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# Fighting terrorism, avoiding war: the Indo-Pakistani situation

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# Fighting Terrorism, Avoiding War

## The Indo-Pakistani Situation

By PETER R. LAVOY



Meeting of the twain  
in Wagha, India.

**A**fter languishing for five decades as a region of only marginal importance to the United States, South Asia became a major area of interest for U.S. defense planners after 9/11. The cause of this turnabout was a need

for cooperation with India and Pakistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. But several subsequent developments, some quite disturbing, ensure that South Asia will remain critical for years to come. They include the presence of the Taliban and al Qaeda militants in Pakistan and possibly Kashmir, anti-American and anti-national terrorism in both nations, turmoil in the disputed state of Kashmir, and a potential for nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan. On a more positive note, Washington has improved its political and military relationships with New Delhi and Islamabad, which has raised expectations.

Because of rivalry between India and Pakistan, which began with their independence from Britain in 1947, the United States has never been able to maintain close relations with both nations simultaneously. India drifted between nonalignment and an outright alliance with the Soviet Union, while Pakistan was a staunch American ally in the fight against communist expansion. When the United States moved closer to India after the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962 and again during the 1990s following the breakup of the Soviet empire, its relations with Pakistan waned. Today the challenge is translating increased influence in both New Delhi and Islamabad into tangible results in the war on terrorism, stabilizing Indo-Pak competition, and promoting other American interests throughout the region.

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AP/Wide World Photo (Peshan Mughal)

## Enduring Freedom

The campaign to deny Afghanistan as a haven for terrorists and crush the al Qaeda network had a dramatic impact on Pakistan, the closest foreign partner of the Taliban. Pakistan had helped consolidate their power during the 1990s. Viewing the Taliban as a friendly if fanatical regime that could stabilize unruly tribes while providing strategic depth, Islamabad was loathe to see a return to insecurity on its western flank. But faced by intense pressure from Washington, President Pervez Musharraf agreed to break ties with the Taliban, provide basing and overflight for coalition forces, deploy troops along the Afghan border, and share intelligence on terrorist groups. In announcing this controversial policy reversal on September 19, 2001, Musharraf stated that taking any other course would risk unbearable losses for Pakistan by threatening its economy, long-term interests in Kashmir, and strategic capabilities.

Though most mainstream Pakistani political parties upheld the decision to aid the coalition, Islamic factions responded in outrage. Some two

dozen religious parties joined in the Pak-Afghan Defense Council to oust Musharraf. Strikes were called, several people were killed, and extremists went to Afghanistan to fight with the

## the Bush administration has gone to great lengths to support internal stability in Pakistan

Taliban. Yet these actions did not incite the nation against the government or persuade the government to reverse its decision on Afghanistan.

The president faced another threat from within his military government. Believing that he had sold out to Washington, hardline officers in the army and intelligence service were reluctant to disengage from Afghanistan and provided incomplete or misleading information. Musharraf faced being ousted by pro-Taliban officers who were instrumental in the coup that brought him to power and held senior posts in the armed forces and intelligence service. He moved to counter this threat, sacking the intelligence chief and deputy chief of the army staff, changing commanders in

Quetta and Peshawar, and demoting other senior officers associated with the Taliban.

The Bush administration has gone to great lengths to support the efforts to maintain internal stability and implement political and economic reforms in Pakistan while assisting coalition forces. Washington has been criticized at the same time for not providing sufficient assistance to Pakistan for its crippled economy and military, which is half the size of the Indian armed forces. In reality the economic benefits have been substantial: waiving sanctions imposed after the nuclear tests in 1998 and the coup in 1999, rescheduling some of the \$38 billion in external debt, and allocating over \$2 billion in economic support and security assistance, including a \$600 million economic support grant, \$30 million in agricultural support, and \$75 million in foreign military financing.

