

INDIA
NEW ELEMENTS OF UNDERSTANDING
OR
CONTINUATION OF THE CONFRONTATION?

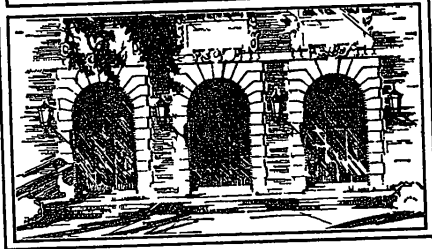
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INDIA NEW ELEMENTS OF UNDERSTANDING OR
CONTINUATION OF THE CONFERENCE?

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Meeting of EXPERIS

PAKISTAN AND THE ARC OF CRISIS

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I INTRODUCTION WHOSE ARC, WHOSF CRISIS?

The assumption of this conference is that there is an arc of crisis stretching from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent to the Horn of Africa. While it is true that many states within this region face crises of great importance, the widespread use of this phrase in recent years is due more to our changing perceptions of the area than events that have occurred within it. In brief, the concept is Western in origin and not all regional states would agree that they form part of such an arc.

This is especially true of India, the largest and (next to the Soviet Union) militarily most powerful state in the area. India has a different angle of vision, a different set of strategic priorities, and a different set of interests than we do. The official Indian position has been that conflict in the Indian Ocean region (they rarely if ever use the phrase arc of crisis) is due primarily to the intervention of outside powers. If such powers would merely leave the region alone, it would again return to normal. This position is transparently self-serving (if outside powers depart the area, this leaves India as the single largest and most powerful regional state) and deceptive (for, as we shall discuss below, India's interests in the region are complex and varied). However, even if the NATO states and Japan do not come to share the Indian view in whole or in part, they must understand it, for India alone among regional states has the military capacity and stable political leadership to play a major regional role, be it positive or negative. This is most clearly evident in the case of Pakistan, the focus of our concerns this week, but it must be remembered that historically it was the Indian Army which was used as the regional enforcer by the British over a hundred-year period. Further, this will shortly be a nuclear India, not a mere regional state but a budding world power.¹

II INDIA S WORLD VIEW LEVELS OF CONCERN

The quickest way to point out the differences between Western and Indian perceptions of the arc of crisis is to set forth the major Indian security concerns ² These are arrayed over four levels stretching from the purely domestic to the purely global

Domestic Disorder

A large number of highly localized factors trends and events impinge on India's security policy usually indirectly But they are beyond the range of influence of outside states so we need only list them and present a summary evaluation Such events as the breakdown of urban law and order rural violence the revolt of tribal groups and increased dacoit activity (in central India) smuggling political corruption an upsurge of unrest among Scheduled Castes and perhaps even railway security are all examples of turmoil within India Yet historically the Indian system has been able to cope with such disturbances with great success This is partly because the internal security apparatus has been modified (by the creation of massive paramilitary forces under state and central control), and partly because India is such a vast complex (indeed continental) political system that it is rare to find major disturbances occurring in more than two or three regions at a time

It could be said that in this respect India (and Pakistan) are like Japan in their importance to the West Merely being a reasonably stable state satisfies most Western interests in the region Indeed we overlook the contribution that India makes to regional stability by tending to its own affairs

Domestic and Regional Factors

There are however several sets of issues which cut across national boundaries and are important to both domestic and foreign policy. These factors arise out of the complex ethnic overlap between India and its weaker neighbors and the interdependence of regional economies.

In India's volatile Northeast in U P and Bihar in Kashmir and Punjab and scattered through the rest of the nation are tribal ethnic and religious groups that have political or other links abroad. Most of these links are to neighboring states (Pakistan Bangladesh Sri Lanka Nepal and China). In almost every case there has been some attempt on the part of neighbors or others to influence one or another group. In the case of Indian Muslims and Pakistan (and perhaps other Muslim countries) there is an ideological dimension as well. From an Indian perspective the ideas that flow freely through the passes of Kashmir and NEFA are as dangerous as the guns. The Muslim question is particularly vexing as it strikes at the very heart of India's constitutional identity as a secular democratic state. Indian Muslims have more political freedom than their Pakistani brethren but they also appreciate the tie to a broader Islamic world and the idea that Pakistan in some ways represents a safety valve for them should their position in India become intolerable.

