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Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia: Is Past Prologue?

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ABSTRACT Throughout the 1990s Pakistan sought to cultivate 'strategic depth' throughout Iran, Afghanistan and the newly emergent Central Asian Republics while seeking to restrict Indian influence in the region. Chastened by its past failures, Pakistan now embraces more modest regional goals. Despite the diminution in objectives, several factors augur failure including Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan, which diminish the likelihood of a stable Afghanistan, and Pakistan's inability to pacify the various insurgencies roiling both Baluchistan and the Pashtun areas of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas as well as the Northwest Frontier Province.

KEY WORDS: Pakistan–Central Asian relations, Pakistan–Iran relations, Pakistan–Afghanistan relations

Pakistan's Central Asia Predicament

Pakistan has been chastened by successive failed – and dangerous – efforts to develop 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asia. Many critics and analysts alike have come to view Pakistan as a major source of global instability because of its past (and possibly present) support for a variety of militant groups acting in the region, the connections between Pakistan's militant groups and international terrorist conspiracies, and disturbing revelations about the nuclear arms bazaar run by Pakistani's nuclear scientist, A. Q. Khan.¹ After the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and President Pervez Musharraf's historic decision to join the war on terrorism, Pakistan was able to redeem itself within the international community and obtained relief from layers of sanctions related to Musharraf's military coup as well as nuclear and missile proliferation. Tainted by its dubious past policies, Pakistani officials are currently loath to concede that Pakistan has a Central Asia strategy, preferring to focus upon

¹Simon Scot Plummer, 'Pakistan, Epicenter of Global Instability', *Telegraph.co.uk* (27 Sept. 2007).

Pakistan's contribution to the war on terror, the endogenous nature of its neighbors' internal problems, and its own efforts to deal with its own myriad domestic problems.²

This was not always the case. Throughout the 1990s, Pakistan tried to forge an 'Islamic bloc' to expand Pakistan's political clout and to promote the country's commercial interests in Central Asia and beyond. This was seen as an important component of Islamabad's much-sought strategic depth to hedge against any conflict with India – its nuclear-armed arch-nemesis. In principle, Pakistan interpreted the demise of the Soviet Union and the emergence of several Muslim Central Asian republics as an opportunity to project its influence into the region and position itself to restrict India's access to the same, rendering the entire region a new theater for Indo-Pakistani strategic competition. Islamabad hoped that its Muslim identity and long-standing cultural and historical ties to the Central Asian region would afford it welcomed access – especially to the region's hydro-electric and hydrocarbon resources.³

This paper argues that while Pakistan may avoid embracing a Central Asia strategy publicly, given the realities of the region and the expanding presence of its rival India, Pakistan has no viable option but to remain engaged. This paper argues that Islamabad has retained two objectives, albeit diminutive versions of those past policies. First, it seeks to encourage its neighbors to deny India a base from which it can pressure or even destabilize Pakistan. This differs from the past when Pakistan sought to be the regional hegemon, denying India access to the region. Now India is firmly implanted in Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Pakistan can only hope that its neighbors will not permit themselves to be used to harm Pakistan's interests. For example Pakistan claims that India is exploiting its base in Afghanistan to cause problems in Baluchistan and in Pakistan's restless tribal areas along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border. Similar accusations abound about India's expanding presence in Iran, especially its 'listening post' in Zahedan in Iran's Sistan-o-Baluchistan province, abutting Pakistan's own restive Baluch province.

²Author interview with high-level Pakistani officials at the Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul, Aug. 2007.

³Juli A. MacDonald, 'South Asia', Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Reorientations, Internal Transitions, and Strategic Dynamics-C, Conference. Report, National Intelligence Council (Oct. 2000) <fas.org/irp/nic/central_asia.html>. For a solid Pakistani assessment of its interests, see Asma Shakir Khawaja, *Pakistan and the 'New Great Game'* (Islamabad Policy Research Institute, April 2003) <ipripak.org/papers/pakandnewgame.shtml>.

Second, Pakistan seeks enhanced commercial access to the region – especially access to hydrocarbon and hydro-electric resources which remains consistent with past policy priorities. While these goals are more humble than the objectives it embraced in the 1990s, there are formidable barriers to achieving them, which are explicated below.

This essay first provides a brief history of Pakistan's past failed policies in the region, identifying those problems which are of enduring nature. It next describes some of the primary means by which Pakistan hopes to project its equities, including the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and its port under construction at Gwadar in Baluchistan. It next evaluates Pakistan's options in Central Asia following 9/11, detailing its objectives with respect to Afghanistan, Iran as well as the Central Asian Republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. This article concludes with some consideration of the substantial contemporary constraints that bind Pakistan as it seeks to establish itself in Central Asia and beyond.

Squandered Opportunities and Failed Policies

Pakistan – and India – squandered early opportunities to strengthen its ties to the newly emergent Central Asian republics in the 1990s and, ultimately, Islamabad efforts to form a Muslim security belt that spanned the expanse of Turkey to Pakistan did not fructify. This failure was due at least in part because of the chronic instability in Afghanistan, the land bridge connecting Pakistan to much of Central Asia.⁴ In the wake of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the country was engulfed by a sanguinary civil war in which the various warlords fought over the remains of post-occupation Afghanistan. To achieve a reasonably stable Afghanistan whose leadership was positively disposed towards Islamabad, Pakistan supported a Pashtun militant faction, Hizb-e-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁵

⁴Ross H. Munro, 'Security Implications of the Competition for Influence Among Neighboring States: China, India, and Central Asia', in Jed C. Snyder (ed.), *After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia* (Washington DC: National Defense UP 1999), 133; Jefferson E. Turner, 'What's Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?' *Strategic Insights* 4/8 (Aug. 2005), <ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/Aug/turnerAug05.asp>.

⁵During the anti-Soviet jihad, Pakistan backed seven Pakistan-based militant groups, six of which were Pashtun dominated. Burhanuddin Rabbani's Tajik-dominated Jamiat-i-Islami was the only non-Pashtun group supported by Pakistan. See Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 2002), Ch. 4, 81–110.

Pakistan hoped that Hekmatyar could deliver a corridor to Central Asia that would begin in Peshawar, continue through Jalalabad and Kabul, stretching onward to Mazar-i-Sharif, and terminate in Tashkent. Kabul remained the choke point in this passageway. Islamabad also hoped that Hekmatyar would recognize the Durand Line as the international border.

Later, under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and with the guidance of her interior minister General Nasrullah Babar, Pakistan began supporting the newly-emergent Taliban when it became obvious that Hekmatyar could not deliver a stable Afghanistan friendly to Islamabad – much less a corridor to Central Asia and formal recognition of the Durand Line as the *de jure* border. From 1994 until 2001, Pakistan provided military, diplomatic, and financial assistance to the Pashtun Taliban movement. As one analyst in an official think-tank in Pakistan explained:

Increasingly disillusioned by the seemingly endless cycle of violence, Pakistan began to view the Taliban as the only force in the country capable of restoring the tranquility that it so desperately required after over a decade and a half of war. Besides, a friendly Pashtun-dominated government in Kabul would provide Pakistan the strategic depth that it required to buttress its defence against India, as well as facilitate its moves to extend its influence in the energy-rich Central Asian Republics (CARs).⁶

Yet, the Taliban too disappointed Islamabad. Not only did their government flounder on providing the much-anticipated stability, they pursued embarrassing policies and did not acquiesce to Islamabad as hoped. The Taliban harbored sectarian terrorists and criminals despite Pakistan's repeated requests that they be remanded to Pakistani authorities.