America has not yet offered the kind of military assistance that many expected (including F-16 sales, which were terminated in 1990 because of concern over nuclear nonproliferation) because it does not want to irritate India and because it wants to develop mutually agreeable terms for future arms transfers. But the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, who led a 44-member defense cooperation group team on a visit to Islamabad in September 2002, confirmed that military assistance and arms sales would be restored to help Pakistan modernize its armed forces, especially air defense. This group, which met for the first time since 1997, also agreed on steps to enhance bilateral ties, including education and training, resumed exercises, and enhanced cooperation in countering terrorism.

## Indo-American Cooperation

The support offered to the United States after 9/11 was no less remarkable. India, which had refused to be drawn into military entanglement with the superpowers and opposed American presence in the region for decades, suddenly extended military





facilities and full logistic and intelligence support. This change in policy was based largely on a calculation that the war on terrorism could hinder Pakistani support for insurgents in Kashmir. The United States did not accept the offer of Indian bases because of a decision to use bases in Pakistan and wanted to avoid making cooperation with the coalition more difficult for Islamabad. But Washington regarded this demonstration of support as part of a growing accord in Indo-American strategic interests. Earlier, in May 2001, the Indian government had unexpectedly supported the U.S. missile defense initiative. Americans had also become aware of opportunities that defense cooperation offered for contingencies in Asia and the Middle East. When President George Bush met with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in November 2001, conditions were ripe for

developing strategic cooperation. While visiting Washington, the Indian leader spoke of the two countries as natural allies.

This atmosphere of partnership found expression in the revitalized bilateral defense policy group. At a meeting in New Delhi in December 2001, agreement was reached on an unprecedented agenda of military-to-military cooperation, exercises and training, resumption of defense trade, and enhanced policy coordination. The armed forces of the two countries also began regular executive steering group meetings to plan and review the details of rapidly expanding cooperative activities. Convening in May 2002, the group approved a number of items, including training and exercises, accelerated arms transfers, and technical cooperation in research, development,

and production. It also sought to improve consequence management for weapons of mass destruction, humanitarian relief, cyberterrorism, and environmental security.

### Terrorism in South Asia

Increased incidents of terrorism occurred in South Asia after the U.S.-led coalition initiated the war against the Taliban. Violence was recorded in Kashmir as well as other parts of India and Pakistan. In October 2001, 31 were killed and 60 were injured when militants detonated a bomb in the legislative assembly of Jammu and Kashmir at Srinagar. A Kashmiri terrorist group claimed responsibility. Two months later, an unidentified group conducted an attack in New Delhi, which ended in the death of 13 terrorists and security personnel. Vajpayee blamed the affair on Pakistan-based

Indian and Pakistani Missile Ranges



Source: U.S. Department of Defense, *Proliferation: Threat and Response* (Washington: Office of the Secretary of Defense, January 2001), pp. 37 and 40.

militants and demanded that Islamabad clamp down on terrorists operating from its territory. To intensify the pressure on Pakistan, Vajpayee recalled the Indian high commissioner and other diplomatic personnel from Islamabad, suspended trade, halted travel across the border, and banned Pakistani aircraft from Indian air space. He also ordered a massive mobilization, deploying more than 600,000 troops to positions along the line of

control in Kashmir and the frontier in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Punjab. Significantly, he took the unprecedented step of moving forces from the border with China to face Pakistan.

In response Musharraf ordered his forces to mobilize and enacted tough measures against extremism at home. With U.S. officials joining the call for firm action against militant movements, authorities arrested two thousand religious extremists and suspected terrorists, including leaders of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and

three other groups. Musharraf also announced steps to control *madrassas* (religious schools that breed extremism), freeze assets of suspected terrorists, close down Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) offices in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, initiate police reform, improve immigration policies, and draft antiterrorist finance laws.

Even as Musharraf cracked down on domestic Islamic militancy, he insisted in a speech in January 2002 that



Pakistani Ghauri missile.