At best this only complicates India's relations with Pakistan and other Muslim countries. Indian Muslims are not physically located in a strategic place (the exception being Kashmir but Kashmiris are among the least militant of Indian Muslims and among the best controlled by military and paramilitary units).

The obverse dimension of ethnic overlap is the concern felt within India for groups in neighboring countries that have ties to India. Particularly the ideological links between the Nepal Congress and politicians in parts of U P and Bihar, the large Hindu minority in Bangladesh, and the limited family ties between Indian Muslims and their Mahajir relatives in Pakistan are all potential security-related issues. A major factor in Indo-Nepali relations in the 1960s was the support given to Nepali democrats by Indians, and a factor in the decision to intervene in East Pakistan in 1971 was the treatment of Hindus by both the Pakistan Army and the so-called Biharis. The Indian government was afraid that the exodus of refugees would destabilize West Bengal, and there was some suspicion that Pakistan was trying to sink India by generating the refugee population. Much the same concern had been raised in 1963-4, in that case massive communal rioting (over the theft of the Prophet's hair from Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar) broke out in Orissa, Bihar, and West Bengal, and communal Hindu groups systematically tried to push Indian Muslims over the border into East Pakistan.

A final source of tension are disputes over regional resources. The outstanding issue is likely to be the development of water resources shared by India, Nepal, China, and Bangladesh. On the one hand is the powerful economic incentive to cooperate, on the other there is disagreement over the mode of cooperation. India insists on bilateral discussions with its smaller neighbors while the latter are afraid of being dominated on a one-to-one basis and press for regional arrangements. Similar problems occur in developing joint navigation schemes, weather information sharing, trade and marketing arrangements, and terms of trade. In almost every case India's smaller neighbors are afraid of both the power of the Indian

economy and the dynamism of Indian culture. In India it is a highly emotive issue especially if there is the suspicion that external powers are encouraging or supporting a smaller neighbor of India.

Regional and International Factors

At a third level of analysis are factors which lie at the boundary of regional and international concern. These are by far of greatest importance to outsiders worried about India's relationship to the arc of crisis although they do not necessarily hold that position within India itself. Chief among these factors are the increase or decrease in support to regional states by external powers especially the Soviet Union, the impact on the region of a superpower presence, the uncertain quality of Chinese and American interaction with both Pakistan and India, and the likely course of nuclear proliferation. Each of these has a profound effect on Indian calculations of the direction, duration, and intensity of future war.

The Soviet-Indian Tie: What are its Premises?

There is room for disagreement as to the basic motivation behind the Soviet support for India, and therefore there must be some ambiguity over the future of the Soviet-Indian relationship. Soviet specialists tend to argue for the importance of India in Soviet policy towards China (and point out that the U S S R only became a major factor in South Asia after Pakistan developed a military relationship with China, and after Chinese troops engaged in armed conflict with the Soviets). Others note the durability and consistency of the Indo-Soviet tie, and India's importance as the largest, most powerful non-aligned friend of the Soviet Union. They also dismiss the significance of the ten Indian army divisions facing

China in Tibet I support the former position and would further argue that the Indian military are not as dependent upon the Soviet Union as has been generally assumed Let us first look at the military calculation

It has been suggested that India will find it very difficult to break away from its Soviet source of weapons In particular the comparison is drawn between India's dependence on Russia and that of Egypt and the difficulty Egypt has encountered in finding alternative sources

If there is a proper analogy it is not Egypt but Pakistan in 1965 Pakistan found itself cut-off entirely from American weapons spare parts and new purchases although spares were later provided much Pakistani equipment was already obsolete and almost entirely American in origin Further this applied to the Pakistan Air Force

