

INDIA'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

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WITH THE SUPPORT OF

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In early October 2011, President Hamid Karzai forged a strategic partnership with India. This partnership was the first of its kind that the government in Kabul had signed with a foreign country.¹ The agreement, among other matters envisaged that India might train units of the Afghan security forces as the US seeks to withdraw its forces from the country in 2014.² Not surprisingly, the formalization of an Indo-Afghan strategic relationship has caused some misgiving within Pakistan. For the past several years, as India's presence within Afghanistan has expanded, Pakistan's policymakers, most notably its overweening military establishment, have repeatedly expressed their concerns about India's role and motivations within the country. They have, on more than one occasion, darkly hinted at India's intent to encircle Pakistan through the establishment of a strategic bridgehead in that country.³

This paper will examine India's interests and involvement within Afghanistan. It will also discuss the impact of India's presence in the country on regional stability, its role within Indo-Pakistani relations and the future of the Indian position in Afghanistan in light of the impending US withdrawal. Finally, it will briefly discuss the significance of Afghanistan's future for Europe.

(i) The Palimpsest of the Past

India's Presence in Afghanistan

To understand India's present policies in Afghanistan it is necessary to recount some key elements of recent regional political history. During much of the reign of King Zahir Shah (1933-1973), barring a brief interlude during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani conflict, India had enjoyed excellent relations with Afghanistan. Even after his overthrow, India managed to maintain good relations with a succession of Communist regimes including those that were foisted on the country following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.⁴ The collapse of the Soviet puppet regime of Mohammed Najibullah and the ensuing civil war within the

1. James Lamont, "Karzai chooses India as partner over Pakistan," *Financial Times*, October 6, 2011.
2. Lydia Polgreen, "Karzai Tries to Soothe Pakistan Over Warmer relations with India," *The New York Times*, October 5, 2011.
3. Simon Tisdall, "India may pay heavily in future for supporting the Karzai regime," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2011.
4. Sumit Ganguly and Nicolas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs*, Fall/Winter 2009, 63:1, 127-140.

country left India with limited influence in the country. Indeed even during the Burhanuddin Rabbani (1992-1996) regime in Afghanistan India had a limited presence in the country.

The demise of the Rabbani regime in 1996 and the Taliban's seizure of power left India worse off than ever. The Taliban's close ties with Pakistan, its inveterate hatred of religious minorities within the country and its deep-seated truculence toward India effectively resulted in a complete rupture in Indo-Afghan relations. It was during this time that India forged a working relationship with the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance of Ahmed Shah Massoud to oppose the Taliban.⁵

India's misgivings about the Taliban regime found ample confirmation when an Indian Airlines aircraft on a routine flight from Kathmandu to New Delhi was hijacked to the north Indian city of Amritsar. From there it flew to Lahore and thence to Dubai and finally landed in Kandahar. The Taliban refused to allow India to use force against the hijackers, asserted that they themselves lacked the capabilities to carry out a raid and eventually moved to protect the hijackers. After protracted negotiations with India, which led to the release of three imprisoned terrorists, they let the hijackers and their terrorist allies to go scot-free. Among other matters, India was forced to release Maulana Masood Azhar, the head of the terrorist organization, the Jaish-e-Mohammed, who had been incarcerated in India.⁶

Apart from this embarrassing episode, Indian officials also believed that the Taliban regime had acted in concert with Pakistan to allow Kashmiri terrorists to train within Afghanistan.⁷ Consequently, India's policymakers had ample reason to harbor a fundamental distrust of the Taliban regime. Not surprisingly, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government promptly offered the US logistical support for military action against the Taliban regime.⁸ To their dismay, the US instead chose to turn to the military dictatorship of General Pervez Musharraf. Worse still, the two Bush administrations, while working to substantially improve relations with India, nevertheless came to almost uncritically rely on the Musharraf regime to pursue its strategic goals in Afghanistan.

The emergence of the Karzai regime in the wake of the toppling of the Taliban gave India an opportunity to rebuild its ties to Afghanistan. Karzai, who had obtained much of his education within India, was well disposed toward to pursue a cordial relationship. Furthermore, it is believed that he harbors personal misgivings against Pakistan because the Taliban was allowed to assassinate his father in the Pakistani city of Quetta.⁹

The Evolution of the Indo-Afghan Relationship

Despite the Karzai's regimes' desire to forge a closer relationship with India staunch Pakistani objections persistently conveyed to the United States hobbled the enterprise. The US was content to allow India to pursue developmental activities within Afghanistan but made it clear that it did not want India to assume any security-related tasks for fear of alienating Pakistan. Accordingly, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)

What has India been able to accomplish within Afghanistan? What are its long-term goals in the country? What are its principal concerns as the US (and International Security Assistance Force) withdrawal from Afghanistan approaches? How is the Indo-Pakistani rivalry likely to affect India's interests and goals in Afghanistan?

