

## Strategic Shifts: US Engagement in Post-9/11 South Asia, particularly towards Pakistan

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#### Abstract

For the most part, Pakistan and India have suffered at the hands of US foreign policy in South Asia. Pakistan joined the US immediately upon gaining independence and it continued to be a front-line state in the US alliance system during the Cold War and the current War on Terror. Conversely, the United States took a different tack when it came to strategic alliances and nuclear cooperation with India. The January 2018 US National Security Strategy rearranged national security preferences, giving India high position as a possible China rival and marginalization Pakistan due to terrorist-related concerns. The current state of US foreign policy is thought to be instable because it offers India advantage at Pakistan's expense. The fundamental tenets of US foreign policy towards South Asia are discussed in this article, along with any possible ramifications for Pakistan.

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## Introduction

The strategic location of the South Asian region is exceptionally advantageous, drawing the attention of powerful nations like the United States, which uses it to further its national security agenda. The stability of South Asia has been impacted by the US's varying degrees of involvement in the region. According to the SAARC, the region consists of eight countries, more lately, Afghanistan was added as an associate

member. This region, which is strategically situated where Asia and Central Asia converge, is divided by the WAKHAN corridor, a thin strip of territory. The US has a lot riding on the stability of this region in this particular setting. Over the course of the last forty years, the US has been active in South Asia. It started with the Gulf oil crises in 1973 and continued with the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet Union's intervention of Afghanistan in 1979, the America-led War on Terror (WOT) in 2001 and eventually the Arab Spring and upheavals in the Middle East. Leading nations are interested in the shifting dynamics of regional and global influence. Notably, the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2018's preferential treatment, the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) waiver, the Indo-US Strategic Partnership and the US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan and the Middle East, the civil nuclear deal and the War on Terror's leadership by the US have all altered South Asia's strategic stability by hyphenating Pakistan with Afghanistan and hyphenating it from India.

Relative to promoting peace and stability in the region, foreign policy of United State in South Asian region after 2001 has been seen as instable force. The US-Taliban rapprochement, President Trump's decision to leave Afghanistan by January 2021, renewed US-Indian engagement and US former National Security Advisor (NSA) John Bolton's tacit support for India's unilateral alteration of the position of Indian Occupying territory of Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K) all contribute to the changing regional landscape that supports the statement. Given that majority of the BRI projects are located in Central Asia and South Asia, the US and NSS 2018, reordering significant power competitions between Russia and China as national security goals has destabilizing consequences from a South Asian perspective. Using the theoretical framework of Balance of Power, the paper analyses how the power dynamics in the South Asian region are changing and how this affects US foreign policy.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This essay was developed using the Theory of Balance of Power within the framework of Realism. This theory addresses hegemony, dominance and power politics. As the status quo power, the US formulates foreign policy to advance its interests as a country in an effort to maintain its leadership in international affairs.

A thorough assessment of the literature has been conducted in order to create a complete United State policy picture towards South Asian region and the degrees of participation, which has aided in the development of empirical data and insightful assessments. Although there are eight countries in South Asia, Pakistan and India are the two that command the attention of major powers. For this reason, US foreign policy in South Asia has been analysis from the viewpoints of these two important players.

In order to combat communism and oppose Soviet expansionist plans, the US placed a great deal of emphasis on uniting its allies in the cold war. Pakistan's support is essential to the US's foreign policy. As a result, Pakistan ratified the Central Treaty Organization's (CENTO) Baghdad Pact in 1955 after initially joining the United State allies of the SEATO in 1954 ( Mazhar, Jabeen, 2011) Pakistan's understanding of the USA allies, however, was that it would prevent a two front war between an increasingly aggression India on the East and the Soviet Union on West, boost the country's economy and defense capabilities and work towards a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute. Meanwhile, US national security objectives were limited to stopping Soviet expansion. At the expense of a significant diplomatic reaction with the USSR following the U2 incident in 1960 (Encyclopedia, 2020) Pakistan genuinely supported US

overtures and aided US activities while serving as a leading state backing American anti-Soviet policy. Nonetheless, Pakistan had to reevaluate its alliance partnership policy in the wake of the world reaction to the conflicts in 1965 and 1971. It subsequently withdrew from CENTO in 1979 and SEATO in 1973 (Khan, 2009)

Furthermore, because South Asia has a notably low Human Development Index (HDI), it poses a challenge to international security due to unresolved issues in Kashmir, the overt atomization of India and Pakistan and other issues related to human security. The fall of the Soviet Union was a great win for the United States of America, but it cost Pakistan dearly as the US withdrew from Afghanistan, leaving Pakistan to deal with internal strife and sanctions related to nuclear weapons for the next ten years. India was compensated in the same breath with an NSG waiver, a civil nuclear accord and a strategic cooperation that had a significant impact on South Asia's strategic stability.

