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Abstract

In discussions of NATO's failure in Afghanistan, there is an increasing recognition of the damaging influence of competition between India and Pakistan. Yet, while reference to "rivalry" abounds, few authors connect Indian and Pakistani behaviour to the established literature on international rivalry. This paper corrects this explanatory gap by applying findings from the subfield of rivalry research. States engaged in rivalry behave differently; each issue of contention is fused into the broader rivalry relationship. For India, influence in Afghanistan is a component of its regional strategy, designed to maintain dominance over Pakistan in South Asia. For Pakistan, influence in Afghanistan is sought primarily for the opportunity to confront, damage, and frustrate Indian aims. The result is continued violence and instability. For policymakers, an appropriate appreciation of the strategic and political realities in a given region is a prerequisite for future international interventions in order to avoid such complications.

Keywords

Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, NATO, rivalry, international rivalry, international security, civil conflict

Introduction

As the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) prepares to end combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014, its leadership continues to portray public optimism: the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will step up where coalition forces step down, placing the country's security in (putatively capable) Afghan hands. Despite official sanguinity, however, the grim realities facing NATO's *Inteqal* (the Dari and Pashto word for "transition") process suggest great difficulty ahead.

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Almost daily, new spasms of violence punctuate the Afghan landscape, with the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and other insurgent groups moving like sharks in bloodied water, sensing both a weak and fractured ANSF as well as eroding American/NATO resolve. For most objective observers, therefore, the prospects for *Inteqal* are as murky as the achievements of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have been modest. What began as a targeted intervention to eliminate the perpetrators of 9/11 (along with their protectors) has cascaded into a 13-year imbroglio involving immense levels of international economic, political, and security engagement. While al-Qaeda has been crippled (in Afghanistan, at least) and Osama bin Laden killed (in Pakistan, no less), a fragile Afghan state, continued violence, a weak economy, and general uncertainty about the future preclude any sense of real achievement. On the contrary, prevailing wisdom suggests that something has gone wrong in Afghanistan. As such, understanding and interpreting the failure of the international intervention is likely to become a growth industry in the months and years to come.

The recognition that competition between India and Pakistan has played a substantial role in frustrating coalition efforts is a belated but welcome addition to the growing list of explanations for NATO's failure. Yet while reference to "rivalry" abounds, few authors (who, to be fair, are primarily concerned with policy analysis and/or reportage) connect Indian and Pakistani behaviour to the established international rivalry literature.¹ As a consequence, important parts of the analytical record remain incomplete. This paper seeks to correct these explanatory gaps by engaging and applying findings from the subfield of rivalry research. In so doing, the strategic imperatives underpinning Indian and (most importantly) Pakistani behaviour are laid bare, enhancing conventional analysis of the war in Afghanistan and highlighting the inadequacy of key components of US/NATO policy.

Whither Afghanistan?

In a recent review article, Roland Paris surveys four putative explanations of US/NATO failure in Afghanistan.² Several themes emerge. Most fundamentally,

1. See Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs* 63, no.1 (2009): 127–140; Shashank Joshi, "India's Af-Pak strategy," *The RUSI Journal* 155, no. 1 (2010): 20–29; Anwesha Ghosh, *Afghanistan from "Enduring Freedom" to "Enduring Chaos"? Implications for India* (New Delhi: Center for Air Power Studies, 2012); Harsh V. Pant, *India's Changing Afghanistan Policy: Regional and Global Implications* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2012); Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, *India's and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan: Implications for the United States and the Region* (Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy, 2012); William Dalrymple, "A deadly triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan, & India," *Brookings Institution*, June 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india-c> (accessed 30 September 2013); for an exception, see Stephen P. Cohen, *Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Conundrum* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012).
2. Roland Paris, "Afghanistan: What went wrong?" *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 2 (June 2013): 539–548. The books reviewed are Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less: The International Project in*

Paris concludes, each explanation emphasizes (to varying degrees) a misunderstanding of Afghan history and political culture. He summarizes: “From the highest levels of decision making to the microdynamics of military patrols and aid projects, foreign organizations and officials seemed to be almost handicapped by their own ignorance of the country. This was a systemic and sustained problem for the operation.”³ Compounding this problem was a persistent short-term outlook in policymaking. Throughout the course of the intervention, expediency was privileged above long-term planning, with ad hoc policies designed to address immediate problems rather than calculated policies meant to pursue clearly identified goals. As the years passed and decisions compounded, an incoherence in decision making emerged: a movement from “light-footprint” to comprehensive counter-insurgency (COIN) and a surge announced at the same time as a withdrawal date are but two prominent and well-known examples. There was, in other words, an absence of *strategy* (which Paris defines as “a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim”⁴) in favour of *tactics* (rendered largely ineffective, moreover, by the aforementioned ignorance of local and historical realities).

Harvard’s Matt Waldman examines in more systematic detail errors in policy-making—particularly with regard to US military and civilian leadership. The “fundamental, pre-existing [and] structural factors that help explain US mistakes” in Afghanistan are explored through 51 in-depth interviews “with current or former senior US officials, advisers to US decision-makers, UK officials, and experts or academics with relevant knowledge or insights.”⁵ Waldman’s interviews reveal the interplay between structural pressures and psychological pathologies in generating policy errors in Afghanistan: risk-aversion, overconfidence, oversimplification, false analogies, attribution error, and other cognitive biases were reinforced, compounded, and perpetuated by institutional inertia, frequent personnel rotations, lack of regional experts, intelligence errors, domestic politics, and other organizational/institutional dynamics. In addition to creating flawed policies, the conjunction of these factors effectively proscribed policy re-evaluation and “course correction”—in other words, proper strategic planning in the manner outlined by Paris.

While decision-making pathologies and organizational dysfunctions are obviously key to understanding the failures of the international intervention itself, these explanations are only part of the broader equation with regard to realities in present-day Afghanistan. US/NATO policy, after all, does not (and did not) exist in a vacuum; policies are inadequate, misguided, or failed only in relation to the complex environment in which they are implemented. In this sense,

Afghanistan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Ravij Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Noah Coburn, *Bazaar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); and Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

3. Paris, “Afghanistan: What went wrong?” 545.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Matt Waldman, “System failure: The underlying causes of US policy-making errors in Afghanistan,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013): 825.

understanding the dynamic elements of the political, cultural, and strategic environment in Afghanistan—the “motivations, objectives and perspectives of other actors,” as Waldman puts it—is a necessary component of any explanation of US/NATO failure.