The Taliban over time proved to be more of a liability than an asset for Pakistan especially from 1998 onward when Al-Qa'eda organized the simultaneous attacks on two American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In response, the United States showered Afghanistan (and a mistakenly a suspect pharmaceutical factory in Sudan) with cruise missiles, targeting Al-Qa'eda's facilities near Khost. During that strike, the Pakistan militant group, Harkat-ul Mujahideen, said that five of its members were killed who were training there. (This group was and is

⁶Aly Zaman, 'India's Increased Involvement in Afghanistan and Central Asia: Implications for Pakistan', *IPRI Journal* (Summer 2003), <ipripak.org/journal/summer2003/indiaincreased.shtml>.

on the US Department of State list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.)⁷

Despite repeated requests (and indeed payments of cash and vehicles) by Saudi Arabia, and later by Pakistan, the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden. Indeed, while the Taliban may have been dubious of bin Laden initially, the 1998 US missile strikes against him cemented the alliance between Taliban and the Al-Qa'eda leadership. This relationship persisted and strengthened in subsequent years putting Pakistan in an ever-more difficult position. Pakistan came under renewed fire for supporting the Taliban after they destroyed the world heritage site, the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001.⁸ Finally, the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 made Islamabad's position simply untenable and Pakistan was confronted by a stark choice of abandoning them and joining the war on terrorism or becoming the target of the same. Despite Pakistan's efforts to encourage the Taliban to hand over bin Laden and preserve its control over Afghanistan, the Taliban refused. Washington compelled Pakistan to turn on its erstwhile proxies in the immediate days following 9/11; however, it is debatable whether this was a permanent or temporary decision.⁹

While Pakistan's alliance with the Taliban drew the ire of virtually every near and far neighbor, so did Pakistan's support for a collective of Sunni tanzems (militant organizations). Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, China (in the Xinjiang province), Russia (in Chechnya and Dagestan), India and even some Arab states all began experiencing bloody violence perpetrated by Islamist militants in the 1990s.¹⁰ These states in varying degrees held Pakistan directly responsible. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov directly accused Pakistan of training Uzbek Islamist militants.¹¹

⁷Chidanand Rajghatta and Kamal Siddiqui, 'Pak cries foul over US revenge strike', *Indian Express* (22 Aug. 1998), <indianexpress.com/res/web/pIe/ie/daily/19980822/23450784.html>.

⁸'Reporters see wrecked Buddhas', *BBC News*, 26 March 2001, <news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1242856.stm>.

⁹See Seth G. Jones, 'Pakistan's Dangerous Game', *Survival* 49/1 (Spring 2007), 15–32 and Frederic Grare, *Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era*. Carnegie Papers, No. 72. (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Oct. 2006).

¹⁰Fazl-ur-Rahman, 'Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia and Central Asia', in Iwashita Akihiro (ed.), *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia: Russia and Its Neighbors in Crisis* (Sapporo, Hokkaido/Japan: Slavic Research Center 2007), 226, <src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no16_1_ses/contents.html>.

¹¹Shireen T. Hunter, 'Religion, Politics, and Security in Central Asia', *SAIS Review* 21/2 (Summer/Fall 2001), 81.

Chechens, Uighurs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Arabs – among other foreign fighters – sought and received refuge and training in Pakistani militant camps in the 1980s, with support and encouragement from the United States and other Western and Arab states to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan. After the end of the ‘Soviet jihad’, foreign militants who fought in Afghanistan and who were unable to return to their home countries took refuge in Pakistan. Many of these Arab and other foreign fighters married Pashtun women in the tribal areas and built families there. Subsequently, a variety of militants obtained support from Pakistani tanzeems and from the Pakistan-sponsored Taliban, found ready access to Pakistan’s madaris (plural of madrasah, religious seminary) and enjoyed the patronage of the country’s Islamist parties such as Jamaat Islami (JI) and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI).¹²

Rather than pursuing security ties with Pakistan, many of the Central Asian states chose to re-establish security relations with Russia, which has been historically an ally of India and wary of Pakistan’s Islamist adventurism. Iran too was chary of Islamabad, holding Pakistan responsible for the murder of 11 of its purported diplomats in Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan in 1998.¹³ Ironically and perversely, while Pakistan supported this collective of Sunni militant extremists to bolster some of its foreign policy objectives in India and Afghanistan, this same policy undermined other important strategic goals such as improved relations with its proximate and distal neighbors. Indeed, most of its neighbors chose India as their most likely South Asian partner recognizing that they shared a common problem: Sunni militancy based in and originating from Pakistan.

Since reversing its policy towards the Taliban and joining – albeit with little choice – the US-led war on terrorism, Pakistani officials work assiduously to communicate Islamabad’s declared policy of supporting Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai and of supporting international efforts to achieve a stable Afghanistan.¹⁴ However, despite Islamabad’s public support for the Karzai government, both capitals have engaged in hostile recriminations. President Karzai has consistently blamed Pakistan for Afghanistan’s Taliban problem while President Musharraf

¹²Ahmed Rashid, ‘The Taliban: Exporting Terrorism’, *Foreign Affairs* 78/1 (Nov./Dec. 1999), 22–35; Dietrich Reetz, ‘Islamic Activism In Central Asia and the Pakistan Factor’, *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 23/1 (Fall 1999), 1–37; Hunter, ‘Religion, Politics, and Security in Central Asia’.

¹³‘Taliban resumes Afghan offensive as Iran gathers forces’, *CNN Online*, 12 Sept. 1998, <edition.cnn.com/WORLD/meast/9809/12/iran.afghanistan/index.html>.

