

# THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH ASIA

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## **Abstract**

The geo-political picture of South Asia is far from clear. There are too many variables and even imponderables in the equation, which can challenge any analyst. The United States saw political, economic and strategic advantages in developing a wide-ranging strategic relationship with India following the demise of Soviet Union. However, given its traditional tactical relationship with Pakistan, it did not entirely marginalize Pakistan. As one analyst put it, its policy has not been India only, even though it certainly became India first. The 9/11 calamity led it to renew its flagging relationship with Pakistan, to deal with the threat of terrorism that endangered US lives and territory. Meanwhile US-India cooperation thrived and developed. However, this burgeoning cooperation can be vulnerable due to: a) traditional India-Pakistan hostility and unresolved “core” issues, b) internal contradictions within India and c) the China factor. China can not allow India-US cooperation, especially defence cooperation and US preponderance in the Indian Ocean as a result, to assume a dimension where it feels threatened. In such an eventuality, China would be obliged to bolster Pakistan to establish a rough balance of power in the subcontinent with a view to thwarting US ambitions. Pakistan, on its part, must create its own space to establish its relevance to the United States. Given these factors, the geo-political configuration of South Asia will remain uncertain and undefined.

## **Introduction**

After long years of being on the margins of US foreign policy, South Asia as a region has recently moved to the forefront of the American world-view. This paper will examine how and why this transformation has occurred and what are the implications of this change. In this regard, I will try to assess what these developments mean for Pakistan and how should we deal with this changing dynamic. South Asia, properly speaking, consists of seven

countries Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives. Lately, Afghanistan has also been included in the regional grouping SAARC as an associate member. However, this paper will focus on Pakistan and India, with tangential references to Afghanistan, as and where necessary, mainly because the United States looks at Pakistan and India as the principal players in the geopolitical construct of the region. This is the case even though Bangladesh has nearly as big a population as Pakistan and Afghanistan arguably is also strategically significant. Secondly, it will dwell upon the United States regard of South Asia after the end of the Cold War and subsequently, telescoping history as and where required, rather than make a historical survey from the time of the emergence of these states as independent nations. Thirdly, my paper will be basically a geo-political analysis, because in my view it is the geo-political factor, more than anything else, that governs American policy towards the region.

### **Post Cold War Developments**

The end of the Cold War and the demise of Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in changing the global strategic landscape in favor of the United States. Taking a cue from Francis Fukuyama, and his thesis of the supposed “End of History”, the US adapted its foreign policy to make sure that the world adjusts in such a way as to suit its enduring interests and values. The United States shifted its focus from the strategic imperatives of the Cold War to issues like international terrorism, non-proliferation and drug trafficking. Thus during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most important policy of the US toward South Asia related to the possession of deadly weapons by both India and Pakistan and prevention of both countries from any action that would undermine regional security and global stability. This principal aim was specified in a report presented to the Congress entitled ‘A National Security Strategy for a New Century’, January 2000.<sup>1</sup>

The Report made the following observations: ‘The development of Indian and Pakistani nuclear programs raise three immediate and one long term concern for the United States, that the two nations do not use their nuclear weapons in a crisis; that their

nuclear weapons not add to regional instability or figure in an inadvertent detonation; and that the technology to produce these weapons not be transferred to other nations or non-sovereign rogue groups’.

While the non-proliferation issue did figure prominently in the US regard of South Asia at this time, nevertheless, new global and regional economic and political scenarios at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century obliged the United States to reverse its traditional zero-sum policy of the Cold War era toward South Asia. The emergence of Chinese and Russian influence in Central Asia and South East Asia led the United States to seek a powerful ally in the region and it chose India rather than Pakistan as a strategic ally due to the former’s potential counter weight to China in the region, as well as its growing economy which represented a new big market for the US business.

The demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War thus overturned the rough parity and balance of power that had prevailed in the sub-continent in the Cold War era, under which Pakistan was aligned with the United States and India had a treaty relationship with the erstwhile Soviet Union. The end of this phase came around the same time as the assumption of office of the new Clinton administration in the United States. For the first time in American interaction with the sub-continent, both Pakistan and India were at its disposition. There was great excitement in Washington at the possibilities that opened up for the United States to build up a relationship with India, as India’s great ally had suddenly disappeared. Of course, the US interest in close relations with India was not new; it went back to the time when both India and Pakistan became independent in 1947. However, nothing came of the US predilection, as India quickly veered towards the Soviet Union and associated itself with what began essentially an anti-US forum, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Despite this effective alienation, President Kennedy sent his trusted friend, Chester Bowles as Ambassador to India, rushed urgent military aid to India in its border war with China in 1962, and made other friendly overtures. But the strain in US-India relations continued till the end of the Cold War as the then Soviet Union remained India’s principal military

supplier and political ally. It was only after the demise of the Soviet Union that the US found that it could pursue its relations with India relatively unfettered and unhindered.

Reflecting the new focus on India, the prestigious Asia Society in the United States sent a study mission to the sub-continent in 1993, which included area experts Stephen Cohen, Emily MacFarquhar, and General John Wickham, a former US Army Chief of Staff, as well as prominent business leaders, and published their report which drew widespread attention.<sup>2</sup> The report, published in 1994, opened thus: “New opportunities are emerging for constructive and consistent ties between the United States and South Asia. The ending of the cold war removed the ideological and geo-strategic factors that shaped earlier U.S. policy in the region”. The Asia Society report made a whole range of recommendations for U.S. engagement with both Pakistan and India, but the emphasis was on a concerted effort to engage with India. The buzz in the think-tank community inside the Beltway was that India could be built up eventually as a counterweight to China. Notwithstanding this new thinking, however, no major overtures were made by the United States to India through much of the nineties, as the US remained preoccupied with post Soviet Eastern Europe, particularly the break-up of the erstwhile Yugoslavia and the bloody civil war that followed. As for Pakistan, the U.S. continued to pursue its abiding concerns with it regarding drugs, non-proliferation and terrorism as well as human rights, democracy and economic liberalization. Basically it sought to eliminate or neutralize all the negative factors that marked its relationship with Pakistan.

### **US Focus on South Asia**

It was not till the late 90s that the U.S. attention fully turned towards South Asia, and that too due to developments in the region. First, India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in May 1998. A set of sanctions were applied to both countries for violation of US non-proliferation legislation. Then the two newly nuclear armed states came to a conflict in Kargil from May to July 1999. Third, another military coup occurred in Pakistan in October 1999. A new set of sanctions were imposed on Pakistan for violation of a US law

against the forcible overthrow of a constitutional government. Despite these negative developments and in line with the strategic focus on South Asia that the Clinton administration had decided upon, President Clinton rendered a much delayed and yet much-heralded official visit to the sub-continent in the spring of 2000. The US President's visit was markedly India-centric, also because Pakistan was under censure at the time. Though Clinton spent five days in India, he spent just five hours in Islamabad. Clinton's stop in Pakistan however indicated that Pakistan was still occupying attention in Washington, mainly because of the perceived negative developments.

### **Expanded Relationship with India**

The US had finally embarked upon a new and much expanded relationship with India. The joint statement issued at the conclusion of the Clinton visit was grandly entitled "A new strategic partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century". As regards Pakistan, the President lectured the Pakistani nation on the need to return to democracy, change its nuclear policy and stop terrorism emanating from its territory. It was not just a "tilt" towards India but in fact a new focus on India. This was apparent in the following:-

- The US launched a wide-ranging institutionalized program of cooperation with India, covering economic relations, political dialogue and military exchanges and a supply relationship.
- The US acknowledged India's leading position in South Asia by beginning collaboration with New Delhi on broader international issues.
- The US even raised its development and food aid to India to \$170 m. in FY 2000, the second largest amount in all Asia and more than 45 times of similar aid given to Pakistan that year (only \$3.78m).

