

# U.S. Behavior and Policies towards South Asia: After 9/11 Attack

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## Abstract

After the Second World War and during the cold war era the policy and behaviour of the USA towards South Asia have different and altered many times, but the US policy makers has never changed the idea to set up the powerful preface in this developing zone. The South Asia policy had been ornamented by many sides by the US government. During the change in global power, South Asia has become an important region to rule. After September 11, 2001, there was a stance change in the strategic cooperation between the U.S and South Asia. US involvement in Afghanistan Pakistan, Indo- Pak emulation, and increasing influence of India and China in this zone has prominently raised the strategic significance of South Asia in the circle of US policy making. This paper examines the U.S interests, behaviour and policies in South Asia: after 9/11 to present U.S strategy. While studying and presenting the facts a descriptive–historical method has been used.

**Keywords:** The U.S., South Asia, foreign policy, interests, India, Pakistan

## Introduction

“**South Asia is most dangerous place on the earth**”, said by President Clinton, when he was going to visit South Asia in 2000<sup>1</sup>.

End of the virus war had presented the incredibly engaging changes among America and South Asia relationship. The United States demonstrate an unmistakable fascination for the district enriches with numerous procedures and shows. In present time "Indian Sub-Continent" is known as "South Asia" zone. From the geopolitical perspective South Asia has dependably been the field of super powers. For about one century, from 1850s to 1947, United Kingdom (UK) colonized the entire subcontinent . As indicated by the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), the South Asia area basically incorporates India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives, and Afghanistan was the last nation incorporated into gathering of countries. South Asia is a gigantic land mass-living arrangement to around one fourth of the total populace. It has assumed much importance<sup>2</sup>.

The most important imperative of post-Cold War in South Asia is that the countries and peoples of the region have decided to join the global economy and act on the global stage.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. seen South Asia as a territory of minor vital significance (other than to check the development of socialism amid the Cold War time frame), the ongoing movements in worldwide power connections have made South Asia a significant locale not to disregard.

President George W. Hedge proclaimed South Asia the underlying performance center for the

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<sup>1</sup> Rajaraman Ramamurti “South Asia is not the most dangerous place on earth” <https://thebulletin.org/2017/04/south-asia-is-not-the-most-dangerous-place-on-earth/>

<sup>2</sup> Hasan Zubeida, South Asia as a Region, *Pakistan Horizon*, **17(2)**, 161-167 (1964)

<sup>3</sup> Dillon Dana “U.S. Strategic Objectives in South Asia” REPORT Asia July 7, 2005, The Heritage Foundation

"war on psychological warfare" after 9/11 and reordered US relations with the district. The most substantial and quick outcome was the landing of American security powers in Afghanistan and Pakistan—just as in neighboring Central Asia, out of the blue. The new arranging fashioned with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India from that point forward have been allotted as a feature of a key move of US approach intended to counter psychological oppression, however every one of these connections faces remarkable challenges<sup>4</sup>.

The situation after September 11, 2001 and the Indo-U.S. strategic cooperation have changed the relationship pattern between U.S. and South Asia. Involvement of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Indo-Pak rivalry, concerns about the proliferation of nuclear weapons, fight against terrorism, and the growing influence of China in the region have significantly increased the strategic importance of South Asia in the U.S. policy making circles<sup>5</sup>.

### **US Interests and Challenges in South Asia after September 11**

At the point when George W. Bramble turned into the new President of the U.S. in January 2001, his Republican Administration proceeded with the Clinton approach of commitment in South Asia, with an exceptional accentuation on US-India connection. The fear based oppressor assaults in Washington, nonetheless, transformed US plan in South Asia significantly as the United States out of the blue ended up in the not used to position of having great relations with the two India and Pakistan: India offered its 'full help' for US counter-psychological warfare endeavors and Pakistan chose to adjust itself to the United States. The

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<sup>4</sup> Nathan Hodge, "Americans Keep Peace for NATO," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 31, 2004, 5A, and James Morrison, "Embassy Row: Afghans 'Love Us,'" December 23, 2004, *Washington Times*, A17

<sup>5</sup> Ganguly Shivaji, *U.S. Policy towards South Asia*, West view Press, Boulder Co., 27 (1990)

September 11 occurrence gave a rare chance to Washington to fabricate an organization with Islamabad and a key association with New Delhi on various bases.

