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Indian Involvement in Afghanistan: Stepping Stone or Stumbling Block to Regional Hegemony?

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Abstract

Due to its geo-strategic location between the Central Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern security complexes, Afghanistan is often defined as an insulator state, and sometimes also as a connector. This in-between position has led to constant instability: ever since the creation of the Durrani Empire, the country has suffered from internal power struggles as well as outside interference. External attempts to control Afghanistan have nonetheless proven extremely difficult. This also holds true for the current conflict management efforts of the US-led coalition. But what could the alternatives be? This paper seeks to explore the prospect of regional security cooperation as a path towards stability for Afghanistan. Although the academic debate has thus far not considered Afghanistan as a primarily South Asian country, I will focus on the South Asian subsystem for three reasons: Firstly, current security matters in Afghanistan are highly connected to the situation in Pakistan. Secondly, with its accession to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Afghanistan has shown an interest in establishing stronger ties with South Asia. Thirdly, India as a rising regional power is the only country in the region that might possess the capabilities, the willingness, and the legitimacy for a long-term engagement in Afghan security.

Keywords: Afghanistan, India, South Asia, regional security, regional hegemony

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Zusammenfassung

Die Auswirkungen indischer Afghanistanpolitik auf das Konzept regionaler Hegemonie in Südasien

Aufgrund seiner geostrategischen Lage zwischen Zentralasien, Südasien und dem Nahen Osten wird Afghanistan oftmals als Pufferstaat, manchmal auch als Brücke zwischen diesen Regionen definiert. Diese Position war mit anhaltender Instabilität verbunden: Seit der Gründung des Durrani-Imperiums hat das Land unter internen Machtstreitigkeiten ebenso gelitten wie unter externer Einmischung. Versuche, das Land unter Kontrolle zu bekommen, stellten sich für externe Mächte allerdings als äußerst schwierig heraus. Dies trifft auch auf die gegenwärtigen Unternehmungen der internationalen Gemeinschaft zu, die darauf abzielen, Afghanistan zu befrieden. Der vorliegende Beitrag konzentriert sich auf die bislang wenig diskutierte Frage, unter welchen Umständen eine regionale Kooperation in Sicherheitsfragen eine Alternative zu den internationalen Stabilisierungsversuchen bietet. Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf Südasien, da 1. die Sicherheitsbelange Afghanistans in hohem Maße mit der Situation in Pakistan zusammenhängen, 2. Afghanistan durch seinen Beitritt zur SAARC sein Interesse an einer engeren Verbindung mit Südasien demonstriert hat, und 3. Indien als aufstrebende Regionalmacht der einzige regionale Akteur ist, der über die notwendigen Ressourcen, die Entschlossenheit und Legitimität verfügen könnte, um sich langfristig in afghanischen Sicherheitsbelangen zu engagieren.

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1 Managing Conflict in Afghanistan

After World War II, the USSR and the US were heavily involved in regional conflicts around the globe. In this way, regional conflicts were globalized, which in many cases also meant that they were exploited or even escalated. From the perspective of international stability, however, the mode of "managing" regional conflict worked surprisingly well during the Cold War. The end of bipolarity in the international system disrupted conflict management arrangements both on the global and on the regional level. During the "unipolar moment," the consequences of this rupture affected the regional level more seriously.¹ On the one hand, we witnessed a resurgence of regional conflicts which had previously been suppressed by superpower rivalry. On the other hand, those who had previously assumed the

¹ If the observed trend towards multipolarity in the international system (Waltz 2000a: 1) is correct, this will again have implications on both global and regional conflict management arrangements. Whereas regional subsystems are expected to become more peaceful in the coming decades, it is likely that the international system will become more conflictive than it has been to date (Waltz 2000a: 10).

main responsibility for the management of these conflicts were either unable (as in the case of post-Soviet Russia) or unwilling (as in the case of the US) to become entangled in peripheral disputes (Lake/Morgan 1997: 5; Kupchan 2000: 134).

This has gradually changed since the beginning of the twenty-first century. American foreign policy has been driven by activism since the September 11 attacks, and the US is now committed to costly missions in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Russia, on the other hand, has regained some scope of action, at least in its immediate neighborhood. Recent US and Russian “demonstrations of strength” have, however, simultaneously been demonstrations of the limits to their power. It has become obvious that international security today cannot be granted by the US, either alone or in the company of Russia. The attempts of international organizations, especially the United Nations, to fill this gap have proven similarly disappointing. The search for alternative conflict management mechanisms is underway. Regional security arrangements are being debated more than ever, both in academic and in policy-making circles (Lepgold 2003: 15f; Thakur/Van Langenhove 2006: 233ff, Bailes 2006: 5ff).

Since the September 11 attacks, the conflict in Afghanistan has taken center stage in the discourse on both regional and international stability and security. Since then, attempts to manage conflict in the country have mainly been international, led by the US and NATO. The neglect of the regional dimension is due not only to the ignorance of policy makers but also to Afghanistan’s peculiar location between three different security systems: Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia (Afghanistan Study Group 2008: 37). It is not clear whether Afghanistan merely separates these security environments or whether it is part of one or more of them. This ambiguity is largely inherited from colonial times. During the Great Game of the nineteenth century, the British designed a multilayered frontier between the Russian empire and their own sphere of influence, British India (Rubin 2007: 62f). This British policy has been root cause of many problems in contemporary Afghanistan. Afghan borders are contested as they cut across ethnic and tribal lines—a destiny which Afghanistan shares with many postcolonial states. Afghanistan, landlocked and poor in agricultural land (Khosla 2007a: 530), also has an inherent economic problem (Rubin 2007: 62; Baev 2008: 38). Weak government and internal conflicts are a consequence thereof. Today even the limited goals for Afghanistan, namely, a crackdown on Al Qaeda and the ousting of the Taliban regime, seem distant (Starr 2008: 351; Rasmussen 2008: 20; Bernard 2008: 47).

This paper focuses on the regional environment and the requirements for the successful pacification of Afghanistan, something which is complicated by the fact that it is not clear which region the country belongs to. The hypothesis of this paper is that India—as an emerging leader in South Asia—is the only regional actor that possesses both the incentives and the capabilities to deal with the negative security externalities emanating from instability in Afghanistan and along the Afghan-Pakistani border. Therefore, Afghanistan is here analytically “reframed” as part of South Asia. It will be argued that the reintegration of Afghanistan into South Asia could be an avenue towards peace and stability for both Afghani-

stan and South Asia as a whole. In South Asia, material characteristics such as the delineation of the region and its power polarity are unclear. India's role within the region and its potential to act as a regional leader providing stability are even more controversial. By examining India's role within its regional security environment, this paper will suggest how this lack of clarity could be remedied. In light of the disputes between India and Pakistan and between Pakistan and Afghanistan, India's involvement in the Afghan conflict is probably the most critical test case.

