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THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH ASIA AFTER AFGHANISTAN

BY ALEXANDER EVANS



ASIA SOCIETY ADVISORY GROUP ON U.S. POLICY TOWARD SOUTH ASIA

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FOREWORD

WITH THE 2014 MILITARY DRAWDOWN in Afghanistan approaching, the second Obama administration faces a vast array of challenges in South Asia. As Afghanistan prepares for a critical transition, it is beset by insecurity, corruption, drug trafficking, and political instability. Rising militancy and extremism in Pakistan threaten regional stability. Poverty and corruption in India have the capacity to undermine economic growth in the region's most vibrant democracy. The advancement of economic and political development in Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka will depend in large part on the success of efforts to foster greater interconnectivity among economies in South Asia and throughout Asia. At the same time, China's ascent as a powerful regional player with a growing range of interests in South Asia is making relations between Washington and Beijing all the more complex.

The United States will need to adopt a fresh approach to South Asia policy if it intends to forge relationships throughout the region built on trust and mutual interests, while also maintaining a broader long-term strategic vision toward Asia. *The United States and South Asia after Afghanistan* seeks to pave the way for a robust and forward-looking U.S. policy toward the region—one that suits the complex realities of the day and ensures that both the United States and the countries of South Asia will be better equipped to handle future uncertainties.

This report reviews U.S. policy toward the region since 1947, drawing on a range of declassified documents, firsthand accounts from American practitioners and their Indian and Pakistani counterparts since the mid-1990s, and more than 90 interviews conducted between August and November 2012. One key conclusion drawn from this review is that the United States has missed crucial opportunities to define and pursue its interests in South Asia.

Through an examination of the actors who drive South Asia policy, the report offers recommendations on how decision making can be more effectively coordinated with the aim of developing strategies that are both long range and decisive. In doing so, the report focuses on the ways in which the United States can improve its processes to make better policy choices, rather than outlining specific policies Washington should adopt toward the region.

Alexander Evans, the report's author and Asia Society Bernard Schwartz Fellow, led this ambitious project, which was informed by his experience in the region and knowledge of U.S. foreign policy making. On behalf of Asia Society, I would like to thank Alexander for dedicating his energy and impressive skills to this effort. The project also benefited from the expertise provided by the members of the Asia Society Advisory Group on U.S. Policy toward South Asia, as well as the individuals who participated as interviewees. I am grateful to all of them for generously giving

their time and informed perspectives. My thanks also go to Johan Kharabi for overseeing the many aspects of this project, Atefa Shah for research and drafting assistance, and to the rest of Asia Society's Global Policy Programs team for lending support to the project in New York and Washington, D.C.

Suzanne DiMaggio

Vice President, Global Policy Programs, Asia Society

December 2012

PREFACE

A STABLE AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH ASIA is important to the interests of the United States and to the future of Asia as a whole. U.S. policy toward the region has had its share of successes and missed opportunities. One of the former is the significant uplift in U.S.-India relations since the 1990s. The latter are the casualties of either too little attention to underlying issues in the region or the by-product of excessive focus on one issue alone.

If the United States is to play a positive role in facilitating a better future for South Asia, it needs a clear understanding of how U.S. policy has evolved over time. Only then can it take the steps necessary to adapt to current realities and meet the wide range of future regional challenges. Afghanistan is not the only interest that Washington has in the region despite its being the immediate focus of much press and policy attention over the past several years. While the United States has made significant progress since 1947 in forging effective bilateral ties with countries across South Asia, policy has regularly focused on the immediate over the enduring.

The United States has a continuing interest in the stability and development of Afghanistan. However, advancing the valuable bilateral relationship with India, achieving a sustainable and effective policy toward Pakistan, and developing a regional policy that understands how South Asia connects to other parts of Asia are of even greater consequence. The U.S.-China relationship is integral to South Asia policy as well, and U.S. policy toward Asia as a whole must be more fully integrated to reflect this. As the drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan continues in the run-up to 2014, this will become more apparent.

The report that follows is timely. Asia Society has interviewed more than 90 current and former practitioners and researched the foreign policy archives to assess how South Asia policy is made and how it could be improved. Interagency coordination has never been easy, but it is absolutely essential if the United States is to adopt a long-term strategy toward the region. Linkages between various policy communities working on South Asia need to be strengthened as well.

Diplomacy is about the art of the possible and is strongly influenced by events. A better prepared, more purposeful, and integrated approach to South Asia policy can help the next administration prepare for the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Ambassador John D. Negroponte

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS REPORT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE without the dedication of a first-class team in the Global Policy Programs department at Asia Society under Suzanne DiMaggio's leadership. Johan Kharabi kept the project on track, skillfully managing an array of competing priorities. His good humor and relentless focus on detail are impressive. Atefa Shah conducted excellent research, contributed drafting, and supplied a constant stream of good ideas. Sarah Shore provided invaluable support for Washington research and interviews. Matt Stumpf and his team in Asia Society's Washington office, along with Debra Eisenman in New York, provided excellent guidance on tone and content.

I am also extremely grateful to all those who contributed to this study—conducted over an intensive four months. An active and helpful advisory group and a generous range of informed interviewees made this report what it is. Errors, omissions, and opinions are my responsibility alone.

This report is written in a personal capacity.

Alexander Evans

Asia Society Bernard Schwartz Fellow

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE NEXT YEAR PRESENTS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY for the second Obama administration to forge a more strategic, integrated, and successful policy toward South Asia. This report looks back in order to look forward, and draws on lessons from the history of U.S. South Asia policy to make recommendations for the future. Many of these recommendations focus on how the United States should improve South Asia policy making rather than setting out detailed policy prescriptions.

U.S. policy toward South Asia since 1947 has been thoughtful, rooted in expertise, and sometimes successful. But the growing importance of the region since the late 1990s has also led to two strategic disconnects:

- Those working on South Asia have not connected closely enough to those dealing with East Asia. The ties that now exist need to be strengthened.
- The focused policy agendas on counterterrorism, Afghanistan, and India have been conducted in parallel rather than in concert. These policy communities and agendas could be better connected. This does not require re-hyphenating India and Pakistan, but it does mean reconnecting the different parts of regional policy—and expanding them into an Asia-wide and global framework.

The Obama administration has set out an economic vision for the South Asia region—the “New Silk Road.” Trade is already growing among these countries in what has been the least economically integrated region in the world. For these positive changes to be truly transformative, they need to be underpinned by sustainable political change as well.

Four principles should inform a fresh approach to South Asia policy:

- **Avoid hyphens.** “Indo-Pak” was offensive to New Delhi and encouraged a perception that U.S. policy would be animated by equivalence, not autonomous judgment, when Washington responded to developments in relations between India and Pakistan. “Af-Pak” was offensive to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kabul resented the implied exclusive linkage to Islamabad along with any suggestion of being a junior partner. Islamabad resented Pakistan being tied to Afghanistan, given the different trajectories of both countries. The future risk is not a return to either of these outmoded hyphens, but of a new and singular hyphenation based on “China-India.” Relations between China and India will be enormously important in the decades to come, but the Beijing-Delhi relationship alone will neither define Asia’s future nor capture all the regional South Asia issues that deserve attention.
- **Think regionally.** This should build on the successful focus on the New Silk Road, as advanced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Ambassador Marc Grossman, the U.S. special representative

for Afghanistan and Pakistan. A regional perspective should include actions as well as speeches and expand beyond an exclusive focus on economic and social development. It must address political and security challenges, including sensitive issues like counterterrorism; deterrence stability; and potential crisis management among India, Pakistan, and China. Each country deserves individual attention within a broader perspective and policy framework. This should connect all the regions of Asia: South, Central, East, and Southeast.

- **Integrate South Asia into an Asia strategy.** A holistic approach is essential. Many, if not all, functional challenges cross the traditional South and Central Asia/East Asia divide. Asian states see Asia as a geopolitical and economic space. U.S. policy makers on South Asia need to do likewise. China is a South Asian foreign and economic policy actor; a close political ally of Pakistan; and deeply engaged with Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. U.S. policy makers need to stretch their vision beyond the boundaries of geographic bureaus at the State Department. Principals in the George W. Bush and first Obama administrations moved toward this: transformational diplomacy followed by the pivot, and now rebalancing, toward Asia. Only in parts has the foreign policy bureaucracy kept pace.
- **Connect policy agendas.** Interagency coordination is always difficult. Coordinating foreign and security policy strategy is even harder. But contested policy agendas in South Asia need not mean a divided approach to policy. Effective U.S. policies in the region will be advanced when the interagency process properly evaluates the competing demands of different policy agendas, establishes realistic goals, and recognizes the load-bearing capabilities of key U.S. bilateral partnerships in South Asia.

Important lessons can be learned from the past, as the history of U.S. South Asia policy demonstrates:

- **A strategic opportunity for recalibrating South Asia policy was lost at the end of the Cold War. It should not be lost again as Afghanistan and counterterrorism no longer dominate available policy bandwidth in Washington.** The problem is not the lack of expertise or, necessarily, strategic capability. It is the relentless focus on the immediate and the urgent—and the lack of properly constituted time to establish a longer-range strategy.
- **A longer-range strategy can deliver, as U.S. India policy has from the 1990s.** The India strategy introduced in the 1990s and advanced since has worked. It was successful because it was bipartisan, sustained over a series of administrations, and delivered tangible benefits for both countries. Successive presidents and secretaries of state nurtured it. The relationship has prospered because it is not limited to U.S.-India bilateral issues.
- **For all that Afghanistan matters, it is not the most vital U.S. national interest in South Asia.** In past decades, immediate policy priorities have dominated. Examples include the 1980s Afghan war, regional wars, crises between India and Pakistan, and nonproliferation. The challenge for strategic policy is to clearly identify core U.S. priorities in the region both now and for the future. The stability of Pakistan is one such example.

Lessons can also be gleaned for the future by looking at who has made South Asia policy in the past:

- **An effective interagency process is crucial.** The National Security Council (NSC) needs to be staffed with officials who have the authority, capacity, and reach to advise, coordinate, and assess policy delivery. Priority countries need to have champions. A reliance on NSC or State Department mid-level staff is not enough.
- **Personal relationships with South Asian leaders matter.** A repeated theme from declassified U.S. foreign policy records is an understanding of this in principle but a failure to operationalize it. Relationship management cannot be subcontracted to ambassadors alone, neither is it about the volume of shuttle diplomacy. Relationships between principals matter and are a measure of the sustained quality of engagement. Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott’s dialogue with Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh after 1998 is one successful example.
- **A focus on crisis management is not enough.** There must be longer-range strategy, regardless of where this is situated across government. The majority of those interviewed for this report argued that strategy toward South Asia is underdeveloped and a recurring challenge. Some interviewees questioned this, suggesting that the problem is not a lack of strategy, but a lack of implementation.
- **The challenge is not necessarily one of expertise. It is how to sustain and utilize expertise to inform strategic and operational foreign policy.** Could the difficulties generated by the initial language of a “pivot” to Asia have been avoided? Could the U.S.-India relationship have advanced further during the Cold War with a more nuanced American diplomatic tone? Could the supply lines for Afghanistan have reopened earlier had Pakistan been better understood following the November 2011 cross-border raid by U.S. forces in Afghanistan?

Finally, this report makes seven specific recommendations for the incoming U.S. administration to bolster processes needed to create longer-term, strategic South Asia policy:

Recommendation 1: Improve the capacity for U.S. strategy toward South Asia.

An enhanced approach to regional strategy that incorporates South and East Asia is needed. It also needs to incorporate smaller states in the region. Policy should be “coordinated with, not subcontracted to, India” (as stated by an interviewee from the region). It could be placed in the NSC, with the advantage of being at the center but at the risk of being overwhelmed by operational detail. It could lie within Policy Planning at the State Department, although this may be too distant from current policy issues. This report recommends either an informal or institutional uplift within the regional bureau responsible for South and Central Asia. The informal model takes after Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell’s creation of a front-office regional strategy team for East Asia, providing strategic policy advice directly to the assistant secretary. An institutional model would establish strategic policy as a specific responsibility of one of the deputy assistant secretaries for South Asia, ensuring that he or she dedicates at least 50 percent of his or her time to this role.

Recommendation 2: Better connect East Asia and South Asia policy, both through cross-postings and by establishing a mechanism for cross-bureau Asia policy.

Career incentives should be introduced to encourage diplomats to serve in China and South Asian states (e.g., by valuing this experience when selecting Foreign Service officers for senior appointments). Progress should be made on the positive work already underway that sees the assistant secretary for South and Central Asia lead talks in Beijing and the assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific lead talks in New Delhi. South Asia policy needs to nest within a strategic Asia policy, as well as inform it. This report does not suggest how this should be done, rather that it needs to be pursued within the bureaucracy. This should be a high priority for the second Obama administration.

Recommendation 3: Continue to bet on India, while managing expectations.

India requires sustained high-level attention, but also a structured U.S. approach to the bilateral relationship. This approach needs to accurately judge how much U.S. and Indian interests will converge and how best to manage the tone of political and diplomatic engagement. As Secretary of State Clinton has said, the United States is making a strategic bet on India's future. In an interview for this report, a former assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs suggested that U.S. and Indian interests "will not always be aligned although they can operate in parallel." The United States needs a realistic discussion of how quickly the relationship can move forward, particularly on global issues for which India does not always adopt a similar position to that of the United States. The public tone of Washington's messaging on the relationship needs care. As one interviewee noted, the United States does not need to highlight the value of Indian security cooperation versus that of China.

Recommendation 4: Develop a realistic, medium-term Pakistan strategy.

The greatest policy challenges lie in the U.S. relationship with Pakistan, including vital national interests for Washington. Fundamental to the success of any future approach must be some deeper work to understand how Pakistan's own governance works, and a greater willingness to work with other states and international organizations. An overly heavy bilateral approach to Pakistan can reinforce some of the negative tendencies in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. As former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Nicholas Platt underlines, the United States "needs a patient policy toward Pakistan." In the short term, Washington needs to continue to work with Islamabad on counterterrorism and the drawdown in Afghanistan. In the medium to longer term, the United States needs to establish an approach to Pakistan that delivers on vital U.S. interests. Whether the administration opts for a cooperative or a confrontational approach to Islamabad, policy will depend on a clear-headed understanding of the art of the possible.

Recommendation 5: Better integrate counterterrorism and regional policy through cross-posting officials between the two areas.

A specific focus on counterterrorism is crucial to protect the United States. However, counterterrorism policy needs to integrate regional policy perspectives. This applies to the way in which to work with regional partners and when and how to pressure them. The more that agencies leading on counterterrorism can draw on regional expertise, not least to think through the consequences of different actions, the better integrated foreign and security policy can be.

Recommendation 6: Establish a formal “South Asia cadre” of Foreign Service officers.

A longer-term focus on South Asia is one integral part of a rebalancing toward Asia. As this report shows, the historic challenge has not been a lack of expertise. Although the policy bench was sometimes thin, a larger challenge was that South Asia work was not highly valued within the Foreign Service. Establishing a formal South Asia cadre in the Foreign Service in which officers can formally declare a career interest in the region would provide the South Asia policy leads in the State Department with a defined community of officers. These officers would continue to be generalists in their respective policy cones (like political or economic work) but should expect to build South Asia experience during the course of their career. This may help establish a discrete community of regional diplomats in a region where language training—unlike the guild identity of those who work on China or the Arab world—does not play a leading role in creating a distinctive social network.

Recommendation 7: Create a South Asia–specific Presidential Management Fellowship.

Establishing a South Asia Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF) is crucial. One appointment should be made each year for a two-year term across the interagency. Like regular PMFs, these positions should allow the officer to rotate through a series of details—six months in the State Department, six months in Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy, and so on. Unlike regular PMFs, who can serve on a range of issues, this position should be limited to South Asia policy roles across the interagency. The criteria for recruitment should include at least a year spent in South Asia beforehand and graduate study with at least a 30 percent focus on South Asia. This role would cost relatively little, but it would advance interagency connections on South Asia and create a visible and valued position on South Asia. If the individual left government to join a think tank or academia afterward, the broader field of external experts would be enriched—with an individual versed in government. If the individual stayed on, either through joining the Foreign Service or taking up a civil service role, the U.S. government would gain a further regional hand. This recommendation could be achieved through amending the current PMF program.

INTRODUCTION: THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH ASIA

We were a lot better at giving speeches than executing them.

– Former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs

SUCCESSFUL FOREIGN POLICY LOOKS AHEAD. It is strategic, or at the very least anticipates future challenges. This report originates from a period of reflection on U.S. foreign policy toward South Asia facilitated by Asia Society, which made this study possible, and from research and teaching at Yale University. It draws on a review of declassified U.S. government archives from 1947 onward, conversations with American practitioners and their Indian and Pakistani counterparts since the mid-1990s, and on more than 90 semi-structured interviews conducted between August and November 2012. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes that appear in this study have been taken from these interviews. This research focused on three recurring questions:

- Is it possible for Washington to develop a more strategic foreign policy approach to South Asia rather than have policy making dominated by the agenda of the day?
- Does the U.S. government have the South Asia expertise it needs, and does this connect properly to policy making?
- How can the competing policy communities that care about specific countries or specific issues forge a common policy agenda that can be coherently implemented by an administration?

These challenges are not unique to the U.S. foreign policy machine. Similar problems afflict other governments. The three questions perhaps mattered less when South Asia was less relevant to U.S. policy goals, but given vital and growing U.S. interests in the region, they merit answers.

Many previous studies have looked at South Asia policy. Some have focused on single countries—India or Afghanistan. Several, however, have taken a longer and more regional view. Since 2001, two independent task forces have attempted to formulate a South Asia policy for the United States: *New Priorities in South Asia: U.S. Policy Toward India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*, sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and Asia Society in 2003,¹ and *American Interests in South Asia: Building a Grand Strategy in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India*, produced by the Aspen Institute in 2011.² Only one perceptive article, written by Bruce Riedel and Stephen Cohen, has argued that the United States is “poorly organized for the challenges ahead” in South Asia and recommended specific changes to address this.³

¹ Council on Foreign Relations, “New Priorities in South Asia: U.S. Policy Toward India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan,” Chairmen’s Report of an Independent Task Force. New York and Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, 2003.

² Nicholas Burns and Jonathon Price, “American Interests in South Asia: Building a Grand Strategy in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India,” New York: Aspen Institute, 2011.

³ Bruce Riedel and Stephen Cohen, “Rethinking South Asia,” *The National Interest*, May 4, 2011.

This region will need constant attention, innovation, and clear-headed policies to pursue a path of stability, security, and economic growth.

– Aspen Institute, “American Interests in South Asia”

This report echoes themes from these studies. South Asia policy should be more proactive. Engagement with India should continue and deepen. Strong bilateral relationships with India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan increase the chances of greater U.S. influence in the region.⁴

There have been two previous opportunities to consider U.S. South Asia policy from a fresh perspective. The first came after the British left the subcontinent in 1947, during a brief two-year window before Cold War concerns became all consuming. The second came after 1989, as Cold War alliances no longer dominated U.S. foreign policy. Neither opportunity was fully grasped.