On September 11, 2001, the United States turned into the casualty of a progression of efficient and exceedingly planned psychological oppressor assaults. A few thousand blameless residents were murdered abruptly after two commandeered regular citizen aircrafts pummeled into the Twin Towers—the images of American monetary and money related influence—of the World Trade Center in New York and the west areas of the Pentagon in Washington DC. It is hard to assess the effect of the assaults on the US, their suggestions for the remainder of the world and to foresee what the distinctions when September 11 will be. Some have said that the new century started on September 11 instead of on January 1, 2001. Others contended that the finish of the Cold War has finished and the world has entered the post-post-Cold War period. The tersest yet significant plan is that of President Bush: "9/11 changed America." They have additionally changed the elements of provincial security in South Asia. "The assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon turned US' South Asia arrangement incidentally tops truly, conveying Pakistan to middle of everyone's attention and putting portions of the US-India motivation on hold." As South Asia researcher Stephen P. Cohen has stated, no piece of the world was progressively influenced by the fear based oppressor assaults of September 11, 2001 than South Asia. In the beginning of September 11, it appears that the US has three fundamental objectives in South Asia:

- For the short term, it is trying to prevent an all-out war between India and Pakistan while concurrently maintaining Indian and Pakistani cooperation in the anti-terror campaign and keeping bilateral relations with the two nations on a positive course.

- For the medium term, the US is interested in preventing the Indo-Pakistani conflict from erupting into a nuclear exchange and ensuring that nuclear weapon-related material in South Asia is not obtained by terrorists or other organizations that would confound non-proliferation efforts.
- For the long term, the United States seeks a permanent solution to the Kashmir problem while at the same time attempting to avoid creating a sanctuary for extremist Islamic militants in the area.

In response to India's 'full support' and Pakistan's 'indispensable help' in the global war on terrorism, President Bush rapidly waived sanctions and provided assistance to them. On September 22, 2001, Bush issued a final determination removing all remaining nuclear test-related economic sanctions against Pakistan and India. On October 27, 2001, the President signed S.146 (P.L. 107-57) into law, officially waiving sanctions on Pakistan related to democracy and debt arrearage through 2003. In addition, the removal of sanctions allowed the United States to extend \$600 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) to Islamabad. In 2002, Pakistan received an estimated \$624.5 million in development assistance and ESF, while India received \$164.3 million in development aid, ESF and food aid grants.<sup>6</sup> In its National Security Strategy of the United States of America, issued in September 2002, the White House indicated that it would "invest time and resources [into] building strong bilateral relations with India and Pakistan," adding that US-Pakistan relations had been "bolstered by Pakistan's choice to join the war against terror and move towards building a more open and tolerant society." At the same time, the US took note of "India's potential to become one of the great democratic powers of the twenty-first century," and added that it has "worked hard to

<sup>6</sup> The Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2002 (P.L. 107-115) and The Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Measure for Anti-Terrorism Efforts (P.L. 107-38)

transform our relationship accordingly.”<sup>7</sup> The United States, thus, planned to build more balanced relationships in South Asia: a partnership with Islamabad and a strategic relationship with New Delhi.