AP/Wide World Photo (B.K. Bangash)

the nation would continue to support the cause of Kashmir diplomatically and morally, which Pakistanis see as a long-term freedom struggle of Kashmiri Muslims against India. By contrast, most Indians believe that this and other insurgencies in their country are fueled—if not guided—from across the border in Pakistan. Another suicide attack occurred in May 2002 against families of Indian soldiers in Jammu. Officials blamed Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed and claimed that Pakistani ISI was involved. According to India, Musharraf was secretly directing militant activities in Kashmir or else the violence was perpetrated by rogue elements in his military and intelligence organizations. In either case, the Indians planned to intensify the military pressure until all manifestations of cross-border terrorism were halted.

Pakistan also has been the site of violent terrorist attacks, raising concerns that Musharraf lacks control over the extremists. An explosion at the American consulate in Karachi in June 2002 killed 12 Pakistanis. FBI investigators blamed the event on Lashkar-e-Omar, a coalition of militant groups banned in January 2002. This and other incidents, including the bombing of a church attended by foreigners in Islamabad, attacks on French naval engineers in Karachi, a missionary school in Murree, and a foreign-supported eye clinic in Taxila,

and the murder of a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal*, are all seen as elements in a plot against the Musharraf government as well as U.S. and foreign interests. These events, and subsequent arrests by Pakistani and American authorities, indicate that remaining Taliban militants and some members of al Qaeda have shifted their locus of operations from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

Given the exodus of terrorists from Afghanistan, Pakistan assumed a

### the prospect of conflict increased dramatically after the attack on the parliament in New Delhi

more crucial role in Enduring Freedom. By October 2002, Pakistani and coalition forces had conducted 99 raids on suspected al Qaeda positions. In addition, 420 suspects were apprehended and 332 were handed over to the United States for interrogation, including Abu Zubaida and Ramzi bin Al-Shaiba, the latter believed to be involved in planning the 9/11 attacks. Pakistani troops have conducted numerous raids in remote tribal areas in the Northwest Frontier Province, marking the first time outside forces have conducted military operations in this largely self-governing territory.

### Military Tension

The prospect of conflict between India and Pakistan increased dramatically after the attack in December 2001 on the parliament in New Delhi and

the mobilization on both sides of the border. The Indians asserted the right to take every step necessary to stop terrorism, including hot pursuit into Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. Islamabad indicated that it was prepared to go to war. Though both countries had mobilized during previous crises in 1987 and 1990, the scope of mobilization in 2002 was unprecedented. For the first time since 1971 they were actually poised to fight. Indian and Pakistani strike forces were activated, ammunition was moved to the front, and landmines were deployed. It was reported that India had moved *Prithvi* short-range ballistic missiles to the border. The Indians tested a mid-range *Agni 1* missile, and as war loomed the Pakistanis test-fired a mid-range nuclear capable *Hatf 5 (Ghauri)*, a short-range *Hatf 2 (Abdali)*, and a *Hatf 3 (Ghaznavi)* ballistic missile. Musharraf, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, warned that his nation was prepared to use nuclear weapons in the event of hostilities.

As war seemed more likely, President Bush dispatched both the Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, and the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, to the region. Before leaving, Rumsfeld voiced concern that the threatened war could involve nuclear weapons. He added that even if these weapons were not used, a conventional war would set both countries back years in economic terms and in their relations with the world community. And it would prevent Pakistan from effectively monitoring its border with Afghanistan and clamping down on extremists at home. According to Rumsfeld, “anything that distracts them from helping us in the global war on terror and trying to finish the job in Afghanistan . . . is notably unhelpful to us.”<sup>1</sup>

Just when hostilities looked inevitable, Musharraf pledged to Deputy Secretary Armitage on June 7 that Pakistan would permanently stop infiltration by militants across the line of control into Indian-controlled Kashmir. Tensions abated, but forces were not pulled back. The Indians waited to see if infiltration actually diminished.



They also wanted to ensure that state elections in Jammu and Kashmir scheduled for September 2002 took place. Pakistan also went to the polls in October. Although violence and irregularities marred both elections, and Pakistan chose to go ahead with tests of the *Hatf 4 (Shaheen 1)* ballistic missile, after the elections Vajpayee ordered Indian troops to withdraw from the India-Pakistan border to peacetime locations, but not from the line of control because he claimed that infiltration into Kashmir was continuing.