The following section elaborates a theoretical framework based on regional security complex theory (RSCT) and the concept of regional hegemony as one form of regional order. It will discuss how a strategic perspective can serve as a bridge between the structural concept of regional security complexes (RSCs) as a security environment, the actor-centered concept of regional hegemony, and the concept of regional order as the outcome of regional interaction.

2 Regional Conflicts, Regional Solutions?

2.1 *Theories of Regional Conflict and Stability*

Over time "regions" have received waxing and waning interest from students of international relations. Whereas from the 1960s until the mid-1970s works on integration trends and systemic mechanisms on the regional level flourished, during the following decades scholarly attention focused more on global events and their explanation through generalist theories (Lake/Morgan 1997: 6; Buzan/Wæver 2003: 77). The state of the art of the first climax of regional studies is relayed in the comprehensive review article "The Regional Subsystem: A Conceptual Explanation and a Propositional Inventory" (Thompson 1973).

Thompson's definition of a region as a set of generally proximate actors whose relations exhibit a particular degree of regularity and intensity and who perceive themselves and are perceived by others as members of a distinctive area (Thompson 1973: 101) was the starting point for new attempts to capture the importance of regional dynamics for world politics. These attempts have become increasingly observable since the end of the Cold War. While some of these new approaches revolve around the economic and normative aspects of the emergence of a new, perceptible regionalized world order (among others Fawcett/Hurrell 1995; Katzenstein 2005), others stick more clearly to the tradition of subsystem studies and concentrate on security implications (among others Lake/Morgan 1997; Buzan/Wæver 2003²). The latter are most commonly associated with regional security complex theory (RSCT). Currently, there are two major strands of RSCT: (1) The Buzan-Wæver variant, according to which the concept of region relies on securitization theory and which emphasizes the rele-

² Buzan and Wæver (2003) try to reconcile a rationalist system perspective with a constructivist perspective through the introduction of the concept of "securitization." As will be discussed below, this paper only builds on the systemic part of their concept.

vance of power polarity in the global and regional systems (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 53). (2) The Lake-Morgan variant, according to which the concept of region is based on local security externalities and which focuses on the mode of regional security management (Morgan 1997: 29ff). Although the two variants have reciprocally influenced each other, there are important disagreements between them (Lake/Morgan 1997: 8f; Buzan/Wæver 2003: 78f). The next section will scrutinize these commonalities and differences and, on that basis, discuss their adequacy for the analytical purpose of this paper.

3 Theoretical Foundations: The Arguments of Regional Security Complex Theory

Both Lake/Morgan and Buzan/Wæver emphasize the distinction between region, RSC, and regional order. An RSC, in their view, is a special form of region, defined by the notion of security (Lake/Morgan 1997: 12; Morgan 1997: 20ff; Buzan/Wæver 2003: 48). Both approaches build on the concept of security interdependence. They argue that the degree of security interdependence is higher at the regional than at the global level (Morgan 1997: 21ff; Buzan/Wæver 2003: 46ff). Lake/Morgan and Buzan/Wæver also agree that RSCs mainly vary along two dimensions: firstly, in terms of degree of actual or potential conflict, or security interdependence;³ secondly, in terms of security management arrangements (Morgan 1997: 31ff; Buzan/Wæver 2003: 55ff). These arrangements are called regional order by Lake and Morgan and are, as mentioned above, the authors' primary preoccupation. In that vein, they concentrate on developing a typology of regional order based on the mode of security management (Lake 1997: 32ff), whereas Buzan and Wæver concentrate on developing a typology of RSCs according to polarity and great-power involvement in the region (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 55ff). The decisive disagreements between the two concepts concern (1) the role of geography, (2) the concept of security, and (3) the creating force as the very source of any RSC.

(1) According to Lake and Morgan, "geography may bind most members of a regional security complex together, geographic proximity is [however] not a necessary precondition for a state to be a member of a complex" (Lake/Morgan 1997: 12). Great powers, in particular, could be part of various RSCs. The criterion for the inclusion of an external power in an RSC is the fact that its involvement is crucial to both the external power's foreign policy and regional security dynamics. As a result, Lake and Morgan reject Buzan and Wæver's concept of great-power overlay. Thus, the Lake/Morgan RSCs are not mutually exclusive (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 48f; Morgan 1997: 27ff).⁴ Buzan and Wæver criticize this as a conflation of levels of analysis and make a case for the fact that states are nonmobile:

³ As already pointed out, Buzan and Wæver are more concerned with the polarity of RSCs. Not only the conflict potential but also the mode of conflict management (and these two concepts are not always precisely separated) is highly dependent on the polarity variable.

⁴ In later work, Lake nevertheless accepts the Buzan/Wæver designation of RSCs (cf. Lake 2009: 35).

Although the United States may be “in” Europe and East Asia and the Middle East in a seemingly durable way, it makes a big difference that it always has the option to withdraw from (or be thrown out of) these regions. China and Japan are in East Asia whether they want to be or not. (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 81)

- (2) Whereas Lake and Morgan stick to a rather traditional meaning of security, defined as “being free from deliberate man-made violence” (Morgan 1997: 22), Buzan and Wæver adopt an integrated approach, where all security actions are linked across sectors (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 76).
- (3) Probably the most significant division between the two concepts is the question of an RSC’s source. Lake and Morgan’s “definition of regional security complexes [is] based on local externalities”; these constitute the “source of the strategic environment that underlies regional security systems” (Lake 1997: 48). Buzan and Wæver, on the other hand, argue that “RSCs [...] are defined [...] by the actual patterns of security practices” (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 41, original emphasis), and thus by the process of securitization, that is, action and interpretation.

Buzan and Wæver have anticipated that readers might “take the different elements of the Lake and Morgan approach as separate, e.g., accepting the revision of RSCT on delineation but not the definition in terms of externalities” (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 81). This is what will be done in this paper, though the other way around. Thus, I side with Buzan and Wæver’s argument on the nonmobility of states and accept their mutually exclusive conception of RSCs. Geographically distant “participators” in RSCs will therefore be treated as external powers in the following case study. On the other points, however, I will adopt the Lake and Morgan approach. Firstly, in my opinion the emphasis on geographic proximity and the externality-based conception of RSCs do not contradict each other. Quite to the contrary, the fact that outside powers have the possibility of retreating from a region, thereby avoiding the negative fallout of local security externalities, brings geography back into the concept of externality-based regional systems. Secondly, Buzan and Wæver’s argument that the externality-based definition of RSCs “must lead to an unmanageable multiplication of issues (and thereby security complexes)” and that it “would be a tall order to structure a security complex and a full analysis around each single issue [...]” (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 81) is not convincing. It is not clear why the securitization approach might be advantageous in this respect, especially given the complex definition of security adopted by Buzan and Wæver. The coherent rationalist system approach with its rather narrow definition of security even appeals as the more clear-cut and more easily manageable of the two. Furthermore, the externality-based approach is compatible with a strategic perspective. This is an advantage when it comes to assessing India’s role in the South Asia RSC as a whole and in the Afghanistan conflict in particular.