¹⁴See Grare, *Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era*; Marvin Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and its Neighbors: An Ever Dangerous Neighborhood*, USIP Special Report No. 162 (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace June 2006).

has accused the Karzai government and its international allies of doing to little to mitigate the Taliban threat, establish the rule of law and a credible government in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Castigated for its decades of interference in Afghanistan and subjected to ongoing claims of continued involvement in its neighbor's internal affairs,¹⁶ Pakistani officials no longer talk of 'strategic depth', and indeed rubbish the concept and its architect, former Chief of Army Staff Mirza Aslam Beg.¹⁷ President Musharraf himself has disavowed the concept as irrelevant for today.¹⁸ It remains to be seen whether Pakistan has in fact jettisoned this policy of strategic depth or simply found it expedient to say it has. As one Pakistan-based analyst noted 'Pakistan's foreign policy regarding Afghanistan is based on pragmatism rather than on what the country actually desires. In fact, in the given situation, Pakistan has had to replace desirability with acceptability – often against its own choice.'¹⁹

Pakistani demurrals notwithstanding, Pakistan does not have the luxury of simply abandoning strategic planning for the region. The demise of the Taliban has brought about adverse changes in the national security environment. First and foremost, India now has unprecedented access to Afghanistan. During the Taliban period, India – along with Russia, Iran and Tajikistan among others – aided the Northern Alliance, opposed to the Taliban. In fact, many Northern Alliance personalities and their relatives were either educated in or residents of India for some period of time. As afore-noted Pakistan-based analyst opined:

With the Taliban having now been removed from power, and with a government in Kabul manned heavily by members of

¹⁵For a review of Pakistan's position, see Noor ul Haq and Sadia Nasir, *Pak-Afghan Relations* (Islamabad Policy Research Institute Aug. 2003). See also 'Afghan toll: Karzai lays blame', *CNN.Com*, 19 May 2006, <cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/05/18/afghan.taliban/index.htm>; Grare, *Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era*; Rizwan Zeb, 'Cross Border Terrorism Issues Plaguing Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4/2 (2006), 69–74.

¹⁶Seth G. Jones, 'Pakistan's Dangerous Game', *Survival* 49/1 (Spring 2007), 15–32.

¹⁷Pakistani officials interviewed by the author in Kabul in Aug. 2007 have used extremely pejorative language to describe Aslam Beg's once-praised approach to the region. Similarly, a high-ranking Pakistani army official visiting Washington in May 2007 also denigrated the concept.

¹⁸Musharraf rejects using Afghanistan as strategic depth in case of aggression: TV', *People's Daily Online*, 20 May 2006, <english.peopledaily.com.cn/200605/20/eng20060520_267145.html>.

¹⁹Adnan Sarwar Khan, 'Pakistan's Foreign Policy in the Changing International Scenario', *Muslim World*, 96 (April 2006), 241.

the Northern Alliance, India has dramatically increased its involvement in Afghanistan and is seeking to marginalize Pakistan's role in the political and economic reconstruction of the latter's war-ravaged neighbour. At the same time, India has taken a determined stride into Central Asia by establishing a military base in Tajikistan and extending its economic and diplomatic activities throughout the region.²⁰

During the Taliban period, the regional powers fought a proxy war that pitted Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and their client – the Taliban under the leadership of Mullah Omar – against that of Iran, Russia and India and their client – the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance was a conglomeration of militant commanders (e.g. Ahmad Shah Massoud, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Karim Khalili, Mohammed Fahim, and Ismail Khan) under the titular political leadership of Burhanuddin Rabbani. The influence of the Northern Alliance remained restricted to the north. In September 1996, the Taliban captured Kabul and soon thereafter most of Afghanistan.²¹

The Taliban's presence severely limited India's access to the country, restricting its zone of influence only to those areas in the north under the control of the famed Northern Alliance commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud. This may have been one of the few successes that the Taliban actually delivered to Islamabad. Afghanistan had always enjoyed better ties with Delhi than with Islamabad and indeed was the only country to object to Pakistan's inclusion in the United Nations, citing dissatisfaction with the disposition of its neighbor's Pashtun population. While shortly thereafter Kabul withdrew its objection, the die had been cast.²² Justifiably vexing Islamabad, Afghanistan's leadership frequently takes the opportunity to make maximalist and irredentist claims on Pakistan's Pashtun areas in the Northwest Frontier Province, the tribal areas and even Baluchistan.

With the Taliban's defeat, India now enjoys unrivalled access to President Karzai and his government. President Karzai openly proclaims India to be his country's most important ally and India has made investment in Afghanistan a top priority.²³ Indeed, the Indian ambassador in Kabul is one of the few ambassadors who enjoy regular and

²⁰Zaman, 'India's Increased Involvement in Afghanistan and Central Asia'.

²¹Daniel P. Sullivan, 'Tinder, Spark, Oxygen, and Fuel: The Mysterious Rise of the Taliban', *Journal of Peace Research* 44/ 1 (2007), 93–108; Barnett Rubin, 'Afghanistan Under the Taliban', *Current History* 98/625 (Feb. 1999), 79–91.

²²ul Haq and Nasir, *Pak-Afghan Relations*.

²³See Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 'Rebuilding Afghanistan: India at Work', CD provided to the author by the Embassy of India, Kabul.

cordial access to President Karzai. India has opened several consulates throughout Afghanistan including missions in cities near the Pakistan–Afghanistan border in Jalalabad and Kandahar.²⁴ The Indian presence in Afghanistan discomfits Pakistan, which claims that New Delhi uses these consulates to run covert operations to destabilize the Islamic Republic. These allegations include printing counterfeit currency, sponsoring terrorism and sabotage in Pakistani territory, including the establishment of several ‘terrorist training camps’ near Qushila Jadid (north of Kabul), Gereshk (in southern Helmand province), in the Panjshir Valley, and in Kahak and Hassan Killies in Nimruz province.²⁵

In a May 2006 interview, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed (Chairman, Pakistan Senate Foreign Relations Committee) alleged that:

These Indian diplomatic missions serve as launching pads for undertaking covert operations against Pakistan, from Afghan soil. Particularly, the Indian consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad and their embassy in Kabul are used for clandestine activities inside Pakistan in general and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Baluchistan in particular.²⁶

India's presence in Afghanistan is a part of Delhi's overall strategy for projecting its influence in Central Asia and denying Pakistan the luxury of strategic depth it struggled for decades to achieve.²⁷ However, India's footing in Afghanistan is also desirable as it confers the ability to ‘punish’ Pakistan for its covert operations in Indian-held Kashmir and India and to deter Islamabad from undertaking future misadventures there.

No doubt Pakistan's dubiety and distrust of India's intentions and activities in its various missions in Afghanistan stems from Pakistan's own lengthy history of using its embassy and consulates in Afghanistan to run covert operations throughout that country. Colonel Sultan Amir (aka ‘Colonel Imam’) is now famous for his covert portfolio of assisting the

²⁴For a list of Indian consulates in Afghanistan in addition to the embassy see <meaindia.nic.in/cgi-bin/db2www/meaxpsite/indmission.d2w/Generals >.

²⁵Scott Baldauf, ‘India-Pakistan Rivalry Reaches into Afghanistan’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 Sept. 2003), cited in Grare, *Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era*, 12.

²⁶Gaurang Bhatt, “‘RAW Is Training 600 Baluchis in Afghanistan’”: Mushahid Hussain’, *boloji.com*, 14 May 2006, <www.boloji.com/analysis2/0116.htm >.

²⁷Stephen Blank, ‘India: The New Central Asian Player’, *Eurasia Insight*, 26 June 2006, <eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav062606a.shtml >; Stephen Blank, ‘India's Rising Profile in Central Asia’, *Comparative Strategy* 22/2 (April/May/June 2003), 139–57.

