

A RISK WORTH TAKING: RETHINKING INDIA'S POSITION WITHIN THE UNIFIED COMMAND PLAN

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Abstract

This paper argues that the current boundaries of the UCP should be adjusted to allow U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) to share in nurturing the military aspect of the regional partnership with India. The convergence of interests between New Delhi and Washington on issues relating to Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as India's growing influence with the Afghan population offers the real possibility of significant short term benefits to U.S. objectives within the CENTCOM area of operations. CENTCOM's direct involvement with India on such matters will help build the foundation for closer cooperation in the future. In making this argument, this paper emphasizes the historic security nexus linking India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan together as well as the overwhelming value of the U.S.-Indian partnership that outweigh the risks involved in adjusting the UCP boundaries. The recommendation is for establishing a shared responsibility for India between CENTCOM and PACOM that is based on functional domains (land and maritime) and separate sets of national interests that, while different, complement each other in the short and long terms.

With national and international partners, U.S. Central Command promotes cooperation among nations, responds to crises, and deters or defeats state and non-state aggression, and supports development and, when necessary, reconstruction in order to establish the conditions for regional security, stability, and prosperity.

- U.S. Central Command Mission Statement

The U.S. Department of Defense's Unified Command Plan (UCP) establishes the basic guidance for all combatant commanders to include missions and geographic or functional areas of responsibility. The UCP is meant to be flexible in order to accommodate changes in the security needs of the United States. Additionally, it is one of the key tools for managing regional partnerships through the coordination of the military element of national power. Since the last UCP review in 2008, America has acknowledged how much the ultimate outcome of operations in Afghanistan depends on the internal stability and actions of neighboring Pakistan. Unfortunately, it is impossible to understand, much less influence, Islamabad without also including India in the strategic equation. Since India lies outside the boundaries of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the combatant command that is responsible for carrying out the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy (AFPAK), a reassessment of India's position within the UCP is in order. In fact, it is time to broaden the strategic scope to follow an Afghanistan-Pakistan-India strategy (AFPAK-I) that encompasses this vital regional player. Because of the historical security nexus linking India with Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as New Delhi's great potential to be a valuable partner in both the short and long term, the UCP boundaries should be adjusted to allow CENTCOM to share responsibility for building a useful strategic partnership with India.

The Strategic Context

The rethinking of India's position within the UCP should occur within the context of the stated policy and strategic vision of the current administration in Washington. President Barak Obama's change of course in the struggle formerly known as the Global War on Terror provides this context. After years of focusing on operations in Iraq, the President shifted the main effort back to Afghanistan, the original battlefield against those who planned and carried out the 9/11 attacks. Perhaps more importantly, the Obama Administration signaled a desire to pursue a more multilateral approach. In March 2009, General James Jones, the National Security Advisor, emphasized that the United States was interested in "partnering with countries around the world to confront common challenges."¹ Jones identified the issue of Afghanistan and Pakistan as one such challenge. The declaration of a single strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan and the renewed commitment to multilateralism were hailed as necessary and long overdue steps that would help to ensure the effective coordination of resources and effort in that troubled region. Although there were few specifics articulated at the time, the National Security Advisor acknowledged the intent to bring together "all those who should have a stake in the security of the region."² India was included on the short list of nations with such a stake.

¹ Gen. James Jones, U.S. National Security Advisor, (Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, D.C., 27 March 2009). <http://fpc.state.gov/120965.htm>, (accessed on 22 February 2010).

² Ibid.

The subsequent deliberations within the Obama Administration focused on determining how best to support the forces already in the field in Afghanistan. The President insisted on discussions that were characterized by Defense Secretary Robert Gates as an attempt to “combine some of the best features of several of the options to maximum good effect.”³ President Obama eventually determined that it was “in our [nation’s] vital interest to send an additional 30,000 troops” to bolster the efforts in Afghanistan.⁴ Throughout this process, the President wanted multiple options in order to ensure that the U.S. was not unnecessarily constrained in moving forward.