In the late 1940s, the strategic focus of U.S. foreign policy was the new global competition with the Soviet Union. Europe, not Asia, was the primary arena. And when Asia intruded beginning in 1950, South Asia assumed a strategic importance but not in its own right. In 1989, there were too many other competing priorities, and a focus on multiple immediate challenges—the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War, China—meant that an opportunity to craft a fresh approach to South Asia was lost. One minor exception was the Kicklighter Agreement on Defense in 1991, which initiated the U.S.-India military relationship.⁵

Could 2013 offer a fresh chance for the United States to reevaluate South Asia policy? Could it provide an important opportunity to take a global and not just a regional perspective on South Asia? The challenge of U.S. South Asia policy since 1947 has been a series of competing policy priorities and the relative lack of a compelling, comprehensive approach to this important region. Strategic interests were frequently devoured by the immediate policy priority of the day. The opportunity now is to consider what an integrated, long-term strategic South Asia policy could look like—and what hard choices this requires from the second Obama administration.

Could 2013 offer a fresh chance for the United States to reevaluate South Asia policy?

The interviews conducted with more than 90 current and former policy makers revealed various ideas about how to move policy forward. Views differed over next steps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and about the pace—if not the substance—of future engagement with India. In all that follows about principles and process, one factor stood out, repeatedly raised by those interviewed: personalities are crucial. Good people and effective relationships are important, both inside the Washington machine and with the intermediaries between U.S. and South Asian decision makers.

⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, “New Priorities in South Asia: U.S. Policy toward India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan,” 2003, <http://www.cfr.org/india/new-priorities-south-asia/p6486>.

⁵ Lieutenant Colonel Brian K. Hedrick, “India’s Strategic Defense Transformation: Expanding Global Relationships,” Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2009, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=950>.

This study does not attempt to lay out in detail what U.S. policy toward the region should be. It will always be deeply challenging, if not impossible, to master all the conflicting U.S. policy interests in the region. Achieving workable policies is always difficult. Instead, this study suggests broad goals and specific changes, which, if implemented, could improve the odds of better policy choices and outcomes.

A TIME OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGE

U.S. policy toward South Asia has been atomized, yet the realities of this region are interconnected. We have to have a regional perspective.

—Vali Nasr, Former Senior Advisor to the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan

U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTH ASIA ARE EVOLVING. An intense focus on counterterrorism and Afghanistan since 9/11 is giving way to a broader range of interests. Washington takes India's global status seriously and is working closely with New Delhi on a range of regional and global issues. China's rise, often neglected as a factor in South Asia policy, is encouraging a more strategic U.S. approach to Asia policy as a whole. As a result, there is a significant opportunity to rethink U.S. South Asia strategy. The second Obama administration will be in a unique position to step back and consider core U.S. interests in and beyond South Asia without being overwhelmed by an immediate crisis. Recalibrating U.S. South Asia policy does not require re-hyphenating U.S. South Asia policy. Each country in South Asia needs to be treated distinctly, and the U.S. bilateral relationship framed accordingly. However, it is also essential that U.S. policy toward South Asia—and Asia—is coherent.

TIME FOR AN INTEGRATED POLICY

An integrated policy approach should be based on high-quality analysis. Existing complex connections between states need to play into policy making. Even though Afghanistan and Pakistan have a complicated and intertwined relationship, U.S. policies can and should be made toward each. However, some issues—refugees, cross-border militant groups, narcotics, and trade—need to be approached through a broader prism. China and India are clearly different, and Washington needs to develop distinct bilateral relationships with each of these major international powers. Yet U.S. China policy will have consequences for U.S.-India relations, and vice versa. India's security policy and relationship with Washington will be shaped by the overall environment in Asia; so too will India's relations with other key Asian powers like Japan and Australia.

A hyphenated approach to “Af-Pak” is just as offensive as a hyphenated approach to “Indo-Pak.”

India and Pakistan should continue to be treated separately by Washington. A hyphenated approach to “Af-Pak” is just as offensive as a hyphenated approach to “Indo-Pak,” and it is unsurprising that regional politicians and commentators responded badly to both hyphenations. A more sensible strategic policy framework would recognize global, regional, and national policy agendas—and would work to frame an Asia policy that fully reflects these.

THE ECONOMIC VISION IS ALREADY THERE

South Asia is a region of young people. More than 35 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 34.⁶ The region needs to advance economically in order to make the most of this demographic dividend and to provide enough jobs for millions of new entrants to the labor market each year.

An economic vision for this is already being developed. The Obama administration has emphasized a long-term economic agenda that could transform South Asia. The “New Silk Road,” a term used by Secretary of State Clinton and others, underlines the economic opportunities of enhanced trade ties and linkages between South and Central Asia. In 2012, following political liberalization in Myanmar, this agenda reaches beyond Bangladesh and India into Southeast Asia and up into China. Reducing the political and regulatory barriers to bilateral trade across a range of key borders could significantly advance prosperity and political stability.

Major steps forward have already been taken. Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a Transit Trade Treaty on July 18, 2010.⁷ It should halve the amount of time it takes goods to get across the border. It opens up 10 additional transit corridors in Pakistan and 8 new corridors in Afghanistan.⁸ This will better link Pakistan to the vibrant trading economies of Central Asia and connect Afghan goods to three Pakistani ports—Karachi, Qasim, and Gwadar.⁹

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan have eased restrictions on bilateral trade. The seventh round of talks on commercial and economic cooperation between the two countries’ commerce secretaries took place in September 2012. India has reduced its tariffs on Pakistani import lines by 30 percent,¹⁰ while Pakistan has indicated that up to 6,000 items (an increase from the current list of 137) could be traded through the land border route. In April 2012, both commerce ministers, along with the chief ministers of Punjab on either side of the border, jointly inaugurated a new state-of-the-art integrated check post (ICP) at Attari on the Indian side of the Wagah-Attari border. The ICP, which cost \$33 million to construct, extends across a 120-acre site and has dedicated terminals for both passengers and cargo. Bilateral trade at this border crossing currently stands at \$44.5 million but could rise to \$222 million within three years.¹¹

India-Bangladesh relations have improved with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Dhaka in 2011. The two countries signed a development agreement that should advance bilateral trade, although progress on implementation has been slow. India offered to give Bangladesh duty

⁶ World Bank, HealthStats Database, accessed October 5, 2012: <http://go.worldbank.org/KZHE1CQFA0>.

⁷ “Historic Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement Signed,” USAID, August 15, 2010, http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/USAID/Article/1352/Historic_Afghanistan_Pakistan_Transit_Trade_Agreement_Signed.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ “India approves sensitive list reduction by 30%,” *Daily Times*, August 23, 2012, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012%5C08%5C23%5Cstory_23-8-2012_pg5_10.

¹¹ See “India-Pakistan Border Trade May See a Boom,” *Hindustan Times*, October 15, 2012, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Punjab/Amritsar/India-Pakistan-border-trade-may-see-a-boom/SP-Article1-944919.aspx>.

free and quota free market access to all the products that matter to Bangladesh—a major offer given that India had traditionally placed restrictions on Bangladeshi textile imports, leading to a trade imbalance in India’s favor.

Moves across the region to improve economic and trade ties are advancing, enabled in part by better bilateral political relations between India and Pakistan and between India and Bangladesh. The major step forward in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations was encouraged by close U.S. interest, although respective leaders in Kabul and Islamabad did the heavy lifting. However transformative enhanced intra-regional trade can be in South Asia, a need also exists for further political efforts to advance U.S. goals.

In the economic realm, the commercial logic of liberalization, improved transport infrastructure, and (particularly for Pakistan) increased government customs revenues make a compelling case for change. Impediments to a more integrated South Asia tend to be political or to reflect narrower

sectional interests (e.g., when specific business sectors resist liberalization that might undermine their market position or margins).

For positive economic changes to be truly transformative, they need to be underpinned by sustainable political change.

For these positive economic changes to be truly transformative, they need to be underpinned by sustainable political change as well. A South Asia at peace will prosper, de-

spite the naturally recurring frictions. However, renewed crises or conflict will undermine this agenda. This could take the form of terrorist attacks in India, undermining its relationship with Pakistan. Conflict and instability could increase in Afghanistan if the transfer of security lead from NATO to Afghan forces does not advance stability. And—in a sign that China is now integral to South Asia policy—setbacks could follow increased friction in the U.S.-China or China-India relationship, which would have consequences for South Asian states and their relationship with Washington.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Driven by countries in the region, bilateral trade between South Asian states has improved in the past decade and is projected to increase steadily. Trade between India and Pakistan is on the rise, though it remains a fraction of its total estimated potential of \$12 billion.¹ In early 2012, Pakistan announced it would ease trade with India by moving from a limited “positive list” of trade items to a “negative list,” with plans to phase out the negative list completely by the end of 2012. This would bring Pakistan closer to granting India most favored nation (MFN) status. The easing of visa restrictions between Pakistan and India in 2012 will also facilitate person-to-person ties while improved relations between India and Bangladesh should lead to visa liberalization.

It remains to be seen if the political and structural barriers to implementing the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) will occur in the near future. The United States has recognized the importance of economic integration and proposed an ambitious vision for South and Central Asia. Secretary Clinton first mentioned the New Silk Road initiative on a visit to Chennai, India, in 2011:

Let's work together to create a New Silk Road. Not a single thoroughfare like its namesake, but an international web and network of economic and transit connections. That means building more rail lines, highways, energy infrastructure, like the proposed pipeline to run from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan, through Pakistan into India. It means upgrading the facilities at border crossings, such as India and Pakistan are now doing at Wagah. And it certainly means removing the bureaucratic barriers and other impediments to the free flow of goods and people. It means casting aside the outdated trade policies that we all still are living with and adopting new rules for the 21st century.²

The New Silk Road initiative should boost growth and improve security in Afghanistan. A more prosperous Afghanistan should become more stable. The roadblocks to integrating South Asia and Central Asia are significant—for example, the long delays in establishing the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline mentioned by Secretary Clinton. On the positive side, however, the political transition in Myanmar in 2012 opens opportunities for trade between Southeast Asia and South Asia. Other indicators point to enhanced intra-regional trade in the next decade: improved ties between India and Pakistan, between India and Bangladesh, and the 2010 Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). To solidify these positive steps, effort needs to be put into sustaining improved political ties between South Asian countries.

1. Muhammad Iqbal Tabish and Mujeeb Ahmed Khan, "Harnessing India Pakistan Trade Potential," SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2011, http://www.tdap.gov.pk/word/SAARC_REPORT_2011.pdf.

2. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "Remarks on India and the United States: A Vision for the 21st Century," Chennai, India, July 20, 2011, www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/07/168840.htm.

U.S. POLICY PRIORITIES

South Asia is much more important to U.S. interests today than it was during the Cold War. A region once on the periphery has moved center-stage over the past 15 years. However, rising U.S. policy interest has not anchored on a single issue—but on a set of core issues. These include counterterrorism (where intelligence agencies have particular influence), Afghanistan (where the military has a significant say), India (where commercial and diplomatic interests dominate), Pakistan (where counterterrorism, Afghanistan, and nonproliferation communities converge), and the broader strategic “rebalancing” toward Asia (where the greatest focus comes from China policy leads or those involved in strategic policy). Each of these communities has distinct characteristics and perceptions of South Asia as a region. If the problem during the Cold War was too little attention to South Asia, perhaps one of the problems in recent years has been too much. A proliferation

of policy interests complicates the interagency process in Washington and makes strategic policy making difficult. A series of urgent, immediate crises and vital interests militate against longer-range, integrated policy planning.

Counterterrorism

While counterterrorism is likely to remain important to the United States, Washington's geographical focus is expanding beyond groups based in Pakistan, which have been at the core of threat. The terrorist threat now draws from individuals based in a diverse set of countries including Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan. The Sahel is a region of increasing concern as al-Qaeda sympathizers have

A proliferation of policy interests complicates the interagency process in Washington and makes strategic policy making difficult.

taken over a large part of northern Mali. Although al-Qaeda operatives and associated groups continue to have some presence in Pakistan's tribal areas, Pakistan is no longer the counterterrorism super-priority it once was. Recent plots to conduct attacks on U.S. soil have involved Nigerians¹² and Bangladeshis,¹³ even if al-Qaeda support or inspiration continues to be a reported threat.

Even though al-Qaeda has tended to command the greatest policy and media attention because of 9/11 and the threat posed to the U.S. homeland, the problem of terrorism is by no means limited to al-Qaeda alone. Terrorist groups in South Asia will remain important for the threat they pose both to the United States and to regional states and stability. One particular challenge is Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), which operates from areas of Pakistan under direct state control, unlike groups based in the sometime lawless tribal areas.¹⁴ Pakistanis have not seen LeT as a threat in the past because of the claimed LeT focus on changing the status quo in Kashmir. This has led to charges that Pakistan is selective in prioritizing terrorist groups, focusing primarily on those that directly threaten Pakistani interests.¹⁵ Competing threat perceptions may shape different policy priorities from Washington, Kabul, New Delhi, and Islamabad. Given the crucial importance of regional stability, LeT deserves sustained attention and a serious policy effort by Washington to defang the group.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the conflict involving the Afghan government, NATO forces, and the Taliban is evolving as NATO forces progressively hand over responsibility to the Afghan military and police. This process of transition will see further reductions in U.S. troop numbers in Afghanistan (Figure 1).

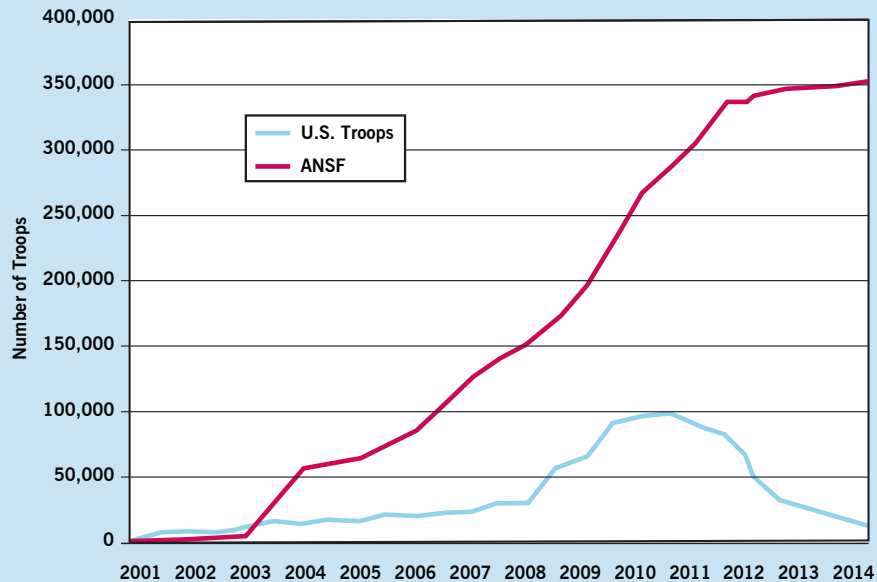
¹² Charlie Savage, "Christmas Day Bomb Plot Detailed in Court Findings," *New York Times*, February 10, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/11/us/underwear-bomb-plot-detailed-in-court-filings.html>.

¹³ Mosi Secret and William K. Rashbaum, "Man Is Charged with Plotting to Bomb Federal Reserve Bank in Manhattan," *New York Times*, October 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/18/nyregion/arrest-in-plot-to-blow-up-federal-reserve-bank.html>.

¹⁴ C. Christine Fair, "Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and the Pakistani State," *Survival* 53, no. 4 (2011): 29–52.

¹⁵ Ashley Tellis, *Pakistan: Conflicted Ally in the War on Terror* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief No. 56, November 2007).

Figure 1: U.S. Troops and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in Afghanistan (Present and Projected)



Sources: Brookings Afghanistan Index, accessed November 20, 2012: <http://www.brookings.edu/about/programs/foreign-policy/afghanistan-index>; International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) factsheet on current ANSF status, accessed November 20, 2012: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-factsheet-on-current-ansf-status.html>.

The principal strategic success in Afghanistan has been denying terrorists seeking to attack the U.S. homeland access to Afghanistan. Despite the temptation for some commentators to use the war in Vietnam as an analogy for that in Afghanistan, the United States does not face defeat in Afghanistan. At the same time, nor has there been, as yet, a resounding political and military success. Washington continues to have a strong strategic interest in ensuring that terrorist groups cannot once again use Afghan territory as a safe haven.

The principal medium-term challenges remain shaping the future of Afghanistan to ensure stability, protecting gains made in nation building (including the advancement of female education), and preventing a return to civil war fueled by Afghanistan's neighbors as was the case in the early 1990s. Notwithstanding the enormous efforts and sacrifices involved in U.S. Afghan policy since 9/11, a narrower emphasis on vital national interests has provided "a necessary and good course correction," according to Nicholas Burns, former under secretary of state for political affairs. Continued efforts to stabilize Afghanistan will remain a difficult and expensive challenge for many years to come, argues Michael Walker, a former chief of the Near East and South Asia Division at the CIA.

India

If Afghanistan policy no longer sucks up most of the oxygen at cabinet-level discussions, there may be more time to consider, consolidate, and advance the U.S. relationship with India. This relationship is one of the most important bilateral relationships for the United States. India is a rising economic and political power, already plays a leading role in South Asia and a significant role in global diplomacy, and—crucially—is a liberal democracy. Unsurprisingly, the U.S.-India relationship has flourished since the 1990s.¹⁶ As Nicholas Burns explains, the main U.S. foreign policy success in the region is “the development over three administrations of a much closer strategic partnership with India—and it has paid off.”

This change drew on growing commercial ties following Indian economic liberalization in the 1990s and the active U.S. diplomacy that led to the signature U.S.-India civil nuclear deal during the George W. Bush administration, which cemented India’s distinct status in the eyes of Washington policy makers. It also marked the defeat of nonproliferation advocates inside and outside government who had campaigned against a special dispensation for India.¹⁷

Other factors have also been important. A more active Indian American diaspora has built relationships with both Democrats and Republicans and now enjoys a significant caucus in Congress. India’s nuclear tests in 1998 captured the world’s attention, if not for positive reasons.¹⁸ India’s restraint vis-à-vis Pakistan during the 2001–02 India-Pakistan crisis, and later in the aftermath of the Mumbai terrorist attacks in November 2008, demonstrated political responsibility. President Obama’s announcement of U.S. support for a permanent Indian seat on the UN Security Council in November 2010 was another important signal of India’s changed status in U.S. eyes. Remarkable bipartisan consensus exists in Washington on the need for positive U.S.-India ties and a close relationship that is markedly different from its Cold War predecessor.

Pakistan

U.S.-Pakistan relations, meanwhile, have been under considerable stress.¹⁹ The Obama administration’s initial focus on enhancing the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, advanced by the \$1.5 billion/year Kerry-Lugar-Berman package of bilateral aid, at first promised a transformed bilateral relationship. The past troubles in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship had generated a so-called trust deficit on both sides.²⁰ Pakistanis felt that Americans had allied with and used their country when it suited them but then abandoned Pakistan to handle the consequences of U.S. policy. Pakistanis would most regularly point to the aftermath of the 1980s Afghan war and the resulting increase in weaponry and militants in the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands.

¹⁶ Nicholas Burns, “America’s Strategic Opportunity with India: The New US-India Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* (2007): 131-46.

¹⁷ George Perkovich, “Global Implications of the U.S.-India Deal,” *Daedalus* 139, no. 1 (2010): 20-31.

¹⁸ Strobe Talbott, “Dealing with the Bomb in South Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 2 (1999): 110-22.

¹⁹ K. Alan Kronstadt, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, May 24, 2012), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41832.pdf>.

²⁰ Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2004).