The importance of Pakistan’s cooperation (or lack thereof) with NATO/ISAF has long been recognized; for years, limiting military operations to Afghan territory allowed insurgents to slip across the Afghanistan–Pakistan border into relative safety, where they could recuperate, replenish, and coordinate future attacks. Many top Taliban officials, such as Mohammed Mullah Omar, used (and continue to use) Pakistan as an operating base.⁶ In 2009, the Obama administration intensified its pressure on Pakistan by articulating its strategic priorities in the region. In the years since, however, it is clear that Islamabad has remained reluctant to meaningfully target the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and other insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan. While the recent (and highly controversial) unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV—or more colloquially, “drone”) campaign has mitigated Pakistani “safe havens” to a degree, Islamabad continues to support and protect elements of the insurgency, contributing to violence in Afghanistan and frustrating US/NATO efforts.

Since 2001, the US has aggressively pursued an enhanced relationship with Pakistan in the belief that continued diplomatic pressure coupled with significant economic, military, and development aid could induce Pakistani support in Afghanistan (or, at the very least, end Islamabad’s deliberately deleterious activity). In recent years, however, the public facade of cooperation has all but crumbled.⁷ With the observation that purposeful support could not be bought or coerced, analysts have sought to account for Pakistan’s obstinacy by exploring Islamabad’s “strategic calculus” vis à vis Afghanistan. The result has been an increasing (if belated) recognition that India, Pakistan’s long-standing existential enemy, drives most, if not all, of Pakistan’s behaviour in the region.

Perhaps the most forceful articulation of this point comes from the British historian William Dalrymple. In a recent essay for the Brookings Institution, Dalrymple argues that “the hostility between India and Pakistan lies at the heart of the current war in Afghanistan.”⁸ While Western observers tend to think in terms of NATO/ISAF versus the Taliban, “in reality,” writes Dalrymple, “this has long since ceased to be the case.”⁹ Instead, India and Pakistan have expanded

6. See Ashok Behuria, “Fighting the Taliban: Pakistan at war with itself,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 4 (2007): 529–543; Christine Fair, “Time for sober realism: Renegotiating US relations with Pakistan,” *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2009): 149–172; Christine Fair, “Under the shrinking US security umbrella: India’s end game in Afghanistan?” *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2011): 179–192.
7. For a thorough discussion of the deteriorating US–Pakistan relationship, see Christine Fair, “The US–Pakistan relations after a decade of the war on terror,” *Contemporary South Asia* 20, no. 2 (2012): 243–253; also Paul Staniland, “Caught in the middle: America’s Pakistan strategy,” *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2011): 133–148.
8. Dalrymple, “Deadly triangle,” section 2.
9. *Ibid.*

their decades-long conflict into Afghanistan, such that the present (and future) situation is (and will be) largely shaped by the South Asian rivals. Understanding the dynamics of the relationship between India and Pakistan, and Afghanistan's place within that relationship, thus becomes a necessary component of understanding the broader conflict.

The point is not to suggest that South Asian rivalry is *solely* responsible for frustrating US/NATO efforts over the past decade, or is singularly determinative of future prospects in Central and South Asia; rather, regional rivalry is a crucial (and, until more recently, often overlooked) portion of a larger, complex tableau of pressures, problems, causes, and consequences which collectively collide in contemporary Afghanistan. The complete image—that is, a definitive and discrete explanation of the failure in Afghanistan—is beyond the purview of this (or any other) work. As Paris adroitly observes:

The problem is not a lack of credible explanations but a surfeit of them: the porosity of the country's borders and the role of Pakistan in harboring and supporting insurgents; the failure to disarm Afghan militias or to challenge the power of local warlords; the prevalence of poppy cultivation and the enormous size of the illegal drug economy; the absence of a transitional justice process; tensions between civilian and military components of the operation and the "militarization" of aid; difficulties of coordination among the national contingents within ISAF; the constraining effect of the "caveats" that some troop-contributing nations placed on their own forces—and the list goes on.¹⁰

Understanding this broader tableau requires each particular portion to be properly defined, examined, and detailed. To this end, an application of established research on international rivalry can help clarify the strategic imperatives underpinning Indian and Pakistani behaviour in Afghanistan, enhancing existing explanations of NATO's failure.

International rivalry

Not all conflicts (not even all wars) result in rivalry; were it so, the concept would be analytically empty, a mere catalogue of conflicts between nations. One of the sad truths of the history of international relations is the ubiquity of violence and war. Rivalry is but a subset (albeit an important one) of this larger pattern. Although different criteria exist to classify international rivalries,¹¹ there is considerable overlap on dozens of core cases, of which India–Pakistan is one. These rivalries are unmistakably distinct from "normal" international relationships, displaying

10. Paris, "Afghanistan: What went wrong?" 546.

11. For an overview of the different lists, selection criteria, and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, see Michael P. Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William R. Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics: Position, Space, and Conflict Escalation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially chapter 2.

patterns of conflict that challenge conventional interpretations of state behaviour. For scholars of international rivalry interested in explaining divergent behaviour (such as the consistent exaggeration or overestimation of threats, or the outlay of significant blood and treasure for seemingly marginal interests), the rivalry approach offers insight into the unique qualities borne of repeated confrontation between the same two states in the international system.

The fundamental insight of the rivalry framework is the intuitive notion that “conflicts and wars are related to each other.”¹² That is, particular events (wars, conflicts, disputes) are not ahistorical but part and parcel of a larger and ongoing narrative. William Thompson and David Dreyer effectively summarize the perceptual shift that occurs as a result:

The states that collide in international space tend to do so repeatedly, especially if they are unable to resolve the conflicts. To the extent that the conflicts persist, the two states in question look at, and treat, each other in ways that are different from the way in which most states interact. They regard each other’s diplomatic and military maneuvers with considerable suspicion. Past defeats and victories are lamented or celebrated. Future attacks or threats are anticipated. As a consequence, the two states surround themselves in a cognitive web of intensifying antagonism, mistrust, and threat expectation that makes future conflict all the more likely.¹³

Despite some (healthy) disagreement between scholars about how exactly to conceptualize and measure rivalry, several key principals have emerged.¹⁴

First, quantitative research has established that conflict and war occur disproportionately between rivals. Gary Goertz and Paul Diehl, for example, found that “of militarized disputes, 45% occur in . . . rivalries, and over half of the wars [in the international system] take place between . . . rivals.”¹⁵ Their work on the war-proneness of rivalries—and the development of their “punctuated equilibrium”

12. Paul F. Diehl, *The Dynamics of Enduring Rivalries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2. While intuitive, this assumption was not always incorporated into studies of international conflict, which traditionally treated war atomistically, separating particular conflicts from their historical context. See for example, Manus Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of War Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).
13. William R. Thompson and David Dreyer, *Handbook of International Rivalries 1494–2010* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011), 2.
14. Early work employed a host of modifiers (“enduring,” “strategic,” “interstate,” etc.) in discussing rivalry, each denoting slightly different approaches to the conceptualization and measurement of rivalry; much recent scholarship has dropped these terms in favour of simply “rivalry.” See, for example, Michael G. Findley, James Piazza, and Joseph Young, “Games rivals play: Terrorism in international rivalries,” *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 1 (2012): 235–248. For a recent appraisal of knowledge cumulation in the rivalry subfield, particularly with regard to internal rivalry dynamics, see Brandon Valeriano, *Becoming Rivals: The Process of Interstate Rivalry Development* (New York: Routledge, 2013), especially chapter 7. Although debates continue within the subfield, my intent in this section is to outline several general principles that capture the key concepts of rivalry and are common to most (if not all) of the different rivalry approaches.
15. Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, “The initiation and termination of enduring rivalries: The impact of political shocks,” *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (February 1995): 32.

model more generally—offers powerful evidence that the study of rivalry is pertinent for scholars of conflict and war.