Such a policy is a logical response to today’s changing geopolitical realities. Given the statements made by the President and his advisors, it appears likely that an increased emphasis on building constructive relationships with other nations around the world will be one of the defining characteristics of U.S. foreign policy in what some are calling a Post-American World. Despite that seemingly pessimistic label, the emerging order is not a reason for despair. The United States will remain a powerful and important leader on the world stage, but in order to effectively shape events to promote peace and stability Washington will have to increasingly rely on regional partnerships with countries that have vested interests in the areas where conflict and tension occur. This new reality accepts the rising importance of emerging powers such as India and requires a more nuanced approach to the application of all elements of national power. It is not about American decline as much as it is about “the rise of the rest.”⁵ President Obama has clearly accepted this reality and is articulating policy guidance accordingly.

How the United States manages relationships with these regional partners is of paramount importance to the future of American foreign policy and national security. The UCP is one important tool that the U.S. uses to coordinate the military with the other aspects of American national power. In practice, this coordination is often difficult because the various agencies representing the instruments of power are organized differently and sometimes have very different visions for how to achieve unity of effort. Additionally, there are significant structural obstacles that stand in the way of effectively coordinating the elements of national power. For example, the boundaries of the State Department’s Regional Bureaus do not match those of the UCP, making the effective coordination of diplomacy and military power even more problematic.⁶ This has inspired widespread criticism of the seemingly disjointed efforts of the various departments within the U.S. government.

In order to fix these problems, some have advocated an ambitious restructuring of the combatant commands’ staffs in order to integrate fulltime interagency personnel, transforming them into Joint Interagency Commands (JIACOM).⁷ However, the feasibility of such a proposal is questionable for multiple reasons. The first potential obstacle would be the availability of interagency personnel to fill the positions on these staffs, especially those that are forward deployed. Since most governmental agencies cannot compel their people to deploy to operational

³ *USA Today*, “Gates: Obama Wants Revised Afghanistan Options,” <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2009-11-11-obama-afghanistanN.htm> (accessed 22 February 2010).

⁴ President Barack Obama, (National address delivered at the United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, 01 December 2009). <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>, (accessed on 18 February 2010).

⁵ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post American World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 2.

⁶ Jeffrey Buchanan, Maxie Y. Davis, and Lee T. Wright, “Death of the Combatant Command?” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 52 (1st QTR, 2009): 93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

theaters, these agencies would have to rely on volunteers, just as they do today. The potential for interagency personnel shortfalls in supporting the JIACOM concept, therefore, becomes more likely. A 2007 official report to Congress emphasized that the causes of this problem included hiring practices, funding for incentives and compensation, as well as structural designs within the various agencies of the U.S. government.⁸ Even if sufficient personnel were available, this sort of reorganization would require detailed negotiations to determine duties and responsibilities for interagency personnel who would presumably be working in some sort of senior-subordinate relationship with military officers from the Department of Defense. Because of the complex and contentious nature of these friction points, a more practical course would be to examine options for improving the existing system. An adjustment to the UCP boundaries, based on a thoughtful analysis of regional dynamics and the historical ties between peoples and nations, offers one such option for gaining greater unity of effort in the pursuit of our strategic and operational objectives.

The Historical Security Nexus

Establishing boundaries is often frustrating for planners. It is especially so when attempting to divide areas in which there is a history of significant ethnic, religious or national tensions. No matter how the boundaries are drawn, there will be legitimate arguments for adjusting them in order to address different issues or concerns. There are many complex ties binding peoples and nations together, but the challenge lies in determining which of these ties are the most important. This requires thoughtful analysis from multiple perspectives. In the case of the UCP boundaries in South Asia, one must consider the positioning of India both from the point of view of the Indians themselves and the important neighboring countries but always within the context of the overriding interests of the United States in the region.

The management of Indo-Pakistani tensions is arguably the most important factor in maintaining the stability of South and Central Asia, and much of this tension stems from the conflicting ideas that underpin each country's national identity. The independence movement that formed during British rule consisted of both Hindus and Muslims, but this unity did not last. Even though few initially advocated a separate state for India's Muslims, the notion of a separate status for them began to solidify in the 1870's. This idea was "an important milestone on the road leading to [the establishment of] Pakistan."⁹ Beginning in 1929, the Indian National Congress declared its desire for an independent India, but soon others began to call for a separate Muslim homeland in South Asia as well. The primarily Hindu Indian National Congress opposed this view. They held the position that Indian Muslims were really indigenous people whose "underlying culture, moral values, and social order" were such that they could share an Indian political identity and "a common electoral arrangement" with Hindus.¹⁰ However, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the man who would eventually become the first governor-general of Pakistan, justified the two-nation theory in this way:

The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures. They neither inter-marry, nor inter-dine together and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions . . . They have different epics, their heroes are

⁸ U.S. Executive Branch Official Report to Congress, "Report on Improving Interagency Support for United States 21st Century National Security Missions and Interagency Operations in Support of Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations," http://policy.defense.gov/downloads/Signed_1035_Report.pdf (accessed 08 April 2010).