Secondly, and what was of great concern to Pakistan, the US adopted a new stance on the Kashmir issue, with mention of only three points, respect of the Line of Control, recommending direct dialogue between India and Pakistan, and opposing the use of force

to resolve the dispute, without any reference to the wishes or aspirations of the Kashmiri people. The stance thus formulated was more favorable to India. (Some time before the Clinton visit to the sub-continent, the then US Assistant Secretary of State, Robin Raphel, inadvertently mentioned the aspirations of the Kashmiri people in a press conference but later denied her assertion, perhaps due to pressure from above.)

The principal reasons for the focus on India, according to a Stimson Center study of 2003, were the following:

- India's economic growth made it an attractive trade and investment partner for the United States. India's vibrant Information Technology (IT) industry placed it on the world economic map. Its burgeoning middle class of nearly 300 million represented a big and attractive market for the US business. On the other hand, the Pakistani economy depended largely on foreign assistance, had poor security conditions and a weak or unstable government that inspired little or no confidence.
- The Indian community in the United States had come of age as perhaps one of the wealthiest immigrant communities in the country, with attendant political clout and influence. It had begun to play an increasingly important role in domestic US politics, particularly in influencing the Administration and Congress in India's favor. On the other hand, the Pakistani community in the US was much smaller and far less effective politically.
- The growing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean, which links the oil-rich Gulf States with the constantly growing energy markets in East Asia. As one analyst put it, "From a geo-political perspective, the sub-continent and Indian Ocean connect Washington's European-Atlantic strategy with its Asia-Pacific strategy. The two were disjointed in the Cold War and in the early years after the end of the Cold War, but as the US began to contemplate the need for a new European-Asian strategy to deal with potential threats stemming from the

uncertain future of both Russia and China, it was India, not Pakistan that could play a key role in this strategy”.<sup>3</sup>

- The US saw India as a potential counter-weight to balance an emergent China with, as perceived by the US, regional ambitions, particularly towards the south. In this regard, the US had in view the India-China border disputes as well as their historical rivalry in economic, political and geo-strategic spheres.
- The US saw China, Russia and India as the main players in the broader region. Developing close relations with India was the most effective way of thwarting a Sino-Russia-India strategic triangle, once proposed by the then Russian Prime Minister Primakov in 1999. Pakistan obviously had no role in this bigger game of power politics.<sup>4</sup>

According to Robert Blackwill, (the US Ambassador to India in the Bush era), when G.W.Bush was Governor of Texas, he had “one big idea”, the “transformation” of US-Indian relations, in view of India’s potential as a world power, its leadership of developing nations and its promise of being a big market for the US.<sup>5</sup> Sure enough, when Bush became President, he decided to make his “big idea” a reality. In April 2001, India and the United States decided upon a series of steps to change the range and dimension of their bilateral relations. They established a bilateral Defence Policy Group (DPG) to activate defence cooperation, and the US undertook to relax the sanctions imposed on India after its nuclear tests in 1998. Richard Boucher, the then Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, described the planned transformation of US-India relations as an evolution from “estranged democracies” to “engaged democracies”.<sup>6</sup>

While India was perceived as an opportunity, Pakistan was considered to be a worry and concern. It was seen as economically weak, politically unstable and internationally isolated. It was also thought to be an increasingly radical Islamic state, given its relations with the isolated Taliban regime in Afghanistan. After the Kargil episode and the subsequent military coup in 1999, the United States saw Pakistan as a highly worrisome, if not a failed state, whose

internal instability was likely to have harmful repercussions in the region.

### **9/11 and its Aftermath**

Then came September 11, 2001, when the US was attacked on the mainland in a series of coordinated acts of terrorism, which shocked the entire American nation. 9/11 immediately altered the dynamics of regional security in South Asia. According to Teresita Schaffer, “The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon turned US South Asia policy temporarily upside down, bringing Pakistan to center stage and putting parts of the US-India agenda on hold”.<sup>7</sup> Pakistan’s support for US action won it the badly needed sanctions waiver in regard to those imposed on it as a result of the nuclear tests (as was given to India) and Economic Support Fund of \$600m as well as development aid and food grants. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, an official document issued in September 2002, stated “that US-Pakistan relations had been bolstered by Pakistan’s choice to join the war against terror”. At the same time, the paper noted “India’s potential to become one of the great democratic powers of the twenty first century”. The security strategy paper thus seemed to indicate that in view of the emergent situation, the US planned to build a partnership with Pakistan without jeopardizing its plans for a strategic relationship with India.