3.1 Analytical Framework: Regional Security Complexes and Regional Hegemony

Within RSCT, Lake and Morgan develop a theory of regional order in which the mode of conflict management within a region is treated as the main dependent variable. The structure of the regional system as well as interaction between the regional and the global systems are possible independent variables. What distinguishes the regional system from the global system is, in the first place, the fact that the global system is closed—in the sense that it cannot be penetrated by outside *actors* (Lake/Morgan 1997: 9). The authors then define a regional security complex as

a set of states continually affected by one or more security externalities that emanate from a distinct geographic area. In such a complex, the members are so interrelated in terms of their security that actions by any member, and significant security-related developments inside any member, have a major impact on the others. (Lake/Morgan 1997: 12)

According to this definition, the regional system also differs from the global system because it is created from existing security externalities rather than from interactions (Lake 1997: 48ff). Security externalities are costs and benefits that do not accrue only to the actors that cause them. In fact, they actually or potentially imperil the safety of individuals or governments in neighboring states. They can vary in magnitude, distribution, and in number. These variations mark the “density” of an RSC (Lake 1997: 49ff).

Nevertheless, the mere existence of regional security externalities does not determine the mode of security management adopted by its members. RSCs are shaped by (1) the distribution of power within the RSC, (2) the number of actors involved and their characteristics,⁵ (3) the degree of conflict, (4) their embeddedness in the global system, and (5) great-power involvement. It is the combination of these variables which leads to the adoption of a certain regional order, which, in turn, varies in terms of (1) the level of cooperation and (2) the level of legal/normative regulation (Lake/Morgan 1997: 12; Morgan 1997: 31ff). Regional orders are thus defined as the “dominant patterns of security management within RSCs” (Morgan 1997: 32).

The typology of regional order developed by Morgan ranges from (1) the power-restraining-power model, (2) a great-power concert, (3) the collective security model, (4) a pluralistic security community to, finally, (5) integration (Morgan 1997: 31ff). As can be easily seen, the typology advances from (1) to (5) with respect to the degree of cooperation and regulation.⁶ The “higher” modes are less likely to disintegrate and less vulnerable to outside intervention. Each mode can nevertheless be well-functioning and stable (Morgan 1997: 37).

One mode of regional order which has not been discussed systematically within RSCT yet, but which is nevertheless implicit in both the Buzan/Waever and the Lake/Morgan approach

⁵ The domestic political systems do not matter *per se* but rather as an aggregated variable at the regional level, that is, the distribution of similar/different types of political systems across the region.

⁶ For a detailed elaboration of each mode cf. Morgan 1997: 33ff.

(cf. Buzan/Waeber 2003: 55ff; Morgan 1997: 33f; Lake 1997: 60), is the concept of regional hegemony. The idea is derived from hegemonic stability theory, which was originally developed in the field of political economy (Kindleberger 1974, Keohane 1980). The concept has been introduced to security studies through the idea of a benevolent hegemon which provides security and stability. With respect to the dominant position of the US, the theme of a benevolent hegemon providing security and/or stability has been repeated variously in both public and scholarly debate under labels such as “empire by invitation,” “co-operative hegemony,” “benign unipolarity,” and “liberal imperialism.”⁷

As a rather new trend, hegemonic stability is also being discussed as a model of regional order (Kupchan 2000; Pedersen 2002). One reason for this is certainly the general resurgence of scholarly attention regarding regional affairs and the need for alternative security arrangements. Caused not least by the end of bipolarity, this rediscovery has been accompanied by uncertainties about the future order of the international system. The rise of China and India has stirred speculations about a new bipolar or multipolar age. In this way, the application of hegemonic stability theory to regional subsystems has been driven not only by the desire to understand the causes of regional peace and conflict but also by the desire to find ways towards stable multipolarity in the international system. (Kupchan 2000: 135).

The developments in the international system have widely been interpreted as a power transition towards Asia (Kugler 2006). Power transition and hegemonic stability theory share the assumption that, in general, unipolar systems are more stable than bipolar ones—a view that is in contrast to Waltzian realism (Waltz 1979: 125ff; Waltz 2000b: 27f). While power transition theory then tries to scrutinize the conditions under which bipolarity triggers conflict,⁸ hegemonic stability theory focuses on the conditions under which unipolarity produces bandwagoning. The key argument is that power asymmetry leads to peace and stability when power is exercised in a “benign” manner (Kupchan 2000: 151). Thus, it is both the structure and the “character” of power which lie at the heart of hegemonic stability:

Benign unipolarity refers to a hierarchical structure in which a preponderant geographic core establishes a hub-spoke pattern of influence over a weaker periphery. Like an empire, the core exerts a powerful centripetal force over the periphery by virtue of its uncontested preponderance and the size and scope of its economy. But unlike in classical empire, regional order emerges from a *consensual bargain* between core and periphery, not from coercion. The core engages in self-restraint [...] In return, the periphery enters willingly into the core’s zone of influence. (Kupchan 2000: 135f, author’s emphasis)⁹

⁷ Cf. e.g. Ikenberry 2001.

⁸ For an application on the regional level cf. Lemke 2002.

⁹ Pedersen develops a similar concept of cooperative hegemony as a regional grand strategy which is based on power sharing, power –aggregation, and a long-term regionalist policy strategy (Pederson 2002: 683f).

This “bargain” does not need to imply a formal or legal procedure. Rather, it evolves from constant interaction between the regional actors. Nevertheless, it is crucial to the legitimacy of the hegemon’s rule over the region. The following question thus arises: How can these often informal bargains be captured and analyzed? The strategic approach towards international relations offers tools for understanding these kinds of bargains if we look at them as strategic interactions. It argues that strategic interaction is shaped by both the actors that are part of the interaction and the environment in which the interaction takes place. It then suggests four main components of investigation: preferences and beliefs on the actors’ side, and actions and information on the environmental side. Preferences are defined as a ranking of possible outcomes of the interaction by the actor. Beliefs are defined as prior assessments regarding the preferences of other actors. Actions are defined as a summary of what could happen as the actors interact. And, finally, information is defined as the structure that determines what an actor can know for sure and what he has to infer from the behavior of others (Lake/Powell 1999: 7ff). It is important to distinguish preferences from strategies, which means “that in any given setting, an actor *prefers* some outcomes to others and pursues a *strategy* to achieve its most preferred possible outcome” (Frieden 1999: 41, original emphasis). Because the options of one actor are affected by the behavior of other actors, each actor’s strategy has to take into account both its own preferences and its beliefs about the future actions of other actors (which reflect its beliefs about the other actors’ preferences).