Both relationships, however, face uncertainty. First, the so-called ‘balanceable’ relations are in fact asymmetrical. The US-Pakistan ‘partnership’ was driven in the short term by a single dimension which glossed over many of the divergences between the two nations. Even in the counter-terrorism campaign, Washington and Islamabad have different and sometimes conflicting goals. The US-India ‘strategic relationship’, however, was a goal the two nations set a few years ago and was based on broad common interests, regardless of whether the procedure was slower than anticipated. Second, fighting psychological oppression was the essential, if not sole, premise of the US-Pakistan ‘organization’. The US and Pakistan had functional joint efforts in the activity of expelling the Taliban routine in Afghanistan. When they moved the field toward the western piece of Pakistan to chase down the remainders of the Taliban and Al Qaida, in any case, the circumstance swung to be entangled. The accomplices started to differ when a progression of real fear based oppressor episodes occurred in Kashmir and it ended up clear that the two countries had contradicting perspectives. Third, in New Delhi, regardless of its more drawn out term method of reasoning, “negativity started to cloud open reasoning on the eventual fate of US-India relations dependent on the inclination that post September 11 improvements had cleared away over a time of political endeavors to rebuild the association with the United States.”<sup>8</sup> The Bush Administration 156 Strategic

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<sup>7</sup> The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. The White House. September 2002, p. 10

<sup>8</sup> LaFranchi, Howard, Attacks Move Pakistan Up, India Down, on US Agenda. The Christian Science Monitor. September 24, 2001

Analysis/Apr-Jun 2003 now has to “balance a new emphasis on terrorism with standing priorities such as the global economy and democracy.”

## **U.S. policy makers Principles towards the South Asian region**

US policy towards South Asia based on these six principles, which were made by the policy makers;

- i. Always be considered in the light of American national interests in their global level.
- ii. Recognize the present American heavy involvement and great stake in the future to the country.
- iii. Develop an integrated approach that gives due attention to the impact of specific actions and of long-term policies on the balance of forces there.
- iv. Pay special attention to the internal dynamics of the political and social systems.
- v. Based on independent appraisal to avoid any impression of simply endorsing the positions of other countries in the area and outside.
- vi. Avoid any pressure to “choose” Pakistan and India.<sup>9</sup>

## **Three Geopolitical Shifts**

Three geopolitical shifts underfoot in South Asia and the broader world amplify the inevitability—or at least, for the sake of U.S. interests, strong desirability—of continued engagement with the region in the coming months and years. U.S. Combat Withdrawal from Afghanistan .The first shift, perhaps ironically, relates to the scaled-down U.S. role in Afghanistan, ever since the American combat war ended in 2014. A lighter U.S. military

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<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Alamgir (Analyst of International Relations) “America’s Interests in South Asia” <https://muhammadalamgir.wordpress.com> (accesses on 04/09/2018)

footprint in Afghanistan has led to a decreased U.S. policy focus on Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> This is concerning, given the country's deteriorating security situation. And yet, at the same time, this presents a silver lining for U.S. South Asia policy. Less focus on Afghanistan means that the U.S. strategic lens applied to South Asia during the early years of the Obama administration—a narrow optic centered on Afghanistan and Pakistan—is being redirected elsewhere in the region, and particularly to India. Perhaps not coincidentally, U.S.-India relations have been deepening ever since U.S. combat troops began departing Afghanistan in 2014 (and also since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a strong proponent of warmer bilateral ties, took office that same year). The receding of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-focused lens also provides openings to hone in more on Bangladesh—a powder keg of a country that U.S. policy has long neglected. Washington's widening South Asia optic also presents opportunities for the United States to make more concrete contributions to regional connectivity Projects like transport corridors and energy infrastructure. U.S. officials periodically articulate support for such initiatives, depicting them as stabilization projects<sup>11</sup>. And yet little has been done on operational levels.

## **U.S. Combat Withdrawal from Afghanistan**

The main move, maybe unexpectedly, identifies with the downsized U.S. job in Afghanistan, as far back as the American battle war finished in 2014. A lighter U.S. military impression in Afghanistan has prompted a diminished U.S. arrangement center around Afghanistan. This is disturbing, given the nation's crumbling security circumstance. But then, in the meantime, this shows a silver coating for U.S. South Asia strategy. Less spotlight on Afghanistan implies that the U.S. key focal point connected to South Asia amid the early long periods of the Obama organization—a limited optic fixated on Afghanistan and Pakistan—is being diverted somewhere else in the locale, and especially to India. Maybe not adventitiously, U.S.- India relations have been developing as far back as U.S. battle troops started withdrawing Afghanistan in 2014 (and furthermore since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a solid

<sup>10</sup> Kugelman Michael , “Bringing Afghanistan Back into the Spotlight,” *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/bringing-afghanistan-back-into-the-spotlight>.