Second, as William Thompson has observed, “confrontations between rivals . . . work differently than confrontations between nonrivals.”¹⁶ John Vasquez, for instance, suggests that repeated confrontations can reinforce hostility and cause a negative spiral in which states become increasingly antagonistic towards one another: “As conflict recurs, contenders become more concerned with hurting or denying their competitor than with their own immediate satisfaction, and with this, hostility deepens and goes beyond that associated with normal conflict.”¹⁷ This is an important contention. Essentially, Vasquez posits that prior hostility alters how states perceive each other; in situations where there has been a significant level of prior conflict, “there is . . . a tendency for all issues (and the specific stakes that compose them) to become linked into one grand issue—us versus them.”¹⁸ Once this “actor dimension” has become operative, states will abandon a conventional cost-benefit analysis of conflict (a “stake dimension”) and engage in confrontation primarily out of hostility toward their rival. This helps explain behaviour that seems, in isolation, to be counterproductive. It also explains why seemingly limited or minor disputes can result in significant escalation and/or conflict. For instance, states engaged in rivalry may allocate strategic value to a particular issue or stake to a degree far greater than would be the case in an isolated or non-rivalry confrontation.

Third (and as a consequence of the above), all disputes in rivalry are related. Issues of high salience (such as disputed territory) may be important for the birth of rivalry, but hostility from such confrontations is carried over to influence subsequent conflicts, even ostensibly minor or insignificant ones. This dynamic may be particularly difficult for observers to appreciate, since it defies the assumption of discrete cost-benefit calculations on the part of a state. The true source of hostility may not be readily apparent, and may in fact lie in the distant past and/or a different geospatial location entirely. To take an obvious example, no account of the Siachen glacier dispute between India and Pakistan would be complete without an appreciation of the historical relationship between the two countries; an analysis predicated solely on the strategic value, tactical advantage, and/or economic opportunity of the glacier (of which there are/is virtually none) would be almost farcical. That rivalry informs Siachen is clear, yet the dynamic is also operative in less obvious situations. Logically, if one accepts rivalry’s influence in certain interactions, one must accept that it is present in all others between the same two states. Even a situation in which conflict/discord might be predicted between non-rivals carries added sting if rivalry is present—a border incursion more likely to escalate, brinkmanship more likely to break down.

16. William Thompson, “Principal rivalries,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39, no. 2 (1995): 215.

17. John A. Vasquez, “Distinguishing rivals that go to war from those that do not: A quantitative comparative case study of the two paths to war,” *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1996): 532.

18. *Ibid.*

Fourth, states use a variety of means to “manage” rivalry. Because rivalry constitutes a perpetual state of competition, the parameters of the rivalry relationship are constantly subject to challenge from one or both sides. In addition to conventional military confrontation, states actively seek alternative ways to challenge the status quo. Most recently, Zeev Maoz and Belgin San-Akca have noted that while various means (including alliances, arms races, direct military confrontation, and covert operations) have been well documented, “one of the least explored rivalry management strategies consists of indirect confrontation,”¹⁹ that is, the use and support of non-state armed groups (NAGs) as a means by which states may target their rivals indirectly, by proxy. The authors argue that states dissatisfied in a rivalry relationship (with regard to a variety of potential issues—territory, regional position, etc.) but wary of the costs associated with direct military confrontation may employ NAGs to impose costs on their rival and possibly revise the status quo. The costs of supporting NAGs that target a rival are perceived to be significantly lower (though not entirely without risk) than other, more conventional options.

This argument is echoed by Findlay, Piazza, and Young in their examination of rivalry-related state support for terrorism: “States now use terrorist movements to ‘manage’ their interstate rivalries by using them to exact real costs on rivals—the targeted state must spend resources on counterterrorism and often sustains casualties—while preventing higher stakes and more costly military conflict.”²⁰ They further note that the attractiveness of such tactics is enhanced by the ambiguity and “plausible deniability” they afford purveyors vis à vis putative targets and as means by which to overcome major asymmetries in conventional capabilities. For the India–Pakistan rivalry—characterized by significant asymmetries in conventional capabilities as well as the constraints of nuclear deterrence—this dynamic is particularly important.

What becomes clear from the preceding discussion is that rivalry connotes a distinct type of relationship in international relations. States engaged in rivalry behave differently toward one another. A traditional analysis of interaction between state A and state B is appreciably altered if we know that state A = India and state B = Pakistan. Though conflicts and disputes retain much of their straightforward state-interest character (power, resources, position), rivalry embitters relations, causing disproportionate aggression, hostility, and—potentially—escalation. Yet these patterns are predictable; what might be deemed “irrational,” “paranoid,” or “jingoistic” foreign policy is entirely consistent with established rivalry behaviour. As such, a state (or group of states) pursuing policies or interests which may, either directly or indirectly, involve, concern, or affect another state (or states) engaged in rivalry, must account for this dynamic.

19. Zeev Maoz and Belgin San-Akca, “Rivalry and state support of non-state armed groups (NAGs), 1946–2001,” *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2012): 720.

20. Findley, Piazza, and Young, “Games rivals play,” 236–237.

Failure to do so is akin to inviting a recently divorced couple to a dinner party and being surprised when tension and hostility dominate the evening.

The India–Pakistan rivalry is included on virtually every comprehensive list of international rivalries. It is, in other words, an exemplary (and therefore troubling) case. Since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, a total of four wars (1947–1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999) have been fought, along with an additional 43 militarized interstate disputes, each falling like a blow on a bruise.²¹ As TV Paul reflects: “[t]he India-Pakistan rivalry remains one of the most enduring and unresolved conflicts of our times.”²²

The most salient unresolved issue between India and Pakistan is generally recognized to be the territorial dispute over the region of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan is the revisionist state, since it seeks to incorporate the majority-Muslim populations living in the Indian-controlled areas of Kashmir (roughly two-thirds of the territory). India, for its part, prefers the status quo since it considers control over Kashmir to be crucial to its secular identity, and fears that an independent or Pakistani-controlled Kashmir could provide inspiration to secession movements elsewhere in the country. While the relatively limited scope of the Kargil war in 1999 and the peaceful resolution of a border crisis in 2002 led some to cautiously suggest the rivalry was entering a period of significant détente and even termination,²³ such optimism has been offset by repeated crises (such as the prominent Mumbai attacks of 2008) which have once again emphasized that “military tensions and clashes appear to be just another terrorist attack away.”²⁴ Indeed, the once-heralded “progress” on Kashmir seems to have been chimerical, the disputed territory destined for continued violence.²⁵ Even assuming progress *could* be made on the long-standing issue, however, the rivalry framework suggests there would remain significant obstacles to normal relations between the two countries. Recall that a rivalry cannot be reduced to any single issue within it, no matter how volatile or high profile. Beyond Kashmir, new theatres of competition have emerged, most notably Afghanistan.