5. Sergei Yakolev, "Russia, India, Iran Line Up in Joint Opposition to the Taliban," *The Boston Globe*, September 14, 2001.

6. Praveen Swami, "Bowling to Terrorism," *Frontline*, January 8-21, 2000.

7. John Diamond, "Taliban, al-Qaeda linked to Kashmir," *USA Today*, May 29, 2002.

8. Madhav Nalapat, "Why the US Fumbled Afghanistan," *The Diplomat*, October 9, 2011. Available at: <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/10/09/why-the-us-fumbled-afghanistan/>

9. I am grateful to Shakti Sinha, a senior Indian Administrative Service Officer, who served in Afghanistan for this insight.

From the standpoint of Pakistan's military, denying India a foothold in Afghanistan would serve multiple purposes

government in New Delhi, keen on continuing the Indo-US rapprochement, was loath to challenge the US on the issue of broadening its imprint within Afghanistan.

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There is little or no question that India, which is the fifth largest aid donor to Afghanistan, has accomplished much in terms of developmental assistance. It assistance has included help with education, health and infrastructure.¹⁰ Specifically, India has built Afghanistan's new parliament building and trained its legislators. Its Border Roads Organization has constructed a 218-kilometer long highway linking the town of Zaranj near the Iranian border to Delaram in the northeast despite periodic Taliban attacks on Indian personnel.¹¹ It has also help build a power transmission line to Kabul and developed a hydroelectric project at the Salma Dam in Herat at a cost of \$180 million.¹² Furthermore, India has also has been active in providing various forms of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Among other matters, it has shipped food to the country, dispatched a team of doctors and even created a camp for the provision of artificial limbs for amputees. Finally, it granted as many as 500 scholarships on an annual basis to Afghan students under the aegis of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR).¹³

In addition to these developmental activities, India had also quietly sought to bolster Afghanistan's security capabilities. According to one analysis, India has provided \$8 million worth of high-altitude warfare equipment to Afghanistan, shared high-ranking military advisers and helicopter technicians from its clandestine foreign intelligence and counter-espionage organization, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).¹⁴

All these efforts have ben made possible because of the US and ISAF military presence which has provided a security umbrella for India. Accordingly, the Indian involvement within the country has mostly been benign. That said, given the long history of Indo-Pakistani discord and deep-seated mistrust, India's expanded presence in the country has generated significant apprehensions in Pakistan.¹⁵ In effect, India's policies in Afghanistan are nonthreatening. However, they are not so construed in Islamabad.

Pakistan's Concerns

Despite this largely developmental role in Afghanistan, India's presence in Afghanistan remains a source of much misgiving within Pakistan and especially its overweening military establishment. To understand, if not endorse, Pakistan's perspective on the subject it is necessary to provide some political background. Since its disastrous military defeat in the 1971 war with India its military apparatus has been obsessed with the quest for "strategic depth" in Afghanistan. Simply stated this has involved the search for a pliant Afghan regime that Pakistan could count upon to provide the Pakistani military sanctuary in the event of a deep Indian incursion into Pakistani territory during a future conflict.

10. Shashank Joshi, "Let India help Afghanistan" *The Guardian*, December 25, 2009.
11. Nishit Dholabhai, "India Accomplishes Afghan Road Mission- Strategic highway survives Pakistan scare and Kabul embassy blast," *The Telegraph*, July 16, 2008.
12. Tom Peter, "India outdoes US aid efforts in Afghanistan," *GlobalPost*, September 9, 2010. Available at: <http://www.globalpost.com/print/5583950>
13. For a detailed discussion see C. Christine Fair, "Under the Shrinking U.S. Security Umbrella: India's End Game in Afghanistan," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2011, 34:2, pp.179-192.
14. Shashank Joshi, "India's Af-Pak Strategy," *RUSI Journal*, February/March 2010, 155:1, PP. 20-29.
15. For a discussion of Indo-Pakistani discord see Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001)