Nevertheless, the incident of September 11, 2001, had changed the whole scenario of global and regional political and security situation. Washington decided to wage global war against terrorism and invaded Afghanistan in order to overthrow the Taliban regime due to its alleged support for Al-Qaeda leaders. Although India enthusiastically courted Washington after September 11, the United States chose reluctant Pakistan as its partner against the Taliban. Geographic access to the main theater of war in Afghanistan as well as the Pakistani army’s intimate knowledge of the Taliban were, of course, decisive in Washington’s choice to invite Pakistani Gen. Pervez Musharraf’s support for the new war. The pros of working with the United States outweighed the cons for Musharraf, and he made the fateful choice to support the U.S. war



on terror against the Taliban. Musharraf hoped that, by offering military bases and other support to the United States, he could salvage some gains from the situation and retain a little political leverage in Kabul; end Pakistan's political isolation; prevent U.S. targeting of our nuclear assets; and gain U.S. economic as well as political support, with hopes of US endorsement of Pakistan's Kashmir policy vis-à-vis India.<sup>8</sup>

The Bush administration managed the new challenge with an eye to the future. Whether it had a conscious strategy or not, it displayed a rare U.S. sensitivity in not undermining its new relationship with India even as it reached out to Pakistan. The United States conveyed to India that it would have to reset priorities in confronting the challenge but also hinted that, once the immediate threat in Afghanistan was tackled, India's terrorist concerns would also be addressed. On their own, these assurances had limited credibility, but the U.S. assurances gained legitimacy in New Delhi from Washington's response to a series of major terrorist incidents in India after September 11 i.e. on October 1, 2001, in Srinagar; on December 13, 2001, at the Parliament House in New Delhi; and on May 14, 2002, in Jammu and Kashmir. However, when India threatened to go to war against Pakistan in the summer of 2002, the United States moved to restrain Pakistan from supporting terrorist acts in India. The high-level political intervention of the United States in South Asia during May and June 2002 succeeded in that it ended, at least temporarily, the threat of imminent war. At the heart of the U.S. crisis-management strategy was the acquisition of a commitment from Pakistan to end cross-border infiltration permanently and a promise from India that it would engage in substantive dialogue on all bilateral issues, particularly the Kashmir dispute, when violence ceased.<sup>9</sup>

### **Resumed Interest in India**

An Independent Task Force, co-sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society brought out a report in January 2004 entitled "South Asia: US policy towards India, Pakistan and Afghanistan" which recommended that the US and India must (1) expand political security, military and intelligence

cooperation, (2) intensify dialogue on economic and trade issues, and (3) negotiate a trade agreement on services. On its part, the US should (1) ease restrictions on India in regard to cooperation in the civilian satellite sector; (2) grant India “friendly” country status in export licenses for transfers of defence equipment and (3) ease restrictions on the export to India of dual-use items of civilian and military uses. As regards Pakistan, the Task Force report noted that US-Pakistan relations had vastly improved since 9/11 because of Pakistan’s important role in the “war against terrorism” but felt that the interests of the two countries “coincided only partially”. It cited differing perceptions of the two countries about freedom fighters and militants in Kashmir, as well as Pakistan’s reluctance to restrain Taliban elements in Afghanistan from using its tribal territories as safe sanctuaries. It also mentioned US worry that continuing India-Pakistan disputes may adversely affect US relations with India.<sup>10</sup>

The Task Force report identified two major problem areas in the India-Pakistan equation : (1) It said “Kashmir remains the greatest single threat to regional stability” and recommended a long term “US diplomatic effort to facilitate and sustain a bilateral process that will gradually lead to resolution of differences, including the core issue of Kashmir” and (2) it cited the real danger of a conventional India-Pakistan conflict becoming a nuclear conflagration, and recommended that the US urge India and Pakistan to initiate nuclear issue discussions “without holding these hostage to progress on the Kashmir dispute”, and seek India-Pakistan agreement on nuclear CBMs, including the establishment of nuclear risk reduction centers, to lessen the chance that accidents, misperceptions or misunderstandings might trigger a nuclear response.