21. Paul F. Diehl, Gary Goertz, and Daniel Saeedi, “Theoretical specifications of enduring rivalries: Applications to the India-Pakistan case,” in T.V. Paul, ed., *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 27–54.
22. T.V. Paul, “Causes of the India-Pakistan enduring rivalry,” in Paul, ed., *The India-Pakistan Conflict*, 3–24.
23. Robert Wirsing, “In India’s lengthening shadow: The US-Pakistan strategic alliance and the war in Afghanistan,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 34, no. 3 (2007): 151–172.
24. Anit Mukherjee, “A brand new day or back to the future? The dynamics of India-Pakistan relations,” *India Review* 8, no. 4 (2009): 404.
25. In 2013, the cycle of attacks and reprisals over Kashmir resumed, causing, once again, heightened tension and hostility. In January, border exchanges across the Line of Control resulted in deaths on both sides; over the summer, soldiers exchanged fire daily for almost two months. See Hari Kumar and Salmon Masood, “Border clashes between India and Pakistan continue,” *New York Times*, 7 August 2013, http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/07/border-clashes-between-india-and-pakistan-continue/?_r=0 (accessed 14 August 2013).

The India–Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan

In this section, I analyze Indian and Pakistani activity in Afghanistan. First, I discuss the objective interests each country possesses, drawing on extant scholarly analysis, expert commentary, government documents, statements from government officials, and newspaper reports to inform my assessment. Next, I argue that competition in Afghanistan—that is, the pursuit of the interests so established—has been amplified by the dynamics of rivalry. In addition to offering viable immediate interests (in a rational/strategic sense), Afghanistan also represents a new opportunity and venue for rivalry competition. As such, a full understanding of what India and Pakistan are doing in Afghanistan, and why they are doing it with such intensity, requires an appreciation of the implications of international rivalry.

India in Afghanistan

India's current support of the Afghan government is linked to its historical support of the "Northern Alliance" (anti-Taliban forces comprising Tajiks and other ethnic groups operating out of northern parts of the country) during the Taliban era. With the fall of the Taliban in 2001, many Northern Alliance leaders were positioned to assume influential roles in the new Afghan government. As Yadav and Barwa explain:

In the aftermath of the 2001 Bonn Agreement and the formation of a new cabinet under [Hamid] Karzai, it was noted that both the Defense Minister Mohammed Fahim and Abdullah Abdullah—who retained his [Northern Alliance] post as Foreign Minister—had close ties to India and were regular visitors to New Delhi where they enjoyed good access to MEA [Ministry of External Affairs] officials and policymakers. Along with the Uzbek military leader Abdul Rashid Dostum this meant that three of the most important cabinet ministers and figures in Karzai's first administration had deep and important links to India, a fact not lost on other observers or on Pakistan.²⁶

Nor was the opportunity lost on New Delhi. After years of dealing with a hostile Taliban regime, India finally had friends in positions of power in Afghanistan, and has since moved to secure and solidify these relationships.

Most visibly, India has offered significant bilateral aid. As of 2012, India had spent USD\$1 billion in development funds, with a promise to spend an additional USD\$1 billion in the years to come.²⁷ This places it among the top five bilateral donors to Afghanistan, and far exceeds the outlay offered by Pakistan.²⁸ The funds

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26. Vikash Yadav and Conrad Barwa, "Relational control: India's grand strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *India Review* 10, no. 2 (2011): 108.
27. Heather Timmons, "Can India 'fix' Afghanistan?" *New York Times*, 7 June 2012, http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/07/can-india-fix-afghanistan/?_r=0 (accessed 21 July 2013).
28. Evan A. Feigenbaum, "India's rise, America's interest," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2010): 76–91.

constitute “simple but targeted assistance” and provide an array of benefits including health, education, energy, communication, and general infrastructure support.²⁹ The construction of the new Afghan parliament, at a cost of USD\$25 million, is considered to have major symbolic implications, linking the site of Afghanistan’s nascent democracy to India and the Indian people. Also prominent has been the building of the Zaranj-Delaram road, which connects Afghanistan’s main Ring Road to the Iranian border and thus serves as a key piece of transportation infrastructure.³⁰ India has similarly provided major components of energy infrastructure, such as the construction of transmission lines to provide power in Kabul, and a hydroelectric plan in Herat.³¹

In addition to aid, New Delhi has pursued various high-level preferential agreements with Kabul as a means to simultaneously boost development and increase ties between the two countries. Trade agreements, as well as “memoranda of understanding of cooperation” in a variety of fields have helped spur private business development.³² In November 2011, the state-owned Steel Authority of India led a consortium of public and private Indian companies through a successful bid for mining rights in three Afghan provinces—a deal which includes an “800-megawatt power plant and 200 kilometers each of road, rail and transmission lines” and is said to be worth USD\$10.8 billion.³³

Though direct military aid/involvement has, until more recently, been cautiously downplayed, India has nonetheless been extensively involved in the training of Afghan military personnel and has provided defensive military equipment such as armoured checkpoints and watchtowers to the ANSF.³⁴ This trend is set to expand in the near future with the signing of a “strategic partnership agreement” in 2011, which signalled a break from prior reticence to publicly broadcast a security/strategic relationship.³⁵ Indeed, all recent developments suggest that Indian support—already extensive—is likely to increase, particularly in a post-NATO environment. As India’s minister of external affairs SM Krishna articulated in a speech in the spring of 2012: “Our approach of high-level political engagement and broad-based development assistance in a wide range of sectors, which have been identified by the Afghan government as priority areas for reconstruction and development, will not only continue but is set to intensify.”³⁶

29. Joshi, “India’s Af-Pak strategy,” 22.

30. Ganguly and Howenstein, “India-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan,” 131.

31. Fair, “Under the shrinking US security umbrella,” 183.

32. Pant, *India’s Changing Afghanistan Policy*, 7.

33. Timmons, “Can India ‘fix’ Afghanistan?”

34. Pant, *India’s Changing Afghanistan Policy*, 8.

35. Katy Daigle, “Afghanistan signs first strategic pact with India,” *Yahoo News*, 4 October 2011, <http://news.yahoo.com/afghanistan-signs-1st-strategic-pact-india-170409367.html> (accessed 21 July 2013).