From a strategic perspective, local security externalities increase the regional or “social” costs or benefits compared to the national costs or benefits. “It is the desire to reduce these greater social costs or capture the larger social benefits that motivates efforts at regional cooperation” (Lake 1997: 52). An RSC, then, constitutes the strategic environment created by externalities and the incentives to deal with them. In this sense, the question of when and where to manage conflict becomes a problem of strategic choice. The outcome—that is, the mode of conflict management—depends on the preferences, perceptions and relative power of the regional actors involved, while their options depend on the preferences of and actions taken by other actors (Lepgold 2003: 18f). An analysis of regional conflict management arrangements has to take into account the type and severity of regional security externalities, the regional incentives, and the capacity for dealing with these. Examples of externalities are refugee flows, the provision of territorial safe havens for hostile groups, the disruption of the regional economy, and the spread of conflict through “social learning” (Lepgold 2003: 16ff).

The advantages of regional security arrangements over global ones are as follows: Firstly, as the members of an RSC are more affected by negative security externalities than outside powers, they have greater incentive to engage in their resolution. Secondly, geographic proximity reduces the costs of conflict management. Thirdly, as regional states are familiar with regional practices, their involvement tends to be seen as more legitimate than outside interference. These are exactly the reasons why, in the long run, a regional approach for Afghanistan seems to be superior to the current conflict management attempts by the US and

the international community. On the other hand, regional actors may be too close in the sense that they themselves are to some extent a party to the conflict. Additionally, as more and more security externalities have domestic rather than interstate roots, the strong inclination to the principle of sovereignty in many regions also inhibits regional conflict management attempts. Last but not least, regional organizations as well as states often lack the resources to address regional conflicts (Lepgold 2003: 13f). This is especially true for developing regions such as the Afghan neighborhood and has been the main reason why a regional approach to the Afghanistan conflict has not come forward thus far.

India is the only country in the region that might possess the capabilities and the willingness to offer a model of regional security management to Afghanistan, namely, an India-centered hegemonic order. It will, however, not suffice that Afghanistan accepts a bargain between core and periphery to legitimize Indian authority over its neighbors. Pakistan has to consent too. In light of the conflict configuration in South Asia, India's offer of strategic restraint vis-à-vis Pakistan is particularly affected by the problem of credibility. From the perspective adopted in this paper, credibility is dependent on the sequence of interaction; the preferences of the actors; and uncertainties about other actors' preferences, that is, their type. It is a dynamic issue and applies both to current promises (signaling) and the question of whether these promises, even if credible today, will be in the actor's interest in the future (commitment). India's prospects of establishing a stable hegemonic order in South Asia therefore rely not least on its ability to credibly signal its benevolence and to convince its neighbors that self-restraint will be a long-term principle of its regional policy. Audience costs and power-sharing mechanisms are two possible means by which India could increase its credibility in its neighborhood (Morrow 1999: 82ff).

4 India's Afghanistan Policy and Its Implications for Regional Order in South Asia

4.1 The Delineation of the South Asian RSC

As outlined above, Afghanistan lies at the crossroads of the Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and South Asian security environments. It was crafted not as a nation-state but as a buffer zone intended to separate the then dominant regional powers Britain, Russia, and Persia. Today, Afghanistan is more of a connector between the surrounding security environments than an insulator. It draws together various security-related issues (for example, narco-terrorism with an Islamist background) and spills them over to all bordering regions. Furthermore, today's regional powers in the broader neighborhood around Afghanistan—Iran, Pakistan, India, Russia, Uzbekistan, China, and Japan—are all involved in the country's affairs. Iran, for instance, has been significantly contributing to the reconstruction of Afghan infrastructure. This, however, has led to the situation that Western Afghanistan is today better connected to Iranian electricity and transportation networks than to those of the rest of

the country. Additionally, Iran's strategy in Afghanistan has become increasingly equivocal as more and more weapons of Iranian origin have been found in Afghanistan (Rubin 2008: 14f; Kjærnet/Torjesen 2008: 10). Japan, as another example, is the second-largest donor of reconstruction and development aid to Afghanistan (Jakobson 2008: 6). Furthermore, it intends to include Afghanistan in its "Central Asia Plus Japan" cooperation framework (Starr 2008: 339). China, already the largest investor in Pakistan, may soon also become the largest provider of foreign direct investment in Afghanistan (Rubin/Rashid 2008: 40f).

This is only to mention few examples of external powers' activities. The rivalries among them often preclude their optimal cooperation for the purpose of stabilizing Afghanistan (Kjærnet/Torjesen 2008: 10f). The fault lines within those rivalries are not easily understood. Interestingly, however, all regional players—except for Japan and a somewhat indecisive India (Grare 2006: 14; Moore 2007: 281)—now seem to share a negative perception of the US presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Russia, China, and Iran feel threatened by long-term US bases in their backyards (Kjærnet/Torjesen 2008: 10; Menon 2003: 198). Iran and the Central Asian Republics furthermore do not want the work of democracy-building NGOs in Afghanistan to spill over to their populations (Menon 2003: 199; Baev 2008: 40). The Afghan government is of course dependent on the US presence. Nevertheless, it is angry about continued US support for Pakistan. And Pakistan, last but not least, suspects the US of leaning towards a hostile Indian-Afghan alliance (Rubin/Rashid 2008: 35ff).

In the end, however, Afghanistan's neighbors are all stakeholders in regional stability.¹⁰ They are aware of the fact that Afghanistan is crucial to this. Thus, China and Russia worry about the spread of Islamist extremism in Central Asia with its potentially destabilizing effects on their own provinces with Muslim majorities (Collins/Wohlforth 2004: 293f). Iran-Afghanistan relations hit rock-bottom during the Taliban years (Rubin 2008: 13). India is affected by Islamist terrorism in Kashmir and increasingly also in its heartland. Even Pakistan is now a target of this kind of violence (Fair 2005: Chap. 1). Furthermore, Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, Iran are the preferred destinations of Afghan refugees in times of heightened turmoil within Afghanistan (Schetter 2004: 103f). Last but not least, all of these states (perhaps with the exception of Russia) are interested in the secure passage of energy through Afghanistan (Starr 2008: 352f; Rubin/Rashid 2008: 43).

As a consequence of ongoing multiparty involvement by neighboring states, the designation of Afghanistan to one region of the world has been inconclusive. Buzan and Wæver, for example, describe Afghanistan as an insulator state or a "mini-complex" and not as a member of a particular RSC (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 110ff). They reason that

[f]irst, none of the neighbouring countries is either interested in, or capable of, establishing its hegemony over [...] Afghanistan. [...] Second, all of the

¹⁰ According to a contrasting view, however, the preferences of Pakistan and Iran are not obvious. Both countries are said to prefer "controlled instability" over US- and India-dominated stability (Rubin 2008: 13ff; Khosla 2007a: 542ff). This point would be a very interesting subject for further investigation.

neighbouring states have more pressing security concerns in other directions. Third, Afghanistan lacks itself the power to force any knitting together of wider security dynamics. [...] Fourth, with the exit of the Taleban, Afghanistan has lost much of its utility as a safe haven for Islamic radicals. (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 112)

The turn of events in Afghanistan has proven the last assertion to be naïve, and the third one is not significant given the externalities-based approach of this paper. According to this perspective, a country does not deliberately attempt to link itself to another group of countries via security interdependence.¹¹ As pointed out above, I actually consider Afghanistan to be a connector because of its weak government, which is unable to control the spillover of negative security externalities to bordering regions. In my opinion, the crucial arguments are, however, the first two, which can be put as follows: “Neither Iran nor India has any interest in expanding into what might be called ‘the Afpakistan area’. Both have more pressing concerns in other directions” (Buzan/Wæver 2003: 113). The following sections will concentrate on these two arguments and explain why I do not agree with them.

