could threaten U.S. interests were they to result in or be accompanied by an upsurge in regional tensions leading to conflict with India. It is in this context that state breakdown in Pakistan—in a manner reminiscent of 1971—could provoke a major conventional war conducted under the shadow of nuclear weaponry. The most valuable USAF resources here are the same as those relevant in the previous scenario: ISR assets for monitoring an unfolding situation and strategic lift capabilities for noncombatant evacuation, relief support, and peace operations.

“High Entropy” Proliferation of Strategic Technologies

The proliferation of strategic weapon technologies from South Asia to Northeast Asia, the Middle East, and nonstate actors represents a geopolitical contingency for the United States whose relative importance rivals the prospect of state breakdown in Pakistan as a threat to U.S. interests. Indeed, many observers conclude that this threat may even exceed that contingency in importance, as it remains a high cost–high probability outcome from the perspective of U.S. interests—in contrast to a political meltdown in Pakistan, which despite its high costs still embodies a relatively smaller probability of occurrence. In fact, many of the same factors that contribute to state breakdown are seen to apply with a vengeance where promoting the diffusion of strategic technologies is concerned: severe economic pressures and declining state control.

This assessment applies to Pakistan in particular because Islamabad’s perilous economic situation offers more inducements for

both state organizations and private entities to profit from the leakage of strategic technologies. The strategic technologies production complex in Pakistan is, moreover, composed of multiple scientific and bureaucratic baronies, many of which enjoy more autonomy than do their counterparts in India—a factor that opens the door to the pursuit of some parochial interests even when those might otherwise undercut the larger interests of the Pakistani state. While the challenges of guaranteeing tight controls are thus likely to be greater in Pakistan than in India, the latter is by no means immune to the problem of leakage. The chief obstacle here—which also holds true for Pakistan *a fortiori*—lies in reconciling principles with practice. If progressively instituted, as they will be under U.S. pressure, even good regulations must be effectively and consistently implemented without fear or favor, and both India and Pakistan must go some distance before concerns about their policy effectiveness are eradicated.

The problem of technology diffusion affects the USAF indirectly but in potentially lethal ways, since strategy technologies exported from South Asia might appear in the hands of other truly committed adversaries of the United States. The USAF assets that would be engaged as a result of this problem in the first instance are its intelligence resources, ranging from the tools and institutions tasked with technical intelligence collection and analysis; those among its human resources who are engaged in intelligence-counterintelligence overseas; and Air Force security services operating domestically in the United States. Insofar as the USAF is tasked by civilian policymakers to participate in joint contingency plans relating to stemming the transfer of strategic capabilities, other elements of the force would necessarily be involved as well.

High-Intensity Indo-Pakistani Nuclear Arms Racing

The possibility of serious Indo-Pakistani nuclear arms racing is an important but lower-order contingency from a U.S. perspective because an intense arms race in South Asia would most likely be more deleterious to the local protagonists than to any bystanders. The general prospect for a high-intensity arms race of the sort that occurred between the United States and the Soviet Union during the bomber and missile “gaps” in the 1950s and 1960s is quite remote,

principally for economic reasons: Both India and Pakistan are relatively poor states, and neither country—particularly Pakistan—can afford to engage in any high-octane military buildups. Both countries also seem committed to developing some version of a finite deterrent that would, if implemented, minimize the opportunity for a competitive nuclear race.

While these factors combine to promise a certain modicum of arms-race stability, two other factors could subvert this promise. The first remains the pervasive misperception on both sides about the extent of the other's achievements with respect to nuclear weaponization. Should the received wisdom on this question suddenly be punctured either by unexpected revelations of capability or by asymmetric increases in transparency resulting from an intelligence coup, the stage could be set for a sharp acceleration in some dimensions of strategic programs that, because of the fear and uncertainty induced by such actions, could precipitate countervailing responses that set off a destabilizing action-reaction spiral between both states. The second factor is that both India and Pakistan have set out to develop their nuclear deterrents at roughly the same time, and while New Delhi's concerns in this regard certainly transcend Islamabad's, the latter's orientation will remain fixed on New Delhi for some time to come. In effect, India's attempts to develop a deterrent that is viable against Pakistan and China simultaneously will have the consequence of raising the threshold of sufficiency for Pakistan. Determining the appropriate equilibrium between both states will unfortunately be both a reflexive and an interactive process in which the distinctions between sufficiency and equality may easily be blurred.

An Indo-Pakistani nuclear arms race has minimal direct implications for the USAF today. Neither country treats the United States, its allies, and its dependencies as potential targets of nuclear attack, and consequently the USAF has no special defensive obligations for which to prepare other than what it would do as part of its routine planning process. The chief burden an Indo-Pakistani nuclear arms race would impose on the USAF would be connected with the demands of monitoring the progress of weaponization on both sides: This would involve the same resources already committed to observation, sampling, telemetry, and SIGINT/ELINT/COMINT/MASINT (signals, electronic, communications, and measurement and signature intelligence) operations. In this context, as in most other con-

tingencies in South Asia, the USAF's general ISR capabilities will become more important than ever before.