Washington perceived the Pakistanis as having dissembled—whether over Pakistan’s nuclear program (and proliferation) or its support to non-state militant groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Pakistan was also seen to hedge on Afghanistan, unwilling to rein in the Taliban or the Haqqani network and undermining U.S. security goals in Afghanistan. The hope that an intensified strategic dialogue between the United States and Pakistan would bridge these gaps has proved to be overly optimistic. Moreover, events intervened—ranging from a case of a CIA contractor who fatally shot two Pakistanis in Lahore in January 2011 to the May 2011 Abbottabad U.S. Special Forces raid that killed Osama Bin Laden. Although no evidence has emerged that Pakistani officials had any knowledge of Bin Laden’s location, his presence there confirmed Pakistan’s dubious standing in the eyes of skeptics. Nevertheless, the raid into Abbottabad was considered a gross breach of the country’s sovereignty, prompting widespread Pakistani objections.

Policy makers scratch their heads when it comes to handling Pakistan. As former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Wendy Chamberlin explains, the United States still believes “there is an Afghan policy but we don’t know what to do about Pakistan.” Nicholas Burns provides a sober assessment: “there is very little trust on both sides of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, and that’s a dangerous thing.” And South Asia specialist Alan Kronstadt concludes: “U.S.-Pakistan relations are fluid at present, but running a clearly negative course.”²¹

This lack of trust is reflected in Pakistani public opinion of the United States. A 2012 Pew Global Attitudes survey found that 41 percent of Indians had a “very favorable” or “somewhat favorable” opinion of the United States. This number was substantially lower for Pakistan, where 12 percent of respondents had a very favorable or somewhat favorable opinion.²² In a special report on Pakistan in 2012, the Pew Research Center highlighted that 74 percent of Pakistanis viewed the United States as more of an enemy while 8 percent viewed it as more of a partner.²³ Meanwhile U.S. assistance to Pakistan is likely to fall sharply if the new Congress cuts funding in 2013.²⁴

China

The relationship between the United States and China is one of the major foreign policy issues for the Obama administration. U.S.-China relations from the 1970s to the late 1980s were based on realpolitik and pragmatism. Henry Kissinger’s opening to China drew on a CIA analysis of Chinese interests, not least vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.²⁵ The United States engaged China as a counterpoint to Soviet power, and the language of U.S. national security documents is remarkably consistent over these two decades. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tiananmen Square massacre, and a rapid rise of Chinese economic power, a policy of realism toward China has been replaced by

²¹ Kronstadt, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*.

²² Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, Spring 2012, Q3A: “Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States?”

²³ Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, “Pakistani Political Opinion Ever More Critical of U.S.,” June 27, 2012. Q105b: “Overall, do you think of the U.S. as more of a partner of Pakistan, more of an enemy of Pakistan, or neither?”

²⁴ Kronstadt, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*.

²⁵ See National Intelligence Estimate 13/67: *Communist China’s Military Policy*, April 6, 1967, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0001095910/DOC_0001095910.pdf.

an active policy debate in Washington. This is driven by global concerns about the balance of power and by arguments about liberal values. Other concerns include cyber-security; the management of the Chinese devaluation of the yuan to help its exporters; and what, if any, threats will be posed by Chinese ownership of U.S. firms.

Some U.S. foreign policy advisors advocate engagement, arguing that only by fostering a positive U.S.-China relationship can Washington advance and protect its global (and Asian) interests. The United States and China enjoy mutual benefits from economic interdependence, open channels of communication between American and Chinese officials, and reestablished military-to-military contacts. Some argue that the two largest economies can engage to build an international order in which both states have significant influence.

Some advocate containment, pointing to past frictions brought on by rising powers challenging an existing major power. A number of Chinese groups also believe in an insurmountable clash of U.S. and Chinese interests and perceive the U.S. pivot to Asia as a containment policy to curb a rising China. Nobody in Washington favors military confrontation with China. The debate is far from reprising the 1954–55 Taiwan Straits Crisis, which saw Washington make preparations for nuclear war.²⁶ But U.S. China policy is complicated by serious policy differences in Washington over how to handle Beijing's growing power and the reality that China policy is a domestic political issue in the United States (as seen during the 2012 presidential race).²⁷

In the short term, further questions arise from the generational change in political leadership in China itself. In 2012, the 10-year government led by Party Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao began the transfer of power for the next ten years to Party Secretary Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, along with a newly appointed Politburo Standing Committee. Though policy prescriptions on the U.S.-China relationship range from containment to increasing bilateral engagement, pursuing American national interests will likely result in foreign policy that is somewhere in the middle.

China's policy toward South Asia will have consequences for Washington's interests.

For China, South Asia is the near abroad. The country shares direct land borders with Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Bhutan and a close interest in Sri Lanka and the Maldives given that so much of China's energy needs are shipped via the Indian

Ocean. Just as U.S. policy toward China will have consequences for U.S. relations with South Asian states, China's policy toward South Asia will have consequences for Washington's interests.

Other South Asian States

Finally, South Asia is not just about India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Bangladesh, a major state in its own right, is a moderate Muslim democracy. Nepal has emerged from a period of civil conflict with

²⁶ See Gordon H. Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis," *International Security* 12, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 96–123.

²⁷ Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?" *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 7–45.

a new political framework, and its sensitive position between India and China makes it particularly vulnerable to changes in the Beijing-Delhi relationship. In addition, Nepal's huge water resources will only grow in importance. Bhutan is moving toward democracy and has enormous hydroelectric potential—at a capacity of 30,000 megawatts.²⁸ Bhutan is currently producing far below its potential but has projects underway to increase its supply to India. Sri Lanka's military recently vanquished the Tamil Tigers, and the choices the government now makes will shape its future political framework. The Maldives has emerged from a long period of dictatorship to hold democratic elections and faces the challenge of furthering non-tourism economic development given an enormous increase in the youth demographic.

South Asia has the potential to be a stable, democratic, and prosperous region. If anything, U.S. interests in each of these states will grow as U.S.-China relations become more important. Advancing regional economic integration will require stable governments with domestic policies that can respond to continuing rapid urbanization, the infrastructure deficit (including a huge need for road and rail investment), and ever-rising demand for energy and water.

U.S. Regional Interests: Security, Development, and Trade

To view U.S. interests primarily through the prism of geography fails to capture the full range of policy priorities. Preventing conflict between India and Pakistan—or indeed in the future between India and China—represents a vital national interest for the United States. A major conventional war, yet alone a nuclear exchange, would be disastrous for U.S. and global interests. Ensuring the security of the region's nuclear weapons is also a vital U.S. interest, particularly given the presence and scale of militant groups in Pakistan.

South Asia already contains more than 23 percent²⁹ of the world's population, and this is rising (Figure 2). Moreover, in 2009, 30 percent of Muslims across the world lived in South Asia, making this region a crucial element in U.S. relations with

To view U.S. interests primarily through the prism of geography fails to capture the full range of policy priorities.

the Muslim world. South Asia is also home to an estimated 600 million of the world's poorest people—subsisting on less than \$1.25 per day.³⁰ Millions lack access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.³¹ South Asian states also exhibit vast discrepancies in development: Sri Lanka ranked 39th out of 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, while India ranked 105th and Pakistan ranked 134th.³² Energy shortages and power cuts are common in the region, and the next

²⁸ Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEP) Policy Database, Bhutan (2012), <http://www.reegle.info/policy-and-regulatory-overviews/BT#sources>.

²⁹ Population Reference Bureau, Mid-2012 population of SAARC countries as a percentage of world population of 7 billion, accessed November 20, 2012: <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2012/world-population-data-sheet/fact-sheet-world-population.aspx>.

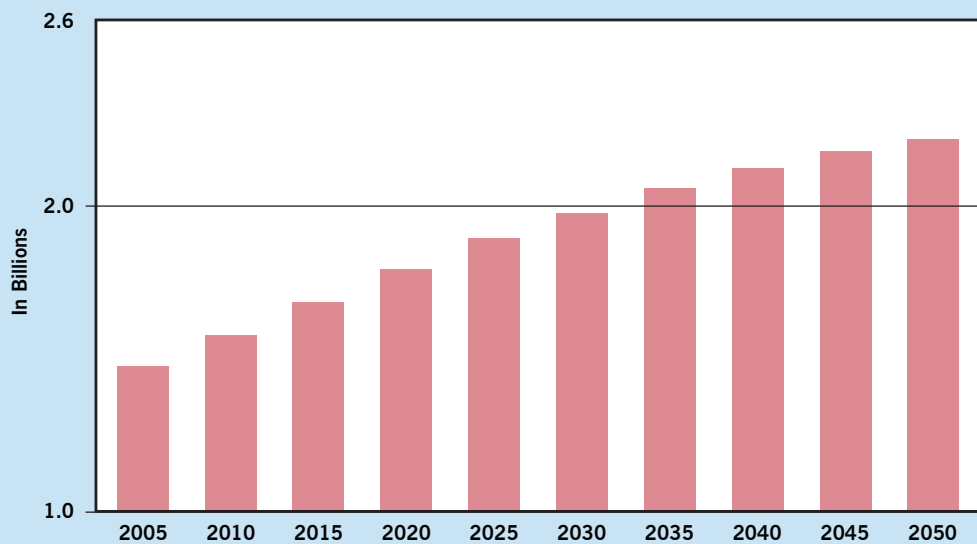
³⁰ The World Bank, "Why Is South Asia Vulnerable to Climate Change?" December 2009, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/0,,contentMDK:22404173~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:223547,00.html>.

³¹ Asia Society, "Asia's Next Challenge: Securing the Region's Water Future," April 2009, <http://asiasociety.org/files/pdf/WaterSecurityReport.pdf>.

³² World Economic Forum, "The Global Gender Gap Report," 2012, <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2012>.

decade will require innovative solutions to meet growing demand.³³ The effects of climate change are severe in South Asia, and an expected rise in sea levels combined with melting of glaciers will complicate crucial development efforts in the future.³⁴ Parts of the region have seen rapid and dramatic economic growth. While these growth rates are encouraging, growth is unevenly distributed. The development agenda is thus important and deserves to be an integrated part of a policy approach to South Asia.

Figure 2: South Asia Population Projection



Source: World Bank's Human Development Network, "South Asia Population Projection," accessed November 20, 2012: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/0,,contentMDK:22404173~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:223547,00.html>.

U.S. commercial interests are also important. Advancing U.S. commercial goals in South Asia should continue to be a high priority for U.S. policy makers, particularly in sectors that have seen limited foreign direct investment to date. India's opening of the retail sector to greater foreign investment, announced in 2012, is a major step forward for U.S. companies.

American defense companies have already seen large increases in sales to India. In 2012, India was the second-largest customer in the world for U.S. defense exports, with \$4.5 billion of sales.³⁵ Ashton Carter, the U.S. deputy secretary of defense, has stressed that the United States wants to be

³³ Asian Development Bank, "Energy Trade in South Asia: Opportunities and Challenges," December 2011, <http://www.adb.org/publications/energy-trade-south-asia-opportunities-and-challenges>.

³⁴ The World Bank, "Climate Change: South Asia," accessed November 17, 2012: <http://climatechange.worldbank.org/content/south-asia>.

³⁵ Albright Stonebridge Group, "Deputy Defense Secretary Details Path to Closer US-India Defense Cooperation," August 9, 2012, http://www.albrightstonebridge.com/carter_defense_cooperation.

India's "highest quality and most trusted long-term supplier of technology."³⁶ As the U.S. Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert (Bob) Blake observes, U.S. firms could also get a significant part of the \$40 billion commercial nuclear sector as India invests in 14 new power reactors in the next five years.³⁷ This agenda should not be limited to U.S. investment in South Asia. The United States benefits from South Asian inward investment, with \$3.3 billion flowing into the United States from India in 2010, supporting thousands of American jobs.³⁸ As inward investment increases, the U.S.-India relationship in particular is likely to strengthen further, creating mutual opportunities across different business sectors.

WHEN CHANGE IS AN OPPORTUNITY

A second Obama administration provides an opportunity to forge a better-integrated South Asia strategy. The approach should not be a focus on a single country alone. This is not about an India strategy, with neighbors attached. Nevertheless, India's importance speaks for itself, both regionally and globally, and a close U.S.-India relationship will benefit both countries. New Delhi will be able to advance some U.S. policy goals, but not all. Neither should U.S. policy revolve solely around a counterterrorism strategy, with geography attached. Afghanistan deserves serious attention but should not be the dominant focus of regional security concerns. Unlike the early 1990s, the United States should not and will not leave Afghanistan to its neighbors alone. Meanwhile, Pakistan policy needs careful thought. Washington should drop its hyphenated "Af-Pak" policy approach and have a discrete policy agenda to deal with Pakistan. Other countries in the region also need to be dealt with on their own terms as much as in a regional context. Finally, China must be part of the core policy discussion, not a regional Asian add-on to a South Asia policy debate.

Four principles should inform a fresh approach to South Asia policy:

- **Avoid hyphens.** "Indo-Pak" was offensive to New Delhi and encouraged a perception that U.S. policy would be animated by equivalence, not autonomous judgment, when Washington responded to developments in relations between India and Pakistan. "Af-Pak" was offensive to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kabul resented the implied exclusive linkage to Islamabad along with any suggestion of being a junior partner. Islamabad resented Pakistan being tied to Afghanistan, given the different trajectories of both countries. The future risk is not a return to either of these outmoded hyphens, but of a new and singular hyphenation based on "China-India." Relations between China and India will be enormously important in the decades to come, but the Beijing-Delhi relationship alone will neither define Asia's future nor capture all the regional South Asia issues that deserve attention.
- **Think regionally.** This should build on the successful focus on the New Silk Road, as advanced by Secretary Hillary Clinton and Ambassador Marc Grossman, the U.S. special representative for

³⁶ Karen Parrish, "Carter Urges Closer U.S.-India Defense Cooperation," American Forces Press Service, July 23, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=117220>.

³⁷ Robert O. Blake Jr., "The Evolution of the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue," Remarks, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 7, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2012/191979.htm>.

³⁸ Ibid.

Afghanistan and Pakistan. A regional perspective should include actions as well as speeches and expand beyond an exclusive focus on economic and social development. It must address political and security challenges, including sensitive issues like counterterrorism; deterrence stability; and potential crisis management among India, Pakistan, and China. Each country deserves individual attention within a broader perspective and policy framework. This should connect all the regions of Asia: South, Central, East, and Southeast.

- **Integrate South Asia into an Asia strategy.** A holistic approach is essential. Many, if not all, functional challenges cross the traditional South and Central Asia/East Asia divide. Asian states see Asia as a geopolitical and economic space. U.S. policy makers on South Asia need to do likewise. China is a South Asian foreign and economic policy actor; a close political ally of Pakistan; and deeply engaged with Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. U.S. policy makers need to stretch their vision beyond the boundaries of geographic bureaus at the State Department. Principals in the George W. Bush and first Obama administrations moved toward this: transformational diplomacy followed by the pivot, and now rebalancing, toward Asia. Only in parts has the foreign policy bureaucracy kept pace.
- **Connect policy agendas.** Interagency coordination is always difficult. Coordinating foreign and security policy strategy is even harder. Coordinating foreign and security policy strategy is even harder. But contested policy agendas in South Asia need not mean a divided approach to policy. Effective U.S. policies in the region will be advanced when the interagency process properly evaluates the competing demands of different policy agendas, establishes realistic goals, and recognizes the load-bearing capabilities of key U.S. bilateral partnerships in South Asia.

HOW HAS U.S. SOUTH ASIA POLICY EVOLVED SINCE 1947?

For many years, South Asia has been on the backside of every American diplomatic globe.

– Tom Pickering, Former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs³⁹

The thing we're missing is history.

– Richard Boucher, Former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs

U.S. policy during my period was very short-sighted, but not because of an inability to look forward but an inability to look backward.

– James Dobbins, Former U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan

ROBERT MCMAHON, THE LEADING HISTORIAN of U.S. foreign policy toward South Asia during the Cold War, explains that South Asia was originally perceived to be on the periphery of world politics. This changed, he writes, only when Cold War strategy led Washington to perceive Pakistan and India as “valuable strategic prizes.”⁴⁰ However, one astute 1948 CIA analysis questioned how the United States could balance the “force of nationalism” with the need to maintain an international balance of power with the Soviet Union.⁴¹ The driving factor was decolonization. Initially the U.S. policy focus was on developing good relations with both Pakistan and India, albeit with new Cold War geopolitics providing the strategic context.

American diplomats dealing with South Asia quickly established good networks of political contacts on the ground. Harold Josif, an American diplomat serving in Karachi from 1948 to 1949, later commented that “on some subjects, our contacts seemed to be as good as the British.”⁴² Officers with regional expertise included Elbert G. Mathews, who spent the end of World War II in Kabul as second secretary before transferring to Calcutta in 1946. A year later, he became assistant chief, then chief, and then director of the Office of South Asian Affairs from 1950 to 1951.⁴³ When he returned from Calcutta, the State Department sent him to the University of Pennsylvania to spend the summer session studying South Asia. Within the space of a less than a decade, U.S. officials dealing with the region felt confident about U.S. diplomacy supplanting that of the British.⁴⁴

³⁹ Leonard Scensny, “Bureau of the Month: South Asian Affairs,” *State Magazine*, December 1998, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/191067.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5.

⁴¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “The Breakup of the Colonial Empires and the Implications for U.S. Security,” September 3, 1948, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000258342/DOC_0000258342.pdf.

⁴² Interview of Harold G. Josif, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, October 4, 2009, <http://memory.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004jos01.txt>.

⁴³ Interview of Richard D. McKinzie, Truman Library, June 13, 1975, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/mathewse.htm>.

⁴⁴ Interview of Sidney Sober, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, February 21, 1990, <http://international.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004sob01.txt>.

A series of National Security Council papers; National Intelligence Estimates; and cable reporting from U.S. embassies in Delhi, Karachi, and Kabul reveals how engaged U.S. thinking was during this time. Cable traffic shows confident reporting and advice.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it took rising Cold War tensions and the “loss” of China to the Communists in 1949 for relations with India and Pakistan to acquire a more urgent tone. There was a growing belief that war between the United States and the Soviet Union was inevitable, as evidenced by a 1949 CIA paper that assumed war would break out before December 31, 1952.⁴⁶ In June 1950, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea, sparking a “hot war” in Asia. NSC 98 in 1951 captured the changing balance of power:

The loss of India to the Communist orbit would mean that for all practical purposes all of Asia will have been lost; this would constitute a serious threat to the security position of the United States. The loss of China, the immediate threat to Indochina and the balance of Southeast Asia, the invasion of Tibet, and the reverses in Korea have greatly increased the significance to the United States of the political, strategic manpower and resource potential of the countries of South Asia.⁴⁷

Predictably, the policy conclusion was that Washington should take urgent steps to protect the non-Communist states of South Asia. While the United States was also involved in supporting UN and regional efforts to resolve India-Pakistan relations, particularly over Jammu and Kashmir,⁴⁸ Cold War concerns rather than regional security merited the highest-level attention by the NSC. Ambassador Chris Van Hollen, who served in India from 1954 to 1955, set out U.S. priorities:

On the broad international level, and in terms of US-India bilateral relationships, our main concern was that India, while professing to be non-aligned, was in fact tilting toward the Soviet Union and China, in a period during which those two countries had a close relationship...So in the international and bilateral fields, the concern was that Indian policy not undermine American objectives which, to a substantial degree, were designed to develop a containment policy vis-à-vis the Sino-Soviet bloc.⁴⁹

1950–1965: THE COLD WAR COMES TO SOUTH ASIA

During the early 1950s, there was growing interest in Washington in developing a closer relationship with Pakistan in order to access the country’s military bases and build collective

⁴⁵ See, for example, the exchanges among Karachi, Delhi, and Washington in 1955. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957: South Asia* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 55–100, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08>.