36. “Opening Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the Joint Media Interaction during the visit of Foreign Minister of Afghanistan,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1 May 2012, <http://mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?19679/Opening+Remarks+by+External+Affairs+Minister+at+the+Joint+Media+Interaction+during+the+visit+of+Foreign+Minister+of+Afghanistan> (accessed 6 August 2012).

The rationale behind such deep involvement and wide-ranging support is multifaceted. First, there are the obvious economic opportunities that a pliant and friendly Afghanistan could deliver. Foremost among these considerations is access to energy-rich Central Asia, with Afghanistan serving as conduit and corridor. As a potentially crucial component of a broader energy-related competition with China, India has “prioritized the region.”³⁷ The benefits are myriad: “India is... desirous of Tajikistan’s uranium and natural gas, has invested in Uzbek production facilities, and retains interest in a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan. Afghanistan furnishes a diplomatic and logistical foothold in the heart of the region.”³⁸ In addition to energy, Afghanistan is a potentially lucrative hub for regional trade in other goods, both as a target (although the domestic market is likely to remain weak for some time) and as a transit corridor. The realization of such possibilities is contingent on quelling instability in Afghanistan, underscoring the import of India’s development activity.

India’s security considerations, moreover, move beyond the immediate protection of economic interests and assets. Over the long term, India considers it crucial to prevent Islamist extremist groups from returning to power in Kabul. With traumatic memories of the Taliban era, New Delhi recognizes the interconnectedness of extremism in Afghanistan and instability in Kashmir and South Asia more generally. As Ganguly and Howenstein observe: “The rise of Islamist militancy on both sides of the [Afghanistan-Pakistan border]... correlates strongly with the rise in militant capabilities in Kashmir and across the Line of Control.”³⁹ For this reason, as Joshi explains, “India has for a long time—and to a far greater extent than the West—perceived its security to be bound up with events in Afghanistan and on its borders.”⁴⁰

From a broader strategic perspective, many analysts point to Indian involvement in Afghanistan as an important “test case” for Indian ambitions as a regional, and ultimately global, power.⁴¹ Given the aforementioned economic and security implications, India is keen to exert its regional dominance as a signal to China—and others—that it has arrived as a major player on the global stage, capable of wielding influence in its own geographical “backyard.” In this sense, extending influence into Central Asia constitutes the land-based parallel to India’s much-publicized naval foray into the broader Indian Ocean; like power projection on the high seas, dominating events in Afghanistan helps legitimize Indian claims to great power status.

India’s interests in Afghanistan thus include economic, security, and strategic considerations. Yet colouring all elements of India’s involvement is its relationship with Pakistan. After all, none of India’s broader aims can be achieved absent a stable Afghanistan, meaning Pakistan’s presence and support for Islamic

37. Joshi, “India’s Af-Pak strategy,” 22.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Ganguly and Howenstein, “India-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan,” 132.

40. Joshi, “India’s Af-Pak strategy,” 22.

41. Fair “The US-Pakistan relations after a decade of the war on terror,” 251.

extremism are fundamentally at odds with Indian interests. Absent the overarching hostile relationship with Pakistan, Indian activities in Afghanistan would be markedly different. Major economic opportunities would still be present, but the challenges to securing those interests less acute. Moreover, the implications for broader Indian security would be less severe. More generally, it is clear that India's desire for regional supremacy (and thus influence in Afghanistan) assumes an ongoing competition with Pakistan. Given current asymmetries in the relationship (military and economic), denying Pakistan influence in Afghanistan can help preserve the status quo in South Asia.

Pakistan in Afghanistan

Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan, like India's, has origins well before 2001. The historical ties between the Pakistani military—particularly Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)—and insurgent militias are well documented.⁴² Pakistan has employed extensive support for insurgent and terrorist groups as a means by which to bleed India over Kashmir.⁴³ Such tactics also have a long history in Afghanistan. Pakistan was active in its support of Afghan Mujahedeen fighters during the Soviet invasion of the 1980s, during which time the first roots of the Taliban began to form among the Pashtun tribes along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border. Following Soviet withdrawal in 1989, covert assistance to Islamist groups continued, including “military and political support for the Afghan Taliban,” support which ultimately proved critical in helping Taliban forces capture Kabul in the mid-1990s.⁴⁴ As described by Christine Fair, the relationship continued in subsequent years: “From 1994 until 2001, Pakistan provided military, diplomatic, and financial assistance to the Pashtun Taliban movement.”⁴⁵ Following the events of 9/11, Pakistan was forced to re-evaluate this connection. Under pressure from the US and its Western allies (with the Bush administration's staunch admonition that states were “either with us or against us” in the global war on terror), Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf publicly cut ties with the Taliban, angering both the Pakistani public (who were, and remain, predominately anti-American) and many elements inside his own military (who continued to view the Taliban as a valuable strategic asset).

42. See Thomas H. Johnson and Chris Mason, “No sign until the burst of fire,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (spring 2008): 41–77; Lawrence Ziring, “Unraveling the Afghanistan-Pakistan riddle,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 2 (2009): 59–78; Marvin Weinbaum, “Hard choices in countering insurgency and terrorism along Pakistan's north-west frontier,” *Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 1 (2009): 73–88; Sumit Ganguly and Paul S. Kapur, “The sorcerer's apprentice: Islamist militancy in South Asia,” *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no.1 (January 2010): 47–59; Paul S. Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, “The jihad paradox: Pakistan and Islamist militancy in South Asia,” *International Security* 37, no. 1 (summer 2012): 111–141.

43. Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

44. Weinbaum, “Hard choices,” 74.

45. Christine Fair, “Pakistan's relations with Central Asia: Is past prologue?” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (April 2008): 204.

They needn't have worried. Although the Pakistani leadership continues to publicly renounce connections to the Taliban and other insurgent groups, clandestine support has largely been maintained. Pakistan continues to "undermine India's position in Afghanistan by supporting the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and even groups such as LeT [Lashkar-e-Taiba—traditionally known for operating against India in Kashmir], which has been increasingly active in Afghanistan since 2004."⁴⁶ Granted, disagreement exists as to the extent of control Islamabad enjoys over militant groups. Yet, at the very least, Pakistan has the ability to "affect [the] intensity" of the violence perpetrated by insurgents.⁴⁷ More likely, Pakistan maintains intimate involvement with such groups. This possibility was alluded to in the fall of 2011, when the then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, stated before the US Senate Armed Services Committee that militant groups (particularly the Haqqani network) in Afghanistan were "proxies of the government of Pakistan."⁴⁸

Indian interests are often the explicit targets of insurgent attacks—the 2008 attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul, "allegedly directed by Pakistan's intelligence service," being but one prominent example.⁴⁹ New Delhi has blamed numerous killings of Indian workers on Islamabad, citing them as proof that Pakistan seeks to discourage India's presence in Afghanistan. In 2010, a spate of terrorist attacks targeting Indians led Minister Krishna to declare that Indians had become "soft targets" in Afghanistan for terrorist organizations keen on derailing Indian-Afghan relations.⁵⁰ More recent violence, such as the 3 August 2013 suicide bombing attempt on the Indian consulate in Jalalabad which killed nine and injured 21, suggests a continuation of this trend.⁵¹

Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan are multifaceted, although not always as (superficially) coherent as the Indian aims outlined above. Pakistan would also

46. Fair, "Under the shrinking US security umbrella," 181.

47. Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From great game to grand bargain," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2008): 36.