When Pakistan followed suit by withdrawing its own troops, the threat of war diminished and the economic drain on both nations ended. The National Security Advisory Board in India estimated in a briefing to the National Security Council prior to the withdrawal that the ten-month mobilization cost \$370 million. Pakistani mobilization was probably less expensive, though it surely had a proportionately larger effect on a fragile economy.

### The Nuclear Danger

The latest standoff between India and Pakistan cannot be reckoned in financial terms alone. If war had broken out, the death and destruction would have been enormous. If the conflict had gone nuclear, the human toll would have been horrific. The Defense Intelligence Agency estimated that there could have been 17 million casualties, not including deaths from starvation, radiation, or fires after the initial blasts. Rumsfeld shared that assessment with Indian and Pakistani leaders during his visit. Even though tension eased considerably before the Secretary arrived, the leaders of both countries continued to treat their nuclear weapons and missile programs as national priorities.

India and Pakistan are self-declared nuclear powers. Neither are signatories of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. India conducted its first nuclear test in May 1974, which it described as a peaceful nuclear experiment. Both nations demonstrated their capabilities in a series of explosions during May 1998. New Delhi claimed to have detonated a 12-kiloton fission device, a 43-kiloton thermonuclear device, and three sub-kiloton devices.

**USS *Rueben James*  
with Pakistani ship,  
*Inspired Siren '02.***



U.S. Navy (Aaron Ansarov)

Later the same month, Islamabad declared that it had responded with six explosions of its own, detonating what nuclear officials described as one big bomb and five low-yield weapons.

India and Pakistan possess stockpiles of nuclear weapons components and could assemble and deploy several within a week. The size, composition, and operational status of these arsenals are guarded secrets, but sufficient information exists in the public domain to make estimates. Assuming the Cirus and Dhruva research reactors yielded 25–40 kilograms of plutonium annually, India could have stockpiled 280–600 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium by the end of 2002.<sup>2</sup> Although there is also a program to produce highly enriched uranium, it is unclear if India has managed to produce weapons-grade material. Experts have determined that as little as 5 kilograms and as much as 7 kilograms of plutonium would be required for each weapon. Assuming the worst and best cases, the Indians could possess enough

fissile material for 40–120 weapons, with 70 as the median estimate.

Unlike the Indian nuclear program, which relies on plutonium, the Pakistani effort is based on highly-enriched uranium. Presuming that the Kahuta plant yields 80–140 kilogram of weapons-grade uranium per year, at present Pakistan could have 815–1,230 kilograms available for weapons production. The amount required is thought to be 12–25 kilograms, depending on design. Also, the unsafeguarded heavy-water research reactor at Khushab produces plutonium that could be reprocessed to make a few weapons annually. When the potential inventories of plutonium and highly-enriched uranium are added together, Pakistan could have enough fissile material to make 35–95 weapons, with 60 as a median estimate. (Indian and Pakistani material and weapons are summarized in table 1 on page 33.)

Both nations have various aircraft and ballistic missiles that could deliver nuclear weapons. The United States determined in 2001 that India would most likely use fighter bombers for delivery since its ballistic missiles were



AP/Wide World Photo (John McCannico)

probably not ready. While several different aircraft could be used, the most suitable are Jaguars, Mirage-2000s, MiG-27s, and Su-30s. The Indians have deployed short-range *Prithvi* 1 missiles capable of projecting a 1,000-kilogram warhead, which presumably is the maximum size of a nuclear device. But because of the restricted range of the *Prithvi* missile, India is most likely to employ either the new solid-propellant *Agni* 1, which has a 700–900 kilometer range and was rushed into development after the Kargil conflict in 1999, or the *Agni* 2, which has a 2,000–3,000 kilometer range, when they become operational.