This argument had some veracity until the late 1980s. However, once Pakistan had acquired an incipient nuclear deterrent, the argument about “strategic depth” lacked much substance. With its nascent nuclear weapons capabilities, Pakistan could effectively ensure that India could no longer mount a serious conventional offensive against it. If Indian forces attacked with vigor and made significant incursions across the international border, Pakistan could always raise the prospect of the first use of nuclear weapons. Indeed the evidence from the public domain suggests that Pakistan has both declaratory as well as operational doctrines that call for a first use of nuclear weapons in the event of a war with India where it faces a significant loss of territory.¹⁶

Consequently, the issue of “strategic depth” is mostly a professed justification for the pursuit of another goal: namely, to limit India’s presence and influence in a post-US and post-ISAF Afghanistan. From the standpoint of Pakistan’s military, denying India a foothold in Afghanistan would serve multiple purposes. It would prevent India from obtaining land access to the resource-rich states of Central Asia, it would thwart it from gathering intelligence on Pakistan’s western reaches (and especially the restive province of Baluchistan) and would also limit India’s ability to exert any possible military pressure in tandem with a future Afghan regime whose interests might be aligned with those of India.¹⁷ Furthermore, it would also enable Pakistan to continue its strategy of using Afghan territory to organize and train various proxy terrorist forces to use against India in general, and in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir in particular.¹⁸

Given these interests it is hardly surprising that Pakistan has assiduously sought to block India from establishing a secure position within the country. Until late 2011, US policymakers had largely concurred with the Pakistan’s perspective in attempts to assuage its concerns. Indeed, on a number of occasions, key American policymakers had publicly asserted that while India’s developmental role in Afghanistan was significant it nevertheless was provoking Pakistani fears and anxieties.¹⁹ However, following the steady deterioration in the US-Pakistan relationship in the wake of the killing of Osama bin Laden, a shift in the American stance toward this issue was discernible.²⁰

Key American policymakers remained loath to explicitly suggest that Pakistani authorities had been aware of bin Laden’s whereabouts. However, a perceptible shift did come about in US attitudes toward Pakistan with a hardening of views toward the country and its apparent unwillingness to cooperate with the US to dismantle a range of terror networks operating from within the country. The relationship dramatically deteriorated when Admiral Michael Mullen, the outgoing US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated in open Senate testimony that the terrorist Haqqani network was a “veritable arm” of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI-D).²¹ His very candid and public assertions probably stemmed from intelligence that linked the attack on the US Embassy and NATO Headquarters in Kabul in mid-September of 2011.²² In the wake of his blunt statement the White House and the State Department sought to repair the inevitable fraying of ties with Pakistan. Despite these efforts it was apparent that a rift had emerged in the US-Pakistan relationship.²³ The existence of this fracture notwithstanding, it is unlikely that the US will wholly abandon its efforts to elicit some modicum of cooperation from Pakistan.

16. On this subject see Vipin Narang, “Posturing for Peace? Pakistan’s Nuclear Posture and South Asian Stability,” *International Security*, Winter 2009, 34:31, pp.38-78.
17. For a useful discussion of Pakistan’s concerns see Eric Randolph, “India’s Afghanistan Dilemma,” *The Guardian*, January 5, 2010.
18. On Pakistan’s use of such proxy forces see Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Islamist Militancy in South Asia,” *The Washington Quarterly*, January 2010, 33:1, pp.47-59.
19. Reuters, “US Seeks to Balance India’s Afghanistan Stake,” *The Express Tribune*, June 1, 2010.
20. Peter Baker, Helene Cooper and Mark Mazzetti, “Bin Laden is Dead,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2011.
21. Elisabeth Bumiller and Jane Perlez, “Pakistan’s Spy Agency Is Tied to Attack on US Embassy,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2011.
22. Alissa J. Rubin, Ray Rivera and Jack Healy, “US Embassy and NATO Headquarters Attacked in Kabul,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2011.
23. Anna Fifield and Matthew Green, “Kabul raid’s secrets strain diplomatic stance,” *The Financial Times*, September 29, 2011.