⁹ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

different, and they have different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other, and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap.¹¹

When Partition finally came in 1947, India and Pakistan wasted little time in giving physical expression to the basic ideological tensions that had been simmering during the years leading up to the end of British rule. The fighting that erupted in late 1947 over the accession of the princely state of Kashmir became a microcosm of the larger Indo-Pakistani conflict. Islamabad views the Kashmir issue as an unfinished task of partition that “stem[s] from India’s refusal to accept the reality of Pakistan.”¹² New Delhi counters by claiming that Pakistan’s irredentism in Kashmir is due to its “unwilling[ness] to accept the fact of a secular India.”¹³ To this day, neither side has been willing to make any sort of lasting concession on the issue because this would be damaging to the foundation of each country’s national identity.

Perhaps the most important legacy of the 1947 Partition was the sense of insecurity that it bestowed on Pakistan. Due to its larger size and geographic location, India received the bigger share when the assets of the former British colony were divided between the two dominions. The division followed a 30:70 overall ratio, leaving Pakistan at a distinct disadvantage in relation to its neighbor.¹⁴ However, the disparity was most painfully apparent in the area of military facilities and resources. Of forty-six training centers, only seven were in Pakistan, and of the forty ordnance depots, only five were located within the borders of the new Islamic state.¹⁵ Pakistan’s relative military weakness, along with perceived Indian treachery in Kashmir, provided background for subsequent confrontations.

The 1971 Indian military intervention on behalf of Bengali separatists in Pakistan’s East Wing solidified Islamabad’s anti-Indian paranoia. As the Pakistani military attempted to quell unrest in the eastern wing of the country, 10 million refugees fled across the Indian border and threatened a destabilizing humanitarian crisis. When faced with the choice of “passively absorb[ing] the refugees” or launching a military intervention, New Delhi chose to go to war.¹⁶ Although it characterized this intervention as a humanitarian imperative, there is little doubt that India also saw this as an opportunity to materially weaken its rival and, hence, bolster its dominant position in the region.¹⁷ The result of this intervention was the establishment of a second independent Muslim state in South Asia, Bangladesh. This was a damaging blow to Pakistan’s national identity because it undermined the notion that “adherence to a common faith” could serve as the sole basis for national unity.¹⁸

Because of its sense of insecurity and paranoia over New Delhi’s perceived predatory intentions, Pakistan became obsessed with obtaining strategic depth against India. It is because of this quest for strategic depth that Afghanistan became an important factor in the interactions between these two countries. Pakistan’s relations with Afghanistan were complicated from the beginning. Afghan Pashtuns created tension by laying claims to Pakistani territory almost immediately following Partition. In 1949, the Afghan loya jirga, or tribal council, went so far as to

¹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹² P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2003), 35.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19.

¹⁵ Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30-31.

¹⁶ Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, 51

¹⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

nullify those pre-partition treaties with British India that dealt with the Durand Line, the demarcation line for Pakistan's western border. This Afghan hostility contributed to Islamabad's perception that it was a "fortress" under siege from all sides.¹⁹ India, on the other hand, managed to nurture relatively good relations with Afghanistan over the years by paying lip-service to Pashtun territorial claims and strongly supporting several Kabul regimes in order to "maintain their distance from Pakistan."²⁰

However, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan proved to be very problematic for Indian strategy. Throughout the Cold War, India attempted to steer a middle course between the United States and the USSR by adopting a policy of non-alignment. In contrast, Pakistan enthusiastically joined the American camp and began to receive substantial U.S. aid. India viewed this relationship with suspicion, and many within the Indian government came to see the Soviets as a countervailing force against the intrusion of the U.S. into South Asian affairs. Over time, Moscow became India's most important supplier of heavy industrial equipment and modern armaments. The Soviet government also supported New Delhi's regional policies, to include the controversial 1971 intervention in East Pakistan.²¹ The perceived importance of the relationship with Moscow compelled India to mute its criticism of the Afghan invasion despite serious misgivings. New Delhi stood by for nine years and watched as Pakistan, with help from the United States, expanded its influence in Afghanistan by supporting various Islamic groups engaged in the anti-Soviet jihad.