<sup>11</sup> Biswal desai Nisha, “The New Silk Road Post-2014: Opportunities and Challenges,” January 22, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2015/236214.htm>.



advocate of hotter reciprocal ties, took office that equivalent year). The retreating of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-centered focal point likewise gives openings to sharpen in additional on Bangladesh—a powder barrel of a nation that U.S. approach has since a long time ago dismissed. Washington's broadening South Asia optic additionally shows open doors for the United States to make progressively solid commitments to territorial availability ventures like transport passageways and vitality framework. U.S. officials periodically articulate support for such initiatives, depicting them as stabilization projects.<sup>12</sup> And yet little has been done on operational levels.

## Malleable and Expanding Network of Terrorisms

A third geopolitical shift that provides Washington with a strong incentive to remain focused on South Asia is the resurgence and expansion of global terrorist syndicates. At first glance, this may seem like questionable assertion, because today international terror networks arguably pose the greatest threats outside of South Asia. Al-Qaeda's presence and clout in South Asia are a far cry from the pre-9/11 era. Its central leadership in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region has been decimated, and some of its remaining top officials have reportedly relocated to Syria.<sup>13</sup> Today, the greatest strength of al-Qaeda lies in its regional affiliates, and the most powerful ones (some of which have plotted attacks on the United States) are based in the Middle East and North Africa, not South Asia. Meanwhile, the territorial advances of ISIS have largely been limited to the Middle East, and its relentless onslaught of attacks has mostly taken place

in the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. And yet, al-Qaeda has not exactly shriveled up and died in South Asia. In 2014, it announced the launch of a new South Asia affiliate. In 2015, the U.S. military claimed to have discovered “probably the largest” al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan since American forces entered the country in 2001.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, al-

<sup>12</sup> Biswal Desai Nisha , “The New Silk Road Post-2014: Opportunities and Challenges,” January 22, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2015/236214.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Lister, “Al-Qaeda is About to Establish an Emirate in Northern Syria,” *Foreign Policy*, May 4, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/04/al-qaeda-is-about-to-establish-an-emirate-in-northern-syria/>

<sup>14</sup> Dan Lamothe, “‘Probably the Largest’ al-Qaeda Training Camp Ever Destroyed in Afghanistan,”

Qaeda retains deep ties to many of the region's most vicious terror groups—including the Haqqani network and Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, all of which have targeted Americans in Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, ISIS has formally declared its expansion into the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. While its physical presence in South Asia is modest, ISIS boasts considerable brand appeal among disaffected local militants—many of them former Taliban fighters in Afghanistan—happy to carry out attacks in its name, and possibly with guidance and other non-operational support from ISIS central authorities in the Middle East<sup>16</sup>. With ISIS increasingly on the defensive as it struggles to manage its shrinking so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq, it has a strong incentive to demonstrate its continued clout by staging (or at least claiming association with) attacks elsewhere in the world, including South Asia. In the summer of 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility for mass-casualty atrocities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Ominously, in the coming months, the presence and influence of al-Qaeda and ISIS could strengthen in South Asia. Deteriorating security in Afghanistan could enable the Taliban to carve out new sanctuaries that double as safe havens for its al-Qaeda ally. This means that an early key U.S. achievement in Afghanistan—the elimination of al-Qaeda sanctuaries—could well be reversed. Additionally, ongoing fragmentation and splintering within the Taliban could spawn new militant factions that reject their parent organization and pledge allegiance to ISIS. Finally, the possibility exists that if ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is killed; al-Qaeda could extend an olive branch to its erstwhile Iraq affiliate. If ISIS feels sufficiently on the defensive and vulnerable, it could well opt for reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> A reunited al-Qaeda and ISIS would spell big trouble for South Asia.