(ii) India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan

Against this backdrop of an increasingly fraught US-Pakistan relationship a seemingly abrupt development occurred in Indo-Afghan relations when the two countries signed a strategic partnership agreement in early October 2011. It is widely believed that the deterioration in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations led Karzai to forge this new security partnership with India.²⁴ Under the terms of this agreement India finally chose to cross the Rubicon when it agreed to train the Afghan National Army on a wider scale than before.²⁵ Furthermore, the agreement also opened up the possibility of greater Indian investments in Afghanistan and most notably in the Hajigak iron ore mines in Bamiyan province to the tune of \$6 billion.²⁶

Apparently, this offer had been on the table when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had visited Afghanistan in May 2011. However, at that time, Afghan officials were still loath to offend Pakistan.²⁷ Their stance apparently changed quite dramatically in the wake of the killing of the former Afghan president and head of the High Peace Council, Burhanuddin Rabbani, in late September. Some, in fact, had gone to the extent of accusing Pakistan in having a hand in his assassination.²⁸

India's decision to expand its relationship with Afghanistan, quite predictably, elicited a somewhat hostile reaction in Pakistan. President Karzai, cognizant of Pakistan's unease with his decision to broaden his country's ties with India, quickly sought to assuage his Pakistani interlocutors.²⁹ To that end, the Afghan ambassador to Pakistan, Omar Khan Daudzai, met with both General Ashfaq Parvez Kiyani and Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir, to assure them that the Indo-Afghan pact would not adversely affect relations with Pakistan, insisting that it was not aimed at isolating Pakistan.³⁰

Whether or not India, Pakistan and Afghanistan can actually work in concert to ensure Afghanistan's stability and security in the aftermath of the US and the ISAF's withdrawal, of course, remains the most critical question confronting policymakers in many capitals well beyond the subcontinent. Given the depth of distrust and hostility that has long characterized the Indo-Pakistani relationship, the prospect of any imminent diplomatic breakthrough that might enable the two sides to reach a modus vivendi on their respective positions in Afghanistan seems rather doubtful. However, at least two recent developments offer a modicum of hope that for such a prospect.

The first was a breakthrough in trade relations between India and Pakistan in early November 2011. After years of foot-dragging on the issue, Pakistan's Cabinet, with the acquiescence of its military, finally granted India Most Favored Nation (MFN) status.³¹ This development, though promising, was, at best, a very minor step in reducing long-standing and extant tensions. However, some analysts believe that an expanding trade and commercial relationship between the two states might create more conducive conditions to tackle truly nettlesome issues such as the seemingly intractable Kashmir dispute that has long dogged the Indo-Pakistani relationship. However, hard-liners within Pakistan remained skeptical of any real improvement in relations without tangible steps toward the resolution of the Kashmir question.³² In India,

24. Rama Lakshmi, "India and Afghanistan sign security and trade pact," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 2011
25. For an early discussion thereof see Sumit Ganguly, "Let India Train the Afghan Army," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 16, 2010
26. Reuters, "Afghan Leader Signs Deal to Deepen Ties with India," *The New York Times*, October 4, 2011
27. Shashank Joshi, "India's Strategic Calculus in Afghanistan," *The Afpak Channel*, October 6, 2011. Available at: http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/06/indias_strategic_calculus_in_afghanistan
28. Associated Press, "Pakistan denies ISI involvement in Burhanuddin Rabbani assassination," *The Guardian*, October 2, 2011; also see Jack Healy and Alissa J. Rubin, "Afghanistan Favors India and Denigrates Pakistan," *The New York Times*, October 4, 2011
29. Lydia Polgreen, "Karzai Tries to Soothe Pakistan Over Warmer Ties With India," *The New York Times*, October 5, 2011
30. Kamran Yousaf, "Strategic pact with India: Afghan envoy meets Kayani to quell Pak's fears," *The Express Tribune*, October 5, 2011. It is also believed that Daudzai is a quite pro-Pakistani in his political proclivities. Personal communication with Shakti Sinha, senior Indian Administrative Service officer, October 2011.
31. Matthew Green and James Lamont, "Pakistan moves to liberalize trade with India," *Financial Times*, November 2, 2011.
32. Associated Press, "Pakistan normalizes trade with India, easing tensions between nuclear-armed neighbors," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2011.

despite the strong reservations of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) about Pakistan's continuing support for terror, the United Progressive Alliance regime has persisted in its efforts to improve relations with Pakistan.

The other development that might suggest a possible way forward was a meeting held in Istanbul in early November 2011 with representations from Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the United States. The NATO, the EU and the UN also sent observers to this conclave. Though the US did not play a central role at this conference it is believed to have expressed support for the process that this meeting may set in motion a diplomatic process involving a range of regional states. Though the meeting did not produce any substantial tangible results beyond promises of continued cooperation and further assistance, it nevertheless provided a possible venue of many of the stakeholders in Afghanistan to come together to discuss their interests and concerns.³³ One of the central issues addressed at the meeting was the question of future Afghan-Pakistan cooperation. Whether or not such cooperation actually ensues will obviously have profound consequences for the future of Afghanistan.