United State interests in South Asian Region are summarized as follows;

- Building strong strategic and commercial ties with India.
- Maintaining Pakistan's state sovereignty in the face of isolation and sanctions
- Managing the terrorism phenomenon following the Afghan Jihad.
- Enhancing the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Agreement.
- Keeping weapons of mass destruction (WMD) out of terrorist hands and from spreading.
- Additionally, maintaining strategic stability and managing the possible arm race specifically, the nuclear race in this region are important.

Because of its closeness to Afghanistan and the Middle East, which acted as the front lines of the US-led War on Terror for nearly two decades, South Asia was severely impacted by the tragic events of September 11, 2001, which altered the regional and global environment (Rudolph, L. I , & Rudolph, S. H, 2006). Resuming communication with Pakistan and lifting every punishment was positive moves that elevated Pakistan's profile. President George W. Bush enacted laws permitting the use of force against 9/11 terrorists who were hiding in Afghanistan on September 18, 2001. It was ruled at the time by the Taliban, a regime that was unpopular outside of Afghanistan because of its fundamentalist views and non-accommodating behavior within the country. They were also charged with concealing and providing sanctuary to the Al-Qaida leadership in charge attacks of 9-11. It did not take long for the Taliban to be driven out of Kabul (COHEN, S. P. & DASGUPTA, S, 2001) most of their leaders were either murdered or captured and very few were able to escape. The US provided financial support for the grand reconciliation process, which was used to settle state institutions and mainstreaming of impoverished areas started at a reasonable rate. The US was very grateful for Pakistan aid and steadfast support in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. It is vital to keep in mind that Pakistan was subject to American sanctions prior to the commencement of the War on Terror because of its 1998 nuclear weapons testing. However, as a result of the War on Terror, all sanctions were lifted, establishing Pakistan as the United States' first non-NATO ally. The years that followed saw increased defense and economic cooperation. Pakistan had previously received rewards for its assistance to the US during times of need. But as time went on, it became clear that Pakistan, formerly a front-line ally, had lost 66,000 soldiers and suffered economic losses of US\$ 126 billion as a result of its alliance with the United States (Mustafa, 2018). Similarly, once

India pledged to provide the USA with logistical support and refueling, the USA eased nuclear-related sanctions against India. The United States of America backed India in every area, at Pakistan's expense, as a new chapter in the strategic cooperation between the two countries began.

### **South Asia's Strategic Significance to the USA**

Due to its advantageous location, South Asia has historically been a focal point for numerous superpowers, despite being a very volatile and complex region. The six South Asian countries are grouped around India, biggest and the most populated nation, making the region Indo-centric. Americans became interested in regions that could be significant from a geopolitical and geostrategic standpoint as the British Empire weakened and American power increased. America sought to secure Middle Eastern oil for use in Europe and the United States by utilizing the diplomatic and military might of the area. The United States has been primarily interested in stopping the spread of Communism to South Asia. The United States has a tendency to see regional conflicts from a global perspective and its global interests have primarily shaped its policies in South Asia. Tensions in the region must be managed because of US interest in South Asia. This implies that stable relations between Pakistan and India are also necessary. India and Pakistan continue to be high on the American agenda because of their nuclear weapons capacity, which affects US nonproliferation objectives.<sup>18</sup> Pakistan's nuclear programmer has gained more attention as a result of accusations that it is spreading nuclear weapons. American involvement in the region is likewise warranted given American commitment to democracy and human rights more significantly, given the attacks of 9-11 and the ensuing WOT, US participation in the region is unprecedented. Even though India is an ally in the fight on terror, Pakistan is nevertheless actively engaged in the conflict as a front-line state. (Fani, M)