⁴⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “The Strategic Importance of the Far East to the US and the USSR,” ORE-70-49, May 4, 1949.

⁴⁷ NSC 98/1, “The Position of the United States With Respect to South Asia,” January 22, 1951, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=div&did=FRUS.FRUS1951v06p2.i0008&isize=text>.

⁴⁸ See Howard Schaffer, *The Limits of Influence: America’s Role in Kashmir* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009); Timothy W. Crawford, “Kennedy and Kashmir, 1962–63: The Perils of Pivotal Peacemaking in South Asia,” *India Review* 1, no. 3 (2007), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14736480208404632>.

⁴⁹ Interview of Ambassador Christopher Van Hollen, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, January 23, 1990, <http://international.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004van02.txt>.

defense arrangements for the Middle East.⁵⁰ Pakistan was seen by successive U.S. administrations to be more resolutely anti-Communist, assisted by the careful Pakistani cultivation of a robust military and pro-Western image.

Congressional pressure favored closer ties with Pakistan. A four-person congressional delegation led by Chester Merrow from New Hampshire visited Pakistan in 1953. Merrow's report emphasized the "great importance" of Pakistan to the free world and advocated an alliance.⁵¹ McMahon argues that the Korean War, "more than any other single event," transformed American attitudes toward Pakistan.⁵² Asia was now the site of Cold War competition. In May 1954, Pakistan signed a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with the United States.⁵³ Pakistan subsequently became a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The substance of the U.S. alliance with Pakistan proved to be less than its promise, as a December 1956 NSC paper noted:

The Government of Pakistan has developed policies essentially pro-West in outlook and generally pro-United States in implementation, although its adherence to the Baghdad Pact and to SEATO has been motivated largely by fear of India's preponderant military position and its own bitter differences with Afghanistan.⁵⁴

While American aid flowed to Pakistan, Pakistan's primary security concern continued to be its vexed relationship with India. By the early 1960s, the U.S.-Pakistan alliance faced criticism in both countries. In Washington, perception was growing that the benefits of the alliance were more rhetorical than substantive. Pakistan's deepening relationship with Communist China was viewed with growing suspicion. In Karachi, the U.S. willingness to provide urgent assistance to India in the aftermath of the 1962 India-China border war undermined Pakistani confidence in the alliance. As Herbert Hagerty, a CIA analyst at the time, remembered:

Within two years of that Chinese attack, there was a U.S. Military Supply Mission [in] New Delhi...of more than 100 officers. But the Kennedy administration was careful in seeking to improve our relationship with India without necessarily destroying our relationship with Pakistan. But the effort was short-lived; it didn't survive a brief military conflict between India and Pakistan in 1965, when the U.S. cut off security assistance to both countries.⁵⁵

By 1965, U.S. disillusion with the Pakistanis had turned into discontent. In July 1965, Thomas Hughes, assistant secretary of intelligence and research at the State Department, sent a nine-page

⁵⁰ Robert J. McMahon, "United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia: Making a Military Commitment to Pakistan, 1947-1954," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (1988): 812-40.

⁵¹ United States Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report of Special Study Mission to Pakistan, India, Thailand, and Indochina* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1953).

⁵² McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 123.

⁵³ See Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 51-85.

⁵⁴ NSC 5617, "U.S. Policy toward South Asia" (Washington, DC: National Archives, December 7, 1956).

⁵⁵ Interview of Herbert Hagerty, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, July 20, 2001, <http://memory.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2007%20txt%20files/2007hag01.txt>.

list of U.S. grievances with Pakistan to the head of the CIA. Hughes noted that on balance “the record is a disappointing one considering the U.S. investment in Pakistan.”⁵⁶

The early U.S. relationship with India did not run smoothly, despite the efforts of a series of U.S. ambassadors to New Delhi. India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru dominated Indian foreign policy and advocated non-alignment. U.S. intelligence officers accurately assessed the drivers of Indian nonalignment, not the least of which were India’s colonial inheritance and Nehru’s firm push for strategic autonomy.⁵⁷ As Nehru said in a speech to the United Nations in 1956, “I submit to you that this idea of the Cold War is essentially and fundamentally wrong. It is immoral. It is opposed to all ideas of peace and co-operation.”⁵⁸

CASE STUDY: GETTING THE TONE RIGHT WITH INDIA

Despite sensible advice from U.S. officials on how to handle India, American principals did not always manage to get the tone right.¹ Prime Minister Nehru’s visit to the United States in December 1956 is a good example. President Eisenhower wrote to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in March 1955 setting out the importance of a successful relationship with Nehru:

In the Indian situation I am struck by the amount of evidence we have that Nehru seems to be often more swayed by personality than by logical argument. He seems to be intensely personal in his whole approach....I do hope that you will urge our new Ambassador there to do everything possible to win the personal confidence and friendship of Nehru. I think he should study thoroughly any methods and practices that have apparently been successful in the past, and we, on our part, should avoid putting chores on our Ambassador that would almost compel him to show an unsympathetic attitude toward the Premier.²

The U.S. Embassy in New Delhi advised Washington in December 1956 that the president should invite Nehru’s views as much as advocate U.S. goals.³ President Eisenhower met Nehru on December 19, 1956. Toward the end of the meeting, Eisenhower opened the window for Nehru to ask about economic assistance, having been briefed that Nehru wanted this but might be too proud to initiate a request:

So if at any time you have an idea, particularly this line you were talking of something you would now wish to get that might come better say from a country like ours—particularly if there were some kind of investment or money involved that we could provide and that would come better from us—you make the request and I will certainly give it every possible consideration. Because I expect the same thing.⁴

⁵⁶ Personal memo from Thomas Hughes to W. F. Raborn, director of Central Intelligence, July 21, 1965 (Library of Congress). I also benefited from discussing this with Hughes 47 years later, in Washington, D.C. in December 2011.

⁵⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *India’s Position in the East-West Conflict*, National Intelligence Estimate 23, September 4, 1951.

⁵⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, Speech to the United Nations General Assembly, New York, December 20, 1956.

Eisenhower thought the meeting went well, but his crucial offer to Nehru—whose primary goal was to get U.S. economic assistance—was not fulfilled in later talks between U.S. and Indian officials. When Indian officials did ask for assistance, they were turned down.⁵ This particular episode captures a broader theme in U.S.-India relations throughout the Cold War. Repeated opportunities to forge a more productive U.S. relationship with India were lost. Despite frequent attempts by U.S. ambassadors in New Delhi to get Washington to take India seriously, engagement really took off only after the Cold War. As Christopher Van Hollen later recalled:

Chester Bowles, in particular, who was twice Ambassador to India...put a great deal of emphasis on India's international importance and...saw India as a key competitor to the People's Republic of China. [Ambassadors such as Bowles] emphasized the need for the U.S. to take into account India's global importance, not just its regional role.⁶

¹ A good history of the bilateral relationship is Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1993).

² Letter from President Eisenhower to Secretary of State Dulles, Washington, March 23, 1955, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d144>.

³ Telegram from the embassy in India to the Department of State, New Delhi, December 7, 1956, 9:00 p.m., <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d160>.

⁴ Memorandum of a Conversation between President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Nehru, The White House, Washington, December 19, 1956, 10:25 a.m., <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d164>.

⁵ Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, May 31, 1957, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d166>; and National Security Council, Statement of Policy on U.S. Policy Toward South Asia, NSC 5701, January 10, 1957, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d5>.

⁶ Interview of Ambassador Christopher Van Hollen, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, January 23, 1990, <http://international.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004van02.txt>.

BEYOND INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Early on, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan rarely loomed large in the U.S. foreign policy agenda. The United States established diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka in 1948. Sri Lanka followed India's lead during the 1960s, subscribing to nonalignment but building close relations with the Soviet Union and China. The U.S. relationship with Nepal was more intimate. Washington formally opened an embassy in Kathmandu in 1959. U.S. interests in Nepal grew, not least because of a covert CIA operation to assist a Tibetan guerrilla campaign against the Chinese government.⁵⁹ Nepal, however, was not important enough to merit significant Cold War attention other than for harassing the Chinese. If India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan were subsumed under a broader Cold War agenda, the smaller states of South Asia were cast in double shadow.

The oldest U.S. diplomatic relationship in South Asia was with Afghanistan. Washington recognized Afghanistan in 1921 and established diplomatic relations in 1935, although a legation office in Kabul was opened only in June 1942. U.S. interests in Afghanistan were limited at first, although Kabul acquired importance during World War II. U.S. policy supported Afghan neutrality, although Washington did provide a significant aid program starting in the 1950s (as did the Soviets).

⁵⁹ Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories—Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

Vice President Richard Nixon visited Afghanistan in 1953, but for much of the period until the mid-1970s, Afghanistan did not attract a lot of policy attention in Washington. U.S. policy papers on Afghanistan in 1960 concluded that “vital United States objectives are best served if Afghanistan remains neutral, independent and not over-committed to the Soviet bloc.”⁶⁰ As former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Howard Schaffer would later note, Afghanistan “was not very significant in U.S.-India relations—and did not become so until the Soviets made their move in December 1979.”⁶¹ One example of this lack of significance was the extraordinary bonhomie of U.S.-Soviet relations in Kabul.

The only exception to relative U.S. lack of interest in Afghanistan came during the 1970s, when the Afghan government’s support for Pashtunistan—with Soviet backing—was judged provocative enough to demand a U.S. response.⁶² Ambassador Robert Oakley, then serving on the NSC staff, recalls:

The government in Kabul was very close to Moscow. We felt that it was trying to subvert Pakistan and maybe even trying to annex parts of Pakistan—Baluchistan and the Frontier provinces....The Soviets were working hand in glove with the Afghan government against the Pakistanis, who were considered our friends and allies even at that time. Kissinger began to work with the Shah and Bhutto; we discussed these issues on some of our 1974 and 1975 trips that took us...to Tehran and Islamabad. The Iranians offered material help; we used diplomacy and the Pakistanis pressured Afghan President Daoud through recruited Afghans who conducted guerrilla warfare against his government....Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan became normal in 1977–78. The Afghan-Soviet efforts to subvert Pakistan stopped.⁶³

The involvement of the White House in Afghan policy was merited because of a potential advance of Soviet influence into Pakistan. The U.S. interest was containment. As President Nixon observed during Prime Minister Bhutto’s visit in September 1973, “the independence and integrity of Pakistan is a cornerstone of American foreign policy.”⁶⁴

THE 1971 BANGLADESH WAR

In 1971, a political crisis in Pakistan quickly turned into a full-fledged fight for independence by Bangladeshi nationalists. The 1971 crisis challenged U.S. policy on a number of fronts. In the White House, it threatened to derail the secret efforts the Nixon administration was pursuing via the good

⁶⁰ U.S. State Department, “Should the United States at This Time, Make a Long-Term Commitment to Afghanistan’s Economic Development Program?” Kennedy Library and Archive, NEA, 1961.

⁶¹ Interview of Ambassador Howard B. Schaffer, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, March 10, 1997, <http://international.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004sch01.txt>.

⁶² See Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, *Pakistan: Pathans and Politics*, May 1972.

⁶³ Interview of Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, July 7, 1992, <http://memory.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004oak01.txt>.

⁶⁴ Memorandum for Mr. John O. Marsh, Office of the Vice President, March 13, 1974. Digitized from Box 65 of the Gerald R. Ford Vice Presidential Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0023/002302726.pdf>.

offices of the Pakistanis to open up relations with China. In Dhaka, U.S. diplomats on the ground were appalled at human rights abuses committed by the Pakistani military. Although an interagency group in Washington concluded that the United States had no vital interests in South Asia, there was a belief that Pakistan's integrity needed to be protected if possible.⁶⁵ U.S.-India relations cooled as a result of the war, not least as it felt that it was on high moral ground. Pakistan also felt that the United States had not done enough for Islamabad during the crisis.

The Carter administration focused on a broader range of issues in South Asia, including nuclear nonproliferation. This was guided by detailed intelligence reporting.⁶⁶ As a March 1977 presidential directive put it, "It shall be a principal U.S. security objective to prevent the spread of nuclear explosive—or near explosive—capabilities to the countries which do not now possess them."⁶⁷ Jack Sullivan, assistant administrator of the Asia Bureau at USAID during the Carter administration, recalls:

The biggest single political issue...was with Pakistan [and] had to do with their attempt to get a nuclear weapon....There were amendments on the Hill, the Symington-Glenn amendment said that if Pakistan was found to be trying to get a nuclear weapon we had to cut off our foreign aid....So one day in 1978 I received a briefing paper indicating that the State Department's going up to brief Senator Glenn and will say, "Yes, Pakistan is trying to get a bomb." I signed off on it and sent it back and said "You just notified me. I'm stopping the aid program." So I cut the aid program off.⁶⁸

INTO THE 1980s

In December 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. At a stroke, South Asia was turned into the frontline of the Cold War. Washington's policies during the 1970s—which focused on development, democracy, human rights, and counter-proliferation—returned to a narrowly defined Soviet-focused agenda. A NSC decision in July 1983 on the Near East and South Asia summed this up: "The most serious threats to our vital interests and objectives in the region are the power, influence and activity of the Soviet Union."⁶⁹ India and Pakistan were now seen primarily in the shadow of U.S. Afghanistan policy.⁷⁰

Under President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, Pakistan became a frontline state and a key ally of the United States in combating the Soviet presence. Washington negotiated a major military assistance and aid package with the country, which expanded under President Reagan into enhanced covert

⁶⁵ National Security Council's Interdepartmental Group for Near East and South Asia, "Pakistan-American Relations—A Reassessment." Paper prepared for the Senior Review Group, Washington, DC, undated and secret. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-054, SRG Meeting, Pakistan and Ceylon, April 19, 1971.

⁶⁶ See Central Intelligence Agency, Pakistan's Strong Intention to Develop Their Nuclear Capability, April 26, 1978.

⁶⁷ See Presidential Directive, NSC 8, "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy," March 24, 1977.

⁶⁸ Interview of John H. (Jack) Sullivan, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, October 29, 1996, <http://international.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004sul01.txt>.

⁶⁹ U.S. Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia, National Security Decision Directive Number 99, Reagan Administration, July 12, 1983.

⁷⁰ Amaury De Riencourt, "India and Pakistan in the Shadow of Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1982/83), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/37137/amaury-de-riencourt/india-and-pakistan-in-the-shadow-of-afghanistan>.

assistance to Afghan rebels.⁷¹ As a 1985 NSC directive put it, “the ultimate goal of [U.S.] policy is the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the restoration of its independent status.”⁷² President Reagan noted this would need improved intelligence support and a good working relationship with Pakistan. He paid attention to Afghanistan,⁷³ and as Robert Oakley puts it, “cared deeply about getting the Soviets out.”⁷⁴ At the tail end of the 1980s, the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan looked as if it was the principal foreign policy success in the region.

AFTER THE COLD WAR

The collapse of the Soviet Union upended global geopolitics. Without the organizing structures of the Cold War, South Asian foreign policy dynamics changed. The United States had no existential interests at stake, although nuclear nonproliferation was still viewed as a vital national interest. India no longer had a superpower ally. Pakistan lacked the same strategic utility to Washington. The early 1990s could have marked the renaissance of an integrated South Asia policy.

This was not to be. In the NSC, attention was focused on a range of crises, not the least of which was the first Gulf War. The Near East, not South Asia, was the priority for White House officials. A new bureau was established for South Asia in the State Department in 1992 that tried to advance a range of policies pursued by the first Clinton administration. It was also the newest and smallest bureau, with just 29 officers in Washington. Wendy Chamberlin argues that this “small, underfunded bureau weakened South Asia [policy].” Policy interests included nonproliferation, democratization, human rights, regional security, and development. Christina Rocca, later assistant secretary of state for South Asia, remembers this period as one during which “the functional bureaus became the powerhouses of policy.”

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE U.S.-INDIA RELATIONSHIP

In 1995, Hillary Clinton traveled through South Asia as first lady. According to former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Karl Inderfurth, “she was clearly impressed by the region....She came back from that trip and...let the president know that this was a part of the world he ought to pay more attention to, that it was an area of the world with great promise, economic potential, and increasingly democratic.” In 1997, a Clinton administration NSC review resulted in a directive advocating “greater engagement” with South Asia.

The following decade saw a transformation in the U.S.-India relationship. Although interrupted by the 1998 Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests and the 1999 Kargil Crisis, the direction of travel was established during the 1990s. In 2000, President Clinton visited India, the first visit since that of President Carter in 1978. There was a fresh emphasis on building a new partnership.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Charles Cogan, “Partners in Time: The CIA and Afghanistan since 1979,” *World Policy Journal* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1993).

⁷² “U.S. Policy, Programs and Strategy in Afghanistan,” March 27, 1985, National Security Directive NSD 166.

⁷³ As is evidenced by a series of National Security directives during the 1980s, including NSD 270, June 5, 1987.

⁷⁴ Interview of Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, July 7, 1992.

⁷⁵ Teresita Schaffer, “Building a New Partnership with India,” *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2002): 31–44.

Table 1: Milestones in U.S.-South Asia Relations

1947	Indian independence, creation of Islamic Republic of Pakistan
1955	Baghdad Pact (Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan, and Iran)
1962	Sino-Indian border war
1962–63	Kennedy administration's mediation effort on Jammu and Kashmir
1965	India-Pakistan war
1971	India-Pakistan war and independence of Bangladesh
1974	India's nuclear test
1979	Soviet invasion of Afghanistan
1990	U.S. aid cut to Pakistan
1998	India and Pakistan nuclear tests
1999	Kargil crisis between India and Pakistan
2001	9/11 attacks in the United States and intervention in Afghanistan
2001–02	Twin Peaks crisis between India and Pakistan
2001–present	U.S. intervention in Afghanistan
2008	U.S. Congressional approval for U.S.-India nuclear cooperation

The George W. Bush administration followed by negotiating a civil nuclear deal with India signed in 2005, recognizing India's nuclear status and negotiating controls in exchange for technology transfers. According to C. Raja Mohan, head of Strategic Studies and a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in Delhi, this was the period when the U.S.-India relationship took off. In 2010, President Obama continued in the same direction, announcing U.S. support for a permanent seat for India on the United Nations Security Council. Many interviewees agree that this continued uplift of the U.S.-India relationship drew on "long-term, strategic planning," as Nicholas Burns puts it. More than half of those interviewed for this study consider the transformation of the U.S.-India relationship brought about by the Clinton and Bush administrations as the defining success of post-1989 U.S. policy toward the region.

More than half of those interviewed consider the transformation of the U.S.-India relationship brought about by the Clinton and Bush administrations as the defining success of post-1989 U.S. policy.

Interviewees raised four main themes about the transformation with India, characterizing the U.S.-India relationship as:

- **Normalized:** Richard Boucher, former assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian Affairs, underlines this: "We have a fundamentally positive relationship with India and this is uncontroversial, by and large."