Pakistan improvised sought Chinese help and found other sources of spares It did not exactly thrive under its new circumstances but it was able to hold off India in the Western sector in 1971 also it did not lose East Bengal for lack of equipment An Indian general when faced with a potential cutoff of Soviet equipment would not despair or draw the Egyptian comparison but would point out that India is much better equipped than was Pakistan to absorb a cutoff from a major arms supplier not only does it have access to European weapons and its own indigenous military production facilities its civilian industrial base is infinitely greater than Pakistan's He might even consult his Pakistani counterparts where he would learn that the cutoff forced Pakistan to develop indigenous systems which--while not as good as the American--were adequate and led to improvement in Pakistan's capacity to absorb and improvise If political calculations change (shaped in part by a Soviet presence in the region) then weapons dependency may not be as important as has generally been assumed and such changes might be possible even within the next few years

The Regional Role of China

The salient quality of Chinese policy towards India is its unpredictability. Indian administrators and soldiers are deeply suspicious of China and do not rule out a resumption of open conflict between India and China. They cite the 1979 attack on Vietnam as evidence that the Chinese have not abandoned the use of force in dealing with its southern neighbors. The difficulty of predicting Chinese behavior, the unsettled character of Chinese politics, and China's nuclear capability all fuel Indian caution and fear. For Indians, China is not only a factor in superpower politics but a factor in its own region and thus an additional link between regional politics and global strategic politics.

If China's potential hostility is nearly a permanent factor in Indian calculations, then the American-China relationship is seen as largely negative. Indeed, China supports Pakistan with weapons and propaganda, and the U.S. supports China economically, but in both cases it is India that must face the unintended consequences. Of course, many Indians argue that India is the target of a so-called U.S.-Chinese-Pakistani axis, but one need not subscribe to this view to reach the conclusion that the actual effect is nearly as bad from an Indian perspective.

Nuclear Weapons as a Regional/International Factor³

The third major factor which overlaps regional and international security concerns is the impending nuclearization of South Asia. One element of this nuclearization has been discussed widely: the disturbance it will cause among the world's non-nuclear states. Lewis Dunn and others have described a nuclear proliferation chain extending from South Asia to the Middle East--and by example to other parts of the world. However,

I would point to another linkage between the regional system and the international system

One of the long-range goals of India is to be able to deal with China on their border conflict from a position of equality. This may mean the ultimate development of a nuclear weapon. In the meantime India has been content to rest upon the known and unknown guarantees provided by the two superpowers (now apparently just the U S S R). From a Chinese perspective such efforts are seen not as an independent Indian move but as a consequence of Soviet encirclement strategies. India runs the risk (particularly if it is pushed prematurely into a nuclear program by Pakistan) of inadvertently joining the Soviet-Chinese nuclear imbalance and thus indirectly the larger global strategic nuclear arms race. Would China dedicate part of its force against India? Would Indians know that it was not when to do so merely involved the rewriting of a computer program? Would the Soviets find it worthwhile to assist an Indian nuclear program if the likely targets were to be in China?

Merely to raise these questions--which will be the common talk in the bazaar in a few years--is to indicate how little we have thought about them for no immediate answers suggest themselves. I would venture to argue that not only do many Indians think of themselves as a natural target for China but that this is so because they are a natural rival for China and that many in the West are once again coming around to this view. The more we know of China the less impressed we are with its technical and political capabilities. As China once again veers towards a position somewhere between the Soviets and the Americans we again appreciate how little we have in common with them politically, culturally, or economically and how

important are our ties with the only slightly smaller but relatively open states of Southern Asia

Exogenous International Events

Finally Indian security is deeply affected by certain events which occur outside of its region and beyond its control. Chief among these events was the breakdown in the unrestricted supply of oil from India's major suppliers before India reached anything approaching self-reliance.⁴ Skillful Indian diplomacy has seen it through the oil price increase and the Iran-Iraq war (both suppliers) would India be as helpless as the rest of the world in the face of a new crisis one which really shut off the flow? Perhaps not. In the face of a cataclysmic event in the Gulf and the realization that disaster lay ahead some Indian leaders would consider a more activist policy. The Indian Army was the original surrogate for the British in the Gulf such units as the Baluch Regiment being raised as early as the 1830s precisely for this purpose (although before oil became important). During both World Wars Indian Army units, Indian intelligence and Indian civilian officials were deployed in the region. There is a long history of Indian involvement in the region as an instrument of great power politics.