### **Post-9/11 Strategic Policy towards Pakistan and India**

Without a doubt, the events of 9/11 changed everyone's perspective on international security, not only USA also those in others nations. Winston Churchill is credited with saying that major battles, whether successful or unsuccessful, completely alter the path of events and establish new standards for morality, behavior and environment in armies and countries that all parties must follow. The fight against terrorism in Afghanistan by the US-led international coalition and the US-initiated war in Iraq have fundamentally changed the understanding of global politics and international security. The Muslim world suffered the most from the terrible crises that followed 9/11, but problems affected the entire world. The Islamic world denounced the 9/11 tragedy and the majority of Muslim nations join the United State led alliance against the terrorism and actively participated in its fight. However, some lobbyists in the USA and the West launched a concerted effort to portray Islam religion of terror and Muslims as terrorists. This section examines how United State strategic policy towards Pakistan and India has changed throughout time.

### **Pakistan USA Relationships After 9-11 Era: A Fresh Start**

Domestically and globally, ties between Pakistan and the USA underwent a radical change following the 9/11 assaults on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre. Even though 9-11, 2001, was an ordinary day in Pakistan, it would have a profound impact on how events in the area and the entire world would unfold going forward.

Ironically, the US once more recognized Pakistan's strategic significance following the events of September 11, 2001. After President Musharraf reversed his predecessors' pro-Taliban stance and sided with the US, agreeing to US requests for over flying privileges, intelligence sharing, logistical support, etc., Pakistan gained favorable standing. Factors Affecting Pakistan-US Strategy prior to 1989, Pakistan was a strategic partner of the United States and fought a ten-year war in Afghanistan. It was then abandoned "high and dry". Then, with India in the enemy camp, the US began to forge a "strategic relationship with them". How would the average Pakistani man perceive this? When the Cold War ended, the United State had little strategic interest in Pakistan. Pakistan has become more strategically significant to the US since the US became involved in Afghanistan and expanded its footprint in Central Asia and the Middle East following 9/11.

### **Fight against International Terrorism**

Pakistan is forced to back the global fight against terrorism. Its policy response stems from its own enlightened self-interest, in addition to backing the US. President Musharraf's statement during a press conference on October 16, 2001, perfectly captures it: "We collaborated with the international community to help capture the terrorists, attack planners and financiers, as well as their traffickers. It is widely believed, therefore, that the US does not distinguish between legitimate freedom struggles in Palestine or the state of Jammu and Kashmir and terrorism. Therefore, religious elements feel that rather than being based on ethical and moral values, US policy is based on obvious double standards. Mohammed el-Syed Said, deputy head of the Al AHRAM think group in Cairo, put it succinctly: "The US need to behave like any honorable general or chief of any military". They can't merely portray themselves as devoid of regard for the people they want to harm.

### **A Strategic ally or a Target: US Strikes and Their Effect on FATA Operations**

In Pakistan's FATA which border Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda groups and Taliban militants are rumored to enjoy "safe heaven", the army has been conducting extraordinary operations since 2003. Since 2008, militant organizations have only become more powerful and hostile. The newly elected civilian-led administration in Islamabad promises to use military action, diplomacy with "reconcilable" parties and economic growth to tackle extremism in the FATA. Pakistan opened its ports, airfields and airspace to the United States for Operation Enduring Freedom. When the magazine New York Times reported on the 19th of February 2007, (The New York Times, 2007) that Al Qaeda had reopened a few tiny terrorist training sites in Pakistan, close to the Afghan border, the US took a more assertive stance. Meanwhile, during the past few months, US Predator drones have carried out a number of missile attacks on behalf of the US military. For instance, there were just six US missile strikes in FATA between December 2007 and August 2008, but since then, there have been about nineteen. The most recent one occurred in the settled NWFP region of BANNU. Reducing extremist infiltration into Afghanistan from Pakistan is crucial, US commanders say. In order to achieve this, the overall commander of US forces in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, is "redefining" the Afghan battlefield to include the border regions with Pakistan. Additionally, US forces are stepping up their efforts to disrupt militant operations and encampments on the Pakistani side of the border from the Afghan side. Among the objectives done by General McKiernan and other US commanders were the construction of intelligence and information sharing centers, efforts

to improve trust amongst the Pakistani military's upper echelons and the reconstruction of the halted process of military cooperation between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US/NATO.