- **Bipartisan:** A former senior State Department official praises “the ability to have the same focus on India as a partner over successive administrations.” Broad congressional support was vital.
- **De-hyphenated:** A congressional advisor emphasizes the delinking of India and Pakistan policy, “begun during the Clinton era, advanced under the Bush administration, and implemented in the Obama administration.”
- **Broadened:** The U.S.-India relationship is moving from the bilateral to the global, ranging from trilateral U.S.-Japan-India discussions to Indian dialogue with Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell—a “novel and enduring” development, observes one current official.

While few interviewees disagreed with this upgraded U.S.-India relationship, some asked questions about where it will go next. “What is the next big idea?” asked one, suggesting that the U.S.-India nuclear deal may mark a high-water point in the relationship. Another strong advocate of the U.S.-India relationship argued that Washington will need to recalibrate, as the relationship will only move at a pace the Indian market can bear. This will require strategic patience by successive U.S. administrations. One former diplomat worried that the potential of the relationship may have been oversold. It will be positive, but Indian and American visions of world affairs—and of intervention—differ. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, who formerly served in India’s National Security Council Secretariat, suggests that Washington and New Delhi focus on four to five issue areas on which both countries can work jointly. Another Indian commentator suggested that defense and energy cooperation could be the next focus areas.

ENGAGEMENT AND TENSIONS WITH PAKISTAN

The relationship with Pakistan since the 1990s has not been as consistently positive.⁷⁶ Even as U.S. sanctions were imposed on Pakistan in 1990, “there was nobody thinking about strategy toward Pakistan.”⁷⁷ The 1990s saw sanctions reimposed as the result of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program; tension flared when Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in response to India’s test in 1998. In 1999, Pakistan’s infiltration of forces across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir triggered an India-Pakistan crisis, and a localized war. The United States intervened to pressure Pakistan to withdraw its forces. For Washington, Pakistan’s willingness to generate tensions in the India-Pakistan relationship over Kashmir undermined peace and stability in South Asia.⁷⁸

The attacks on 9/11 transformed this relationship—for a time. Pakistan again became a crucial ally as the United States intervened militarily in Afghanistan, relying on Pakistani territory for

⁷⁶ A superb account of how the United States has negotiated with Pakistan is Howard Schaffer and Teresita Schaffer, *How Pakistan Negotiates with the United States: Riding the Roller Coaster* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2011).

⁷⁷ Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, interview with the author, October 2012.

⁷⁸ Bruce Riedel, *American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Advanced Study of India, 2002).

logistical support to a growing military and counterterrorism campaign. Pakistan's support to U.S. counterterrorism efforts sat alongside what was perceived by some as an ambiguous Pakistani approach to militant groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Terrorist attacks on Indian targets by Pakistan-based groups in December 2001 and May 2002 triggered a full-scale India-Pakistan crisis. Pakistan-based groups were behind a series of lethal attacks on U.S. and Indian targets in Afghanistan. In November 2008, the Mumbai terrorist attacks by Lashkar-e-Tayyaba once again brought the spotlight back to these non-state actors and the question as to what Pakistan could and would do to rein them in.⁷⁹

In 2009 and 2010, U.S.-Pakistan relations improved as the Obama administration tried to build a more cooperative bilateral relationship with senior Pakistanis. In 2009, Senators John Kerry and Richard Lugar sponsored legislation that committed the United States to \$1.5 billion of assistance a year in a \$7.5 billion package of aid to Pakistan.⁸⁰ Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, shuttled to Islamabad to advance a strategic dialogue with the Pakistanis. The policy faltered amid a lack of clarity on what the United States would do for Pakistan and vice versa. A series of blows to the relationship followed: the detention of a CIA contractor who had fatally shot two Pakistanis in January 2011, the May 2012 Special Forces raid that killed Osama Bin Laden, and a cross-border raid by U.S. forces in Afghanistan that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011. In response, Pakistan closed overland routes for NATO convoys for seven months until the United States apologized.

There is no consensus on U.S. policy toward Pakistan. Many in Washington are frustrated with the Pakistanis, and some favor containment or sanctions.⁸¹ These options are not viable for the United States at this time—although this does not preclude them being an option in two to three years. As former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage explains, it would be a “high-risk strategy” to sanction Pakistan in advance of an Afghan drawdown.

A few interviewees point to the U.S. foreign policy success since 1989 in preventing a full-scale India-Pakistan war. One senior foreign policy strategist points to the following:

The lack of Armageddon! As bad as things may be, they could have been much, much worse. We haven't had a nuclear exchange; only one (limited) war and India-Pakistan dynamics are better now than at any stage since the end of the Cold War.

A former defense official says that “the ability of the U.S. system to orchestrate multilateral crisis management between India and Pakistan” was not a single success, but a repeated series of

⁷⁹ Alan Kronstadt, “Terrorist Attacks in Mumbai, India and Implications for U.S. Interests” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 19, 2008).

⁸⁰ Jane Perlez and Ismail Khan, “Aid Package from U.S. Jolts Army in Pakistan,” *New York Times*, October 7, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/08/world/asia/08pstan.html>.

⁸¹ Bruce Riedel, “A New Pakistan Policy of Containment,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/new-york-times-new-pakistan-policy-containment/p26208>; and Stephen D. Krasner, “Talking Tough to Pakistan,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February, 2012), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136696/stephen-d-krasner/talking-tough-to-pakistan>.

successes.⁸² Successful crisis management aside, a number of interviewees echoed one respondent, who argued that “the biggest gap in U.S. South Asia policy is the lack of a Pakistan policy.” Tom Simons, a former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, argues that today “in theory, there is an opportunity to make policy toward Pakistan on the basis of Pakistan.” Wendy Chamberlin puts it bluntly: Pakistan policy needs “a focus that goes beyond just Afghanistan and counterterrorism.”

WAR AND NATION BUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN

The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan after 9/11 has been an enormous investment of blood and treasure. Most of those interviewed argue that the way in which the intervention evolved represented a failure of strategic thinking. As one Afghan specialist notes, the United States “saw Afghanistan deteriorating after 9/11 but we didn’t have a response at all.” Michael Walker explains the failure of nation building in Afghanistan:

[S]enior policy makers and U.S. military leaders in 2001, and in later years too, with absolutely no expertise on Afghanistan, were involved in making hasty decisions and establishing many poorly planned and disjointed initiatives. Throughout much of the war, many policy makers and U.S. military leaders had a Pollyannaish attitude toward winning the war and “sorting out” Afghanistan....The protracted U.S. mission in Afghanistan shifted from overthrowing the Taliban leadership and its al-Qai’da allies to denying safe haven to terrorists to democratization to fighting an insurgency to open-ended nation building.

The Congressional Research Office estimates that the war cost the United States \$443 billion between 2001 and 2011.⁸³ More than 2,000 Americans have been killed and more than 17,000 injured.⁸⁴ Yet the strategy—and commitment of U.S. troops and civilian effort—has varied over time.

Under the Obama administration, the United States firmly turned back to al-Qaeda as the primary focus. In December 2009, President Obama emphasized the U.S. intent to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and prevent its capacity to threaten the United States and its allies in the future. This meant a focus on denying al-Qaeda a safe haven, reversing Taliban momentum, and strengthening the capacity of Afghanistan’s government and security forces. In June 2011, the president emphasized a commitment to draw down U.S. forces in Afghanistan given the progress that has been made there.

A debate on Afghan policy continues in Washington. With falling public support for the war at home, sustaining a continued military campaign at scale “will likely be difficult,” according to one former

⁸² The best accounts of this are P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2007); and Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, “US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis” (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, September 2006).

⁸³ Kenneth Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 21, September 2012), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Military Casualties—Operation Enduring Freedom, Defense Casualty Analysis System, accessed October 18, 2012: <http://www.defense.gov/news/casualty.pdf>.

defense official. Some analysts argue that military success remains possible if the United States can stay the course.⁸⁵ Many interviewees were more pessimistic, arguing not that the United States faces defeat, but that the medium-term political outcome in Afghanistan remains uncertain. Any successful reconciliation or peace talks will take time—if achievable at all—and a regional political settlement on Afghanistan requires stability and consensus among Afghanistan’s neighbors.⁸⁶

AFGHANISTAN: A CONTINUING CHALLENGE

The war in Afghanistan, now in its twelfth year, is projected to end by December 2014. The current American strategy to end the war focuses on building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), ensuring a peaceful change in Afghan leadership through elections in 2014 and assisting the Afghan government in a political resolution to the Taliban insurgency.¹

The current 68,000 U.S. forces,² which peaked at about 100,000 in 2011,³ will draw down to an estimated 15,000⁴ that may remain in Afghanistan to assist in Afghan security. The United States and Coalition trainers are building the capacity of the 337,187 ANSF, projected to reach 352,000,⁵ for the handover of complete responsibility for Afghan security to Afghans. Stability in Afghanistan depends greatly on a well-functioning ANSF. The United States will pay a little more than \$2 billion of the estimated annual costs of \$4.1 billion to maintain the ANSF.⁶ Other international donors will pay the rest.

Some fear ethnic and political alliances can contribute to a civil war after 2014,⁷ but a strong and diverse ANSF can be a major factor in preventing factionalized violence at that time. Building the ANSF has not been without setbacks. The relationship between trainers and the ANSF proved deadly for some U.S. and Coalition forces, with some Afghan forces turning their guns on NATO troops. In 2007 and 2008, there were four so-called “green-on-blue” attacks and four deaths;⁸ in 2011, these attacks killed 35 Coalition forces;⁹ and in 2012, by October, forces in ANSF uniforms had caused the death of 51 American or Coalition soldiers.¹⁰ These green-on-blue attacks are spread out around the country. Desertions are also a challenge; in the first six months of 2011, about 24,590 Afghan soldiers deserted the ANSF.¹¹

Washington and Kabul are now seeking a political solution to the insurgency through a reconciliation process with the Afghan Taliban, who, with a Pakistan-based senior leadership and an office in Doha in the Kingdom of Qatar, have expressed interest in reconciliation talks. How far this process will advance remains uncertain, as talks have been suspended since March 2012, and fighting between Coalition forces and Taliban insurgents continues.

The Afghan-led effort for a political solution, the High Peace Council, set up by President Karzai in 2010, has had limited success in building potential negotiations with the Taliban.

⁸⁵ Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan “The ‘Andar Uprising’ and Progress in Afghanistan,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444004704578032160624939562.html>.

⁸⁶ See Ashley Tellis, ed., *Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2010/05/06/is-regional-strategy-viable-in-afghanistan/2cn>.

The targeted killings of council member Arsalan Rahmani in 2012 and of the council chief and former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani in 2011 undermined this outreach. Inside the Afghan government, the opposing interests of multiple political factions that date back to the 1990s may also present obstacles to reintegration and reconciliation efforts with the Taliban.

A debate continues as to whether reconciliation with the Taliban is possible—yet alone wise. Some argue that there are no “good Taliban” to engage with and that any distinction between good Taliban and bad Taliban is miniscule. Ending the insurgency appears to depend on a successful political process inside Afghanistan, but whether this requires a political deal with the Taliban remains to be seen.

¹ President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan,” June 12, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/22/remarks-president-way-forward-afghanistan>.

² “Last of Obama ‘Surge’ Troops Leave Afghanistan,” BBC News, September 21, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19671626>.

³ Brookings Afghanistan Index, accessed November 20, 2012: <http://www.brookings.edu/about/programs/foreign-policy/afghanistan-index>.

⁴ Dexter Filkins, “After America,” *The New Yorker*, July 9, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/07/09/120709fa_fact_filkins.

⁵ See “ISAF Factsheet on Current ANSF Status,” Afghanistan International Security Assistance Force, October 16, 2012, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-factsheet-on-current-ansf-status.html>; and monthly press briefing by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, October 1, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-14799719-798B5756/natolive/news_90371.htm.

⁶ Filkins, “After America.”

⁷ International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition* (Brussels: Author, October 8, 2012), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/236-afghanistan-the-long-hard-road-to-the-2014-transition.aspx>.

⁸ Rahim Faiez, “Afghan Gets Death for Killing 4 French Troops,” *The Associated Press*, July 17, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/10340324>.

⁹ Mark Memmott, “Afghan Soldiers’ Attacks on U.S. Troops Not Being Fully Reported, AP Finds,” *National Public Radio*, May 1, 2012, <http://kunc.org/post/afghan-soldiers-attacks-us-troops-not-being-fully-reported-ap-finds>.

¹⁰ Alissa J. Rubin, “As Afghan Forces Kill, Trust Is Also a Casualty,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/21/world/asia/afghan-insider-attacks-on-west-s-forces-corrode-trust.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

¹¹ Joshua Partlow, “One in Seven Afghan Soldiers Deserted During First Half of Year,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 2011, http://o.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2016095986_afghan03.html.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Given how U.S. policy toward the region has evolved, the lessons for contemporary policy makers are as follows:

- **A strategic opportunity for recalibrating South Asia policy was lost at the end of the Cold War. It should not be lost again as Afghanistan and counterterrorism no longer dominate available policy bandwidth in Washington.** The problem is not the lack of expertise or, necessarily, strategic capability. It is the relentless focus on the immediate and the urgent—and the lack of properly constituted time to establish a longer-range strategy.
- **A longer-range strategy can deliver, as U.S. India policy has from the 1990s.** The India strategy introduced in the 1990s and advanced since has worked. It was successful because it was

bipartisan, sustained over a series of administrations, and delivered tangible benefits for both countries. Successive presidents and secretaries of state nurtured it. The relationship has prospered because it is not limited to U.S.-India bilateral issues.

- **For all that Afghanistan matters, it is not the most vital U.S. national interest in South Asia.** In past decades, immediate policy priorities have dominated. Examples include the 1980s Afghan war, regional wars, crises between India and Pakistan, and nonproliferation. The challenge for strategic policy is to clearly identify core U.S. priorities in the region both now and for the future. The stability of Pakistan is one such example.

WHO MAKES U.S. SOUTH ASIA POLICY?

Only four people make strategic foreign policy—the president, national security advisor, secretary of state, and secretary of defense.

—Former senior U.S. official

HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

Three discrete groups of people have influenced U.S. South Asia policy since 1947:

- Successive presidents and their cabinet members
- Senior advisors—whether in the NSC or individual agencies—who have influenced decisions at particular points of time
- Representatives in Congress, who control resources and have the ability to shape the public agenda

There are influencers beyond these immediate three groups as well. The media help shape the public tone, especially since the rise of cable news in the 1990s. Beltway think tankers can have influence, although perhaps more as and when they can rotate back into government than when they opine from outside. Their role as “shadow” advisors to influential out-of-power politicians can be important.

Measuring influence is extremely difficult. Academic analysts have advanced a variety of arguments as to how decision making in small groups takes place. Even in a clear hierarchy like that of the NSC, the neatness of theory can falter: “the actual process of choice may not be a clear, precise occurrence.”⁸⁷ The president may not always have a strong view. Some decisions are more controversial than others. Decisions are not always made in the formal meeting or off the official paper, but instead as the result of side meetings or conversations. Reconstructing decision making is further complicated by vanity. Officials, whether junior or senior, want to claim that their input shaped key decisions. Politicians may want to claim credit for key decisions or frame them in positive terms. How we remember can often be more about how we want to remember than an accurate account of how events unfolded. Even if a formal decision is taken at a committee meeting (say, of principals) or by a formal decision memo (e.g., from a president or prime minister), we need to examine the anthropology of government in order to properly understand how decisions are actually formed.

In the 1960s, bureaucratic theorists argued that presidents in the U.S. system were increasingly trapped by their bureaucracy, or as former Director of Policy Planning at the State Department

⁸⁷ Margaret Hermann and Charles Hermann, “Who Makes Foreign Policy Decisions and How: An Empirical Inquiry,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (December 1989), 361–87.

Stephen Krasner puts it, “by a permanent government more enemy than ally.”⁸⁸ Later psychologists pushed back, arguing that personality and relationships, the intricate webs between elite groups, played an important role in foreign policy. In democracies, where cabinet government is a regular form of decision making—even if there is a strong leader—the nature of internal coalition building creates a different dynamic. Small group dynamics assume a disproportionate importance. Today a handful of officials—perhaps five to seven—deal with South Asia daily at the NSC, compared with more than 100 at the State Department and many more across the Department of Defense.

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

The National Security Council was established by the July 26, 1947, National Security Act.⁸⁹ Its core purpose was to provide advice to the president on how to integrate domestic, foreign, and military policies; to more effectively coordinate the policies and functions of the departments and agencies of the government; and to assess the commitments, objectives, and risks for the United States. Its first meeting took place on September 26, 1947, a little more than a month after India and Pakistan gained their independence from the United Kingdom.

The NSC in the late 1940s had fewer than 10 full-time professional staff, which limited its ability to do much more than interagency coordination. Diplomat Elbert G. Mathews argues that the NSC had little impact on South Asia policy during the Truman period:

I don't recall any significant impact of the NSC operation on us in South Asia in those days. But I think the reason for this was that the initial and proper focus of the NSC structure was on much broader considerations—in other words, you know, our overall position in the world rather than looking at it area by area. That came later and was really developed in Eisenhower's time. So, as I say, we knew there was an NSC structure in the process of formation, but it had very little impact on those of us who were working in South Asia....In a sense, NSC had not got around to South Asia.⁹⁰

Even during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, the NSC had no dedicated South Asia staffer. Former CIA analyst and NSC staff member Robert Komer, whose remit was much broader, simply focused in on the crisis during its peak in August and September. As the NSC grew, so too did the time available to NSC officials to engage on a broader set of foreign policy priorities. The primary focus remained the Cold War, with substantial attention also given to the Middle East. For most of the Cold War, NSC bandwidth was limited. The big expansion in NSC staffing during the past 25 years has changed this—but even today, the NSC is consumed by the operational demands of meeting the staffing needs of the president and national security advisor, commissioning or drafting papers for committees, and coordinating (and tracking) interagency action. As Karl Inderfurth puts it:

⁸⁸ Stephen Krasner, “Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland),” *Foreign Policy*, no. 7 (Summer 1972): 159–79.

⁸⁹ Alan Whittaker et al., *The National Security Policy Process: The National Security Council and Interagency System* (Fort McNair, DC: National Defense University, 2011).

⁹⁰ Elbert G. Mathews, interview with Richard D. McKinzie, Truman Library, June 13, 1975, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/mathewse.htm>.

The NSC staff is meant to be the president's in-house foreign policy team to represent his interests, not any particular departmental point of view, and to protect the president's interests. State will have a point of view. Defense will have a point of view. Treasury will on economic issues. You've got all these players. Coordination has to come from somewhere.⁹¹

The archives, oral histories, and interviews show how the NSC was closely engaged on South Asia from the early 1950s, commissioning a series of papers on the United States and South Asia.

The 1960s and 1970s: Expansion in a Period of Crisis

The NSC in the mid-1960s expanded in size. While no single official was dedicated to South Asia, Robert Komer handled the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Komer's staccato memos to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and President Lyndon Johnson earned him credits, but his primary task was to handle the complicated Vietnam policy portfolio. South Asia barely figures in the papers.