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*Washington Post*, October 30, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/10/30/probably-th...>

<sup>15</sup> Michael Kugelman, “Al-Qaeda is Alive and Well in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *War on the Rocks*, February 13, 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/02/al-qaeda-is-alive-and-well-in-afghanist...>

<sup>16</sup> Kugelman Michael “U.S. Policy in South Asia: Imperatives and Challenges” 05 october 2016

<sup>17</sup> Hoffman Bruce , “The Coming ISIS-al-Qaeda Merger,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-29/coming-isis-al-qaeda-...>

## A Festinate Asia Rebalance:

Another remarkable shift that emphasizes the importance of American engagement with South Asia is an intensified U.S. focus on the Asian rebalances. This much-ballyhooed “pivot,” intended to allocate more American resources to the Asia-Pacific, has been painfully slow in coming. However, concrete U.S. actions over the last year—multiple high-level trips to the Asia-Pacific, successful efforts to solidify new friendships (such as with Burma and Vietnam), and intensified U.S. participation in joint exercises with friendly militaries in the region—suggest the policy is gaining steam.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the Transpacific Partnership trade accord, if ratified, would not only incentivize, but also necessitate, a more intense U.S. focus on the Asia Pacific. And yet it is growing U.S. unease about China’s provocative moves in the Asia-Pacific that arguably constitutes the most powerful incentive to push forward with the rebalance—a concern that will remain paramount regardless of who is in the White House come January 2017. India, and by extension South Asia, plays a critical role in the Asia rebalance policy, because Washington views India as a useful counterweight to China. The Modi government’s articulation of a new “Act East” policy—suggesting a more active and robust policy in the Asia-Pacific than the “Look East” policy embraced by previous administrations—is music to Washington’s ears, because it amplifies how the United States and India intend to rebalance to the same region, and for the same reason: to provide a counterweight to China.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

US involvement in South Asia initially began in the Cold War era, a time when Washington was trying to win over camp followers or the two important and strategically located states, India and Pakistan, the former chose nonalignment whereas the latter, chose to be an ally of the United States. Fierce competition between the two super powers compelled policy makers to have allies and influence in every corner of the globe. The stunning growth of the United States has been fueled in good part by realist logic

<sup>18</sup> Kugelman Michael “U.S. Policy in South Asia: Imperatives and Challenges” 05 october 2016

<sup>19</sup> ibid

along with the need to prosper, benefit and expand economically as well as militarily. All this coupled with a powerful sense of ideological mission called for influence and expansion.

Post-September 11 South Asia has witnessed changing US-India and US-Pakistani relations but unchanged India-Pakistan tensions. The US has developed good relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously after 9/11. It has rebuilt a partnership with Pakistan as a frontline country in the global war on terror while continuing to develop strategic relations with India which it has viewed as an emerging power for nearly a decade. The basis of these relations, however, is quite different. Whether the US-Pakistan partnership will be strategic and long-standing is still doubtful, especially if the two countries cannot enlarge the base to political, economic and cultural fields. The future of the US-India strategic relationship, however, is bright in the long term, even if it has slowed down since 9/11 because of differences over how to view relations with Pakistan.

Thus from the above description of the U.S.' core interests and policies towards South Asia from the Cold War era to Strategic Rebalancing, it can be asserted that this region has remained a dynamic area where the U.S.' interests and thereby its foreign policy priorities has been oscillating with ups and downs or engagements and disengagements. Nevertheless, it is also observed that the strategic interests have been most important factor for the U.S. policy towards South Asia. Such a policy has remained an important part of the U.S. global strategy that wants to see Europe or Asia free from domination by any hostile power. In the U.S. policy calculations, during the cold war era the Soviet Union was that power and in the 21st century China is emerging such a power. Thus as long as the shadow of "China Threat" remains in the minds of the U.S. policy makers; the U.S. will treat India as its mutual partner in the South Asian region. At the same time, as long as the terrorism is not eliminated and Afghanistan is not transformed into a peaceful and stable country free from terrorism, the U.S. will try to maintain its current balanced policy towards India and Pakistan.