Today, Afghanistan is clearly a part of the dominant conflict in South Asia: “Afghanistan [...] in many ways has replaced Kashmir as the main arena of the still-unresolved struggle between Pakistan and India” (Rubin/Rashid 2008: 31). Pakistan has been at odds with most Afghan governments because of the disagreement on the Durand Line.¹² Pakistani policymakers have found themselves flanked by two hostile neighbors with whom they have been involved in territorial disputes since the very emergence of the Pakistani state (Rubin/Siddique 2006: 7f; Afghanistan Study Group 2008: 37). From Pakistan’s perspective, its own support for the Taliban government was therefore helpful in two ways: On the one hand, it relieved pressure stemming from the Afghan-Pakistani border dispute and from Pashtun nationalism (Rubin 2007: 66ff; Schetter 2004: 125). On the other hand, it helped the country to gain long-sought “strategic depth” vis-à-vis India (Khosla 2007a: 541). This gain has been shattered by the taking of office of the Karzai administration, whose foreign policy agenda is pro-Indian and at least rhetorically fixed on conflicts in its relationship with Pakistan (Rubin/Siddique 2006: 15f). Conversely, the Indian government’s sustained support for perceptibly anti-Pakistani forces in Afghanistan is interpreted as “strategic encirclement” by Pakistan (Rubin/Rashid 2008: 32ff).

¹¹ From my knowledge of media coverage and the official statements of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, I speculate that the securitization approach would also reveal the problem of Pakistan as the most significant external security discourse in Afghanistan, whereas even in Pakistan and India the situation in the Afghan-Pakistani border region and related terrorism threats would figure very prominently. These speculations, of course, would need to be proven by a comprehensive study.

¹² In 1893 the northwestern frontier of British India was demarcated with the Durand Line. In 1947 the line became the border between Afghanistan and independent Pakistan. Because it cuts across Pashtun tribal areas, it has not been recognized as an international boundary by Afghanistan (Rubin/Siddique 2006: 5ff).

All this indicates that “security externalities are far more extensive, compelling, and durable” (Morgan 1997: 29) among Afghanistan, Pakistan and India than between them and other countries. Pakistan definitely sees both India and Afghanistan as relevant to its own national security and, accordingly, responds to actual and perceived threats in its relations with both states.¹³ Pakistan, like many postcolonial states, has time and again faced the threat of internal fragmentation and has accused India and Afghanistan of supporting separatist movements within Pakistan (Rubin/Siddique 2006: 4). The fragmentation of Pakistan would, however, send out major shock waves to Afghanistan and Central Asia and would be

hardly good news for India, and not only because Pakistan has nuclear weapons. The geographical, cultural, historical and demographic links between the two countries dictate that India cannot escape the fallout [...] from Pakistan’s fragmentation. India must, therefore, support stability in Pakistan. (Menon 2003: 197)

On the other hand, any worsening of the security situation in Afghanistan directly spills over to Pakistan by encouraging local Taliban there. Notwithstanding this, Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of supporting the Afghan insurgents in order to maintain control over intra-Afghan affairs and considers this a major threat to its national security (Kjærnet/Torjesen 2008: 9; Afghanistan Study Group 2008: 37).

In addition to all these negative externalities shared by India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the cooperative structures in the region, limited as they may be, should not be entirely omitted. From this perspective, the ongoing exclusion of Afghanistan from South Asia has appeared all the more doubtful since Afghanistan joined the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 2007 (India Review, 5/2007: 1).

In contrast to the high security interdependence between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, Afghanistan is not a party to the dominant conflict in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Afghanistan is connected to the Middle Eastern security complex mainly through Iran. Iran’s role in both security environments is indeed important to their delineation. In this respect, I support Buzan and Wæver’s assessment that Iran is much more preoccupied with developments in the Middle East, where it seeks a leading role. For Iran, the most pressing security threat emanating from Afghanistan is *not a local externality* (such as the problem of Islamic fundamentalists or of Afghan refugees) but the military presence of the US. The military presence of the US in Afghanistan threatens Iran not so much because of competing interests within Afghanistan itself, but rather because of the US containment of Iran’s leadership aspirations and the related nuclear standoff in the Middle East. Therefore, it seems reasonable to take the Iranian border as the line that separates the Middle Eastern from the South Asian RSC. With a view to Afghanistan’s northern neighborhood, Russia’s attempt to integrate Afghanistan into Central Asia has failed. Although northern Afghani-

¹³ For this criterion cf. Morgan 1997: 31ff.

stan in particular has close economic, ethnic, and cultural ties with the post-Soviet republics of Central Asia, in terms of security it is much more affected by the South Asian complex. The exclusion of Afghanistan from the South Asian RSC can also be interpreted as being the result of hegemonic definition (Singh 2001). It can be traced back to British colonial rule, when the exclusion of Afghanistan from what “naturally” constituted India was intended to conceal Britain’s inability to gain full control over the territory west of the Indus. After the departure of the British from the Indian subcontinent, the US coined and promoted the term *South Asia* (Singh 2001: 8f), distinguishing it from *Southeast Asia*, the region which Burma now belonged to. To summarize:

[G]eography has only since about 1970 come to know of a region called South Asia, which for years thereafter was thought of as a name needing a place more than a place needing a name. During the centuries before that, there was the unity of Hindustan, or later, the Indies, and later still, India, all of which included Afghanistan and Myanmar. (Khosla 2007b: 255f)

Singh explains from a constructivist perspective how the hegemonic discourse frames regional groupings. The question of *why* this happens can again be considered a question of strategic choice. Thus, the delimitation of regions fundamentally affects responsibilities for conflict management and justifications of engagement (Lepgold 2003: 21):

India [...] said the inclusion of Afghanistan in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation would go a long way in establishing lasting peace and stability in the region. External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee [...] said Afghanistan’s membership was important from a “strategic point of view.”¹⁴

In this light, Afghanistan’s accession to the SAARC and the fact that it was promoted by India (Moore 2007: 283) can be interpreted as a sign of India’s willingness to engage durably in Afghan security management and to integrate Afghanistan into the South Asian regional order.