Taliban. In a 2006 interview, he explained his 'emotional attachment to the Taliban' who were a force of 'angels' that 'brought peace, they eradicated poppies, gave free education, medical treatment and speedy justice. They were the most respected people in Afghanistan.'²⁸ Pakistan also complains bitterly about the use of India's Border Roads Organization – an arm of the Indian Army – to rebuild sensitive roads and the deployment of several hundred soldiers from the Indo-Tibetan Police Force to protect Indian workers building key stretches of the ring road as evidence of India's military presence and capacity for trouble making.²⁹

While goodwill for Pakistan in Afghanistan is in short supply, Iranians too look warily towards their eastern neighbor. Whereas once Pakistan could count on Iran for 'strategic depth', Tehran cooled to Pakistan throughout the 1990s because of the latter's support of the Taliban and due to its patronage and deployment of Sunni Islamist militants operating throughout the region, including anti-Shia *tanzeems*. Tehran for its part is culpable for starting the sanguinary sectarian violence that continues to plague Pakistan to date, forming there the fundament of reciprocal suspicion and concern about Iran's influence. With anywhere from 10–25 percent of its population comprised of Shia, Pakistan has reason to be concerned.³⁰ Iran's involvement in sectarian conflicts in Iraq should not bolster Pakistani confidence that a more influential Iran will be benign.

While Tehran and Islamabad have made limited progress in overcoming these antagonisms, Tehran and Delhi have quickly forged what some Indian analysts characterize as a comprehensive 'strategic' bilateral relationship that encompasses economic, political and defense-related areas of cooperation. At the same time, India has access to an airbase at Ayni (about 35 miles from Dushanbe) in Tajikistan and a medical facility in Fakhor (some 80 miles south of Dushanbe), near the Afghan–Tajikistan border.³¹

²⁸Declan Walsh, 'As Taliban insurgency gains strength and sophistication, suspicion falls on Pakistan', *The Guardian*, 13 Nov. 2006), <www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,,1946279,00.html>.

²⁹Pakistanis claim that there are in fact 'more than 300 Indian commandos' in Afghanistan. Indian interlocutors claim that there are several hundred personnel from the paramilitary outfit, the Indo-Tibetan Police Force (ITPF). They argue that the ITPF is perfectly suited for this task given that it routinely works in challenging security areas at altitude. Interviews with high-level Pakistani embassy officials in Kabul in Aug. 2007 and with high-level embassy officials at the Indian Embassy in Kabul in Aug. 2007.

³⁰Estimates of Pakistan's Shia population vary wildly because areas that are traditionally heavily populated with Shia (e.g. Pakistan's Northern Areas) are not enumerated in its census. Thus estimates range anywhere from 10 to 25 percent.

³¹India has maintained a presence at the Ayni airbase since 2002 and has spent some \$1.77 million (est.) to upgrade the facility. In 2006, there were media reports that India

Even Pakistan's historical ally, China, has pursued ever more important relations with India. Whereas once Pakistan had hoped to project its natural Islam-based influence in the region, Islamabad now finds itself increasingly encircled and outflanked by India with few options to improve this strategic picture.³² Notably, India with considerable justification can also flout its Islamic credentials in the region: Muslims comprise some 13 percent of its 1.1 billion population, totaling some 143 million Muslims compared to Pakistan's 160 million Muslims.³³

Pakistan's Great Hope: Energy and Commerce

Pakistan's interests in Central Asia beyond Afghanistan have traditionally been dominated by economic objectives. Islamabad's primary bilateral structure to achieve these goals was the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which grew out of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). The RCD was founded in July 1964 and included Iran, Pakistan and Turkey – the three strongest US allies in the region at that time. The RCD became the ECO in 1985 and in 1992 expanded to include Afghanistan, five of the newly created Central Asian republics and one Caucasus country (Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan).³⁴ The ECO was intended to establish a common market for goods and services and

was about to deploy as many as 12 MiG fighter-bombers at Ayni, which would have marked the first time that India stationed such assets beyond its own territory. The deployment was delayed due to problems with the planned upgrade. The base was unable to support the aircraft until mid-2007 when renovations were finished, some two years behind schedule. Initially, Russia supported India's foothold in Central Asia. Recently, it seems that Moscow has cooled to the idea. Analysts have pointed to the expanding nature of US–Indian relations as the motive for the Kremlin's shift in policy. At the time of writing, it is unclear what will happen to India's presence in Tajikistan. See Stephen Blank, 'Russian-Indian Row Over Tajik Base Suggests Moscow Caught in Diplomatic Vicious Cycle', *EurasiaNet Insight*, 11 Jan. 2008, <www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011108f.shtml>; Swapna Kona, 'India in Central Asia: The Farkhor Airbase in Tajikistan', *ICPS Article No. 2347*, 4 Aug. 2007, <www.ipcs.org/whatsNewArticle11.jsp?action=showView&kValue=2363&status=article&mod=b>.

³²C. Christine Fair, 'India and Iran: New Delhi's Balancing Act', *Washington Quarterly* 30/3 (Summer 2007).

³³Calculations derived from percentage of Muslims in India and Pakistan and their total populations. These data elements are taken from the US Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 2007* (last updated Sept. 2007), <cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>.

³⁴Shah Alam, 'Iran-Pakistan Relations: Political and Strategic Dimensions', *Strategic Analysis* 28/4 (Oct.–Dec. 2004), 526–44.

foster the development of capital and financial markets among Muslim countries. Pakistan also hoped it would permit it to develop access to the region's energy resources while exporting textiles, telecommunications equipment and machinery. Pakistan also seems to have understood the ECO's territorial configuration to comprise a 'web of strategic interests around it as a way to contain India's potential influence in the region'.³⁵ Through the ECO, Pakistan was able to tender several credit offers to the Central Asian states. However, as will be discussed below, Pakistan was unable to bring these agreements to fruition due to regional problems and its own fiscal weaknesses.³⁶

Pakistan's strategic situation weakened with the establishment of the Shanghai Five in 1996, which developed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001.³⁷ The SCO is comprised of China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan and has maintained the agenda of the Shanghai Five of advancing mutual economic interests, fostering military trust among its members and combating Islamist radicalism.³⁸ (In many senses, Pakistan could be seen as an early target of this anti-Islamist radicalism objective). In recent years, the SCO has developed an explicitly anti-US position and opposes the American military and political presence in Central Asia.³⁹ While several countries have expressed interest as joining as full-fledged members (India, Pakistan, Iran, Mongolia, Turkmenistan), Chinese and Russian officials explained prior to the May 2007 summit that no additional countries could be admitted until an accession mechanism is created.⁴⁰

³⁵Hamid Gul, 'ECO, Strategic Significance in the Context of Islamic Resurgence and Geopolitical Environment', in Tarik Jan *et al.* (ed.), *Foreign Policy Debate: The Years Ahead* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies: Islamabad 1993), 188–9.