Soon after the Task Force report came out, a high-level US delegation visited New Delhi in June 2004 to hold negotiations with India regarding transfer of technology related to the missile defence system. The US also gave license to Boeing satellite systems to construct a communications satellite for the Indian Space Research Organization. In July 2005, visiting Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Bush met in Washington and worked out a road-map for the transformation of bilateral relations

in a document entitled “Next Steps in Strategic Partnership” and decided upon its early implementation. The two most significant agreements signed in the meeting, within the new framework of the road-map, were regarding US military sales to India of high-tech items, and a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement. The nuclear cooperation agreement was unprecedented, as a NPT-signatory country was offering nuclear material and technology to a non-NPT signatory state. Through concerted efforts of several years, the US Administration got the deal approved by the IAEA, the NSG, and finally by the US Congress by 2008, despite reservations in all these bodies. Interestingly, Pakistan’s request for a similar nuclear deal has not been entertained by the US. Finally, to cap the considerably expanded US-India cooperation now under way, US President Obama has recently visited India in November 2010.

On the other hand, with Pakistan it continues to be a relationship of more of the same as has obtained in the preceding years. Of course there is a greater emphasis on Pakistan’s economic development, as manifest in the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act that provides for a \$7.5 billion package of assistance to Pakistan, with a major component of economic development funds, as against earlier aid packages of military assistance. At the same time, the US continued to pursue its policy of consistent pressure on Pakistan to deal with terrorism and extremism. Its other concerns regarding democracy, drugs, human rights etc are also articulated on a regular basis. Lately, in the wake of the devastating floods in Pakistan this year, the US has diverted \$370m from the Kerry-Lugar package to flood relief assistance.

The US position on South Asia, as evidenced in our survey of the last two decades or so, is clear and well-defined. It sees India as a strategic ally and Pakistan as a tactical partner. As someone put it, it is not a policy of India only, but it is certainly a policy of India first. It considers India first for a whole set of reasons, political, economic and geo-strategic. Pakistan is of US interest also, but for two different reasons, one, in the context of eliminating the terrorist threat that the US fears ever since 9/11, and two, Pakistan’s potential of disrupting its strategic relationship with India, as Pakistan’s political instability and economic fragility can upset and overturn

the US objective of building up India. It sees Pakistan's long-standing hostility towards India as a danger for its grand design for South Asia. To deal with this situation, the US intends to do the following: (1) provide military help and assistance to Pakistan to combat terrorism, perceived by the US to be mainly caused by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, and (2) provide economic assistance to Pakistan to strengthen its economy and its development efforts, and thus eliminate or reduce Pakistan's possible disruptive role in terms of regional peace and security. In regard to Pakistan-India relations, it began working hard, behind the scene, to bring about some kind of entente between India and Pakistan, lest the bilateral differences set back its grand design. The result of these efforts is the jerky resumption of the India-Pakistan dialogue that is currently underway.

### **Negative Factors that may affect Growing Indo-US Relations**

The question that arises is whether the US strategy for the region is likely to succeed. There are a number of factors that can prevent the realization of American objectives and set back its plans. In the preceding paragraph, we have discussed what the US is trying to do in averting the possibility of Indo-Pakistan rivalry/animosity from escalating into a conflict. However, this policy is aimed at containment of the problem. It does not aim at resolving the differences between India and Pakistan. As long as the intractable problems between the two countries exist, particularly that of Kashmir, which is a festering sore that has remained unhealed for the last 63 years; the danger of an Indo-Pakistan conflict remains clear and present. In its latest mutation, this problem has developed another fearsome dimension. The growing tendency of the radical extremist groups of taking charge of the Kashmiri struggle, and their equally radical Pakistani supporters and cohorts colluding with them to launch a daring terrorist attack somewhere in India, may lead the Indian government to commence hostilities against Pakistan. Unfortunately, India already has a battle plan which can be disastrous for the sub-continent, the so-called Cold Start Doctrine.