If the crisis were severe enough I am certain that present inhibitions about joining in what would now be termed a neo-imperialist military operation would dissolve. With assurances of an equal voice and equal share it is quite possible that Indian decision-makers would join such an operation. However the military and the navy will lack--for many years--the logistic sealift and airlift capability to engage in such an action (even on a limited scale) without superpower support.

Much of the above argument has been made in the case of Pakistan but the notion of Indian cooperation in the Gulf has seemed far-fetched I would not dismiss it so quickly. Indeed, if it is realistic to consider the Pakistanis as a stabilizing force in the Gulf then it is realistic to assume that the Indians will not be far behind in offering their services both out of concern over the sharing-out and a desire to preempt the Pakistanis.

If one begins to take potential Indian (or Pakistani) involvement in the Gulf seriously then there are important internal military implications. Much of the current Indian doctrine on short-war strategies might have to be supplemented or replaced by the notion of an international constabulary force. India's own involvement in the Congo and the Middle East UN peace-keeping forces provides one historical precedent--certainly more acceptable than earlier duty under the British flag.

Beyond access to oil, India is also dependent upon the broader international system for supplemental purchases of grain, weapons, spares, ammunition, and technology. However (and very much like India's more purely domestic security and law and order problems) these are to some degree self-regulating relationships dependent upon various global markets and unlikely to be the source of a major change in India's security position.

III CONCLUSION

Our brief survey of Indian security interests shows that while Pakistan and the region to the West are important to India, these areas are by no means the only important components of India's world view. India has one foot in the region and one foot on the world stage, and the West will have to accommodate its policies to this fact, just as Indians must accommodate

themselves to the fact that there are legitimate Western security interests in the Persian Gulf the Indian Ocean and even Pakistan

However India has not been ignorant of recent traumatic developments although in discussing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan its diplomats have at times shown insensitivity to the English language and the plight of two and a half million Afghan refugees The official Indian position on the Iran-Iraq war the crisis in Afghanistan and other catastrophes oscillates between silence and the cliché that if only outside powers would go away the region would settle its own affairs

Behind this paralysis of policy lies a real debate within the Indian security community Indians remain divided over their ultimate interests vis a vis Pakistan whether they can live in peace with Pakistan or whether the latter will be so unstable or so provocative that another war (this time to the finish) will be necessary But the hard liners have not won the day and India's cautious policy on the ground since the invasion of Afghanistan has given Pakistan considerable breathing room What complicates thought on this problem is that India's ultimate relationship with Pakistan is intimately tied to its present relationship with the three major military powers of the world the U S S R the U S A and China There has been considerable movement away from the Soviets and towards a fresh start with the U S A and there would have been even more movement vis a vis the Chinese if the latter had begun to take its southern Asian twin seriously in 1979 when progress on the border issue was possible

I do believe that detente with Pakistan is a real possibility in the next few years and that many individuals in both states have come to see that their common interests are increasingly important Yet there are real obstacles to movement in this direction The first is the knife-

balance of power in Pakistan itself the role of the military has become a permanent feature of Pakistani politics but without either doctrinal base popular support or--indeed--widespread support in the officer corps itself⁵ Further this military dominance of Pakistan concerns Indians who have always been nervous about the contamination of their own military Indian elites are suspicious of the U S role as Pakistan's chief weapons supplier (although this may not in fact be the case) The linkage between the Pentagon and the generals of Rawalpindi is an old theme in India and it is one of Zia's great accomplishments to have begun to persuade India that he is different than his predecessors Finally there are those in India (and indeed Pakistan) who support the Soviet position that unity between these two states is fraught with danger The last thing the Russians want is a de facto security arrangement between these two militarily effective states having them turn their weapons outward rather than upon each other

The Soviets would like to see the present mini cold war between India and Pakistan go on indefinitely Each is then dependent upon the Soviet Union to some extent if only because the other is the Soviets could ultimately emerge as the de facto balancer of the South Asian system a feat that they attempted in 1965-8