The 1970s saw the NSC play a greater role, not least given the Nixon administration's centralization of foreign policy under Henry Kissinger. Once again, South Asia really figured only during a period of crisis or high political priority. The 1971 India-Pakistan war was one example. Former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley underlines the difference that sitting at the center of policy making made—and similar points were made by a range of former NSC officials interviewed for this report:

There is of course a difference in perception of situations when you sit in the NSC as contrasted to the State Department. The view from the NSC is much broader. You also get a much better understanding in the NSC of how different policies relate to each other not only within a region, but also between regions. Sometimes an NSC staffer might not have all the details, but I have also found that knowing a lot of details may hamper policy development rather than help it. The view from 1600 Pennsylvania is entirely different than it is from Foggy Bottom.⁹²

The 1980s: Afghanistan and Nonproliferation

The 1980s saw a greater focus on South Asia, although the war in Afghanistan and nuclear nonproliferation were the two issues that received most attention. In 1983, the NSC reorganized and five geographical directorates were introduced from the former Political Affairs Office. One of these was the Near East and South Asia Affairs directorate, which matched both State Department and CIA structures. NSC officials in this directorate during the Reagan administration included William (Bill) Burns (most recently deputy secretary of state in the Obama administration),

⁹¹ Interview of Ambassador Karl Inderfurth, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, April 27, 2001, Library of Congress Oral History interview, <http://memory.loc.gov/service/mss/mssmisc/mfdip/2005%20txt%20files/2004ind01.txt>.

⁹² Interview of Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, July 7, 1992.

Geoffrey Kemp, Michael Lazan, Robert Oakley, Patrick Putignano, Dennis Ross, Shirin Tahir-Kheli, and Howard Teicher. The NSC team saw itself as keeping the interagency machine working properly, although the perspective from the State Department could differ. Herbert Hagerty recalled the problems that occasionally arose with the Reagan NSC:

You'd send something over, a letter, for instance, with well-considered and thoughtful text, only to learn that it was signed by the president with changes made by the NSC staff without any further consultation with the [State] Department. So the next time you saw it, say as an outgoing cable, it was already "approved" by the president or by someone on his behalf. This left no way to correct errors that might have been introduced into it by unknowing people at that end. That's been a problem of the NSC system for a long time. During the Reagan administration, it was particularly difficult because, with Reagan, you never knew who actually had signed it off.⁹³

The 1980s also saw, for the first time, a dedicated official working on South Asia. Shirin Tahir-Kheli focused on South Asia as director of Near East and South Asian Affairs in the NSC from 1986 to 1989, having already spent 1984 to 1986 working on political-military issues on the staff. Sandra Charles took over the portfolio in 1989 and covered it until 1991. Other officials also worked on South Asia. Robert Oakley had returned for his second tour in the NSC, and three officers worked on the Near East and South Asia in 1987. As Oakley recalls, "The NSC Near East division became what it had been ten years earlier. It covered North Africa, the Middle East, the Gulf, and South Asia. Our workload was much heavier than it had been in 1974–77."⁹⁴

Oakley recalls spending a lot of time on Afghanistan. There had also been U.S. intervention between November 1986 and March 1987 over rising India-Pakistan tensions:

The Indians and the Pakistanis had become involved in the Indian military exercises called "Operation Brass Tacks" which could have turned into a major conflagration or at least a serious confrontation. Each started a series of maneuvers, which did not end when they were supposed to. In fact, both sides began to build up infantry and armor along their border. Finally President Zia and [Prime Minister] Rajiv Gandhi managed to diffuse the tensions by agreeing to meet at the border and watch a cricket match together....We helped that process a little by providing intelligence to both sides which showed that the more alarmist reports from their own intelligence services were exaggerated....I think that helped to reduce the tensions.⁹⁵

Richard Haass was senior director for Near East and South Asian Affairs from 1989 to 1993. Although Afghanistan and an India-Pakistan crisis attracted attention, the focus of the directorate's work was the Middle East. This included the Iranian regime, the Iran-Iraq war, the Middle East peace process and the Gulf War in 1990–91.

⁹³ Interview of Herbert Hagerty, July 20, 2001.

⁹⁴ Interview of Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, July 7, 1992.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

South Asia continued to be “more about crisis management than grand strategy,” in the words of one NSC staffer. Although many of the papers from the George H. W. Bush administration onward remain classified, we can see how many times South Asian issues were specifically discussed in the Principals and Deputies Committees. The George Bush Presidential Library has released a list of topics for these meetings, and what emerges is how little South Asia was discussed even at the tail end of the Cold War. The Deputies Committee met twice in March and April 1990 to discuss India-Pakistan tensions over Kashmir,⁹⁶ but apart from the tensions in 1990, the other issues that merited senior attention were nuclear nonproliferation and Afghanistan.⁹⁷

The 1990s: Clinton-era Engagement with India

The Clinton NSC was more engaged on India, in part because of the president’s (and first lady’s) interest in the country. Two years after Hillary Clinton’s 1995 visit to India, a NSC review of “policy toward South Asia was underway. It resulted in a directive approved by the president to establish a policy of ‘greater engagement’ with South Asia.”⁹⁸ The Clinton administration increased efforts on South Asia. Part of this was driven by the traditional portfolio of issues: nonproliferation, regional security, and democratization. But part of it was also informed by a period of energetic efforts “to improve relations with South Asia,” according to one participant. Anthony (Tony) Lake, then national security advisor, attempted to open up a debate with his Indian counterpart on global issues. And Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott led efforts after the 1998 nuclear tests to build a fresh relationship with India.⁹⁹

The Post-9/11 Era

If the Clinton NSC had helped set the tone for a fresh emphasis on engaging India, the George W. Bush NSC drove forward that agenda by conceptualizing and executing the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal. In a further signal that South Asia was getting more attention, the South Asia desk at the NSC was moved out of the Middle East section and reported to the Asia director. The NSC also introduced a specific function for strategic planning in an effort to bridge a much larger professional staff in the White House and generate tangible, longer-range strategy in its midst.

During the first Obama administration, the NSC staff on South Asia continued to expand—notably on Afghanistan. However, the functional organization of the NSC meant the hyphenation of Af-Pak, which was run by Deputy National Security Advisor General Douglas Lute, while India

⁹⁶ Devin T. Hagerty, “Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: The 1990 Indo-Pakistani Crisis,” *International Security* 20, no. 3 (Winter, 1995–96): 79–114.

⁹⁷ NSC/DC 001 February 8, 1989, Meeting on Afghanistan; NSC/DC 112 March 26, 1990; NSC/DC Meeting on Kashmir; NSC/DC 113 April 4, 1990; NSC/DC Meeting on Kashmir (George H. W. Bush Presidential Library); NSC/DC 124 May 7, 1990, Meeting on Pakistan Stingers; NSC/DC 154 July 9, 1990, Meeting on Pakistan Nuclear Program; NSC/DC 190 August 31, 1990, Meeting on Pakistan Nuclear; NSC/DC 193A September 5, 1990, Meeting on Pakistan Nuclear; NSC/DC 205 October 2, 1990, Meeting on Pakistan Nuclear; NSC/DC 207 October 5, 1990, Meeting on Afghanistan; NSC/DC 208 October 5, 1990, Meeting on Pakistan; NSC/DC 260 March 5, 1991, Meeting on Afghanistan; NSC/DC 271 April 12, 1991, Meeting on Afghanistan; NSC/DC 282 May 17, 1991, Meeting on Angola and Afghanistan; NSC/DC 331 January 3, 1992, Meeting on Afghanistan.

⁹⁸ Interview of Ambassador Karl Inderfurth, April 27, 2001.

⁹⁹ Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2004).

fell under Dennis Ross, special assistant to the President and senior director for the central region. The intense counterterrorism focus on Pakistan meant that counterterrorism officials in the NSC also looked at South Asia.

Successive NSCs have had a strong influence on South Asia policy. When issues are elevated to high-level interagency discussion, NSC staffers are responsible for coordinating advice. Even on functional issues, the NSC manages a series of interagency policy committees, which serve to coordinate particular aspects of cross-agency work. NSC officials get access to far more reporting than mid-level officials in particular agencies, giving the comparative advantage to an NSC director, for example, as compared to a desk director in the State Department. However, the latter are closer to the daily business of regional policy.

A change here has been driven by technology. Secure video telephone conferences mean that ambassadors in the field can dial in to interagency meetings. In the case of a high-profile country—like Pakistan or Afghanistan in recent years—this gives the NSC, and the Principals and Deputies Committees, the ability to tap into lead officials on the ground. This change is important as it directly plugs senior ambassadors into policy making, according to two ambassadors and several former NSC officials interviewed.

One limitation is that the NSC focus can be relentlessly operational. Staffing the president, the national security advisor, and the three major committees—the full National Security Council, the Principals Committee, and the Deputies Committee—is demanding. As one interviewee and former NSC official put it, the NSC needs to be staffed by people who are operationally effective and capable of a broad perspective.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT

The State Department office for South Asia was created within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs in the late 1940s. The South Asia office at that stage was composed of two to three officials covering the entire region embedded within a geographical bureau with a much broader range of responsibilities. South Asia remained a subset of Near East policy until the creation of a separate South Asia Bureau in 1992. This came about through the specific lobbying of Representative Stephen Solarz, supported by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Solarz was convinced that South Asia (and particularly India) would get more attention within the State Department only if it had a distinct assistant secretary with a voice (rather than relying on an assistant secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, who was usually a Middle East hand). Even a South Asia bureau, however, initially did not substantially increase the number of officials dealing with the region. The bureau was small by State Department standards. One former State Department official recalls that the India desk team had not changed in numbers between his time working on it in the late 1980s and the late 1990s.

The Foreign Service had a series of officers who worked on and in South Asia. The most frequent combination was India and Pakistan, although a number of officers also served in India and Nepal

or Sri Lanka and India. “Localitis” was an issue, particularly between the U.S. embassies in India and Pakistan. Diplomats in each state would sometimes identify closely with the perspective from that capital, leading to frictions between the two U.S. diplomatic teams or with Washington.

A range of interviewees who have worked on or in the region in the State Department pointedly suggested that South Asia did not always attract senior-level attention in government. This had an impact on recruiting and retaining experts. As Karl Inderfurth explains:

Since South Asia had not gotten a lot of U.S. attention over the years, except during times of crisis, it really hadn’t attracted as much Foreign Service interest as some other regions. It certainly didn’t have the pull of U.S.-Soviet relations, or East-West relations that had developed a cadre of experts like Kennan and Bohlen and Thompson over the years. Nor had it approached the status of having Middle East “hands” or China “hands.”

External studies on the State Department claim that regional South Asia expertise was not greatly valued.¹⁰⁰ This seems to be an over-exaggeration. Regional expertise played into policy making continuously from 1947 as declassified policy papers show. A greater challenge was the (relative) lack of career opportunities for officers who focused on South Asia. There were (and still are) relatively few ambassadorships or senior Foreign Service posts in the region. Within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), diplomats whose careers focused on the Arab world dominated. In the contained but important world of bureaucratic status, South Asia counted for less. For regional experts—those Foreign Service generalists who built careers around South Asia—advancement depended on work outside the region as well as their experience within it. As Ambassador Howard Schaffer puts it:

[B]y the late 1970s, there was a cadre of South Asia experts, although it was rather thin. The main problem was that senior positions—from DCM to section chiefs—were often given to officers with very little experience in the area. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult to build a sturdy cadre of experts in South Asia—even if it is one of several specialties that an officer might have. Our officers are no fools; they see who is assigned to Delhi and Islamabad as Deputy Chief of Mission or political counselor or as chief of the economic section. They notice that, too often, the assignment is given to someone with European or East Asian or Middle East experience.¹⁰¹

Until 1992, the senior-most State Department post on South Asia was a deputy assistant secretary of state (DAS) within NEA. While this DAS usually ended up working directly with senior officials including the under secretary for political affairs when they intervened on South Asia issues, the DAS was not present at the regular assistant secretary-level meetings with the secretary of state.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Andersen, “U.S. Foreign Policy towards South Asia: A Continuing Tilt to the Functional,” in *Making U.S. Foreign Policy toward South Asia: Regional Imperatives and the Imperial Presidency*, eds. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 77–100.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Ambassador Howard B. Schaffer, March 10, 1997.

Nor did the South Asia DAS enjoy “policy equivalence” with assistant secretaries of functional bureaus, most notably successive policy leads on nonproliferation from the 1970s.

The introduction of a separate Bureau for South Asian Affairs (later expanded to include Central Asia as well) was meant to change this. Ironically, the proposal had little support in the State Department to begin with, even among the regional experts who believed that South Asia deserved more focus. Robert Oakley replays this debate:

In some ways, I regret that South Asia has been divorced from the rest of NEA; I think it may have diminished the importance of the subcontinent in the eyes of high-level officials. Bill Burns, who succeeded me in the NSC NEA job, recently confirmed that view; he feels that South Asia gets less high-level attention in the [State] Department now that it is in a separate bureau, rather than enhancing it, which was the principal reason for the organizational change. I don’t think that I or the NSC as a whole would have been more active during my NSC tour on South Asia issues if they had been raised by a separate bureau in the Department.¹⁰²

The first assistant secretary of state for South Asia to do a full tour (1993–97) was Robin Raphel, previously political counselor in New Delhi. Raphel’s tenure saw a renewed focus on South Asia. Washington was keen to advance a range of policy agendas in the subcontinent, including democratization, human rights, nonproliferation, and regional security. This was a broad and transformative agenda, and Raphel encountered some resistance in the region, particularly on efforts to improve India-Pakistan relations. Karl Inderfurth (1997–2001) followed her, bringing a background of work on the Hill, in journalism, and in the Carter National Security Council. Christina Rocca (2001–06), a former CIA official, succeeded Inderfurth. Richard Boucher (2006–09), a career Foreign Service officer, then took the helm until he was followed by Bob Blake (2009–present), a South Asia hand who had served as deputy chief of mission in New Delhi and as ambassador to Sri Lanka.

The State Department South Asia team began to expand significantly during the past decade. The biggest change came after 9/11, when the budget and political attention shot up. As Rocca remembered: “Suddenly, overnight, not only are you at war but sanctions have been lifted. Suddenly the floodgates opened. It launched the South Asia bureau into another category altogether.”

In time, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan merited their own offices, and the Obama administration then established a special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. He created an interagency office inside the State Department. This office, S/SRAP, sat above the directors for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and included some 40 officials drawn from a variety of different agencies. There were very few Foreign Service officers. Not only did it lead on regional policy, but it also coordinated interagency efforts and engaged in multilateral outreach—including to the Chinese.

¹⁰² Interview of Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, July 7, 1992.

S/SRAP had a powerful logic. The sheer scale of the U.S. effort on Afghanistan and Pakistan required concentrated effort and detailed, driven coordination. The NSC alone could not do this. Nevertheless, creating an additional office on top of a much-expanded policy machine and an office dedicated to part—but not all—of South Asia created fresh problems just as it solved them. S/SRAP could be nimble and creative and drive policy forward quickly. But it could sometimes be less effective in driving the policy machine and making the best use of the talented staff on the policy desks. Despite a formal mechanism to relate S/SRAP to the South and Central Asia bureau, effective coordination with those dealing with India “was not ideal,” according to one former official.

The State Department’s role on counterterrorism, however, was not as pronounced. While a highly effective coordinator for counterterrorism, Dan Benjamin, leads a bureau focused on global counterterrorism policy, assistance, and multilateral coordination, the major part of the U.S. counterterrorism machinery is elsewhere. The State Department may have a strong voice on regional policy, but counterterrorism policy is—by virtue of being both visible (when it goes wrong) and sensitive—driven more from the NSC and the intelligence community.

Today, the State Department continues to play an important role in South Asia policy, with the greatest concentration of officials dedicated to South Asian issues. This is not limited to officials based in Washington but reflects the knowledge and influence that ambassadors in the region can bring to the table. Senior ambassadors like Nancy Powell in New Delhi and Ann Patterson, formerly in Islamabad and now in Cairo, can have powerful voices at the policy table.

Counterterrorism policy is—by virtue of being both visible and sensitive—driven more from the NSC and the intelligence community.

Ambassadors have also at times directly recruited external experts to support them. Ainslee Embree and Ashley Tellis have both worked for past U.S. ambassadors in New Delhi (Frank Wisner and Robert Blackwill) and in both cases enhanced the embassy’s capacity for nuanced reporting. Tellis became a key operational interlocutor with the Indians

on his return to Washington, playing an important role in U.S.-India civil nuclear negotiations. State Department officials often rotate to the NSC directorships and senior directorships, including officers with South Asia experience. Former senior directors Don Camp and Michael Newbill are just two examples of Foreign Service officers with both deep and broad understanding of regional issues who have worked in NSC positions.

Other parts of the State Department have also periodically played an important role. The under secretary for political affairs has at times been a significant actor on South Asia, particularly in recent years as dialogue with Indian and Pakistani counterparts has grown. In the late 1980s, Michael Armacost (1984–89) was closely engaged on Afghanistan policy. Nicholas Burns (2005–08) and Bill Burns (2008–11) spent much of their time building relations with India and negotiating the next steps in the U.S.–India relationship. Deputy secretaries also played a leading role, as did Strobe Talbott (1994–2001), Richard Armitage (2001–05), and John Negroponte (2007–09).

Ironically, the State Department now may face a challenge posed by the successful rise of South Asia to enduring policy importance. The expansion of desk positions means that portfolios for many narrow: instead of working on a country as a whole, officers now focus on a particular issue within it. As a result, relatively few officials can successfully build a broad understanding of regional issues. The same goes for officers in the respective regional embassies. In the late 1990s, fewer than 200 American diplomats served in Pakistan. By 2010, there were 640.¹⁰³ A large increase of diplomatic positions in India began as part of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's transformational diplomacy and continued under Secretary Clinton and means that many more officers will serve in India. But in the case of Pakistan, diplomats are generally not accompanied by their families, and many serve one-year tours. More officers serve in Pakistan, but their experience is brief and security constraints can restrict the scale and quality of engagement with Pakistanis.

THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

OSD Policy plays a very unappreciated role and a much bigger role than people think. It's a small enough shop to be not enormously bureaucratic. It has a direct line to the under secretary for policy. And it is their job to do the 30,000-foot policy and they have the resources to task out thinking.

—Senior Congressional Advisor

The Office of the Secretary for Defense (OSD) has had a small group of officials working on South Asia. While primarily focused on defense issues, including military assistance, OSD has had a series of potential advantages in working on this region. First, it is an integrated regional office. Second, spots on the policy team are hotly contested, which allows for very high-quality staff. Third, the vast defense store of resources, staff, and knowledge allows OSD Policy to reach out and resource specific requests. OSD has also had a particular historic relationship with Pakistan, partly the result of the 1954 alliance and partly since the establishment of the Office for the Defense Representative in Pakistan (ODRP) during the 1980s. This office was originally designed to support U.S. Afghan policy in Pakistan and to staff the necessary bilateral military assistance that this required.

The Department of Defense (DOD) also has good ties with India, which have largely grown since the end of the Cold War (and have advanced rapidly in concert with U.S.-India ties). There is an urban myth, particularly among those examining U.S. South Asia policy from a remove (and sometimes from the State Department), that the DOD and the military shape U.S. policy toward Pakistan. Indian officials, according to one interviewee from India, also share this belief. Interviewees and the archives suggest otherwise, although former senior DOD officials pointed out that maintaining effective military to military relations is a priority in a number of countries and not just Pakistan.

¹⁰³ United States Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, "Compliance Followup Review of Embassy Islamabad and Constituent Posts, Pakistan," Report Number ISP-C-12-28A, May 2012, <http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/193863.pdf>.

This report has primarily focused on the role played by the State Department and NSC, but interviews with former (and current) OSD officials suggest that OSD can bring longer-range thinking to bear, albeit with a specific defense focus. The risk in OSD is the operational focus on current military efforts, which tends to privilege a more intense focus on Afghanistan. Even so, joint military activities with India continue to grow, as does one of the commercial success stories of recent years—U.S. defense exports to India.