³⁶Khan, 'Pakistan's Foreign Policy in the Changing International Scenario,' Tahir Amin, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian States', in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1994); Dianne L. Smith, *Central Asia: A New Great Game?* (Washington DC: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College 1996); Turner, 'What's Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest'.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸See Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pal Dunay, Pan Guang and Mikhail Troitskiy, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 71 (Stockholm: SIPRI May 2007); Rajan Menon, 'The New Great Game in Central Asia', *Survival* 45/2 (Summer 2003), 198; Hunter, 'Religion, Politics, and Security in Central Asia'. Also see 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization', <www.sectSCO.org>.

³⁹Joshua Kucera, 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summiteers Take Shot at US Presence in Central Asia', *Eurasia Insight*, 20 Aug. 2007, <eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav082007a_pr.shtml>.

⁴⁰Kucera, 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summiteers.'

The SCO significantly constrained Pakistan's Central Asian aspirations at least in part because the SCO permits non-Islamic states such as Russia and China to have greater access to the region and preferentially situates them to access the region's energy resources. For this reason, states including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran among others have expressed interest in participating in this regional forum in some capacity. While Russia and Kazakhstan support India's entry into the SCO as a full-fledged member, China's support for Pakistan's bid has been joined by Tashkent, reflecting significant rapprochement between Pakistan and Uzbekistan. Islamabad and Tashkent now opine that they share a common enemy in terrorism. Uzbekistan's maneuvering towards Pakistan likely reflects its interest in accessing the Arabian Sea through Pakistan's ports in Gwadar and Karachi. Until 2005, considerable friction existed between the two due to, among other concerns, the presence of Islamist militants associated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) based in and operating from Pakistan. Indeed, the 2007 purges of Uzbeks from Pakistan's tribal areas is widely believed to be the result of an agreement reached by Presidents Musharraf and Islam Karimov during the latter's May 2006 visit to Pakistan, during which they inked a counterterrorism agreement among others.⁴¹ That visit was notable because it was Karimov's first official visit to Pakistan in over 14 years.⁴²

As a part of Pakistan's overall strategy for increasing its presence in Central Asia and beyond is the deep water port that it is building with Chinese assistance in Gwadar, in the violence-prone Baluchistan

⁴¹For information about the conflict between the Ahmedzai Wazir militant commander Mullah Nazir who led the charge against Uzbeks under the leadership of IMU commander Qari Tahir Yuldashev, see M. Ilyas Khan, 'Pakistan's tribals - who is killing who?', *BBC Online*, 5 April 2007, <news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6529147.stm>. According to interlocutors in Pakistan interviewed in Aug. 2007, the Ahmedzai Wazir tribesmen were 'assisted' by Pakistani military personnel who were called 'Punjabi tribesmen', casting aspersions upon Pakistan's official line that the uprising was a spontaneous effort of Pakistani tribesmen to rout foreign terrorists seeking refuge in the Waziristan. For information on the Karimov visit, see Gulnoza Saidazimova, 'Uzbekistan: President Karimov Courts Pakistan To Boost Security, Trade', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 May 2006, <rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/05/4b240d75-0485-49e1-83a3-91e29be566cd.html>. While the Uzbeks are still operating in Pakistan, the Pakistani government has been keen to eliminate them wherever possible. This is at least in part because Islamabad views them as 'Al-Qa'eda' and responsible for some of the more outrageous developments in FATA and in Baluchistan. For example, they are believed to have initiated the gruesome practice of beheading and they are believed to be behind the killing of several Chinese in Baluchistan.

⁴²Rahman, 'Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia and Central Asia'.

province. This port will be of tremendous economic import for Pakistan for several reasons. Given the chronic instability in the Gulf region and the fact that it is located a mere 250 miles from the Straits of Hormuz through which some 40 percent of the world's oil supplies move, the port may provide a stable access point for the Gulf ports. (This may remain elusive due to the ongoing strife in Baluchistan that has arisen in part due to the modalities of the port's construction). Second, given the strategic location of the port, it can serve as an important regional shipping hub, providing the landlocked Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, and the Chinese Xinjiang region with much-desired access to the Arabian Sea. To help transform Gwadar into a shipping hub, Pakistan is building a road that connects Gwadar to Saindak, which will run parallel to the Iran–Pakistan border. When complete, this will be the shortest route linking Central Asia and the Arabian Sea. As such, it will facilitate the transfer of Central Asia's vast energy resources to world markets, augmenting Pakistan's coffers with significant profits in transit fees.⁴³

However, before Pakistan can reap the advantages of Gwadar, including the allure of foreign investment to the area, it will have to find some means of contending with the violence that episodically takes place in Gwadar and elsewhere in Baluchistan. While some of this violence is the handiwork of Al-Qa'eda, local Baluchis, who are deeply distrustful of the Gwadar project and angry over Islamabad's utilization of Baluchistan's gas resources, frequently attack gas pipelines, disrupting energy flows. This violence is intended to impose significant financial loss to punish the center for its policies and to coerce Islamabad to be more accommodating of Baluch interests. Some Baluchis worry that the economic gains of the project will benefit the other provinces, not Baluchistan and the Baluchis.⁴⁴

Islamabad must find some means to accommodate the demands of the local Baluchis who view the port as detrimental to their own economic interests and who voice numerous complaints about the federal government's chronically low levels of investment in the region. With the ongoing domestic turmoil in Pakistan over the return to democracy, the residual role of the Army in Pakistan's governance and the modalities of the next phase of military-controlled democracy, resolving the Balochistan impasse may not be likely in the near term. As such violence and terrorism may continue to plague Baluchistan and

⁴³See Ziad Haider, 'Baluchis, Beijing, and Pakistan's Gwadar Port', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (Winter/Spring 2005), 95–103.

⁴⁴Haider, 'Baluchis, Beijing, and Pakistan's Gwadar Port'; Frederic Grare, *Pakistan: The Resurgence of Baluch Nationalism*. Carnegie Paper No. 65 (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Jan. 2006).

mitigate the benefits that Pakistan could otherwise realize from the Gwadar project and related investments.

Afghanistan

In many ways, Pakistan's goals remain largely unchanged over the past 60 years. Since Pakistan's inception, it has sought to counter the demand advanced by nearly every Afghan government that an independent state be established for Pakistan's Pashtun population.

Second, Islamabad would like some future Afghan government to drop its juridically vacuous claim that the Durand Line is not the *de jure* border separating the two states. (In 1893, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand demarcated the boundary with agents of the Afghan Amir Abdul Rahman Khan.)

Third, and related to the first two objectives above, Islamabad has sought to establish a regime in Kabul that is 'friendly' if not deferential. Pakistan has yet to see Afghanistan as a neighbor rather than a client and this is, in part, due to Kabul's own episodic but noxious rhetoric regarding the border and Pakistan's Pashtun populations. Islamabad also seeks to thwart India's influence on its western flank and to deny it access to Afghanistan, from which India could (and possibly does in some measure) harass Pakistan. All of these goals are inter-related and derive in large measure from fears that India may encourage Afghanistan to stoke ethnic fissures within Pakistan as just deserts for the latter's efforts to exploit ethnic and religious differences in Indian-administered Kashmir and beyond.