High-Intensity Sino-Indian Arms Racing

The possibility of a serious Sino-Indian nuclear arms race is the last and perhaps most unlikely contingency from the perspective of the United States. Concerns about this contingency arise mainly because the Indian nuclear program, when complete, promises to change the extant Sino-Indian strategic equilibrium in at least one fundamental respect: New Delhi will be able to target Chinese assets for the first time in much the same way that Beijing has been able to target Indian assets since the early 1970s. The rise of this new mutual vulnerability relationship often provides grounds for concern because it is feared that China might seek to recover its previous strategic advantages by responding to the development of the Indian deterrent through a major nuclear buildup oriented toward New Delhi. This outcome, however, is unlikely to obtain. In part, this is because historically China has never viewed India as a "peer competitor," and any strategic reactions suggesting otherwise at this point would only undercut Beijing's traditional attitude of treating New Delhi as a parvenu that seeks to punch above its own weight. Further, the gap in numbers and technological capabilities between the mature Chinese nuclear deterrent and New Delhi's evolving force-in-being is so large that Beijing does not have to respond in *any* way to India's incipient efforts at developing a minimum deterrent. To be sure, Chinese nuclear capabilities will expand in the decades ahead, but this expansion will be driven more by its own modernization efforts (which were under way for at least a decade prior to the Indian tests of May 1998), its perceptions of U.S. nuclear capabilities, and the future character of the nuclear regime in East Asia than by developments to the south of China. Chinese nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis India is in fact so robust that no capabilities India develops over the next decade will allow it to systematically interdict Beijing's nuclear forces either for purposes of ensuring damage limitation or for achieving counterforce dominance. Given this fact, there is little China needs to do in the face of an evolving Indian nuclear capability except what it might choose to do purely for symbolic reasons; both the range of Beijing's missiles and the yields of its warheads already allow it to hold at risk numerous Indian targets from far outside the

Chinese periphery, and consequently dramatic alterations in current Chinese deployment patterns or operating postures vis-à-vis India are unnecessary and likely will be avoided.

The principal demands on the USAF will therefore arise in the context of Chinese nuclear modernization vis-à-vis the United States rather than in the context of a Sino-Indian nuclear arms race. The American response here will continue to be the same it has always been: to maintain a robust nuclear deterrent to prevent any Chinese or, for that matter, any other nation's efforts at threatening U.S. interests through nuclear arms. In the specific case of nuclear developments in the Sino-Indian realm, the same capabilities identified in the previous scenario remain relevant, including all instruments associated with the demands of monitoring the progress of weaponization on both sides.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

The nuclear tests of May 1998 heralded a new phase in security competition in South Asia. The sanctions levied on both India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the nuclear tests abruptly brought to a halt many initiatives that were intended to allow U.S. policy to reach a new equilibrium in South Asia: a deeper engagement with India consistent with the latter's steadily growing economic and strategic capabilities, coupled with the continued reassurance of Pakistan despite the downgrading of past strategic and military ties. After considerable soul searching, the United States has recognized that its larger strategic interests require a resumption of its previous efforts at engaging India and Pakistan. The efforts it has made in this direction include the waiving of sanctions imposed after the tests; the willingness on the part of the President to visit the region after a gap of more than 20 years; a restoration of U.S. support for multilateral economic development programs; and a willingness to discuss the resuscitation of previous initiatives relating to strategic cooperation, depending on the proliferation choices made by both India and Pakistan. Where the issue of nuclear proliferation is concerned, the United States has elected not to pursue chimerical goals such as rolling back the nuclear programs in South Asia but has chosen instead to focus on more limited and practical objectives, such as in-

stitutionalizing a nuclear restraint regime in both countries. Irrespective of how success eventually materializes in this area, the administration's decision to restore a semblance of normalcy to its relations with both India and Pakistan reopens opportunities for the USAF in its own military-to-military contacts with the region.

U.S. relations with both India and Pakistan are, however, still subject to considerable constraints because of many unresolved issues relating to proliferation. USAF engagement with both countries at the military-to-military level will therefore remain constrained, and the limits of these endeavors will continue to be guided by larger geopolitical and strategic considerations rather than merely by USAF needs. Nevertheless, the renewal of American relations with both India and Pakistan offers new, even if small, opportunities in the near term.