### **Freezing of Tension in South Asia**

The United States of America is interested in sustainable peace in South Asia. It seeks to settle long-standing and raging disagreements between Pakistan and India, particularly those pertaining to the latter's Jammu and Kashmir region. This is in opposition to its global plan in order to prevent nuclear war and devastation. The US wants India to grow into a significant power at the same time. It's conceivable that the US would rather Pakistan stay weak in order to prevent it from undermining India's hegemonic status in the area and the globe. This may be the cause of why Pakistan is reluctantly supplied the state-of-the-art military equipment, while India receives it directly or through Israel. However, the US would like not to destabilize Pakistan to the point where it becomes a client state of India, or vice versa, as this would prevent it from using Pakistan as an advantage point against India. From a South Asian perspective, it is critical to uphold the region's power balance and to foster economic growth and stability. Pakistan should not be very concerned about the newfound friendship between India and the US, though. The expanding tight ties between the US and India, according to MASUD Khan, the spokesman for the Pakistan Foreign Office, present a "window of opportunity that can convince Islamabad and New Delhi to collaborate in creating a working relationship for bringing peace and stability to the area". The US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina ROCCA, declared in New Delhi in September 2003 that Pakistan was going through a dramatic political, economic and ideological transformation. It has not yet managed to avoid the threats of a major catastrophe with several moving parts. It needs help to accomplish a smooth landing that reverses unsettling internal trends, reorients it as a moderate Muslim state and ultimately eradicates all forms of terrorism that originate there. We think that Indians should welcome such help and I understand that many do. The United States appears eager to establish a durable alliance with India in order to further its strategic and financial objectives. In actuality, the US has an interest in preventing hostilities between the two neighbors. For the benefit of its citizens, Pakistan must also experience peace in order to grow quickly in the cutthroat world of the twenty-first century. It must both maintain its ability to deter with nuclear and conventional weapons and simultaneously clean up its own mess by fortifying itself through advancements in the economy and political power.

### **India US Strategic Cooperation: A Fresh Start**

India, the dominant nation in South Asia, advocated for non-alignment during the Cold War and took advantage of both superpowers, without forming an alliance. India turned to the United States with the fall of the Soviet Union. The well-established Jewish lobby in the US and the neo-conservatives who supported President Bush's government wanted to view Pakistan through an Indian lens. The US "abandoned its long-standing practice of trying to have India and Pakistan treated "equitably" when it came to issues pertaining to their respective safety concerns", which was a stark shift in US policy.<sup>62</sup> In fact, it appeared as though US policy had reversed. There was a bias in support of Pakistan during the Cold conflict, but that bias shifted in favor of India following the conflict. President Clinton's 1999 visit to India, which lasted five days, was a notable illustration of this policy, as did his five-hour visit to Pakistan. After taking office in January 2001, the conservative George W. Bush administration was keen to significantly change the US strategic strategy for four distinct regions: 1) the EU relationship; 2) the scope of the new

security architecture; 3) the shift in China's strategy from constructive engagement to strategic rivalry; 4) the upgrading of the historic relations with Pakistan and the strengthening of the relationship with India. It is obvious that the Bush administration's approach to South Asia prior to 9/11 was to maintain a bias towards India while deteriorating ties with Pakistan. India responded to Bush's proposal for a new global order with great enthusiasm. Why was India so supportive? Numerous justifications are possible: 1) India was keen to usurp Pakistan as Washington's strategic ally in South Asia; 2) India desired an easing of nuclear explosions sanctions from the US; and 3) India desired support from the United States to secure its permanent place on the Security Council of the United Nations. In the end of 2001, the administration of George W. Bush had implemented several measures to strengthen ties with India, including airlift support, airborne assault, airborne search and rescue and logistics transfer. As part of Operation Enduring Freedom Afghanistan, the Indian Navy cruisers SUKANYA and SHARDA escorted US ships across the Malacca Straits in June and July of 2002. US warships started to refuel in Mumbai and Chennai. September 2002 saw the biggest-ever naval drill between the United States and India (The White House, 2017). Over 180 senior officials from the Indian security sector attended conferences in 2003 that were supported by the US Department of Defense. The existing relationship holds great importance for the entire world, not just for the United States and India. Recently, combined exercises, high-level visits, training exchanges, US defense sales to India and training exchanges have all contributed to the growth of defense contacts. The US's attempts to include India in agreements such as the Logistics Support Agreement (LSA) and Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) indicate that it intends to take things a step further (MUNIR, Ahsan).