4.2 *Regional Order in South Asia*

Within the South Asian RSC, India is the overwhelmingly dominant actor in terms of material capabilities. India accounts for more than 75 percent of the region’s population, GDP, and military expenditure and almost 65 percent of its area and armed forces.¹⁵ India’s military strength largely outbalances that of all other members combined (Bajpai 2003: 209). The distribution of capabilities within the South Asian RSC should thus be clearly unipolar. India has nonetheless never managed to transform its material lead into the political reality of hegemony. In fact, South Asian politics seem to have been driven by a bipolar constellation

¹⁴ See www.rediff.com/news/2007/jan/24afghan.htm (last accessed on 10 February 2009).

¹⁵ Source: Statistics of the World Bank and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (<http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query>, www.sipri.org/contents/webmaster/databases; last accessed on 9 February 2009).

most of the time, with India unable to ultimately resolve its conflict with Pakistan, either through the use of force or through peaceful means. The regional order in South Asia has remained a crisis-prone power-restraining-power model. This highlights the fact that no distribution of power-related approach can explain South Asian politics since India has not been able to dominate regional affairs according to its material superiority (offensive realism) nor has it effectively fostered regional integration through the provision of public goods (hegemonic stability).¹⁶ No clear tendency of joint balancing among (defensive realism) or bandwagoning by the smaller South Asian states has been observable so far (hegemonic stability, power transition). In short, most scholars find it puzzling that the South Asian RSC is far from exhibiting a stable hegemonic order in spite of a unipolar distribution of capabilities.

This can be partly explained by the fact that, despite India's apparent superiority, Pakistan is still disproportionately strong compared to the remaining South Asian states (Bajpai 2003: 231). Therefore, it has been relatively easy for India to transform its relations with the smaller South Asian states towards hegemony, which has in turn brought about more cooperation and stability in this part of South Asia. In terms of relative gains, India had little to fear when it announced the principle of nonreciprocity with these countries¹⁷ as its own leading position was beyond reach. To date, the principle of nonreciprocity has not applied to Pakistan. Although the gap in material capabilities between India and Pakistan is considerable, India still does not feel comfortable including Pakistan in its doctrine of unilateral concessions (Bajpai 2003: 222ff). The nuclearization of the subcontinent has reinforced Pakistan's claim as a serious challenger of India's superiority. This could explain why

South Asia comprises of two distinct "theatres" of conflict: between India and Pakistan, on the one hand, and between India and its smaller neighbors, on the other. The first is a theatre of war where military hostilities are always a distinct possibility; the other is a theatre of less militarised conflict in which hostilities are virtually ruled out. (Bajpai 2003: 209f)

In that vein, it is not only Buzan's delimitation of the South Asian RSC but also his structural description of it that needs to be revised.

Buzan defined the security complex for South Asia as revolving around the India-Pakistan rivalry. [...] In South Asia, the India-Pakistan rivalry appears as strong as ever [...], however, this is not the only serious conflict in the region and not every one of those conflicts revolves around the India-Pakistan rivalry. (Diehl 2003: 270)

¹⁶ The SAARC, for instance, was a Bangladeshi initiative that was quickly embraced by the smaller states of South Asia. India remained skeptical of this form of multilateral regional politics for a long time (cf. Muni 2000).

¹⁷ Through the principle of nonreciprocity India acknowledges that as the biggest state in the region it has a special responsibility for regional cooperation and needs to make unilateral concessions. The principle applies to India's relations with Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives (cf. Saran 2007: 242; Wagner 2005: 59f).

Rather, the complex revolves around the dominant position of India in terms of material capabilities, which has, in the first place, threatened all smaller neighbors.¹⁸ Compared to India, Pakistan is small. Compared to the remaining South Asian states, however, it is still huge. This peculiar distribution of power has produced a double security order in South Asia with (1) an eastern theater (India and Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives) which is already much advanced in the direction of hegemonic stability and (2) a western theater (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan) in which cooperative and effective regional security management is still inhibited by political divisions among the actors, ethnic and sectarian conflict, weak government, and territorial disputes.

The states in the eastern theater were too weak to resist Indian superiority for long. India, on the other hand, was confident in quickly resorting to the means of benign unipolarity within this theater. These developments were consolidated by the restraint of outsiders who acknowledged India's dominant role in this area. Thus, the US countenanced India's interventions in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal during the 1980s (Bajpai 2003: 220f). As predicted by RSCT, this unipolar sub-order functioned relatively autonomous and headed towards stability (Lake 1997: 60). In the western theater, however, quite the contrary was the case. During the Cold War, the bipolar logic within this sub-order was sustained through great-power involvement, that is, the US and China on the Pakistani side and the Soviet Union on the Indian side. Given this backdrop of a bipolar international system interacting with a quasi-bipolar regional system, it is not surprising that attempts at conflict management in western South Asia have been sparse and ineffective (cf. Lake 1997: 60ff). Pakistan's various internal and external security threats have from the beginning been tied to both India and Afghanistan. With respect to its relations with India, this has led to a history of conflict and instability due to constant attempts at challenging Indian superiority (Sathasivam 2005: Chap. 1). With respect to its relations with Afghanistan, this has resulted in the erosion of the colonial construct of the country's isolation. Both India and Pakistan have been trying to gain influence over Afghanistan and have thus been drawing it back into the South Asian security system (Rubin/Siddique 2006: 14). Today Pakistan's fear of hostile encirclement and its attempts to forestall this have made the respective security of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan inseparable:

Now, the Pakistani military has turned the FATA¹⁹ into a staging area for militants who can be used to conduct asymmetric warfare in both Afghanistan and Kashmir [...]. This use of the FATA has eroded state control, especially in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, which abuts the FATA. The Swat Valley, where Pakistani Taliban fighters have been battling the govern-

¹⁸ On international maps, India and Afghanistan do not share a common border. As India still officially claims the whole territory of Jammu and Kashmir, it sees itself, however, as a direct neighbor of Afghanistan.

¹⁹ The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are a compound of semiautonomous tribal areas at Pakistan's border with Afghanistan.

ment for several years, links Afghanistan and the FATA to Kashmir. Pakistan's strategy for external security has thus undermined its internal security. (Rubin/Rashid 2008: 37)

Up to today, violent conflict has prevailed in the western theater. In particular, Pakistan and Afghanistan still suffer from the fact that they were both crafted as states without nations and contain various nations without states. Attempts to compensate for the lack of internal cohesion through the construction of external threat perceptions and through an Islamization of the society have only added new problems. We have observed mighty security externalities of all kinds between India, Pakistan and Afghanistan to date; thus, the density of the complex could hardly be higher. On the other hand, incentives for managing and finally resolving conflict are also inherent in these sources of crises. The boom of the Indian economy throughout the last decade has raised the hope that India could now successfully extend its hegemonic order to its western neighborhood. The next section will explicate the conditions under which it appears probable that India could act as a benign hegemon in the entire South Asian RSC, including Afghanistan.