Finally, Pakistan has long hoped that Afghanistan could provide it access to Central Asia for commercial and hydrocarbon markets and to permit Pakistan to project its influence politically and culturally. India and Pakistan – along with China and Russia among others – are competing for access and influence in the new Great Game, where access to energy resources is the prize.

To achieve these objectives, Pakistan has exploited Afghanistan's ethnic fissures and has prosecuted a variety of (largely failed) policies to support Afghanistan's Pashtuns out of the belief that a Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan would be more pliable and even sympathetic. In the 1990s, Pakistan supported several jihadi organizations, preferring the Pashtun Gulbuddin Hekmatyar over others. When it became apparent that Hekmatyar could not deliver a stable Afghanistan positively inclined towards Islamabad, Pakistan began supporting the odious Taliban regime until 2001. While the Taliban was indeed Pashtun-dominated, it did not acquiesce to the demands of Islamabad. The regime harbored known criminals and sectarian militants, despite Islamabad's repeated requests that they be remanded to Pakistani

custody. After the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the Taliban's continued protection of Al-Qa'eda's Osama bin Laden and key deputies, many within the Pakistani security establishment argued for a revised policy. Thus for many, the events of 9/11 afforded Pakistan with a ready excuse to dump the Taliban.⁴⁵

Indeed, it is clearly in Pakistan's interests to have a stable Afghanistan. A prosperous neighbor would no doubt create numerous opportunities for Pakistani products and services. If Afghanistan were to be pacified and safe roads and other lines of communications could be constructed and safely utilized, Pakistan would have access to the Central Asian markets that it craves. Similarly, a stable Afghanistan would make critical gas pipelines more feasible (e.g. the proposed Tajikistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline). Currently, Pakistan's bilateral trade with Afghanistan surpasses \$2 billion annually. (Pakistani exports to Afghanistan total \$1.2 billion and Afghanistan's exports to Pakistan total \$700 million). Indeed, trade volume has increased since the fall of the Taliban, when bilateral trade was only \$25 million. In 2003–04, bilateral trade was only \$492 million and for 2004–05, the figure climbed to \$1.63 billion dollars mainly because of exports. Because of Pakistan's geographic, ethnic and cultural proximity, Pakistan has emerged as a major Afghan trading partner in the reconstruction efforts. Despite the early positive signs, Pakistani manufactures may be losing out to Indian and Iranian competition. In 2006–07, exports actually declined by almost \$400 million over the previous year.⁴⁶

While there is little doubt that a stable and prosperous Afghanistan is in Pakistan's long-term interests, Pakistan must ultimately maintain a contingency plan given the changed strategic environment it currently confronts. From several vantage points, the strategic picture with respect to Afghanistan has decisively worsened since 9/11. As noted above, India and Kabul have forged extremely prominent ties and Kabul openly antagonizes Pakistan about the disposition of their border, which some Pakistanis believe is done through the goading of India. Pakistan anxiously complains, albeit with diminished credibility, about the under-representation of Pashtuns in the current government, whose composition still favors the ethnic minorities Tajiks, Uzbeks and

⁴⁵C. Christine Fair, *The Counterterror Coalitions: Cooperation with India and Pakistan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 2004).

⁴⁶Marvin G. Weinbaum and Jonathan B. Harder, 'Pakistan's Afghan Policies and Their Consequences', *Contemporary South Asia* 17/2 (March 2008); Barnett Rubin and Abubakar Siddique, *Resolving the Pakistan–Afghanistan Stalemate* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace 2006); Ashfaq Yusufzai, 'Trade-Pakistan: Smugglers Profit From Landlocked Afghanistan', *IPSNews.net*, 4 Aug. 2007, <ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=38794>.

Hazaras that comprised the Northern Alliance and which were more closely allied with India, Iran, Tajikistan and Russia during the Taliban period.

Notably, Pakistan's concerns were most valid with respect to the transitional administration that formed in the wake of the emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002. That transitional government included three ministers from the former Northern Alliance (e.g., Mohammad Qasim Fahim, Abdullah Abdullah, and Younus Qanuni), although some 14 ministerial portfolios were held by Pashtuns. Many of the early imbalances were redressed in the 2005 parliamentary elections when Pashtun parliamentarians replaced most of the prominent non-Pashtun personalities from the Northern Alliance.⁴⁷ However, Pakistan's rhetoric has not evolved accordingly.

While a strong international presence – especially an American presence – may dampen India's unfettered access to Afghanistan and thus Delhi's ability to harm Pakistan's interests, many in Pakistan chose to believe that Washington will not remain in Afghanistan over the long term. Thus, some Pakistani security managers contend that once Washington withdraws, so will the other, international actors, once again leaving Afghanistan open to predation by its near and distant neighbors. This may have encouraged some of Pakistan's security elites to conclude that it is in Pakistan's national interest to keep its options open with respect to some elements of the Taliban currently operating in Afghanistan. In the end, geography dictates Pakistan's compulsions. Unfortunately, its ostensible preference for instability in an effort to curb India's footing decreases the likelihood of a stabilized Afghanistan, which would no doubt bring greater value over the long term.

Moreover, Afghan perceptions that Pakistan is at the core of Afghanistan's problems encourages Kabul to seek closer ties to Delhi, remain insouciant about its deepening inability to provide good governance, and to adopt antagonizing postures on issues such as the Durand Line. Moreover, the international community has been remiss in not helping Afghanistan come to the obvious conclusion that accepting the Durand Line is in its own interests as is finding a *modus vivendi* with Pakistan. Arguably, the former is a necessary but insufficient condition for the latter. Prospects are bleak that this necrotic cycle of distrust and contingency planning can be broken.

Iran

Prior to the Iranian Revolution, Iran and Pakistan were allied with the United States through the Baghdad Pact, which later became the

⁴⁷Grare, *Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era*.

Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). During the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistan wars, Iran provided Pakistan with modest support during the war but substantial postwar recovery assistance. The Iranian Revolution rent the strategic relationship between Tehran and Washington and by extension with Islamabad. The Iran–Iraq War further put Islamabad and Tehran upon divergent paths with Pakistan supporting the Arab Gulf states and Iran employing bellicose rhetoric to chastise the same. During their war, Iran and Iraq turned Pakistan into a proxy battlefield that fostered the enduring sectarian conflict that persists in Pakistan to date.⁴⁸

While Tehran became a chief antagonist to Washington after 1979, Islamabad became ever more tightly allied to the United States following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. While Pakistan became a key player in that conflict, Iran remained on the margins of that conflict. Pakistan's territory was the primary training and staging ground for the mujahidin who were also recruited from Pakistan, particularly among Afghan refugees. In contrast, Iran's material support to the resistance was minimal and focused upon the Hazara Shias. The collapse of the Afghan state sharpened the difference between the two Islamic republics. Saudi Arabia – Iran's strategic rival – supported the Afghan mujahidin and later the Taliban, along with Pakistan and the United States and in fact solidified Riyadh's sphere of influence in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Afghanistan has been and remains a significant point of contention between Tehran and Islamabad. Iran, like Pakistan, bore a heavy burden with several million Afghan refugees living in Iran before the fall of the Taliban. Iran was deeply bothered by the presence of Deobandi and Salafist militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan who were tightly allied with its strategic competitor and exporter of Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia. This is at least in part because for Iran, security implies the preservation of its state ideology as well as the promotion and protection of its Shia traditions and the protection of Shi'a populations beyond its borders. All of these interests were threatened by the Taliban and anti-Shia Sunni groups operating in and from Pakistan.⁴⁹

As noted above relations between the two precipitously soured after the fall of Mazar-e Sharif to the Taliban in 1998. The Taliban assassinated the above-noted Iranian diplomats (whom many believe were spies) and slaughtered thousands of Hazara Shia as well.