The strategy embodying the Cold Start Doctrine was first enunciated in 2004 by the then Indian Army Chief, General

Padmanabhan, and was reiterated by his successor, General Deepak Kapoor in December 2009, when he made a speech in which he said that the possibility of a limited war with Pakistan under a “nuclear overhang” existed. Stating his reasons, he argued that South Asia along with West Asia had emerged as “one of the epicenters of conflict and instability”, and with the absence of a common consensus to combat this continuing threat the possibility of “territorial disputes, provocation by proxy wars, religious fundamentalism, radical extremism, ethnic tensions and socio-economic disparities”, were likely to further exacerbate the situation on the ground. This, the Indian Army Chief argued, would invariably link “sub-conventional” conflicts to situations leading to preemptive action/strikes under the ‘Cold Start’ doctrine. The aim of the new doctrine is to increase the Indian military strike options for possible retaliatory or pre-emptive strikes against Pakistan without provoking the Pakistani nuclear threshold. The doctrine envisages an increase in the Indian military options based on a situation where Indian Armed Forces can have military success that can be used to achieve limited political objectives before international intervention and before the conflict assumes a nuclear dimension.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the Indian government has already put in place an official doctrine envisaging an armed conflict with Pakistan at a future date is a serious matter. It makes a mockery of the entire exercise of undertaking efforts to reduce tensions between India and Pakistan, encouraged and supported by the United States. One can only draw the obvious conclusion from such a situation that an Indian initiated war against Pakistan is more likely than not. Furthermore, if it were to take place, it would throw up imponderables that could have adverse consequences for the Indo-US equation. Secondly, even if we hope that despite these ominous portends, war does not actually occur, the US strategy for the region is based on assumptions about the intentions of regional players that could be proved wrong over time. It does not take into account the possibility that Pakistan may not accept India’s elevation to a regional “hegemon” and the pre-eminent power in the sub-continent. Given the bitter history of India-Pakistan relations, it is naïve to assume that Pakistan will play ball (as the expression goes) to

whatever the US and India wish to do. US grand strategy should take into account of this variable in the equation.

Then there is the China factor. A Chinese analyst, Zhang Guihong, wrote that China is mindful of the US-Japan alliance in East Asia, and if there is a new US-India alliance in South Asia, it may fear encirclement and prevent it from taking shape. The Chinese have a historical memory of SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization) in the 1950s when the US had an anti-China security ring around its southern rim. Zhang says, a strong India-US defence engagement, perhaps leading to US preponderance in the Indian Ocean, may become a cause for concern for China. Therefore, it will see a solid Indo-US alliance as a de-stabilizing factor not only in the regional power balance, but also in the broader context of the Indian Ocean. China may then feel it necessary to build up Pakistan to re-establish the old balance of power in the sub-continent. Zhang concludes the argument thus: “The emergence of India – coupled with the decline of Pakistan since the late 1990s and the sea change after 9/11 - launched South Asia on the Chinese leadership’s agenda. Regional balance and stability in South Asia and Pakistan’s healthy development are two major interests for China.”<sup>12</sup>

In the years to come, China is likely to establish itself as a full fledged global power. It will then certainly feel irked by the US attempts to further strengthen its relations with India. Its reaction would be similar to the US reaction to the development of close economic and military relationship of the Soviet Union with Cuba in the 1960s. A global power seeks a comfort level on its periphery and that would be lost for China if the US and India forge ahead with their close relationship.

Secondly, the larger stake of China of dominance in the Indian Ocean will also be at peril. China will not, and could not, countenance US hegemony in the Indian Ocean. The Chinese fear of a likely US incursion into the Indian Ocean, through its military relationship with India, will again compel China to thwart the excessive growth of Indo-US military cooperation.