4.3 India As a Benign Regional Hegemon in South Asia

As an emerging regional leader, India's incentives to engage in Afghan conflict management are obvious: inaction is felt in various ways, for example, in the cut-off of the Indian market from Central Asian economies and energy reserves (Kjærnet/Torjesen 2008: 11f) or in the constant infiltration of militant Islamists to Kashmir (Ganguly 2006: 50ff). The geographic proximity makes the projection of force to Afghanistan easier for India than for remote powers. With Pakistan's refusal to grant India direct overland access to Afghanistan (Starr 2008: 340; Moore 2007: 281; Afghanistan Study Group 2008: 15), however, this advantage on India's part is rendered less significant. The decisive issues determining India's future role in Afghanistan are in fact (1) whether India possesses the capabilities for long-term engagement in Afghan security, both in material and in organizational terms; (2) whether its engagement will be accepted as legitimate by Afghans and other stakeholders in Afghan stability; and (3) whether Indian policy makers will be able to justify their engagement vis-à-vis their domestic constituencies, especially in the case of rising numbers of Indian casualties in Afghanistan (cf. Lepgold 2003: 20f).

The question of whether India will also be able to become a regional hegemon in the western theater of the South Asian RSC thus depends on its own resources and resolve on the one hand, and on its acceptance by the Afghans and by external parties on the other hand. With respect to India's resources and resolve, India initially pledged US\$650 million in economic aid to Afghanistan and has since raised this offer by an additional US\$100 million in 2007 and another US\$450 million in 2008. India is thus the largest non-OECD donor to Afghani-

stan (Khosala 2007a: 545; Bajoria 2008).²⁰ In addition, India provides scholarships for Afghan students and fosters its commercial ties with the country, something which has, however, been hindered by Pakistan's denial of direct access. India has also offered training to the Afghan National Security Forces, but this has not been realized due to Pakistani opposition (Khosla 2007a: 551; Moore 2007: 283). Nevertheless, India has sent about four thousand Indian workers to Afghanistan. Since attacks on them have increased, they are now protected by Indian paramilitary and police forces (Bajoria 2008; Khosla 2007a: 551). India is committed to development and infrastructure projects in various sectors in Afghanistan, especially the reconstruction of overland roads. In terms of soft power, India's asset is the high popularity of Indian music, movies and television shows in Afghanistan (Bajoria 2008).²¹ With a view to military capabilities, India has enhanced its presence in Central Asia through the establishment of its first airbase outside India, in Farkhor/Aini, Tajikistan (Bajoria 2008; Starr 2008: 340). All this points to India's willingness and preparedness to become more involved in the attempt to reconstruct and stabilize Afghanistan.

India as the main provider of security in its troubled neighborhood can, nevertheless, only be a long-term prospect: it first needs to deal with its own domestic instabilities and problems resulting from underdevelopment. While India is expanding its capabilities and its commitment to Afghanistan, the burden of granting security—especially in the battle against Taliban and Al Qaeda—will still rely heavily on US and NATO efforts. To be clear, it is not realistic to think that India will be able to replace the international security forces any time soon. The idea is rather that while the international forces try to regain and maintain military control over Afghanistan and to rebuild the Afghan National Security Forces, the regional actors—especially India and Pakistan—should be encouraged to create the conditions which mean that such a heavy presence of security forces is no longer necessary. In order for this to be achieved, it is crucial that India sustains economic growth, both to attain the necessary capabilities and to create incentives for members of the South Asian RSC to bandwagon.

Concerning external acceptance, the US is likely to welcome increased Indian engagement as long as this does not endanger Pakistan's cooperation. This potential acceptance is largely due to a transformation in the relationship between the US and India towards a strategic partnership since the end of the Cold War (Mohan 2008: 150ff; Tellis 2008: 24f). Japan, too, is supportive of extended Indian engagement in Central Asia (Starr 2008: 340). Russian-Indian ties have always been friendly, with India being an important client for Russian military exports. As long as India does not advance its military presence deeper into the Russian sphere of influence—and until now India has been cautious not to do this—Russia is likely to prefer

²⁰ Figures vary; the figures given in this paper reflect the information taken from the cited sources and from the website of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, www.meaindia.nic.in (last accessed on 9 February 2009).

²¹ The question of acceptance among the Afghan population must be further investigated. Compared to the now highly unpopular US, India's assistance enjoys a good reputation (Khosala 2007a: 547ff). Conservative circles are, however, concerned about the popularity of liberal Bollywood culture in Afghanistan. The Hindu-Muslim divide could indeed cause friction once the US presence is outside the spotlight of public attention.

an India-dominated regional order that stretches through Afghanistan over a prolonged US presence in the region (Moore 2007: 282). The same applies to Iran, with which India has enjoyed increasingly cooperative relations since the end of the Cold War (Fair 2007: 145). Within Central Asia India does not arouse the fear of imperial domination which the US, Russia, and China do (Starr 2008: 339ff).

Although most of the external parties are likely to accept a prominent role of India in Afghanistan, two important veto players remain, one within and one outside South Asia: Pakistan and China. Since the late 1950s India-China relations have been marked by mutual suspicion, rivalry, and at times overt hostility. Today, both countries seem to handle their relationship pragmatically, giving priority to economic growth and postponing contentious issues such as border disputes (Lu 2007: 19f). Due to their status as emerging non-Western economies, both countries have common interests vis-à-vis established powers and express their views at venues such as the BRIC²² meetings. Nevertheless, China remains suspicious about the nascent Indo-US friendship and fears encirclement (Menon 2003: 197f), just as India fears encirclement by a hostile China-Pakistan entente. Furthermore, whereas Chinese and Indian claims along the border, in Southeast Asia, Tibet, and Kashmir are set, Central Asia is a new playground where both states are competing for access to natural resources. Against this backdrop it appears doubtful that China will consent to an extension of Indian influence to the outskirts of Central Asia. On the other hand, the alternatives—an enduring US presence, an abandoned Afghanistan drifting into chaos, or China itself as a provider of order and security to Afghanistan—seem similarly undesirable from a Chinese perspective. India has little to offer in order to influence the Chinese position. China's reluctance would make it more difficult for India to establish itself as a benign hegemon in Afghanistan, but it would not make it impossible. Pakistan, on the other hand, could doom India's efforts to failure. Vis-à-vis Pakistan, however, India has more options for inducing cooperation. The liberalization of the Indian economy and its subsequent boom have increased both the possibilities and the benefits of regional economic cooperation. But if India wants to become a regional leader, a mere consolidation of its material lead will not suffice. As Kupchan has explained, hegemonic stability requires both a certain structure and a certain character of power. To put it simply: "The core agrees to engage in self-binding, and in return the periphery bandwagons and agrees to enter into the core's sphere of influence" (Kupchan 2003: 138). Indian policy makers may well be convinced that they already have been acting with self-restraint vis-à-vis Pakistan. To them it will be obvious that India is only seeking its due position in South Asian politics, not to bully its neighbors (or even reintegrate them into India, as some still fear) but to bring about security, stability, and prosperity in the region. Khosla, in a publication of the Indian Foreign Service Institute, for instance, expressed it this way:

²² BRIC stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China.