Embedded in the above analysis are four alternative security futures for South Asia These are 1) the continuation of the present status quo and hostility between India and Pakistan just short of war 2) Indian emergence as the regional dominant leader after the destruction of Pakistan's military capability 3) increased Soviet influence to the point where they manage the Subcontinent and 4) a contained India as regional leader The last would involve real detente between India and Pakistan the negotiation of a series of security and arms control agreements joint determina-

tion of relative force levels and disposition of major units and (in the context of overall Indian dominance) an agreement that Pakistan could at least maintain a minimum deterrent (hopefully a conventional rather than a nuclear one)

I have elsewhere argued that the last future is not an impossible goal and that the presence of the Russians in Afghanistan and the Americans in Diego Garcia and elsewhere may be a stimulus to regional states to move in this direction⁶ What can outsiders do to encourage these two states to move in this direction or at least to see that the present balanced imbalance between India and Pakistan does not come crashing down?

First it is essential to recognize that Pakistan's security will always rest on Indian good will (or at least Indian calculations of gain and loss) Helping Pakistan meet the crisis to the west without equally vigorous movement to the east is self-destructive and if various Western powers have not recognized this at least it has become a major theme of President Zia ul Haq's campaign to restore normal relations with India Further it must be recognized that a weak Pakistan is no less a threat to India than a strong Pakistan and many Indians are coming to acknowledge this point They do not want to see Soviet soldiers pouring in to the Northwest Frontier Province (no doubt at someone's invitation) and have the Indian Army face them across the Indus There is an upper level and a lower level of Pakistani military power above which Pakistan becomes an unnecessary threat to India and below which it becomes a temptation to India the determination of these levels is one of the most critical regional security issues

Secondly outsiders must be clear about their priorities when it comes to nuclear proliferation Will we tolerate a nuclearized Pakistan? Will

we tolerate an Indian attack (a la Israel) on Pakistani nuclear facilities? Will we use force ourselves? What steps would we ultimately be willing to tolerate to stop an Indian nuclear program? What is interesting is that most governments have tried to postpone making these choices or even thinking very deeply about the problem.

Thirdly there are areas where the major outside economic powers can make a useful contribution to regional stability. There are a number of joint river and water projects that could be pursued by India and one or more of its neighbors. There is room for expansion of informational and educational programs (especially on the issue of nuclear war) and there are even joint regional nuclear programs that could be pursued which would benefit from outside support and encouragement. In brief if the Western powers and Japan are serious about enhancing the rewards for cooperative behavior in South Asia between India and Pakistan and are not to be entirely hypocritical about their nuclear policies they should be offering to sponsor such programs.

Finally some day there will have to be movement on those territorial issues which are also disputes over national identity and purpose. Kashmir is the most obvious problem but the Indian border conflict with China goes to the heart of India's perception of itself as an important power and is also intimately related to the Soviet border dispute with China. There may be little that outsiders can do here by way of direct intervention but movement on these issues (or at least agreement to defer them while moving on to more amenable ones) is a necessary part of a broad strategy of reconciliation.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 For discussion of idea of India as a great power see Stephen P Cohen and Richard I Park India Emergent Power? (New York Crane Russak 1978) and John W Mellor ed India A Rising Middle Power (Boulder Westview 1979)
- 2 For a selection of informed Indian writing on these issues see Bimal Prasad ed India's Foreign Policy Studies in Continuity and Change (Delhi Vikas 1979) K Subrahmanyam ed Nuclear Myths and Realities India's Dilemma (New Delhi ABC Publishing House 1981) and Sisir K Gupta India and the International System (Delhi Vikas 1981)
- 3 For my views on the regional proliferation problem see Perception Influence and Weapons Proliferation in South Asia (Washington Bureau of Intelligence and Research U S Dept of State 1979) unclassified 56 pp
- 4 Recent reports indicate that India may not be as far away from self-sufficiency as many had assumed See William Stevens "Indian Treasure Offshore Oil" New York Times September 2 1982
- 5 For a full-scale study of the relationship see Stephen P Cohen The Pakistan Army Images of War Visions of Peace (Berkeley University of California Press forthcoming)
- 6 In a discussion paper presented to the IISS in London on July 21-22 1981