After the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan fell into chaos as the various mujahedeen groups began to fight among themselves. Neighboring countries in the region began to back their own clients in this civil war in order to check forces that each viewed as hostile. India, along with Iran and Russia, supported northern commanders such as Ahmed Shah Massoud. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia supported the more fundamentalist Pashtun opposition groups.²² However, it would not be until 1996 that an upstart group of committed Islamists, known as the Taliban, would take control of Kabul and provide Pakistan with a "pliant regime" on its western border and strategic depth against India.²³ This solidified the uneasy (and long-standing) security nexus linking Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. India and Pakistan, already sharing a history of distrust and suspicion, were now locked in an asymmetric competition that pitted India's conventional military and economic superiority against the extremist proxies sponsored by its rival. Pakistan had learned the effectiveness of these proxies from the success of the anti-Soviet jihad and its aftermath, and Afghanistan remained one of the key locations where this competition played out.

The Value of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership

For reasons of its own, India is already engaged in Afghanistan in ways that converge almost perfectly with the current interests of the United States. New Delhi and Washington both agree that a resurgence of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan would be inimical to the interests of both countries and that the desired objective should be "the emergence of a stable, secure, and broadly representative government" in Kabul that does not support or provide sanctuary for radical Islamic groups.²⁴ The reconstruction aid provided by India seems to be making New Delhi the preferred ally

¹⁹ Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 46.

²⁰ Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, 249.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2009), 46.

²³ Sumit Ganguly & Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs*, volume 63, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 128.

²⁴ Ganguly & Howenstein, 136.

of the Afghans. India is the sixth largest donor to Afghanistan with an estimated \$750 million in developmental funds already provided and an additional \$1.6 billion planned for the future. This far surpasses the assistance provided by Pakistan, and it inspires far less suspicion from the Afghans themselves who vividly remember their past disputes with Islamabad.²⁵ Perhaps because of these contributions, recent polling indicates that 74% of Afghans hold “favorable opinions toward India” while only 8% have a positive view of Pakistan.²⁶ Therefore, it appears that India offers the potential for valuable influence with large segments of the Afghan population that U.S. forces, under CENTCOM leadership, must win over in order to achieve victory in that theater.

Beyond the immediate concerns of AFPAK, it is clear that New Delhi still “stands out in the landscape of potential partners” for the United States.²⁷ Many in Washington seek to cultivate India as a long term counterweight to Chinese influence in Asia. While both the U.S. and the Indian governments officially eschew any such official effort to limit or manage China’s growth, there is little doubt that India’s utility as a strategic partner is at least somewhat “contingent upon China’s future trajectories.”²⁸ However, it is important to also understand that the United States and India have a convergence of national values that transcends the cold calculations of balance-of-power politics. In a joint statement released in November 2009, President Obama and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pointed to the strong foundation for U.S.-Indian cooperation in dealing with the challenges of the 21st century. They emphasized their two countries’ common commitment to “ensuring sustainable global development,” stimulating the revival of the world economy, and “educating and empowering future generations.”²⁹

Among the other possible advantages that the U.S. could leverage through a partnership with India are the unique niche warfare capabilities of the Indian Army. For example, India has conducted extensive operations, including counter-insurgency, in both urban and rural terrain. Also, Indian units possess “a well-honed and exceptional high-altitude warfare capability, of which few [other] countries can boast.”³⁰ Military-to-military cooperation promises to be one of the expanding dimensions of a newly invigorated Indian relationship with the United States, but it will likely move forward at a modest pace. This is due largely to the traditional Indian reluctance to see its military in a power-projection role. However, there is increasing evidence that bilateral military operations with American forces are becoming more palpable to Indian policymakers if executed in a situation that has “a decisive enemy, clear value for India’s national interest, and a mandate from the Indian populace.”³¹ If America can be even moderately successful in engaging the Indian military in a way that inspires cooperation relating to current objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan, this will go a long way to setting the stage for more extensive cooperation in the years to come.