OSD Policy can also bridge the gap that some analysts see between the two primary operational commands in South Asia, Central Command (CENTCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM).¹⁰⁴ The dividing line between these two commands runs along India's border with Pakistan. CENTCOM originated from the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force designed to provide greater U.S. military capability in the Gulf.¹⁰⁵ Based out of Tampa, Florida, CENTCOM leads on Afghanistan and Pakistan. Based out of Hawaii, PACOM is responsible for India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Some have argued that this divide limits U.S. military understanding of South Asia as an integrated space, not least as one of the main potential conflicts—India-Pakistan—runs across the CENTCOM/PACOM boundary.

This critique has some merit. CENTCOM officers have too little exposure to India and PACOM officers have too little exposure to Pakistan. But all the possible alternatives are less appealing. Changing CENTCOM to include India runs directly counter to the logic of an integrated approach to Asia. Expanding PACOM to include Pakistan makes little sense given the current focus on operations in Afghanistan. A separate South Asia command would be expensive and raise additional problems as to where to place its headquarters. Ultimately, this military command divide has some negative implications for an integrated approach to the region, but these are not strategically significant. The OSD and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington resolve any policy differences.

THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

The CIA is enormously important. Their judgments have an effect on policy.

– Richard Boucher, Former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs

The U.S. intelligence community has developed expertise on South Asia since the late 1940s. A series of declassified National Intelligence Estimates and other analytical papers point to the quality and depth of this expertise. From CIA analysis of Indian politics, Defense Intelligence Agency assessments of Indian military capabilities, and Bureau of Intelligence and Research reports on Pashtun nationalism, declassified reports point to a confident, well-versed community

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Howerton et al., *Lines Have Meaning: Why India Should Be Part of USCENTCOM's AOR* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School National Security Program, May 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Bernard Trainor, "Washington Talk: The Military; Now Chiefs Fight for Command Nobody Wanted," *New York Times*, July 22, 1988, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/22/us/washington-talk-the-military-now-chiefs-fight-for-command-nobody-wanted.html>.

of intelligence experts. There are also challenges, including a “perennial drift in reporting and collection priorities,” according to one former senior official. Functional expertise is often valued more highly than regional expertise, according to another interviewee, as the most sensitive subjects for collection and analysis often revolve around specific state capabilities in South Asia. An illustration of this is a declassified CIA analysis of Pakistan’s nuclear program from 1978. Even today, 10 of 38 pages remain classified for U.S. national security reasons.¹⁰⁶

The intelligence community does not make policy, although intelligence contributes to both strategic and tactical policy making. However, the intelligence community has played a greater role in issues when intelligence provides a vital part of the picture—as with nonproliferation, during a regional war or crisis, or when covert action has been part of the portfolio of policies chosen. A temptation exists here to think that the CIA makes policy, as with the case of covert assistance to the Afghan mujahideen during the 1980s, but declassified NSC papers show how closely President Reagan paid attention to and authorized specific actions.

The intelligence community also brings institutional memory. As Michael Walker, who served in Afghanistan from 1983 to 1985, 2002, and then as chief of the CIA’s Near East and South Asia Division from 2007 to 2010 points out:

[Both the State Department and the CIA] have been in Afghanistan for many decades and understand the history, geography and complex culture of the country. And the CIA had 10 years of in-depth involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s assisting in the gradual defeat of the Soviet military and monitoring the failure of the Soviet Union’s extensive nation-building efforts there.

The challenge since 9/11 is the growing importance of counterterrorism, a policy area in which intelligence plays a crucial role. The sensitivity of specific casework means that not all policy advisors will be read in on particular strands of high-priority work, such as with planning for the Osama Bin Laden Special Forces raid in May 2011, knowledge of which was kept extremely close until it was concluded. The challenge in cases like these is to make sure that the consequences of covert action are properly assessed, using what a former Peruvian diplomat, Ambassador Ricardo Luna, calls “the law of proliferating unintended consequences.”¹⁰⁷

Intelligence officers, primarily analysts, have also rotated into NSC roles on South Asia. Robert Komer is an example from the 1960s and Bruce Riedel from the 1990s. Like other detailees from the interagency, they carry with them inherited experience and perspectives. Unlike policy detailees from the interagency, intelligence officers may have fewer potential conflicts of interest, particularly if they do not return to their home agency afterward.

¹⁰⁶ April 26, 1978 CIA Assessment, ‘Pakistan Nuclear Study’ declassified in part in 2007, National Security Archive, Washington, DC. See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Ambassador Ricardo Luna, interview with the author, Washington, DC, 2011.

U.S. ECONOMIC POLICY MAKERS

This study largely focuses on the political and security dimensions of U.S. policy toward South Asia. The economic component, both private and public sector, is also crucial. Economic assistance has been a continuing element of U.S. policy toward the region since the 1940s. USAID missions in South Asia have been among the largest in the world, with Afghanistan and Pakistan in the top 20 recipients in 2011 at a total of \$1.8 billion.¹⁰⁸ As U.S.-India commercial and trade ties have risen dramatically since the 1990s, a broader constituency of private sector interests has a direct stake in U.S.-India relations.

India also has a growing stake in the United States. In 2010, Indian foreign direct investment (FDI) in the United States was \$3.3 billion, a 40 percent increase from 2009.¹⁰⁹ Indian FDI is geographically dispersed across the United States, and Indian companies are increasingly investing not just in sectors such as information technology but also in steel, pharmaceuticals, and energy. The SelectUSA program for attracting FDI to the United States, run by the U.S. Department of Commerce, is set to host a roadshow in December 2012 in three Indian cities to raise awareness about investment opportunities in the United States.¹¹⁰ In early 2012, the U.S. Department of Commerce renewed the U.S.-India Commercial Dialogue for an additional two years.¹¹¹ The U.S.-India CEO Forum, now in its seventh year, was initiated by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2005 to facilitate person-to-person contact at a business level and to enhance bilateral trade and investment with India. The longstanding U.S.-India Business Council also continues to forge business ties to increase bilateral trade.

In October 2012, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Tim Geithner visited India for the third annual meeting of the U.S.-India Economic and Financial Partnership—a meeting focused on building more bilateral trade and investment. As a result of the size of India's expanding economy and growing middle class, this partnership should ensure a reliable market for exports from the U.S. private sector.¹¹² Meanwhile, the Office of South and Central Asian Affairs at the U.S. Office of the Trade Representative manages the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum for advancing bilateral trade and investment. The office also develops and implements U.S. trade policy with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

¹⁰⁸ USAID, "Where Does USAID's Money Go," accessed November 20, 2012: http://transition.usaid.gov/policy/budget/money/WheredoesUSAIDsMoneyGo_FY2012March2012.xlsx.

¹⁰⁹ Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "U.S.-India Bilateral Trade and Investment," accessed November 17, 2012: <http://www.ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia/india>.

¹¹⁰ SelectUSA, "SelectUSA Roadshow in India," accessed October 25, 2012: <http://selectusa.commerce.gov/selectusa-roadshow-india>.

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, "India Trade Mission: Day 1—Commercial Dialogue," The Commerce Blog, March 26, 2012, <http://www.commerce.gov/blog/2012/03/26/india-trade-mission-day-1-commercial-dialogue>.

¹¹² Joint Statement of Secretary Geithner and Indian Foreign Minister Chidambaram at the 2012 U.S.-India Economic and Financial Partnership, Press Center, U.S. Department of Treasury, October 9, 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1730.aspx>.

A QUESTION OF EXPERTISE

The role and availability of expertise in foreign policy is a huge subject. This report spends less time on it here because of the mixed responses from interviewees who were divided on how much expertise there is on South Asia. The most senior interviewees argued that there simply is not a problem. The U.S. government can call on experts when needed. At the assistant secretary level, views differed. One pointed to a “very good bench,” while another suggested that “there wasn’t enough.” A former ambassador in the region argued it had improved dramatically during the 1990s.

A number of interviewees pointed to the difficulty of making good use of expertise. “You can’t get expertise into PowerPoint®,” commented one former assistant secretary of state. Another former State Department official suggested that regional experts were better able to provide analysis than advice—how to advance policy was not always their strength. C. Raja Mohan provides another criticism of how South Asia expertise manifested itself in the U.S. government. The hyper-specialization of experts limits their ability to connect the dots, and he argues that the improvement in U.S.-India relations took place “in spite of regional experts” who were still preoccupied with nonproliferation and the Kashmir issue. Nicholas Burns emphasizes the importance of ambassadors as a source of strategic advice, particularly given their contemporary role as direct participants in policy videoconferences. A former deputy assistant secretary at the State Department agrees, qualifying this with the comment that South Asia embassy expertise was not as pronounced as that in East Asia. Wendy Chamberlin argues that personalities matter and are “more important than the title or position held.”

Interviewees identified three key weaknesses in expertise when it comes to South Asia:

- South Asia was a relative policy backwater until the late 1990s, so the initial bench of policy experts was fairly thin.
- There is no language community as there is with Mandarin, Japanese, or Arabic speakers, which limits the growth of a distinct cadre.
- The group of South Asia policy experts beyond government in U.S. universities and think tanks is relatively small, and many academics do not speak the language of policy. According to Radha Kumar, Executive Director of the Delhi Policy Group, “in American universities, there is well-developed academic knowledge of Indian culture, art, and history, but when it comes to policy there is not enough attention. Perhaps this will change in the future.”

Some interviewees also commented that the DOD invests in language and regional expertise better than the State Department, as Table 2 illustrates.

Table 2: U.S. Government Programs to Build Language and Regional Expertise

U.S. Department of Defense	U.S. Department of State	U.S. Department of Education
Boren Fellowships	Fulbright Program for Educational Exchange	Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships
Boren Scholarships	Funding to Council of American Overseas Research Centers	Funding to Council of American Overseas Research Centers
The Language Flagship	Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program	Title VI-funded Academic Centers and Programs
English for Heritage Language Speakers	Foreign Service Institute	Fulbright-Hays Program
National Language Service Corps		
Project Global Officers		
Defense Language Institute		

The Department of Defense runs several programs to learn language, gain cultural expertise, and utilize the results of existing and acquired regional knowledge in government. DOD programs also represent the most growth and expansion in language and cultural training.¹¹³ The National Security Education Program (NSEP), under the DOD, oversees a range of programs to build American expertise in lesser known regions and cultures for the purposes of national security.

The David L. Boren National Security Education Act of 1991 created NSEP, which first distributed Boren awards in 1994. The Boren program sends American citizens abroad to learn languages and cultures that are not generally represented in conventional study abroad programs, and draws on a belief that the United States must increase its expertise.

For South Asia expertise, the Boren program supports the study of many languages spoken in South Asia: Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Pashto, Persian, Punjabi, Sinhala, Tamil, and Telugu. Travel to India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan is supported by the Boren awards, although the program does not anticipate awarding fellowships to Pakistan in 2013 because of security concerns. The learning of language or area study as a Boren scholar involves two conditions: first, that the language/area of study is important for U.S. national security interests “broadly defined”¹¹⁴ and, second, that Boren scholarship recipients serve in the federal government “in a position with national security responsibilities” within three years of graduation. The program prioritizes service in the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and the State Department or any part of the intelligence community.

Some argue that this is not sufficient. Alyssa Ayres (now deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian Affairs) argued in 2003 that the awards under NSEP are too short

¹¹³ John Vandiver, “Defense Language Institute Gets a New Home in Stuttgart,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 5, 2012.

¹¹⁴ The broad definition of national security in this program includes human and environmental security.

and “deep competence in a ‘critical area’ cannot be achieved in the time allotted by the two-year fellowship limit.”¹¹⁵ She also argued that deep academic expertise from Title VI-funded centers in South Asian languages, regions, and cultures exists, but that it is disconnected from the policy world. This is due to a lack of established networks between the academy and policy making, but also because some scholars are disinclined to be involved with U.S. policy “out of concern for the politicization of knowledge through affiliation with the U.S. security state.” Nevertheless, “there are clear strategic, as well as longer-term economic reasons, that make a bigger pool of experts with better skills in South Asian languages, as well as more comprehensive knowledge of its contemporary affairs, desirable.”¹¹⁶ The U.S. military also operates the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program, which develops regional specialists in the uniformed services, sending them to military colleges and supporting linguistic and political expertise. These FAOs form a vital part of the U.S. military’s capability to understand South Asia.

One question is whether similar schemes to the Boren fellowship could be considered by the State Department or as an interagency program to support broader cross-government expertise. A specific investment in South Asia expertise could strengthen the policy desks dealing with the region.

WHO REALLY CALLS THE SHOTS?

The biggest and most controversial South Asia policy decisions are made at the senior-most levels. Herbert Hagerty calls this the “magic” level where someone on the seventh floor of the State Department, at the NSC, or in the White House makes a judgment call. And this is surely right.

However, the senior level of strategic decision making can undermine integrated policy making. If one of the contemporary challenges of policy is the sheer range of policy communities dealing with South Asia, an effective interagency process is vital. A number of interviewees argue that the interagency process is seriously challenged. This criticism is not limited to the current administration. “The planning process for diplomacy seems broken,” says one former senior NSC official. A former State Department official argues that the “vertical integration” of counterterrorism policy, whereby the intelligence community consists of the advisors and executors of policy, increases the risk that policies are pursued without being aligned with other, non-terrorism interests. A former intelligence official argues the reverse, suggesting that this integration better connects policy and execution. A former NSC official argues that the expansion of the NSC and the fact that more junior officials tend to hold positions (like senior directorships) that were once occupied by “grown-ups” reduces the authority of the

The senior level of strategic decision making can undermine integrated policy making.

¹¹⁵ Alyssa Ayres, “Disconnected Networks: Notes toward a Different Approach to Filling the South Asia Expert Gap,” *India Review* 2, no. 2 (April 2003): 69–96.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

NSC to coordinate, direct, and hold the interagency to account. Another former National Security Council official queries the ability of an NSC that has, for most of the first Obama administration, divided Af-Pak from India officials to properly include India in Afghanistan and Pakistan policy. (Despite the formal organizational gap, NSC officials dealing with Afghanistan and India sat in close proximity in their office.)

A group of former and current officials point to the difficulty of reconciling different policy agendas and to the challenge of long-range, strategic policy making. The NSC, Principals Committee, and Deputies Committee tend to deal with the highest-priority issues. The urgent or the important gets attention. The longer-term but not immediate issues do not. The net result, argue many interviewees, is an excessive focus on the short term. Strategy suffers. This leads to a “lack of a comprehensive South Asia policy,” claims one observer from the Hill. Another former official argues that “there is no South Asia policy now: there is an Af-Pak and an India policy.” These criticisms are bi-partisan.

Obama administration officials have pushed back. They have pointed to the focus on the New Silk Road as a regional policy with the potential to transform South Asia. President Obama has advanced the relationship with India, supporting New Delhi’s bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Afghanistan policy has turned toward a political process, marked by the emphasis on transition and tentative efforts to open talks with the Taliban. Some former officials interviewed also leapt to the defense of the current administration. One observes that the Obama administration “is dealing with a hugely difficult set of policy challenges in the region.” “How do you even begin to deal with Pakistan?” asks another.

LESSONS FROM THE MACHINE

If there are lessons for the future from looking at who has made South Asia policy, the following four observations flow from the archives and interviews:

- **An effective interagency process is crucial.** The National Security Council needs to be staffed with officials who have the authority, capacity, and reach to advise, coordinate, and assess policy delivery. Priority countries need to have champions. A reliance on NSC or State Department mid-level staff is not enough.
- **Personal relationships with South Asian leaders matter.** A repeated theme from declassified U.S. foreign policy records is an understanding of this in principle but a failure to operationalize it. Relationship management cannot be subcontracted to ambassadors alone, neither is it about the volume of shuttle diplomacy. Relationships between principals matter and are a measure of the sustained quality of engagement. Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott’s dialogue with Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh after 1998 is one successful example.

- **A focus on crisis management is not enough.** There must be longer-range strategy, regardless of where this is situated across government. The majority of those interviewed for this report argued that strategy toward South Asia is underdeveloped and a recurring challenge. Some interviewees questioned this, suggesting that the problem is not a lack of strategy, but a lack of implementation.
- **The challenge is not necessarily one of expertise. It is how to sustain and utilize expertise to inform strategic and operational foreign policy.** Could the difficulties generated by the initial language of a “pivot” to Asia have been avoided? Could the U.S.-India relationship have advanced further during the Cold War with a more nuanced American diplomatic tone? Could the supply lines for Afghanistan have reopened earlier had Pakistan been better understood following the November 2011 cross-border raid by U.S. forces in Afghanistan?

THE FUTURE: U.S. GRAND STRATEGY AND SOUTH ASIA

In the short-term it is India-Pakistan, in the long-term it is India-China.

– Stephen P. Cohen, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

SOUTH ASIA SHOULD REMAIN an enduring U.S. foreign policy interest in the coming decades—for both positive and negative reasons. India will continue to rise as a global actor, even if the pace of its advance may be uneven. It would be difficult to imagine a positive Asian future without a democratic, friendly India. The general principle of a positive U.S.-India relationship is well-established, but where the relationship goes next remains up for debate. This suggests that the Obama administration needs to answer four questions. First, what does India want from the U.S.-India relationship over time? Second, should the United States prioritize particular strands of activity with New Delhi and allow others to languish? India has a smaller foreign policy establishment than the United States, and one Indian commentator suggested that there are more American diplomats resident in India than Indian Foreign Service officers on home tours in the Ministry of External Affairs. This lack of capacity and smaller Foreign Service affects potential policy. Third, how will India's policy toward Afghanistan evolve as the U.S. drawdown continues, and will New Delhi's approach mirror that of Washington? Fourth, in the context of a more strategic approach to Asia, what is the U.S. view of the trilateral relationship between India, Japan, and the United States? China will track this closely and likely adjust its Asia policy accordingly.

The future of Pakistan, a country of 190 million people,¹¹⁷ has major consequences for regional security and prosperity. Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons and, despite the growing positives of their bilateral relationship, a troubled history. Pakistan continues to deal with the legacy of past policies pursued by both Islamabad and Washington, including the presence of armed terrorist groups that threaten Pakistani, American, and Indian interests. The Obama administration needs to establish what a strategy for Pakistan means. This includes defining the scale of ambition (how realistic U.S. goals will be) and the means to advance U.S. goals. Washington will need to determine how much it will cooperate with Pakistan on Afghanistan and counterterrorism, as against pursuing these goals unilaterally or with other partners. A robust U.S. strategy will also draw on a close understanding of what Pakistan wants from the bilateral relationship. U.S. strategy toward Pakistan needs a focus on internal developments in Pakistan: more effective governance, a stronger economy, and any reduction in extremist violence will primarily depend on Pakistan's political leadership, policy, and administrative capabilities.

Afghanistan remains important to the United States, both to ensure that terrorist groups do not use its soil again to threaten America and because a stable political transition in that country is a necessary ingredient of regional stability. This requires continuing policy attention

¹¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, July 2012 Population Estimate, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2119.html>.

toward Afghanistan rather than any precipitate drop-off, as had been the case after past intense foreign policy crises. As the government of Afghanistan takes greater responsibility for security, Washington will need to pay closer attention to internal politics in Afghanistan and the regional balance of power. Politics will likely shape Afghanistan's future security, raising the importance of high-quality political reporting and influencing by U.S. officials.