The Future of American Policy

It is apparent that the US is now seeking a multi-pronged approach to the Afghan conundrum. It has clearly granted India some leeway to play a wider role in Afghanistan despite Pakistan's oft-stated objections. Its willingness to provide India greater latitude within Afghanistan may also stem from concerns about the PRC's attempts to penetrate the country in the quest for its substantial mineral resources.³⁴ Its support for the Istanbul conference also indicated a willingness to invite other actors in helping bolster Afghanistan's fragile state as the withdrawal of NATO and ISAF forces loom. However, it also seems quite focused on both diplomatically engaging as well as exerting pressure on Pakistan to end its support for the Haqqani network and also to induce elements of the Afghan Taliban to move toward the negotiating table.³⁵ However, some analysts have argued that despite periodic American pressures and blandishments it is unlikely that Pakistan will easily abandon the Haqqani network as it is one of its principal strategic assets in a post-American and post-ISAF Afghanistan.³⁶

Accordingly, there appears to be a significant, if not fundamental, impasse in US-Pakistan relations. Yet there is little reason to believe that either the Obama or another future American administration will prove willing to maintain an indefinite military presence in Afghanistan. This is especially the case with declining support from the other parties in the ISAF, increasing US economic constraints and the growing unpopularity of the war at home.³⁷ Indeed, it is interesting to note that analysts who were past advocates of the Pakistan are now suggesting that the US fundamentally recalculate its options given that US and Pakistani interests seem to be at odds and with little or no prospect of reconciliation in the foreseeable future.³⁸ That said, the US cannot make significant progress toward stabilizing Afghanistan without either a significant weakening of the Haqqani network and the Afghan Taliban or their willingness to adopt a more forthcoming posture on the question of negotiations and reconciliation.

33. Karen de Young, "At meeting, Afghanistan's neighbors promise cooperation and aid," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2011.

34. Aziz Haq, "Chinese Takeout," *Foreign Policy.com*, June 15, 2010. Available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/15/chinese_takeout

35. Eric Schmitt and David E. Sanger, "US Seeks Aid From Pakistan In Peace Effort," *The New York Times*, October 31, 2011.

36. Matthew Green, "A lethal legion," *Financial Times*, October 31, 2011.

37. On the unpopularity of the war in the US see Stephanie Condon, "Poll: Nearly 2 out of 3 Want Troops in Afghanistan Decreased," *CBS News*, October 3, 2011. Available at: http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20115031-503544.html?tag=cbsnewsMainColumnArea

38. Anatol Lieven, "With a Friend Like This," *The New York Times*, November 1, 2011.

What then might India do to protect its investments in Afghanistan and ensure that the country does not, yet again, emerge as a safe haven for Islamist terrorist organizations intent upon carrying out attacks in Kashmir and elsewhere?

Despite Pakistan's lack of cooperation on these matters, and indeed its intransigence, the US is not in a position to wholly end the US-Pakistan relationship. The reasons are straightforward. The continued dependence, albeit reduced, of the US on the Pakistani land route to supply its forces will necessitate the sustenance of at least a working relationship, however strained.³⁹ In the meanwhile, Pakistan can be counted upon to sustain its clandestine ties to its terrorist proxies in an attempt to ensure that it will be a key power broker in a post-American Afghanistan.

That said, any prospect of stabilizing Afghanistan also depends on the ability of the Karzai regime to address serious shortcomings of political order and governance. Unless the regime can demonstrate a willingness to address problems of widespread corruption, rampant inefficiency, extensive unemployment and hopelessly inadequate public order, it is far from clear that simply curbing, if not ending, external meddling will enable it to gain greater legitimacy and support from its own populace.⁴⁰

(iii) Policy Strategies & Recommendations

India's Options

Under these likely circumstances what policy options remain available to India? Despite a small handful of members of India's strategic community who are enthusiastic about a future Indian military role in Afghanistan it is most unlikely that the present regime or one of its successors will undertake any such expeditionary venture.⁴¹ The disastrous memories of the costs that India incurred as a consequence of the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka in the 1980s still remain vivid within policymaking circles in New Delhi. Indeed the misgivings related to the Sri Lankan experience had swayed both parliamentary and public opinion when a previous government had given serious consideration to sending Indian troops to Iraq following the toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime.⁴²