### **India and 9 11, US Counter Terrorism Cooperation**

India provided the United States with significant assistance in its counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks. This encompassed the utilization of many Indian military installations, a proposal never extended to the former USSR, which served as New Delhi's supporter in the final years of the Cold War. Prior to the start of the US-led OEF, India also gave the US satellite photos of Afghanistan. The Indian Navy aided the US effort in the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) by escorting ships passing through the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea with military equipment.

In a combined speech released on eighteen July with American head of State and Indian PM emphasized the importance of "vigorous counter-terrorism cooperation" in order to "combat terrorism relentlessly" during his visit to Washington. The proclamation reinforced the military agreement reached on June 28, 2005, which aimed for strengthening the two nations' militaries' ability to "promote security and counter terrorism. President Bush accelerated the process by discussing the expansion of a bilateral "global partnership" during his three-day visit to India in March 2006. That Joint Statement underlined that terrorist activity is an international plague that must be battled and eradicated in all parts of the world, in addition to highlighting the enhanced counterterrorism cooperation between the two nations". Increasing ties with India are imperative, as stated by US authorities on multiple occasions. In an editorial that appeared in the April 2007 Washington Post, Nicholas Burns, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, argued that "two more giant steps" should be taken to forge a global alliance, boost bilateral counterterrorism cooperation and fortify the military. Burns hailed stronger Indo-US connections. US diplomats consider one of the most significant parts of the two nations' altered relations to be the bilateral defense cooperation, which had increased dramatically by 2004 between the US and India wording of

“shared national interests and common principles”, which includes stopping the spread of weapons, stopping terrorism and preserving regional stability. Leading US commanders have stressed the necessity and future possibility of increasing military cooperation with India. In April of 2007, U Command chief Admiral Tim Keating informed a Senate subcommittee that the Pentagon intended to “aggressively” pursue extending military-to-military cooperation with India.

India and the US have conducted a wide range of collaborative military exercises in addition to multiple counterterrorism initiatives. In addition to heightened military cooperation, stronger military-to-military ties have resulted in joint counter-insurgency training between army units at the company level and several naval, aviation and ground exercises between the India & America since 2002. A company of US marines visited India in October 2006 as part of an Indian army counterterrorism drill. In September 2006, the Indian Army sent a company to Hawaii to train alongside US Army Pacific forces. Additionally, both countries’ Special Forces have focused on high-altitude operations and training in Jammu & Kashmir, which is close to the border between China and India. In the northeastern Indian state of Mizoram, at the CIJW School in VAIRAGNATE, some US army men have trained in jungle terrain. With the exception of a slight decline in 2006–2007, US aid to India via IMET program has tripled since 2000.

### **Consequences of the US-India Nuclear Agreement**

The nuclear agreement between India and the United States, which started as a discussion between the two presidents of state in July 2005, has completely changed the dynamic between the two nations. Advocates of the India-US civil nuclear accord have portrayed it in India as merely necessary for acquiring fuel and technology for the nation’s nuclear energy strategy. However, US representatives have consistently stated that they were prepared to eliminate India’s nuclear sanctions in return for India entering into a “strategic partnership” with the US. In addition, the export of reactors from India’s collapsing nuclear sector generates billion-dollar contracts and employs thousands of Americans. During her April 5, 2006, hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

CONDOLEZA Rice said: The US’s several strategic publications outline its broader strategic strategy for Asia. It has recognized the nuclear agreement as a pivotal component of this policy and India as an essential strategic partner in Asia. The main barrier to India-US ties, according to WJ. Burns, undersecretary of state for political affairs, was the imposition of nuclear sanctions on September 18, 2008. The nuclear agreement is significant on its own, but it has also advanced our ties more quickly and thoroughly than any previous development as it tackles and removes the main barrier that has prevented better relations for decades. The nuclear agreement between the US and India has also revealed Washington’s bias towards India. India is acknowledged as a nuclear power informally as it is not a signatory to the NPT. In advancing US foreign policy objectives, such as free trade, democracy and energy cooperation, President Bush views India as an ally. Pakistan, a crucial ally in the fight against terrorism, is extremely displeased with the nuclear pact. This demonstrates the US’s tendency towards unilateral action with little to no consideration for the effects on the balance of power and stability in region.