Despite the benefits that a U.S.-Indian partnership would have both in the immediate and long terms, there is much anxiety about the potentially negative reaction by the Pakistani government. Since 2001, Islamabad has ostensibly been the key regional U.S. partner in

²⁵ Ibid., 131.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ C. Christine Fair, “U.S.-Indian Army-to-Army Relations: Prospects for Future Coalition Operations,” *Asian Security*, volume 1, no. 2 (April 2005): 158.

²⁸ C. Christine Fair, “India and the U.S.: Embracing a New Paradigm,” *Indian Foreign Policy in a Unipolar World*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008): 144.

²⁹ President Barak Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (Joint Statement, Washington, D.C., 24 November 2009).

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/joint-statement-between-prime-minister-dr-singh-and-president-obama> (accessed on 30 March 2010).

³⁰ Fair, “U.S.-Indian Army-to-Army Relations,” 158.

³¹ Ibid., 166.

Afghanistan. However, many Pakistanis remain skeptical of America's commitment and fear that the U.S. will depart from the region and leave Islamabad alone to deal with the aftermath, just as it did following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Additionally, bitter feelings still linger regarding the American enforcement of the Pressler Amendment in 1990. This anti-proliferation law banned the sale or transfer of military equipment and technology to Pakistan once President George H.W. Bush was unable to certify that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear weapon. The Pakistanis saw this as a betrayal that left them "defenseless against the Indians."³² Any move that appears to bring America closer to India, especially on issues concerning Afghanistan, could be viewed by Pakistan as another betrayal and could complicate its cooperation with the United States.

However, there is a good reason to accept the risk of friction with Islamabad over an increased U.S.-Indian partnership on ACPAK issues. Although the Pakistani military and intelligence services have shown reluctance in the past to take decisive action against extremist elements within their own borders, recent trends indicate that there has been a shift in the attitude of the Pakistanis. After years of launching limited operations against extremist strongholds followed by negotiated settlements that left these extremist organizations intact, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari ordered the army into the Swat Valley in March 2009 to expel the Pakistani Taliban that had taken over that area in open defiance of the central government. The most significant thing was not the military action itself but the resolve shown by the army and the political leadership. This time, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gillani declared that there would be no negotiations, and the population showed support for his decision.³³ This resolve seems to have resulted from the fact that the Swat Valley is only 60 miles from Islamabad. With the reality of the formerly-distant threat now at the doorstep of the capital, it appears that the Pakistanis have finally recognized the grave danger that domestic Taliban elements pose to the country. U.S. Envoy Richard Holbrooke indicated that he believes this to be true when he stated that "the distinction between Afghan and Pakistan Taliban – if it ever existed – is eroded."³⁴ If such is the case, then it is unlikely that Pakistan will completely abandon cooperation with the U.S. against the Taliban regardless of Washington's perceived closeness to New Delhi.

A Shared Responsibility

America has moved in the right direction by acknowledging the importance of Pakistan to the ultimate outcome of U.S. operations in Afghanistan. However, the articulation of an ACPAK strategy is only a first step. In order to craft a truly comprehensive approach, the Indian portion of the security nexus must become part of the U.S.'s strategic calculation specifically relating to achieving stability not only in Afghanistan but in South Asia overall. This necessitates a strategy that will address America's immediate goals in a way that will build an important partnership that serves our long-term interests. Such a strategy could rightly be called ACPAK-I.

A broadening of the strategic scope, however, requires that the United States rethink India's position within the Unified Command Plan. This does not necessarily mean a wholesale shift in the boundaries of the involved unified commands. On the contrary, there should be a shared

³² Jones, 49.

³³ M.M. Ali, "Pakistan Still Menaced by Taliban," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, volume 28, no. 7 (September/October 2009): 29.

³⁴ CNN, "U.S. Sees Improved Relations with Pakistan," <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/03/15/holbrooke.afpak/index.html?iref=allsearch> (accessed 24 March 2009).

responsibility between CENTCOM and PACOM for building the military aspect of this strategic partnership. India rests at an important, central position astride vital maritime routes and adjacent to countries that are either currently volatile or potentially contentious in the future. To India's west and north lie the Middle East and Central Asia, areas that are of immediate concern not only to the United States but also to India. To the east lies China, a country of ever-growing importance to strategists in both Washington and New Delhi. CENTCOM should play a key role in building U.S.-Indian cooperation on the land in dealing with the immediate problems of stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Likewise, PACOM should focus on the maritime domain of the Indian partnership with an eye on the longer term interests to the east, most notably any issues directly concerning China.