⁴⁸John Calabrese, 'The Struggle for Security: New and Familiar Patterns in Iran-Pakistan Relations', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 21/1 (Fall 1997), 61–80; Hafeez Malik, 'Iran's Relations with Pakistan', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 36/1 (Fall 2002), 56–71.

⁴⁹Shah Alam, 'Iran-Pakistan Relations: Political and Strategic Dimensions'.

Iran remains concerned about the fate of Shia in Pakistan, the predominant victim in sectarian clashes there. This is ironic. Iran is responsible in large measure for initiating the sectarian conflicts in Pakistan in the 1970s both to frustrate President General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq's efforts to Islamize Pakistan as a decisively Sunni state and to promote its revolutionary ideals during the Iran–Iraq War. In response, Zia welcomed the patronage of Arab Gulf states to build Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadis madaris in Pakistan and supported a number of Sunni militias to counter those militias supported, trained and armed by Iran. Thus the issue of sectarian violence in Pakistan persists as an irritant for both capitals.⁵⁰

Despite the fall of Taliban and Pakistan's ostensible abandoning of its former clients, they continue to disagree on the preferred political arrangement in Afghanistan with Iran continuing to support those associated with the United Front (National Islamic United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, the political party reconstituted from the Northern Alliance⁵¹) and Pakistan's persistent preference for the Pashtuns as once embodied in the Taliban. Indeed, Iran remains dubious of Pakistan and continues to see it as a 'corrupt, unstable, historically pro-American and basically artificial nation-state' and derides its short history as inferior to its own ancient civilization.⁵² While Iran has tried to work with the various Pakistani governments, fundamentally Tehran distrusts Islamabad and perhaps because of Pakistan's security relations with the US, since 2000 Iran has worked to develop security ties with India. Since 2000, by any measure, India has come to enjoy ties with Washington that are far more substantive and expansive in scope than those enjoyed by Islamabad. It is not clear at this juncture whether or not Delhi's proximity to Washington and Tel Aviv has dampened Tehran's interest in closer ties with India per se. However, some Indian officials have observed that in recent years it has become more difficult to forge reliable agreements in Iran.⁵³

⁵⁰Vali R. Nasr, 'International Politics, Domestic Imperatives, and Identity Mobilization: Sectarianism in Pakistan, 1979–1998', *Comparative Politics* 32/2 (Jan. 2000), 175–9, 183–7; International Crisis Group. *The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan: Crisis Group Asia Report no. 95* (Brussels/Islamabad: International Crisis Group 2005), 12, 19–20.

⁵¹Amin Tarzi, 'Afghanistan: What Unites The New "United Front"?' *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 10 May 2007, <rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/05/64ccc722-13eb-4f66-8c60-eb7785eb64bb.html>.

⁵²Fred Halliday, 'Iran and the Middle East: Foreign Policy and Domestic Change', *Middle East Report*, 220 (Autumn 2001), 44.

⁵³Fair, 'India and Iran: New Delhi's Balancing Act'.

Since 9/11 and Pakistan's alliance with the United States, Iran remains wary of Pakistan. Relations between the two have been further strained with the election of Iran's hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the evolving nuclear confrontation between Iran and the West. Pakistan's position towards Iran's nuclear program is delicate as Iran acquired technology and hardware from Pakistan via A. Q. Khan's nuclear arms market – likely with the Pakistan military's blessing. Moreover, Pakistan fears Iran's alliance with India and believes that India now enjoys a solid military, intelligence and commercial presence in Iran. Indeed, India's relations with Iran are critical to Delhi's own Central Asia strategy and providing India access to Afghanistan, noted above. Pakistani interlocutors increasingly claim that India has exploited its consulate (read 'listening post') in Zahedan in Iran's Sistan-o-Baluchistan province to instigate Baluch separatists in Pakistan and to fuel the instability in this resource-rich region.⁵⁴

Despite geographical proximity, the overall trade volume between the two is low (\$394 million in 2004).⁵⁵ While Pakistan surely could benefit from better ties with Iran (especially with regard to hydro-carbon resources), there are serious sources of economic and strategic competition between the two. Pakistan is building a deep water port in Gwadar with Chinese assistance. The port is essential to China's efforts diversify its crude oil supplies and both Beijing and Islamabad anticipate that the port will deliver important economic and military gains to both states. For this reason India and Iran construe it as a potential threat to their economic interests and security and as an important competitor to Iran's Chahbahar port, built with Indian assistance. Notably, Chah Bahar is only a few hundred kilometers upon the Makran coast from Gwadar. Indeed, Gwadar has 'raised eyebrows in neighboring India and Iran over Sino-Pakistan maritime activities and has sparked a tacit competition over whether Pakistan's Gwadar port or Iran's Chabahar port... will serve as Central Asia's conduit to warm waters'.⁵⁶

Central Asian Republics

When the Central Asian states became independent, Pakistan expressed what one Pakistan-based analyst called 'over enthusiasm' for establishing closer ties with those states.⁵⁷ Pakistan's initial ventures in the

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵'Pakistan-Iran preferential trade accord', *Daily Times*, 3 March 2004, <dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_28-3-2004_pg5_8>.

⁵⁶Haider, 'Baluchis, Beijing, and Pakistan's Gwadar Port', 96.

⁵⁷Rahman, 'Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia and Central Asia'.

Central Asian republics were economic in nature and relied heavily upon the afore-noted ECO. Pakistan began its courtship of the Central Asian countries with a high-level delegation, led by then Minister of State for Economic Affairs, Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali. Between 24 November and 15 December 2001, his team visited Russia and the Central Asian republics. Remarking upon the initiative, the then Secretary General of Foreign Affairs (Akram Zaki) pronounced that 'recognition of the Central Asian states would open new vistas of bilateral cooperation with these states with whom Pakistan close ties of history, faith and culture'.⁵⁸

From this engagement, Pakistan tendered some \$10 million each in credit to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in effort to 'establish joint ventures in cotton, textiles, garments, pharmaceuticals engineering goods, surgical instruments, telecommunications and agro-industry'.⁵⁹ Pakistan also made an agreement with Uzbekistan to establish satellite communications, build highways, produce telecommunications equipment jointly and manufacture some of the materials for the Central Asian Railways.⁶⁰ Pakistan's cooperation with Uzbekistan in fact became most prominent, with wide ranging agreements in the areas of joint trade ventures, scientific and cultural cooperation, education, tourism. Pakistan signed agreements to import hydroelectric power from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1992 and forged joint economic commissions with all of the Central Asian states. Pakistan also set up fully funded training facilities to those states that spanned from 'English language instruction, banking, accounting, insurance, and postal service to diplomacy'.⁶¹ Despite the turbulence that later emerged, these programs continued.