Pakistan has placed a premium on acquiring ballistic missiles to offset conventional military threats and ensure reliable delivery of nuclear weapons. While its F-16 and Mirage 5 aircraft are probably nuclear-capable, liquid-fuel *Ghauri* missiles developed with North Korean assistance and solid-fuel *Shaheen* 1 and 2 missiles which were fielded with Chinese help are more likely choices. (Delivery systems are described in table 2.)

Vajpayee has said that India is pursuing a minimal but credible nuclear deterrent and will not be the first to go nuclear. A government panel

**the Indian defense minister broached the possibility of absorbing a nuclear strike**

drafted new doctrine in August 1999 that called for a nuclear triad of land, sea, and air capabilities, a sound command and control system, and the flexibility to rapidly shift from peacetime deployments to full operability to ensure the effectiveness and survivability of the nuclear deterrent. India subsequently reiterated its credible minimum deterrent doctrine and revealed the creation of a national command authority, in which a political council, chaired by the prime minister, would be responsible for authorizing the use of nuclear weapons, and a strategic forces command would manage strategic forces.

Pakistan accepts the possibility of going nuclear first. Preventing India from threatening national viability has been central to its nuclear policy for

decades. As Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto said in 1974, “Ultimately, if our backs are to the wall and we have absolutely no option, in that event, this decision about going nuclear will have to be taken.” More recently, a senior officer reportedly stated that nuclear weapons would be used only “if the very existence of Pakistan as a state is at stake. . . . Nuclear weapons are aimed solely at India.” If deterrence failed, nuclear command authority likely would consider their use if India:

- attacked Pakistan and conquered a large part of its territory
- destroyed a large part of either Pakistani land or air forces
- proceeded to the economic strangling of Pakistan
- pushed Pakistan into political destabilization or created large-scale internal subversion.<sup>3</sup>

At the height of the 2002 crisis, the Indian defense minister broached the possibility of absorbing a nuclear strike by Pakistan and retaliating in kind. Musharraf affirmed: “Nuclear weapons are the last resort. I am optimistic and confident that we can defend ourselves with conventional means, even though the Indians are buying up the most modern weapons in a megalomaniac frenzy. . . . If Pakistan is threatened with extinction, then the pressure of our countrymen would be so big that [the nuclear] option, too, would have to be considered.”<sup>4</sup>

Because of a growing dependence on the part of India and Pakistan on nuclear weapons for deterrence, it would be difficult to disagree with the Director of Central Intelligence:

*The chance of war between these two nuclear-armed states is higher than at any point since 1971. If India were to conduct large scale offensive operations into Pakistani Kashmir, Pakistan might retaliate with strikes of its own in the belief that its nuclear deterrent would limit the scope of an Indian counterattack.*<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1. Indian and Pakistani Nuclear Weapon Capabilities**

|          | Weapons-Grade Plutonium (kg) |        |      | Weapons-Grade Uranium (kg) |         |         | Weapon Capability |        |      |
|----------|------------------------------|--------|------|----------------------------|---------|---------|-------------------|--------|------|
|          | Low                          | Medium | High | Low                        | Medium  | High    | Low               | Medium | High |
| India    | 280                          | 400    | 600  | unknown                    | unknown | unknown | 40                | 70     | 120  |
| Pakistan | 5                            | 15     | 45   | 815                        | 1020    | 1230    | 35                | 60     | 95   |