Yet, as has been argued earlier, India's developmental activities remain dependent on the presence of a viable security umbrella. In the absence thereof, barring a dramatic improvement in Indo-Pakistani relations, India's aid workers would be acutely vulnerable to possible attacks from Pakistani proxies. Such fears are hardly chimerical. There is clear-cut evidence that Pakistani authorities were connected to the Taliban-led attack on the Indian Embassy in 2008.⁴³

What then might India do to protect its investments in Afghanistan and ensure that the country does not, yet again, emerge as a safe haven for Islamist terrorist organizations intent upon carrying out attacks in Kashmir and elsewhere? It may seek to reassure Pakistan that its presence in Afghanistan is not inimical to Pakistan's vital security interests. How it can accomplish this of course remains uncertain despite the recent warming trend in Indo-Pakistani relations. The Pakistani military establishment's *idee fixe* about India's dubious motivations will not be easy to address.

39. Andrew Quinn, "Hillary Clinton to find Afghan supply routes as Pakistan ties sour," *Daily News and Analysis*, October 21, 2011.

40. Stephen Biddle, "Is It Worth it? The Difficult Case for War in Afghanistan," *The American Interest*, July/August 2009.

41. Sushant K. Singh, "A bigger military presence is essential," *Pragati: The Indian National Interest Review*, 17, August 2008, 12-13.

42. Amit Baruah, "No troops for Iraq without explicit UN mandate," *The Hindu*, July 15, 2003.

43. Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, "Pakistanis Aided Attack in Kabul, US Officials Say," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2008.

Given the stakes involved, it is likely that India will seek to work with other states which also do not wish to see Afghanistan plunge into a renewed vortex of internecine conflict. To that end, it may well cooperate with Iran and Russia to ensure that Pakistan's proxies do not successfully come to dominate a post-ISAF political order in Afghanistan.⁴⁴ This strategy will also involve the bolstering of India's existing ties to the remnants of the Northern Alliance and drawing upon the existing goodwill that India enjoys within the country.

India is likely to pursue this policy because its long-term concern remains clear. It can ill-afford to see Afghanistan become a haven for Islamist forces yet again. Consequently, any regime in New Delhi will make concerted efforts to try and fend off the re-emergence of such elements. Beyond this strategic goal it would like to have a substantial diplomatic presence in a stable Afghanistan to enable it to pursue commercial and economic interests in the states of Central Asia.

Implications for Europe

It is evident that India's options to influence the course of events in a post withdrawal Afghanistan are limited. Accordingly, it may have to remain alert to the very substantial dangers that the future may hold in Afghanistan for its security interests. What does the withdrawal of NATO and ISAF forces portend for Europe? It is most unlikely that the American efforts undertaken in late 2011 to engage the Haqqani network, the Quetta *Shura* and the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatayar will prove especially fruitful.⁴⁵ As one analyst has cogently argued, these entities have little interest in meaningful negotiations when they see that US withdrawal is all but imminent.⁴⁶ However, it is also clear, that exhortations to the US to stay the course in Afghanistan and expend further blood and treasure is most unlikely to induce a change in policy.

To varying degrees, the members of the European Union have an interest in the future stability and security of Afghanistan. Humanitarian concerns aside, they must remain cognizant of the potential dangers that a renewed civil war and the return of a Taliban-centered regime could pose for their security interests. Such a regime could, yet again, become a refuge of the remnants of Al Qaeda and other radical Islamist organizations with global aspirations. This is hardly a chimerical concern given the growing reach of such Pakistan-supported entities as the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* whose goals and activities are no longer solely confined to promoting mayhem in India and Indian-controlled Kashmir.⁴⁷ Consequently, it is in their interests to remain engaged with key regional states including India, Russia and even Iran to ensure that the Pakistan's security and intelligence establishments do not enjoy a *carte blanche* to pursue their parochial and myopic policies and interests in the country in the wake of NATO's withdrawal.

44. In this context it is important to note that a poll conducted in November 2011 showed that support for the Taliban is actually declining within Afghanistan. However, support for the Karzai regime was also hobbled because of its inability to tackle problems of widespread insecurity, poverty, corruption and unemployment. See Associated Press, "Afghan support for the Taliban steadily declining, people feel growing sense of insecurity," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2011.

45. For an excellent Indian critique of this strategy see Praveen Swami, "Desperate bid to purchase elusive peace," *The Hindu*, November 5, 2011.

46. Ashley J. Tellis, "2014 and Beyond: US Policy Towards Afghanistan and Pakistan," Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, US. Congress, November 3, 2011.

47. Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)