Understanding what these opportunities might be requires an appreciation of regional attitudes toward engagement with the USAF. Both India and Pakistan clearly seek to increase the quality of their cooperation with the USAF, but there are significant differences in the two states' attitudes. Since Pakistan had a long history of cooperation with the USAF, especially in the early decades of the Cold War, there is nothing more that Islamabad would like than to restore its early cooperation. Both Pakistani policymakers and their air force officers fondly recall the contributions the USAF made in assisting Pakistan with everything from combat aircraft through organization to logistics—capabilities that enabled the Pakistan Air Force to survive several wars with India. These contributions obviously occurred in the context of a different geopolitical environment, when the United States and Pakistan were formal allies in the struggle against the Soviet Union. Today this relationship has lapsed, and Pakistani decisionmakers do not seek to resurrect it because of their belief that formal alliances with other states did not serve Pakistan's interests well in the past. Consequently, they would settle for "merely" a normal relationship with the United States that includes an acceptance of the legitimacy of Pakistan's nuclear program given its strategic environment; a withdrawal of those restrictive legislative regimes which prevent Pakistan from being able to purchase American weapons, spare parts, and training; a commitment to increased economic and commercial ties, including U.S. support for Pakistani

efforts at debt rescheduling; and evidence of American sensitivity to Pakistan's interest in issues such as Afghanistan and Kashmir.

Within the parameters of a normalized relationship, Pakistan seeks to improve its engagement with the USAF. This would include deepening the levels of military-to-military contacts in the form of exchanges and visits as well as increasing opportunities for training and exercises if possible. Pakistan clearly views the USAF with great respect. Having watched USAF operations in the Persian Gulf and Kosovo with interest and admiration, Pakistan would prefer to develop a relationship that allows it to increase its own technical capabilities and operational proficiency as far as air warfare is concerned—a competency that is critical to its survival in its struggle with India. The willingness to engage in any activities that further this goal, however, would not carry over to the support of hedging strategies vis-à-vis China. Rather, engaging in such activities is justified primarily by Pakistan's own security concerns which predominantly involve India. In addition, Pakistan might be willing—if relations with the United States improve considerably—to help the USAF in other ways, such as allowing for emergency staging and recovery of aircraft committed to humanitarian missions or even peace operations if these are either endorsed by the United Nations or conducted in support of friendly governments.

Like Pakistan, India is greatly interested in increasing its defense cooperation with the United States. Even more than Pakistan, however, India seeks a new, more normal, relationship with Washington that erases the mixed memories of the Cold War years and allows for at least some degree of tacit cooperation in combating the threats that may appear in the future. Because emerging as a true great power with both security and status remains at the heart of its grand strategy, India seeks to deepen its engagement with the United States, but not at the cost of its independent foreign policy. This implies that India seeks a relationship with the United States that has room for differences in opinion when New Delhi's preferences do not align with Washington's on a given issue; is not encumbered by restrictive control regimes that limit the kinds of civilian, dual-use, and military technologies available to India; and offers opportunities for greater political and military cooperation without making India appear to be a junior ally.

These objectives imply that, at least in the near term, India's attitude toward greater cooperation with the USAF will resemble that of Pakistan. India seeks to restore if not improve the levels of military-to-military contacts, exchanges, and visits that existed prior to the nuclear tests in May 1998. It had even begun a small program of exercises with the USAF, most of which were small-unit exercises, and the Indian Air Force leadership in particular is very interested in expanding the scope, regularity, and complexity of these exercises. Although it is clearly recognized that this is a gradual and long-term endeavor, both Indian security managers and the Indian Air Force leadership recognize that cooperating with the USAF would assist India in a variety of issue areas ranging from modernizing logistics through coping with downsizing to learning how to plan and execute a high-intensity air campaign. Developing a robust air warfare capability, which includes maintaining its current theater air supremacy over China, also remains an Indian Air Force goal. To the degree that engaging the USAF supports this objective, India's civilian security managers—the ultimate controlling authorities in the national command system—will permit the air force leadership to pursue various forms of engagement that at present are unlikely to go beyond combined training and exercises (although these could vary considerably in the scale and types of equipment and organizations involved).

The real value of continuing to engage India, however, will be manifested only over the longer term, when the growth of both Chinese and Indian power in Asia will create new opportunities for the USAF. At the very least, getting to know and appreciate Indian air capabilities, developing relationships with the current and emerging leadership in the Indian Air Force, and setting in place a foundation of cooperation that can be expanded if circumstances warrant remain a sound strategy for cooperating with an emerging great power whose interests will in many ways parallel U.S. objectives in Asia. These objectives—which ultimately revolve around preventing the rise of a hegemony that threatens U.S. presence in and access to the continent, sustaining an open economic order that permits secure trade flows of national resources and finished goods, and preserving a political environment that is free of extremism and violent threats to domestic order—all remain issues on which India and the United States could cooperate. The current goal of USAF engagement with

India (and of U.S. engagement in general) must therefore be to create the foundations for enhanced cooperation in each of these issue areas without in any way prejudging the forms in which such cooperation may eventually materialize. If this effort is successful, there may come a point where activities that are infeasible today—e.g., cooperative intelligence collection and sharing, opportunities for staging and recovery, and combined operations in the context of peace operations broadly understood—would be well within the realm of possibility.