48. "Statement of Admiral Michael Mullen, US Navy Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Afghanistan and Iraq, September 22, 2011," Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington, DC, 2011, 3.

49. Lisa Curtis, "The reorientation of Pakistan's foreign policy toward its region," *Contemporary South Asia* 20, no. 2 (June 2012): 264. One of the more significant revelations of the 2010 "Afghanistan war logs" release by WikiLeaks was the ample documentation detailing ISI involvement in attacks in Afghanistan targeting Indian interests. For instance, an entry on 18 December 2007 describes attempts by an ISI agent (identified as "SARKATEEP") to establish relations with Afghans for the purpose of conducting attacks on Indian consulships in Jalalabad, Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mezar-e Sharif. Another report from 22 March 2008 details an ISI plot to offer between USD \$15,000 and \$30,000 as reward for killing Indian nationals working in Afghanistan. See "Afghanistan: The war logs," <http://www.theguardian.com/world/the-war-logs+tone/news> (accessed 21 January 2014).

50. "Indians in Afghanistan are soft targets: Krishna," *Hindustan Times*, 21 March 2010, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indians-in-afghanistan-are-soft-targets-krishna/article1-521567.aspx> (accessed 22 August 2013).

51. Sayed Salahuddin, "Blast near Indian consulate kills 9 Afghans," *Washington Post*, 3 August 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/blast-near-indian-consulate-kills-9-afghans/2013/08/03/53cc9da-fc16-11e2-9bde-7ddaa186b751_story.html (accessed 30 September 2013).

benefit economically from access to Central Asian energy through Afghanistan. Similarly, a stable and prosperous Afghanistan would constitute a new and proximate market for Pakistani goods. Moreover, geography dictates that trade between India and Afghanistan would likely have to pass through Pakistan, suggesting a mutual Indian–Pakistani interest in this regard. Yet Pakistan’s deep-seated and pervasive desire to block Indian influence in the region at all costs overshadows such considerations.

Frédéric Grare assesses the “paranoia” that defines the Pakistani position:

According to Pakistan, whatever India does in Afghanistan is a ploy against Pakistan, be it economic investment, infrastructure, or any related matter . . . Thus, the reopening of Indian consulates in Afghanistan and the building of roads and other infrastructure have systematically been interpreted by Pakistan as conspiracies against its interests. As a result, Pakistan has ensured that Indian interests would be blocked whenever and wherever possible. It has refused, for example, to give India and Afghanistan transit rights to trade goods across Pakistan.⁵²

Steve Coll, for his part, provides details of an exchange that puts the Pakistani position in even starker terms:

In March [2010], two Pakistani generals—Ashfaq Kayani, the Army chief, and Ahmed Pasha, the head of ISI—met with [Afghan president Hamid] Karzai in Islamabad, and signalled that they could help cool down the Taliban insurgency. In exchange, Kayani said, the Karzai government must ‘end’ India’s presence in Afghanistan. According to a senior Afghan intelligence official, he said, ‘There cannot be any type of Indian presence in Afghanistan—any type.’⁵³

This attitude continues to block even the most mutually beneficial potential cooperation. The long proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, for example (which all parties agree would be of significant economic benefit), suffers from tepid Pakistani support related to anti-Indian concerns.⁵⁴

Explanations for such intense opposition vary. Many point to the belief that Afghanistan is considered a crucial venue through which to achieve “strategic depth” vis à vis India. Faced with a persistently uncertain eastern border, Pakistan is loath to allow inimical forces to also occupy the territory to its west; in case of conventional conflict with India, it may need to retreat into Afghan

52. Frédéric Grare, “Pakistan,” in Ashley Tellis and Aroop Mukharji, eds., *Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), 21.

53. Steve Coll, “War by other means: Is it possible to negotiate with the Taliban?” *The New Yorker*, 24 May 2010, 51.

54. Tridivish Singh Maini and Manish Vaid, “Roadblocks remain to TAPI pipeline construction,” *Oil and Gas Journal*, 3 April 2013, <http://www.ogj.com/articles/print/volume-111/issue-3/transportation/roadblocks-remain-to-tapi-pipeline.html> (accessed 22 August 2013).

territory to wait out attacks and reorganize militarily. Although Pakistani officials now publicly dismiss the “strategic depth” doctrine, the pervasiveness of its logic is striking. Decades of planning for conventional conflict with India have entrenched certain attitudes and beliefs in the Pakistani military leadership, causing many potentially outdated strategies to persist (another example is the continued emphasis on the acquisition of heavy, conventional weaponry in lieu of counter-insurgent capabilities necessary for dealing with domestic extremists).

In addition to a perceived desire for strategic depth, even more extreme scenarios are contemplated, such as the existence of a “US-Indian-Afghan alliance... aimed at undermining Pakistani influence in Afghanistan and even dismembering the Pakistani state.”⁵⁵ According to this belief, an Indian-influenced Afghan regime “would allow an encircling India to create a backdoor military threat to Pakistan.”⁵⁶ On a more specific level, there is considerable concern (complete with accompanying accusations) that India might be stoking ethnic tensions along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, particularly in the region of Balochistan, as “just desserts” for historical Pakistani involvement in Kashmir.⁵⁷ Such admonitions are persistent even though “Pakistan has no strong proof of material assistance from India [to Balochi insurgents] passing through Afghanistan.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Pakistan remains concerned that a strong, centralized, and Indian-backed Afghan regime might reopen nationalist claims to Pashtun areas along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border.⁵⁹

To an even greater extent than India’s, Pakistan’s involvement in Afghanistan can be attributed to the overarching rivalry in South Asia. Specific Pakistani concerns are primarily couched in terms of its rivalry with India—blocking, preventing, disrupting, and damaging Indian interests. “Pakistan,” in the words of Fair, “will oppose India’s engagement at all costs. Pakistan’s revisionism no longer centers on the dispute over Kashmir’s disposition. Pakistan now resists Indian claims of hegemony in South Asia. As Afghanistan is a key theater for Indian influence, Pakistan will not abandon this mission.”⁶⁰ This conclusion is important since it highlights the link between specific opposition of India in Afghanistan and opposition to India more broadly.