It should not be overlooked that, in contrast to Pakistan, India has never submitted to US dictates in this new alliance. India is therefore the equal partner and there is a certain warmth and consistency of character in Indo-US relations. India is undoubtedly viewed as the US’s regional manager in terms of



political strategy. The crucial point is that Pakistan's security environment is directly impacted by and made worse by the US-Indian relationship. The strategic alliance between the US and India directly affects Pakistan and the US relationship. Concerns regarding the US-India nuclear agreement have been voiced by Pakistan. Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA), acting on behalf of President Pervez Musharraf, released the following statement: Given that the US-India deal would allow India to create a considerable amount of fissile material and nuclear weapons from unsafeguarded nuclear reactors, the NCA voiced solid resolve that our credible minimum deterrence needs will be met. This suggests that South Asia may be on the verge of a fissile material race. Such a race would be costly, dangerous and counterproductive to South Asia's attempts at peace and development.

### **USA future policies towards Pakistan**

The US will withdraw its military from Afghanistan in August 2021. Pakistan, which has strong economic ties to China, was kept at a distance by the Biden administration's increasing focus on strategic confrontation with China in Asia following their withdrawal from Afghanistan. Khan then openly accused the United States of pressuring Pakistan into its "War on Terror", which claimed over 80,000 lives and caused over \$123 billion in losses to the country's economy. On April 12, SHAHBAZ Sharif became Pakistan's 23rd prime minister following Imran Khan's removal in an opposition-led motion of no confidence. Imran Khan, who has not yet offered any proof, said that his removal was the consequence of a scheme orchestrated by the United States to punish him for pursuing an independent foreign policy with China and Russia. The already tense relationship between the United States and Pakistan has worsened because of Khan's choice to incorporate foreign policy into his domestic political campaign and utilize it as a tool for his political survival. USA Secretary of State Antony BLINKEN congratulate SHEHBAZ shortly after he became prime minister and stated, "for the sake of the interests of our two nations, the United States believes that Pakistan must be powerful, prosperous and democratic". USA aim to establish strong connections with the new Pakistani government while also pressing them to utilize their influence with the Taliban to fulfil the international community's demands makes it obvious that the scope of bilateral relations is quite narrow and security-centric. In order to do this, the US might encourage the IMF to support Pakistan's faltering economy, support Pakistan's removal from the FATF's grey list and recognize Pakistan's contributions to the fight against terrorism. In order to mend U.S.-Pakistan relations, SHEHBAZ government will still need to perform critical damage control. Through restored relations with the new Pakistani leadership, the US would also like to reclaim lost ground and change how Pakistanis see it.

### **USA Future Policies towards India**

There are still four concerns that are very crucial. First, India's present policy may be affected by Biden's policies towards Pakistan and China. Trump's adamant resistance to China benefited Indian interests; notwithstanding the difficulties, it may have caused the United States. India could really consider cooperation with Beijing up until the latest border difficulties, avoiding a frenzied counterbalance against China. India thus got the best of both worlds: US animosity restrained its rival while restricting China's opposition to itself.

Secondly, Biden's position on the trade disputes between the US and India is unclear. As a developing country, India asks for the restoration of its preferential access to the US market. Thirdly, Biden's commitment to tackling international concerns like climate change offers chances for future US-India collaboration. Liberal U.S. visa regulations for Indian professionals may also lessen the pain of these trade issues, though they still seem certain to worsen.

## Conclusion

The United States finds the South Asian region strategically essential, since it paves the path for the US to balance its strength, particularly with the assistance of India and Pakistan. Because India and Pakistan are two significant, nuclear-armed nations in the South Asian area, it is in everyone's best interest to keep the region stable. Providing India preferential treatment at Pakistan's expense will undoubtedly upset South Asia's geopolitical balance. Similarly, Pakistan shouldn't be held accountable for the circumstances in Afghanistan because it is a sovereign nation with the defense and governance capacity to manage its own affairs. As a result, de-hyphenating Afghanistan will enable Afghanistan to exist independently of future blame games, which is crucial for fostering trust. As India wants Afghanistan to be on its side to have more regional influence and Pakistan believes that a peaceful Afghanistan is essential for peace in Pakistan, the removal of US forces from Afghanistan without the establishment of a stable government may also be viewed as a destabilizing factor. A balanced strategy is urgently needed for long-term stability and the US, Russia and China can complement each other's initiatives to improve this impoverished region.

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