Bangladesh deserves attention as a moderate Muslim democracy of 160 million people¹¹⁸ and the bridge for a future economic corridor between South and Southeast Asia. Nepal, although not a vital U.S. interest, could become more important if U.S.-China relations deteriorated. Nepal's hydroelectric resources could help meet the energy demands of its neighbors. The same is true of Bhutan, which could also present investment opportunities to unlock its enormous energy potential. While Bhutan does not have diplomatic relations with the United States,¹¹⁹ it does participate in the South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy (SARI/Energy) sponsored by USAID. The program helps countries in South Asia develop their power infrastructure. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are a key component of any regional policy, both to stimulate greater economic integration and to maintain peace and security in the Indian Ocean.

The United States has a vital interest in regional stability. Between the 1940s and the early 2000s, this was largely interpreted through the narrow prism of a hyphenated India-Pakistan relationship. A stable relationship between the two countries remains crucially important, but it is not the only U.S. interest in the region and does not demand interventionist diplomacy. It does, however, "require careful thinking about deterrence stability," according to one analyst of the area, particularly as India's defense capabilities continue to become superior to those of Pakistan. The United States also has a vital interest in a stable China-India relationship. Washington needs to broaden its perspective on regional stability to incorporate China and extra-regional actors when appropriate (e.g., Saudi Arabia can influence Pakistan). As former Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gallucci presciently points out, "the only country that could do more than the United States to influence South Asia is China."

China matters to South Asia because of its sheer economic power, as can be seen from growing bilateral trade (see box, "Bilateral Trade with China") and because China is clearly the most powerful military actor on the Asian continent. Apart from China's growing role in economic investment in South Asia, the next decade may bring an expansion in China's political influence. One demonstration of this is the September 2012 visit to Afghanistan after 46 years by a senior Chinese official, Zhou Yongkang. His visit signaled China's growing interest in shaping the future of Afghanistan. China's close ties with Pakistan are not new, though a February 2012 decision by China to take part in a trilateral meeting process with Pakistan and Afghanistan indicates a deeper interest in regional politics.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ U.S. Relations with Bhutan, Fact Sheet, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, July 3, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35839.htm>.

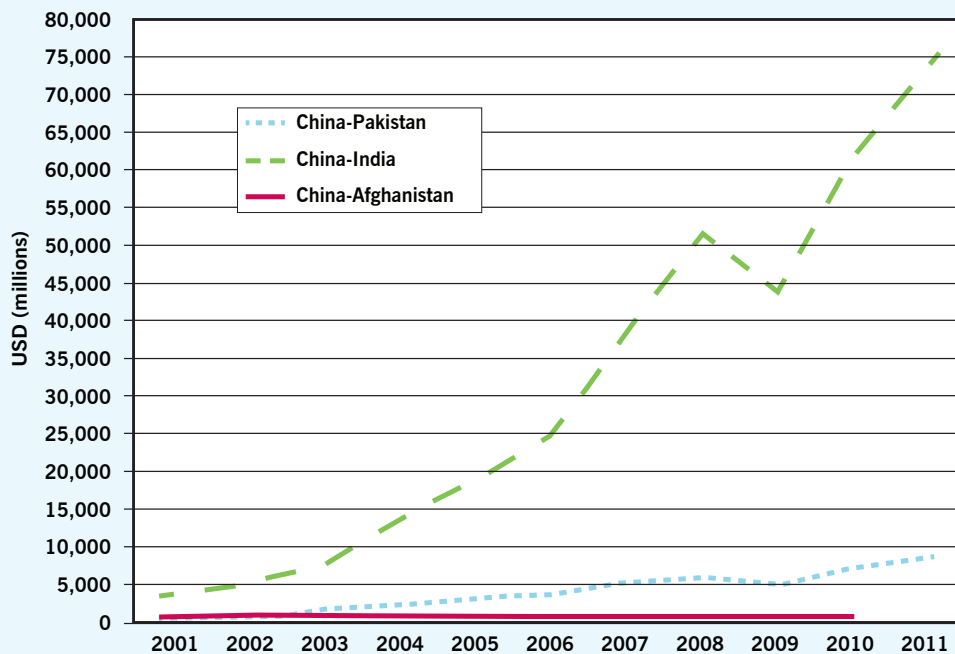
¹²⁰ Andrew Small, "China's Afghan Moment," *Foreign Policy*, October 3, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/03/china_afghan_moment.

BILATERAL TRADE WITH CHINA

Bilateral trade between China and South Asian countries has shown exponential growth in the past decade. China is India's biggest trading partner, with trade in 2011 at \$73.9 billion¹ According to the Indian minister of commerce and industry, both nations are on a course to reach \$100 billion in trade by 2015.² This figure greatly dwarfs Chinese trade with Pakistan and Afghanistan at \$8.1 billion in 2011 and \$179 million in 2010 respectively.³ China is also Pakistan's largest trading partner.

China is investing heavily in South Asia: in the Mes Aynak copper mine in Afghanistan,⁴ the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, and in various industries in India including new energy projects. China recently pledged to increase investment in Pakistan from \$7 billion to \$30 billion a year.⁵ Only India, however, has significant investment in China in a reciprocal relationship. The first Chinese-built port opened in Sri Lanka in June 2012,⁶ a symbol of China's support for development in the postwar state. Other Chinese projects in South Asia include plans to build a second port in Sri Lanka,⁷ a rail project in Nepal,⁸ and a possible port on Sonadia Island in Bangladesh.⁹

Trade with China



Sources: UN Comtrade and Ananth Krishnan, "Amid Strains, India, China, look to push trade ties," *The Hindu*, 27 May 2012.

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6. "Sri Lanka's Chinese-built Port Opens for Business," Agence France-Presse, June 5, 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/389576/sri-lankas-chinese-built-port-opens-for-business/>.
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8. Ananth Krishnan, "China to Complete Tibet Rail Link Ahead of Schedule," *The Hindu*, September 26, 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-to-complete-tibet-rail-link-ahead-of-schedule/article3939249.ece>.
9. Anbarasan Ethirajan, "Bangladesh Pins Hope on Chittagong Port," BBC News, September 3, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19462142>.

Combating terrorism will remain an important U.S. goal. Interviewees differed on whether this constitutes a vital national interest, although few demurred from the argument that an administration would attract much political criticism if a successful terrorist attack in the United States occurred that linked back to groups based in South Asia. As Robert Gallucci puts it, "The United States has one vital interest in Pakistan: to avoid nuclear weapons/material from falling into the hands of terrorists." While some of this activity will continue to focus on al-Qaeda, there will also likely be greater focus on other groups such as LeT.

South Asian states also play an important role in multilateral diplomacy and in international organizations. This can be demonstrated in the traditional preference for nonintervention and consensus, which still appears in UN General Assembly voting records. It can also be seen in priority issues for the United States such as sanctions on Iran or the current Syrian crisis.

In the case of Iran, there are particular current sensitivities because of the sanctions regime and the potential for military action against Iran's nuclear facilities. South Asian states have to balance their relationship with Washington and concerns about proliferation with the reality of Iran as a close, intimate, and economically-important neighbor. Going forward, South Asian economic and energy interests—along with the desire to boost trade with Central Asia—will be a factor in South Asian bilateral relations with Iran and the United States.

UNITED NATIONS VOTING RECORDS

Although Washington has largely positive relations with South Asian governments, these do not necessarily translate into voting records that coincide with U.S. interests at the United Nations. This can be seen from voting behavior from 2001 to 2011. India and Pakistan appear least likely to extend their support on votes that the State Department considers important. Reasons for this include a history of commitment to nonintervention by South Asian states as well as the continuing legacy of the nonaligned movement. There may also be a reluctance to get out ahead of broader voting blocs such as the Group of 77 or the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The U.S. and India tend to be better aligned in economic fora like the G20. In groups like these, India plays an important role, and there may be scope for Indian membership of other economically-focused international organizations like the OECD. One challenge for U.S. policy toward the region will be reconciling positive bilateral relations with potential disagreements in some multilateral fora.

Average Percentage of Voting Coincidence With the United States in Non-Consensus Votes, 2001–11

Country	*All Votes	**Important Votes
Afghanistan	22%	25%
Bangladesh	21%	20%
Bhutan	19%	28%
India	22%	12%
Maldives	24%	29%
Nepal	22%	19%
Pakistan	17%	11%
Sri Lanka	21%	16%

* Coincidence percentage only for the GA votes where the United States voted Yes or No.

** Votes on issues which directly affected United States interests and on which the United States lobbied extensively.

Source: U.S. Department of State, "Voting Practices in the United Nations," accessed November 20, 2012: <http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/index.htm>.

In the 1990s, “there wasn’t a lot of attention given to a broad South Asia strategy,” according to a former assistant secretary of state for the region. There was “close to zero long-range planning on Pakistan,” says one ambassador to Pakistan during the 1990s. This needs to change. The second Obama administration should take the opportunity not just to evaluate the U.S.-South Asia relationship, but to set out a long-range vision of how the U.S. relationship with the region should evolve.

Any U.S. assessment of its interests in and policy toward South Asia should begin with a clear-headed analysis of core U.S. strategic goals. It should be informed by expertise, but not subject to experts’ special interests. It should not consist of glittering generalities: speeches alone do not make strategy. It needs to be aspirational and specific, meaningful and measurable. Here a challenge presents itself: where to anchor this in the bureaucracy.

WHO SHOULD MAKE FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY, AND WHERE IN THE INTERAGENCY SHOULD IT BE MADE?

Two parts of the U.S. government have a formal remit to prepare foreign policy strategy: the NSC, where a formal role now exists for strategic planning alongside interagency coordination, and the Department of State Policy Planning Staff. NSC staffers with a strategy mandate have repeatedly found themselves dragged into high-priority policy work, and successive Policy Planning Staffs have often spent more time on speech writing or broader think pieces than charting out specific strategy. Even if the decision making takes place at the highest levels of government, longer-term thinking is needed. Meanwhile, neither of the two strategic foreign policy documents produced by the U.S. government, the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) and the National Security Strategy (NSS) provide sufficient guidance on South Asia. The QDDR outlines the need for work with allies and partners in a regional context but does not deal with South Asia in this regard. The NSS has a section on extremism and a stand-alone paragraph on the importance of India but does not integrate these.

One major conclusion from this study is that strategy matters—when informed by institutional knowledge and tied to implementation. “To do strategy, you need people who have experience and context,”

Strategy matters—when informed by institutional knowledge and tied to implementation.

says a former NSC official. Another former White House staffer suggests that “if you have longer-range guidelines you don’t stumble into shorter-term mistakes.” According to a former ambassador to India, “Unless you have strategic direction from the very top of an administration—well-defined and well-understood—then it’s very easy to get sidetracked by events.”

While these ideas may seem easy to implement on paper, they are much harder to realize in government. To start with, consensus does not always exist on what strategy actually is. Is it a huge document that incorporates all the interagency’s major policy interests, or a nimble concept that

captures a long-term vision in a way that makes sense to those implementing policy on the ground? A former deputy assistant secretary of state argues that “what DOD means by planning is not really what policy planning is,” whereas a former ambassador argued that strategic thinking “does not come easily to State.” Richard Armitage argues that “strategy, such as it is, doesn’t survive the first contact with the enemy.”

In this report, strategy means identifying—in a few pages, not a thesis—the core interests that the United States faces in the region and setting out realistic goals and a specific long-term vision of how to achieve them.

Getting the right people is crucial. Relatively few officials work on broader-brush foreign policy. As one former head of policy planning at the Department of State explained, this kind of mind-set is “not in the DNA of Foreign Service officers.” Tours at the NSC, in the State Department Policy Planning Staff, in the press office, or working for a member of the Principals or Deputies Committee are probably the closest officials can get. Think-tankers, journalists, and academics sometimes have the breadth of perspective but may not have sufficient understanding of government.

Another former head of policy planning at the State Department argues that NSC staff should have both operational and strategic skills. Robert Gallucci argues that “the best you can do is try to compress long-range thinking into a form and modality that can be consumed in a way that is useful.” Those who have worked in policy planning know to be skeptical about what long-range planning can deliver. But strategy is about being longheaded, not predictive. The task is to build out scenarios of how different policy approaches to South Asian states may—or may not—work and develop policy accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Looking forward, South Asia needs to be written into U.S. Asia strategy, and vice versa. Chester Bowles, a former ambassador to India and former under secretary of state, once argued for a single Bureau for Asian Affairs.¹²¹ As Nicholas Burns explains, “at some point you might want to have an assistant secretary for Asia” on top of the regional bureaus at the State Department. However, there is no simple institutional fix. Foreign policy principals will always have limited time and attention, and simply calling for more of this bandwidth to be channeled to South Asia is unrealistic (and may sound like special pleading). The principle of a broader approach to Asian policy, in which South Asia policy is a coherent and strategic part, deserves closer attention. An important component of this proposal is strengthening the staff capacity within the South and Central Asia Bureau at the State Department. The next year, 2013, presents a singular opportunity for U.S. foreign policy makers. The section that follows suggests how the incoming second Obama administration can utilize this opportunity.

¹²¹ Howard Schaffer, interview with author, August 2012.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INCOMING ADMINISTRATION

IT IS TEMPTING TO OFFER a series of recommendations, especially on the more difficult areas of foreign policy toward the region, but no magic formula to solve long-standing problems is at hand. This is true whether those underlying tensions are between states in the region (such as India and China, India and Pakistan, or Pakistan and Afghanistan) or between the U.S. and regional states (such as Pakistan). It is equally true of thematic problems like counterterrorism.

This study does not reveal alarming gaps of expertise or capability in the U.S. foreign policy machine when it comes to South Asia. However, it does suggest that an integrated approach to strategy requires further attention. No evidence indicates that political administrations of one type or another approach strategy better. Individual senior officials are often crucial in driving forward a longer-term approach, whether it is Ambassador Robert Blackwill's focus on the U.S.-India relationship or Kurt Campbell's drive to rebalance U.S. policy toward Asia as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs.

A focus on strategy can overreach, as with the headier expectations of the short-term benefits from the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal or the consequences of the Indian reaction to U.S. use of the term "pivot" toward Asia. A strategic approach to the region should not focus exclusively on a geopolitical conception of Asia, but it does require a focus on security as well as economics.

The following recommendations are suggested to strengthen U.S. foreign policy toward South Asia.

Recommendation 1: Improve the capacity for U.S. strategy toward South Asia.

An enhanced approach to regional strategy that incorporates South and East Asia is needed. It also needs to incorporate smaller states in the region. Policy should be "coordinated with, not subcontracted to, India" (as stated by an interviewee from the region). It could be placed in the NSC, with the advantage of being at the center but the risk of being overwhelmed by operational detail. It could lie within Policy Planning at the State Department, although this may be too distant from current policy issues. This report recommends either an informal or institutional uplift within the regional bureau responsible for South and Central Asia. The informal model takes after Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell's creation of a front-office regional strategy team for East Asia, providing strategic policy advice directly to the assistant secretary. An institutional model would establish strategic policy as a specific responsibility of one of the deputy assistant secretaries for South Asia, ensuring that he or she dedicates at least 50 percent of his or her time to this role.

Recommendation 2: Better connect East Asia and South Asia policy, both through cross-postings and by establishing a mechanism for cross-bureau Asia policy.

Career incentives should be introduced to encourage diplomats to serve in China and India or Pakistan (e.g., by valuing this experience when selecting Foreign Service officers for senior appointments). Progress should be made on the positive work already underway that sees the assistant secretary for South and Central Asia lead talks in Beijing and the assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific lead talks in New Delhi. South Asia policy needs to nest within a strategic Asia policy, as well as inform it. This report does not suggest how this should be done, rather that it needs to be pursued within the bureaucracy. This should be a high priority for the second Obama administration.

Recommendation 3: Continue to bet on India, while managing expectations.

India requires sustained high-level attention, but also a structured U.S. approach to the bilateral relationship. This approach needs to accurately judge how much U.S. and Indian interests will converge and how best to manage the tone of political and diplomatic engagement. As Secretary of State Clinton has said, the United States is making a strategic bet on India's future. In an interview for this report, a former secretary of state for South Asian affairs suggested that U.S. and Indian interests "will not always be aligned although they can operate in parallel." The United States needs a straightforward discussion of how quickly the relationship can move forward, particularly on global issues for which India does not always adopt a similar position to that of the United States. The public tone of Washington's messaging on the relationship needs care. As one interviewee noted, the United States does not need to highlight the value of Indian security cooperation versus that of China.

Recommendation 4: Develop a realistic, medium-term Pakistan strategy.

The greatest policy challenges lie in the U.S. relationship with Pakistan, including vital national interests for Washington. Fundamental to the success of any future approach must be some deeper work to understand how Pakistan's own governance works, and a greater willingness to work with other states and international organizations. An overly heavy bilateral approach to Pakistan can reinforce some of the negative tendencies in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. As former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Nicholas Platt underlines, the United States "needs a patient policy toward Pakistan." In the short term, Washington needs to continue to work with Islamabad on counterterrorism and the drawdown in Afghanistan. In the medium to longer term, the United States needs to establish an approach to Pakistan that delivers on vital U.S. interests. Whether the administration opts for a cooperative or a confrontational approach to Islamabad, policy will depend on a clear-headed understanding of the art of the possible.

Recommendation 5: Better integrate counterterrorism and regional policy through cross-posting officials between the two areas.

A specific focus on counterterrorism is crucial to protect the United States. However, counterterrorism policy needs to integrate regional policy perspectives. This applies to the way in which to work with regional partners and when and how to pressure them. The more that agencies leading on counterterrorism can draw on regional expertise, not least to think through the consequences of different actions, the better integrated foreign and security policy can be.

Recommendation 6: Establish a formal “South Asia cadre” of Foreign Service officers.

A longer-term focus on South Asia is one integral part of a rebalancing toward Asia. As this report shows, the historic challenge has not been a lack of expertise. Although the policy bench was sometimes thin, a larger challenge was that South Asia work was not highly valued within the Foreign Service. Establishing a formal South Asia cadre in the Foreign Service in which officers can formally declare a career interest in the region would provide the South Asia policy leads in the State Department with a defined community of officers. These officers would continue to be generalists in their respective policy cones (like political or economic work) but should expect to build South Asia experience during the course of their career. This may help establish a discrete community of regional diplomats in a region where language training—unlike the guild identity of specialists who work on China or Arab world—does not play a leading role in creating a distinctive social network.

Recommendation 7: Create a South Asia–specific Presidential Management Fellowship.

Establishing a South Asia Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF) is crucial. One appointment should be made each year for a two-year term across the interagency. Like regular PMFs, these positions should allow the officer to rotate through a series of details—six months in the State Department, six months in Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy, and so on. Unlike regular PMFs, who can serve on a range of issues, this position should be limited to South Asia policy roles across the interagency. The criteria for recruitment should include at least a year spent in South Asia beforehand and graduate study with at least a 30 percent focus on South Asia. This role would cost relatively little, but it would advance interagency connections on South Asia and create a visible and valued position on South Asia. If the individual left government to join a think tank or academia afterward, the broader field of external experts would be enriched—with an individual versed in government. If the individual stayed on, either through joining the Foreign Service or taking up a civil service role, the U.S. government would gain a further regional hand. This recommendation could be achieved through amending the current PMF program.

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INTERVIEWEES

We are grateful to the following individuals for providing their invaluable feedback. In addition, we interviewed a number of serving officials from across the U.S. interagency. None of the interviewees are responsible for the report's content.

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