Because of its size India can afford [...] non-reciprocity in relations with the smaller neighbours. [...] [G]estures that are being made to Pakistan on issues such as their claim on the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, are steps that fall in this category; they [...] promote the regional spirit. (Khosla 2007a: 553)

The problem in this respect is India's credibility, and for Pakistan this is vital—as the words of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto indicate:

It's our history. A history of three wars with a larger neighbor. India is five times larger than we are. Their military strength is five times larger. In 1971, our country was disintegrated. So the security issue for Pakistan is an issue of survival. (cited in Waltz 2000a: 13)

A strategy to gradually change this dilemma must be twofold: On the one hand, Pakistan's excessive threat perception needs to be alleviated. On the other hand, India's credibility problem must be addressed.

In the first place, it is necessary to politically strengthen Pakistani sovereignty; that is, the US needs to immediately stop nonconsensual military operations on Pakistani soil for everything that further undermines Pakistan's sense of security will sooner or later undermine security in the entire western theater of South Asia. In the medium term the border issues between India and Pakistan as well as between Pakistan and Afghanistan need to be resolved. Recognition of the Durand Line as the international frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan would be an important step towards regional stability. Given the weakness of the Afghan government, however, this would also be risky with regard to Afghanistan's internal stability. The same is true for Pakistan and the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir: in the present situation, the Pakistani government is too weak to justify concessions vis-à-vis its domestic constituencies. India, as the strongest and most consolidated of the three, would have the best chances of making unilateral concessions in the border dispute, for example, regarding the Siachen Glacier, and thereby setting in motion a virtuous circle.²³

This brings us to India's credibility problem. Although India's self-perception might be that it has acted with considerable restraint in prior crises with Pakistan, for example, in the 2002 standoff after the attacks on the Indian parliament, in the 1999 Kargil crisis and even in the 1971 war, from the Pakistani perspective the trauma of disintegration suffered in 1971—when India significantly assisted in the creation of Bangladesh—overshadows all Indian actions.²⁴ This can be described as a signaling problem. For India the intervention in the 1971 East Pakistan crisis was legitimized by West Pakistan's bad governance in the east and the resulting negative security externalities affecting India. India's limited motivations have, from an Indian perspective, been demonstrated by the nonintegration of East Bengal into the Indian Union

²³ The Line of Control (LoC) separates the Indian- and Pakistani-controlled parts of Kashmir. The Siachen Glacier area has not been demarcated, something which has led to fighting that still continues today. India and Pakistan have never officially recognized the LoC as an international border.

²⁴ For a summary of the events which led to the 1971 war and the 1999 and 2002 crises cf. Sathasivam 2005: 9ff.

and the sparing of West Pakistan. For Pakistan, however, the events of 1971 were the proof that India ultimately seeks to dismember Pakistan (Sathasivam 2005: 11f). In Pakistan's eyes, restraint on the part of India has only been shown out of fear of US or Chinese intervention.

As the security issue for Pakistan is an issue of survival, it cannot afford misjudgments of Indian motivations. In order to change Pakistan's beliefs about Indian preferences, India needs to send out a strong signal. The extension of the principle of nonreciprocity to Pakistan, especially in territorial questions, would without doubt be a costly move for any Indian government with regard to the domestic audience. But according to the logic of signaling, it is precisely these costs that make a signal credible (Morrow 1999: 87). Of course, this would not guarantee that Pakistan's beliefs and preferences and thus its strategy towards India would be altered. Given all its domestic problems, Pakistan (and also Afghanistan) is likely to remain a difficult neighbor for a long time. Nevertheless, if India actually seeks to establish a hegemonic order in the whole of South Asia, few other options appear to be sustainable.

5 Conclusions

In summary, the analysis has shown the high degree of security interdependence which exists in the western theater of South Asia, that is, between India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. It has furthermore detected strong indications of India's willingness to expand its responsibility in this area, especially through contributions to stabilizing Afghanistan. These intentions could fill an existing gap since other regional and global actors have so far not been able or willing to consolidate security management arrangements in western South Asia. On the other hand, it has become clear that the establishment of a stable regional order in the region is hampered by Pakistan's opposition to Indian domination. It has been argued that Pakistan can only accept an India-centered order if its own security—vis-à-vis neighbors, external powers, and most importantly India itself—is granted. This requires a credible demonstration of Indian self-restraint as well as mechanisms to ensure India's commitment to this principle in the long term.

Given this, it appears doubtful that India actually aspires to a leading role in South Asia if it will come with these costs. What would be the benefits? Firstly, the successful management of regional security externalities would reduce their negative fallout for India. This management does not need to be regional. Why would India nevertheless prefer a regional arrangement although this would likely place the burden of granting security on its shoulders? The most convincing answer to this question refers to two major preferences in the Indian grand strategy: (1) India wants to exclude external powers from its immediate neighborhood (Sathasivam 2005: 142ff). (2) India wants to be recognized as a global major power (Bajpai/Sahni 2008: 98f). *If* these assertions are correct, India will not be able to avoid taking on responsibility for security and stability in its exclusive sphere of influence. *Whether* they are

correct and how they relate to one another—whether they are co-constitutive or whether one is actually only a means to achieve the other—should be the subject of further investigation. Unless the international system returns to bipolarity, the structural conditions are favorable to the realization of benign unipolarity in South Asia. Although the concept is heavily informed by Western experience and a one-to-one application to South Asia is improbable, this does not mean that a South Asian version of stable hegemony is not possible. The international community and especially the US could actively contribute to this as facilitators and guarantors of a regional peace accord (Rubin/Siddique 2006: 2; Starr 2008: 334). To bring India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to the bargaining table on serious and reasonable terms will not be easy. Nevertheless, the US can offer a number of incentives—as provider, as broker, or as guarantor—to each of them, including the following: support for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline and other forms of energy cooperation between South and Central Asia for Afghanistan, Pakistan and India; access to Pakistani seaports for Afghanistan; land access to Afghanistan and Central Asia for India; enhanced recognition in international fora;²⁵ and transparency about Indian activities in Afghanistan and security on its northwestern frontier for Pakistan²⁶ (Starr 2008: 362; Rubin/Rashid 2008: 41f, Fair 2005: 86ff).

²⁵ With the conclusion of the Indo-US nuclear agreement, the US has given away an important bargaining chip vis-à-vis India. Although from a US perspective the nuclear deal has primarily been motivated by global level considerations, it is not clear why some progress in regional affairs has not been among the conditions.

²⁶ This can only be achieved if Pakistan simultaneously seeks a political solution to the problems in the FATA and the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP).

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