Afghanistan as a theatre of rivalry

As mentioned, many recent assessments of the war in Afghanistan have acknowledged the damaging influence of Indian–Pakistani competition. Indeed, several authors have explicitly identified the India–Pakistan “rivalry” as playing an

55. Rubin and Rashid, “From great game to grand bargain,” 36.

56. Ibid.

57. Fair, “Pakistan’s relations with Central Asia,” 215; see also Rasul B. Rais, “Afghanistan and Pakistan: Difficult neighbors,” *The National Bureau of Asian Research* 19, no. 5 (2008): 13–24.

58. Marvin G. Weinbaum and Jonathan B. Harder, “Pakistan’s Afghan policies and their consequences,” *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1 (March 2008): 30.

59. Curtis, “The reorientation of Pakistan’s foreign policy,” 265.

60. Fair, “The US-Pakistan relations after a decade of the war on terror,” 251.

important, if not decisive, role in frustrating NATO efforts and fomenting instability.⁶¹ Yet the use of the term “rivalry” in this context is descriptive, not theoretical. That is, the authors continue to view both India and Pakistan as conventional, rational-strategic actors unencumbered by the distorting effects of compounded hostility as outlined in the theoretical literature on rivalry. For example, Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid offer an excellent overview of the parameters of Pakistan’s interests in Afghanistan, as well as the tension deriving from Indian involvement and the attendant ramifications for coalition success in both political and military terms. Yet their policy prescriptions suggest an under-appreciation of rivalry dynamics. First, they propose that a solution to the Kashmir issue (or at least the prospect of one through US-led dialogue) might alleviate competition in Afghanistan. Next, they submit that a series of regional conferences on economic cooperation might convince both India and Pakistan (along with other regional states) about the benefits of coordinating rather than competing in Central Asia. Neither proposition, however, accurately reflects the *intensity* of Pakistan’s position, which, for reasons discussed below, precludes such ostensibly reasonable proposals.

Other authors seem to recognize the influence of rivalry (in the theoretical sense), but are unable to account for it; they *observe* but cannot *explain* apparently odd or irrational behaviour. Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, for instance, discuss Pakistan’s paranoia regarding India in Afghanistan, noting that perceptions often do not align with strategic realities. Nonetheless, they conclude: “Regardless of whether Pakistan’s desires for its own strategic involvement in Afghanistan are outdated, Islamabad nonetheless sees itself as surrounded by inimical forces . . . In many ways, Pakistan appears to be applying the same gravity . . . to India’s involvement in Afghanistan as it does to the Kashmir issue.”⁶² Precisely. Yet Ganguly and Howenstein offer no particular reason as to *why* the relatively minor (the key term here is relative—despite the real and tangible interests outlined above, no one would argue that Afghanistan is Kashmir’s equal in objective importance) issue of influence in Afghanistan should be afforded the same purchase as a core (and in many ways constitutive) dispute such as Kashmir.

What such conventional appraisals (whether by academics or policymakers) of Indian and Pakistani activity ultimately fail to recognize is that competition in Afghanistan *is* the fight over Kashmir; it is also the Siachen dispute; the wars of 1947–1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999; the border crisis of 2002; the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008; and every other hostile interaction between the two nations since their founding, all compounded and added together. As per the dynamics of international rivalry, all of these disparate battles and disputes have merged such that the identity of the opponent—and not the particular stake at issue—is of primary importance. Activities in Afghanistan are not only assayed according to immediate

61. See footnote 1.

62. Ganguly and Howenstein, “India-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan,” 133.

or even long-term interest, but as a component of the ongoing rivalry, a new venue and theatre for its expression.

For Pakistan, in particular, Afghanistan presents an attractive opportunity for confrontation. Activities in Afghanistan act as a means through which Pakistan is able to challenge India, circumventing its inability to do so conventionally. The preponderance of Indian military power, along with the imperatives of nuclear deterrence, prevent Pakistan from using conventional military means to confront India, despite its continued desire to revise the rivalry status quo. The result is a variant of the “stability–instability” paradox (that is, the stability of nuclear weapons generating instability at other levels) whereby alternative, sub-conventional methods are employed in lieu of traditional forces.⁶³

As a strategy for rivalry management, therefore, Pakistan uses proxies (the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, the LeT, etc.) in Afghanistan. Because of the interconnectedness of disputes within rivalry, hurting India anywhere helps the fight everywhere; the fact that India has myriad and meaningful interests in Afghanistan simply enhances the attractiveness of the opportunity and amplifies the tenacity with which Islamabad will pursue anti-Indian activities in the country. India, in turn, has responded by increasing its support for the Afghan government and reaffirming its commitment to a stable Afghanistan absent Taliban (read, Pakistani) influence. Should the Taliban re-emerge, New Delhi recognizes that Pakistan would regain an important foothold from which Islamic extremism, terrorism, and militancy—with guidance and support from the ISI—could take aim at the Indian state. As such, India’s present involvement in Afghanistan is as much about mitigating Pakistan’s ability to wage sub-conventional war in South Asia as it is about the broader economic and strategic opportunities outlined above. This combination of tangible interests and rivalry dynamics has pulled Afghanistan inexorably into the orbit of South Asian rivalry; one can no longer be fully understood absent the other.⁶⁴ The implications are two-fold.

First, there is a new outlet for hostility in a relationship which has otherwise been largely stabilized by nuclear deterrence and power asymmetry. While no large-scale conventional fighting has occurred in over a decade, the rivalry has not ended; rather, hostility continues to simmer just below boil, escaping when and where it can at the margins, such as in Afghanistan. This observation bolsters the arguments made by Maoz and San-Akca, as well as Findley et al., regarding proxy conflict

63. Michael Krepon, “The stability-instability paradox, misperception, and escalation control in South Asia,” The Stimson Center, 2003, <http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/ESCCONTROLCHAPTER1.pdf> (accessed 3 May 2013).

64. Although my intent in this paper is to demonstrate the *general* applicability of the rivalry framework to Indian–Pakistani competition in Afghanistan, it is worthwhile noting that conceptualizing Afghanistan as a component of the broader rivalry dovetails with the specific theoretical literature on the types of issues that constitute rivalry. For example, the “two-issue” rivalry model of Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson emphasizes “spatial” and “positional” issues; the former is certainly present in the India–Pakistan rivalry as the territory of Kashmir continues to be hotly contested. Influence in Afghanistan, by contrast, can be considered a “positional” issue since it represents a “contest [over] relative shares of influence over activities and prestige within a system or subsystem.” Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics*, 79.

in rivalry.⁶⁵ It also suggests that optimism regarding the prospect of détente between India and Pakistan must be tempered; no large-scale war is obviously good, but neither should its absence be mistaken for meaningful rapprochement or the resolution of underlying points of contention.