However the success of these early ventures was limited because of the yawning gap between Pakistan's intent and its capability. Dianne Smith suggests that these failures were due do regional instability (in Tajikistan, Afghanistan), Pakistan's inadequate lines of communication and control, and limited financial resources.⁶² However, Pakistan's

⁵⁸Cited by Rahman, 'Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia and Central Asia', 226.

⁵⁹Tahir Amin, 'Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian States', in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and Its Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1994), 221 cited by Turner, 'What's Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?'

⁶⁰Amin, 'Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian States', 222, cited by Turner, 'What's Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?'

⁶¹Rahman, 'Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia and Central Asia', 227.

⁶²Dianne L. Smith, *Central Asia: A New Great Game?*, cited by Turner, 'What's Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?'

decision to support Pashtun elements in Afghanistan's civil war against the Uzbek and Tajik ethnic groups became deeply problematic, particularly when Pakistan shifted its support to the Taliban in 1994. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which share borders with Afghanistan, were particularly vexed by Pakistan's policies. Islamists opposing the regimes in both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan had ties to Al-Qa'eda and the Taliban and received training in Afghanistan. Given Pakistan's commitment to a Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan, the gap between Islamabad, on the one hand, and Tashkent and Dushanbe, on the other, widened.⁶³

After 2001 and the subsequent refurbishing of Pakistan's regional image, the country has reinvigorated its efforts with continued high-level delegations to the region and has again found an opportunity to re-engage its Central Asian neighbors. However, acrimony that arose during the Taliban period has not entirely diminished. Indeed, since 2005 analysts increasingly believe that Pakistan is passively – if not actively – supporting anti-government elements in Afghanistan, which is not welcome news to its near and distant neighbors.⁶⁴

Another hindrance to Pakistan solidifying its ties with Central Asia (and for that matter with Russia) is the presence of foreign fighters in Pakistan's tribal areas (the Federal Administrated Tribal Areas along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border). Many of these fighters were in Afghanistan supporting the Taliban when US-led forces came in from the north, forcing those fighters out of Afghanistan and into Pakistan's tribal belt. Since 2002, and especially since 2004, Pakistan has sustained military operations against those militants in South and North Waziristan. (Those operations tend to rely upon the Frontier Corps, a poorly trained, inadequately equipped and deeply compromised paramilitary organization. While its officers are seconded from the Pakistan Army, its cadres are recruited from the local Pashtun population). As noted, it is widely believed that purported 'tribal rebellion' in North Waziristan to oust Uzbeks came out of the May 2006 Karimov–Musharraf summit in Islamabad.

The basic objectives that animate the government of Pakistan and those of the Central Asian states remain stable, emphasizing commercial and economic interests and fundamental political goodwill. Pakistan necessarily hopes to situate itself advantageously vis-à-vis India. All parties involved recognize Pakistan's potential as an important trade and energy corridor, as reflected not only in China's investments in Gwadar but also in its commitment of \$350 million to upgrade the Karakorum Highway, linking Pakistan to China and

⁶³Rahman, 'Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia and Central Asia'.

⁶⁴For a recent example of such suspicion, see Jones, 'Pakistan's Dangerous Game'.

onward to Central Asia. Additionally, Pakistan, China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan signed a quadrilateral trade and transit agreement that has worked since 2004. In principal, this can also be extended to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.⁶⁵ Many in the region are also hopeful that an Iran–Pakistan–India pipeline may emerge, despite Washington's vociferous and vigorous objections. There is also support for the TAPI pipeline, which Washington prefers.⁶⁶

As noted above, Pakistan is in principle an ideal route for Central Asia's international trade. However, Afghanistan's continued instability and Pakistan's lack of adequate lines of control linking the ports of Gwadar and Karachi to Torkham and Chaman (the prominent legal crossing points for goods between Pakistan and Afghanistan) dampen the prospects for this corridor's emergence in the policy-relevant future. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have significant potential for hydro-electric power, which Pakistan would like to access; however, turbulence in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's border areas such as the Northwest Frontier Provinces, the tribal areas and Baluchistan render such access increasingly less likely.

Conclusions

Fundamentally, Pakistan's strategic objectives with respect to Iran, Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics remain unchanged since the early 1990s. However, Pakistan's strategic environment *has* changed substantially and largely for the worse since the demise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In the wake of 9/11, Pakistan was able to recuperate its international image by turning on the Taliban and joining the war on terrorism. Pakistan has received wide accolades for its enormous sacrifices in the war on terrorism including the loss of more than 1,200 troops. Pakistan's casualties are higher than those incurred by any other US ally in the war on terrorism.

However, in the intervening years, there have been numerous accusations that Pakistan is either passively (or even actively) supporting Pashtun militants in Afghanistan even while losing many men fighting the so-called Pakistani Taliban and allied militants. These accusations along with deepening domestic terrorist problems in Pakistan and the discovery of episodic international terror groups with ties to that country – howsoever tenuous – jeopardize the goodwill that Pakistan's decision garnered in the early years after 9/11. Pakistan's

⁶⁵Rahman, 'Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia and Central Asia.'

⁶⁶Dan Millison (Asian Development Bank, South Asia Energy Division), 'Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Natural Pipeline Project, Nov. 2006, <meaindia.nic.in/srec/internalpages/tapi.pdf>.

ability to continue improving its relations with its near and distant neighbor may well turn on the veracity – or lack thereof of those claims – and upon the Islamic Republic's own domestic instability.

Many of the impediments to success that plagued these efforts in the 1990s persist and are likely to do so for the foreseeable future. Afghanistan remains unstable and some analysts have even argued that Pakistan may prefer it unstable to one that is stable and solidly aligned with India – even if this imposes economic opportunity costs on Pakistan over the long term.⁶⁷ Pakistan's fiscal weaknesses, dearth of extant lines of control, domestic instability in key areas (e.g. Gwadar, Karachi) are all important internal hindrances that do not augur for Islamabad's success.

Meanwhile, India with its large and growing economy continues to establish solid relations with Iran, Afghanistan and the Central Asian states based upon a wide swathe of common interests including economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, as well as counterterrorism, defense and other intelligence and security-related forms of engagement. Increasingly, Pakistan is finding itself outflanked in its own backyard. Dismantling the substantial barriers that preclude Pakistan's success in Central Asia may simply be beyond Islamabad's capabilities at present and for the foreseeable future.

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⁶⁷See Grare, *Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era*; Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and its Neighbors*.

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