Table 2. Potential Indian and Pakistani Nuclear Delivery Capabilities

|                                    | Range (hi-lo-hi) | Source                 | Status and most recent test                       |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|---|
| <b>Indian Aircraft</b>             |                  |                        |   |
| Mirage-2000H                       | 1,205 km         | France                 | 2 squadrons, 35 planes in inventory               |
| Su-30 MKI                          | 3000 km          | Russia                 | 50 planes purchased, 18 in inventory              |
| Jaguar S(I)                        | 850 km           | Britain/France         | 4 squadrons, 88 planes in inventory               |
| MiG-27 ML                          | 500 km           | Russia                 | 214 planes in inventory                           |
| <b>Indian Missiles</b>             |                  |                        |   |
| <i>Prithvi 1</i> (SS-150)          | 150 km           | indigenous             | army version, in service                          |
| <i>Prithvi 2</i> (SS-250)          | 250 km           | indigenous             | air force version, tested, in development         |
| <i>Prithvi 3</i> ( <i>Danush</i> ) | 350 km           | indigenous             | navy version, failed test in 2000, in development |
| <i>Agni 1</i>                      | 700–900 km       | indigenous             | tested January 2003, in development               |
| <i>Agni 2</i>                      | 2,000–3,000 km   | indigenous             | tested in 1999 and 2001, in development           |
| <i>Agni 3</i>                      | 3,500–4,000 km   | indigenous             | in early development                              |
| <b>Pakistani Aircraft</b>          |                  |                        |   |
| F-16 A/B                           | 925 km           | United States          | 32 planes in inventory                            |
| Mirage 5 PA                        | 1,300 km         | France                 | 50 planes in inventory                            |
| <b>Pakistani Missiles</b>          |                  |                        |   |
| <i>Hatf 1</i>                      | 80–100 km        | indigenous             | in service since mid-1990s                        |
| <i>Hatf 2</i> ( <i>Abdali</i> )    | 180 km           | indigenous/China       | tested May 2002, in production                    |
| <i>Hatf 3</i> ( <i>Ghaznavi</i> )  | 290 km           | indigenous/China       | M-11, tested May 2002, in service                 |
| <i>Hatf 4</i> ( <i>Shaheen 1</i> ) | 600–700 km       | indigenous/China       | tested October 2002, in service                   |
| <i>Hatf 5</i> ( <i>Ghauri 1</i> )  | 1,300–1,500 km   | indigenous/North Korea | No Dong, tested May 2002, in service              |
| <i>Hatf 5</i> ( <i>Ghauri 2</i> )  | 2,000 km         | indigenous/North Korea | No Dong, tested April 2002, in development        |
| <i>Hatf 6</i> ( <i>Shaheen 2</i> ) | 2,000–2,500 km   | indigenous/China       | not yet tested, in development                    |

Source: This information is compiled from *Jane's Sentinel Security—South Asia*; *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*; *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*, and various media reports.

Because any serious regional crisis has the potential to escalate to conventional and then to nuclear warfare, the United States must remain deeply engaged in the strategic and political affairs of South Asia long after the Taliban and al Qaeda are destroyed.

The events of 9/11 brought India and Pakistan to the fore of U.S. national security interests and also precipitated significant changes in the region. It is unlikely that either New Delhi or Islamabad will be able to resolve their mutual difficulties without assistance from Washington. America will be expected to play an active role

in helping both countries in counter-terroring terrorism, reducing the danger of nuclear war, and promoting the social, economic, and political wellbeing of a large portion of the world population. The close relationships with India and Pakistan will offer the United States a unique, albeit brief, opportunity to meet this challenge. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Secretary Rumsfeld Meeting with *The Washington Post* Editorial Board," June 3, 2002, [http://defenseink.mil/news/Jun2002/t06042002\\_t0603edb.html](http://defenseink.mil/news/Jun2002/t06042002_t0603edb.html).

<sup>2</sup> All estimates are derived from David Albright, *India and Pakistan's Fissile Material and Nuclear Weapons Inventory, End of 1999*

(Washington: Institute for Science and International Security, October 11, 2000), <http://www.isis-online.org/publications/southasia/stocks1000.html>.

<sup>3</sup> "Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Stability and Nuclear Strategy in Pakistan: Concise Report of a Visit by Landau Network-Centro Volta," <http://lxmi.mi.infn.it/~landnet/Doc/pakistan.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Boyes, "Musharraf Warns India He May Use Nuclear Weapons," *Times Online*, April 8, 2002, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,3-260481,00.html>.

<sup>5</sup> George J. Tenet, "Worldwide Threat: Converging Dangers in a Post 9/11 World," Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 19, 2002.