Such an arrangement is not without precedent. Responsibility for Alaska is currently shared between U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and PACOM due to its unique position on the "seam" between these two unified commands. Although this example is obviously in a far more benign environment than that in South Asia, the principle behind this shared responsibility remains sound. Additionally, some have advocated that UCP boundaries be based on "functional capability requirements" rather than geography.³⁵ A sharing of responsibility for India might follow a similar pattern, but it would be just as appropriate to characterize these boundaries as interests-based because of how each unified command would be focused on a different set of national security interests that both relate directly to the U.S.-Indian partnership.

General David Petraeus, the CENTCOM Commander, has given indications that he recognizes the importance of reexamining India's official relationship to the ongoing efforts in the AFGPAK theater of operations. During Congressional testimony in April 2009, Petraeus created some controversy by saying that the portfolio of the Obama Administration's Special Representative for AFGPAK, Richard Holbrooke, "very much includes India and, in fact, the Central Asian states and the other neighbors there."³⁶ The U.S. government quickly backed away from this assertion because of a negative reaction from New Delhi. Since Ambassador Holbrooke's duties are specifically focused on coordinating the diplomatic aspects of all AFGPAK issues, the Indians were suspicious that an expansion of his portfolio might provide the Pakistanis with an opportunity to link their regional cooperation with the United States to a mediated resolution of the Kashmir issue. Since fighting first broke out over Kashmir in 1947, India has insisted on resolving the dispute bilaterally with Pakistan without any outside interference.³⁷

Indian reluctance to accept being included under the Holbrooke-led diplomatic structure of AFGPAK illustrates the importance and sensitivity of coordinating the diplomatic aspect of national power with CENTCOM's direct involvement in building a U.S.-Indian partnership. Given India's misgivings about Ambassador Holbrooke, CENTCOM might require a different counterpart for coordinating military power with diplomacy within the larger picture of an AFGPAK-I strategy. The Department of State's Regional Bureau for South and Central Asian Affairs offers a viable alternative. This regional bureau, created through Congressional legislation in 1992, has an already established relationship with New Delhi that exists independently of the official AFGPAK diplomatic structure guided by Ambassador Holbrooke. It is charged with dealing with U.S. foreign policy and relations with all the countries of the region, including India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.³⁸ Because it

³⁵ Kelly Houlgate, "A Unified Command Plan for a New Era," *Proceedings*, volume 132, no. 9 (September 2005): 30.

³⁶ Times of India, "Is India Too A Concern for Af-Pak Envoy?" <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Is-India-too-a-concern-for-US-Af-Pak-envoy/articleshow/4449183.cms> (accessed 30 March 2010).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ U.S. Department of State, "Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs." <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/index.htm> (accessed 08 April 2010).

both predates and is independent of Ambassador Holbrooke's team, the South and Central Asia Bureau provides a less contentious yet still highly capable diplomatic counterpart to CENTCOM. Such an arrangement would send a strong signal to the Indian and Pakistani governments that although America is committed to assisting in the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute, Washington does not intend to make cooperation on other regional issues contingent upon a settlement.

Rethinking the position of India within the Unified Command Plan is a complex issue with many potential benefits and possible pitfalls, but the advantages of adjusting boundaries to allow CENTCOM to share responsibility for the building of this valuable partnership far outweigh the accompanying risks. CENTCOM's direct involvement with India will leverage those advantages in accomplishing our most immediate objectives while simultaneously assisting PACOM in setting the stage for a more extensive, long-term strategic partnership. At the most basic level, it is impossible to form a comprehensive approach for Afghanistan and Pakistan without including India in the strategic equation. The bonds of history are too strong to separate these three countries in terms of their long-standing security nexus. The current AFPAK strategy that CENTCOM is executing must be broadened into an AFPAK-I strategy. Such a move is in keeping with the bigger picture of President Obama's policy of multilateralism and regional partnerships. Bringing India into the strategic equation is a contentious proposition, but the rewards over both the short and long terms are worth the risk.

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