Third, India itself is unstable. It has active insurgencies in many of its states; it continues a policy of extreme repression in Indian-occupied Kashmir, which can conceivably boil over at some point. It has a huge population that lives in abject poverty, estimated at 450 million living at less than \$1.25 a day. As a result, widespread turmoil cannot be entirely ruled out, which could jeopardize its regional ambitions. According to George Friedman, in his book “The Next Hundred Years” India is unlikely to attain great power status because of its internal contradictions. Internal instability in India will again setback its external relationships, particularly that with the United States.

Thus, despite the US desire, and strategy, to build up a wide-ranging strategic relationship with India following the demise of the erstwhile Soviet Union, there are certain imponderable factors that may hinder its plans.

### **Options for Pakistan**

It follows from the above analysis that Pakistan could find for itself enough room in this emerging scenario to carve out its own role and place in the geo-political configuration now taking shape. There are two factors that are strongly in its favor. In the first place, given its strategic location and abiding relevance for the United States, Pakistan cannot be ignored, nor can its concerns and interests be disregarded. If the US were to do so, it would not be able to proceed on its charted course with equanimity. Secondly, if it were to pursue its objective nevertheless, it would come up against Chinese resistance to its plans. The effect of all this would be that instead of bringing any power balance in the region, there would be a destabilization that may prove to be the undoing of all its plans and stratagems.

The long term prospects of a successful US-India relationship are clouded by a number of factors which may or may not allow the US grand design to materialize. However, Pakistan has to be prepared for the contingency in which this grand design does take shape. As the US has an abiding interest in India, Pakistan should not insist on hyphenation or some kind of parity with India.

Instead, it should aim at establishing its relevance to the US in the context of Afghanistan and perhaps Iran, and its partnership with the US in the elimination of transnational threats, be it terrorism or drugs or nuclear non-proliferation. To achieve this objective, Pakistan must continue to impress upon the United States its pivotal role in the region, and project its geo-political relevance to the government as well as the opinion forming circles in Washington.

## **Conclusion**

The United States has manifested a clear and unmistakable intention of developing a strong strategic relationship with India over the years, but this geo-political design has also been frustrated by developments beyond its control (Communist expansion in the 50s and 60s, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the 9/11 episode), which obliged it to maintain an intermittent tactical relationship with Pakistan. The persistent hostility between India and Pakistan further complicated American objectives in South Asia. The American initiative of moving full steam ahead with building a wide-ranging cooperative relationship with India following the demise of the Soviet Union could create a new tension with China, which is fast emerging as a global power. Pakistan thus remains an important player in the game, given its special relationship with China. Only time will tell how these variables interact in the future. South Asia has a complex dynamic that is difficult for the outside world to comprehend and deal with. The United States is unlikely to achieve its ambitions in the sub-continent any time soon.

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## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2002-2003,



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- <sup>2</sup> Stephen Cohen, Emily MacFarquhar and General John Wickham, “ South Asia and the United States after the Cold War”, *Asia Society Report*, 1994
- <sup>3</sup> Zhang Guihong (Associate Professor, Institute of International Studies, Zhejiang University), “US Security Policy towards South Asia after September 9<sup>th</sup> and its implication for China: A Chinese Perspective,” *Stimson Centre Study* (January, 2003).
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid
- <sup>5</sup> Blackwill’s speech in Mumbai, “on the future of US-India relations,” (September 6, 2001).
- <sup>6</sup> US Department of State Press Statement (June 19, 2001).
- <sup>7</sup> Teresita Schaffer, “The US and South Asia: New Priorities, Familiar Interests,” *Global Beat Issue Brief* (September, 2002).
- <sup>8</sup> *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2002-03,
- <sup>9</sup> Hussain Haqqani, The Eternal India-Pakistan-US Triangle, *Gulf News*, (April 6, 2005).
- <sup>10</sup> Ikram Sehgal, “South Asia: US policy towards India, Pakistan and Afghanistan,” *Media Monitors Network* (January, 2004).
- <sup>11</sup> *The News*, (24 November 2009),
- <sup>12</sup> Zhang Guihong, *US Security Policy towards South Asia after September 9<sup>th</sup> and its implication for China: A Chinese Perspective* (January, 2003).