Second, and even more important for US/NATO policymakers, Indian and Pakistani intervention has altered the dynamics of the civil war in Afghanistan, the “strategic environment” in which US/NATO forces operate. Moreover, it has done so in a manner that has been consistently damaging to coalition interests. One can speculate, for instance, that a Pakistan unencumbered by international rivalry—while still pursuing its interests in a manner commensurate with its geographical proximity to Afghanistan—would have been more likely to acquiesce to certain requests for tactical support, coordination, and/or cooperation against the Afghan insurgency. Active support and guidance for insurgent groups, similarly, would have been less likely absent the tangible target of Indian interests. Indian aid, in turn, may have had more of its desired effect, helping boost development without triggering Pakistani-directed reprisals. Indeed, the speculative list of potential implications is long and impossible to know with complete certainty: negotiations with the Taliban may have been more fruitful, political solutions more viable, and economic opportunities more vigorously pursued. What is clear, however, is that the war in Afghanistan has been significantly complicated by the intrusion of the India–Pakistan rivalry.

Policy discussion

Thousands of lives and billions of dollars later, NATO’s campaign in Afghanistan is—for better or worse—coming to a close. In the short term, violence and instability are likely to continue. Any security benefits over the long term (if they exist at all) may be difficult to gauge and/or identify for some time to come. In most respects, uncertainty prevails. What *is* certain, however, is that understanding the problems, failures, and mistakes of the international campaign is vital. Moving forward, new challenges, opportunities, crises, and conflicts will demand international attention and, potentially, action. Whatever the ultimate lessons of Afghanistan (with respect to international interventions writ large), the immediate lessons as to what went wrong in planning and decision making may help guide the practical execution of future engagements. Thus, the thrust of the present policy discussion is primarily retrospective and diagnostic as opposed to prescriptive. Its purpose is to illuminate past mistakes, such that policy makers in the next crisis or international impasse may benefit from a greater understanding of potential complications stemming from the international strategic environment.

Several recent scholarly attempts to interpret the lessons of NATO failure have focused on the organizational, institutional, and psychological pressures plaguing

65. Maoz and San-Acka, “Rivalry and state support of NAGs,” 732–733; Findley, Piazza, and Young, “Games rivals play,” 245.

the intervention. The confluence of these factors, so the argument goes, resulted in a bloated international mission, one lacking strategic vision, unable to navigate a dynamic and complex environment in which myriad actors operated toward diverse aims. With regard to this environment, expert observers and policymakers alike have long emphasized the insidious influence of Pakistan's continued support (both passive and active) for the Afghan insurgency. Safe havens on the Pakistani side of the border effectively vitiated COIN operations in the battle-torn south, while material support and tactical guidance from the ISI concomitantly enhanced insurgent capabilities, escalating and perpetuating violence. Recognizing as much, US and NATO policy vis à vis Pakistan attempted to encourage—through diplomatic pressure, economic incentives, development aid, international friendship, and ultimately tough talk—first an effective COIN partner and, failing that, at least a cessation of intentionally damaging behaviour. Yet Pakistan has remained steadfastly intransigent. Clearly, the “motivations, perspectives, and objectives” of Islamabad have been serially misunderstood or, more accurately, underappreciated by policymakers. While Pakistan's enduring enmity with India has long been recognized, the extent to which this relationship drives behaviour in Afghanistan has only recently received adequate attention from the scholarly community. This paper has attempted to push this recognition even further by applying an established framework in the study of international conflict—that of international rivalry—to Indian–Pakistani competition in Afghanistan.

The central insight of the rivalry framework is the amplifying effect of compounded hostility between states over time. Repeated confrontation, and the expectation of future conflict, generates a deviation from standard international behaviour; states engaged in rivalry no longer approach particular issues on a case-by-case basis, but rather perceive each issue of contention as part and parcel of the broader conflictual relationship. Both India and Pakistan interpret Afghanistan in the context of rivalry: Pakistan to block, frustrate, and damage Indian aims (and in so doing challenge the rivalry status quo); India to enhance and maintain its regional hegemony vis à vis Pakistan (in part by preventing Pakistani-backed Islamic extremism from once again taking root). For Pakistan, in particular, using proxies against India in Afghanistan is attractive because more conventional options of confrontation are simply not available or feasible, given India's military and economic advantages as well as the constraining effects of nuclear deterrence. Ultimately, both countries apportion an importance to Afghanistan *beyond what would normally be expected given the economic and strategic opportunities available*. This is an observation accessible only through an application of the rivalry framework and one that helps highlight the inadequacies of the aforementioned US and NATO policies. Most prominently, offering development aid and economic incentives to Pakistan in exchange for cooperation in Afghanistan has failed, and continues to fail, because doing so lacks an appreciation of the strategic rationale underpinning Pakistani behaviour. Islamabad is actively engaged in an ongoing battle with India and is unlikely to abandon a viable tool in the fight; instead, it will seize the opportunity to confront India wherever, whenever, and however it can.

From a policy perspective, the key question thus becomes: what does this analytical insight mean for the practical execution of the US/NATO mission in Afghanistan? Beyond the obvious if unhelpful exhortation to “not expect very much” from the Pakistanis, a discussion of several key developments reveals not only the extent to which policymakers may have misread the strategic environment but also what they might have done differently in order to mitigate and/or avoid the deleterious effects of the India–Pakistan rivalry.

Short-term gain, long-term pain

In the aftermath of 9/11, the US and its allies moved quickly and decisively into Afghanistan. Priorities and objectives in the initial phases of the intervention were specific, manageable, and clear. Pakistan, following President Musharraf’s official (if disingenuous) abandonment of the Taliban, was considered important for logistical reasons, providing access to ports, airfields, and ground lines of control without which “the US’s ability to launch Operation Enduring Freedom . . . would have been in question.”⁶⁶ The result, as Michael O’Hanlon observed at the time, was a “masterpiece of military creativity and finesse.”⁶⁷ Yet a myopic focus on immediate military success over a relatively weak al-Qaeda contingent and Taliban army obscured the hornet’s nest of conflicting interests and priorities that were inevitably whipped into a frenzy following the American intervention. The result has been years of violence and instability in the form of an insurgency for which Pakistan has received considerable blame. Two key decisions stand out as having precipitated and exacerbated this reality.

First, in keeping with US secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld’s vision of dynamic, “light-footprint” military operations, the US relied heavily on local allies in the initial fighting, most notably the Northern Alliance. A long-standing enemy of the Taliban, and already a pole of power in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance offered a natural and expedient ally, ready-made for US purposes. Ultimately, 15,000 Northern Alliance fighters joined the US effort during Operation Enduring Freedom, offering invaluable if not decisive support, and even leading the final charge into Kabul.⁶⁸ While militarily effective in the short term, the US’ selection of the Northern Alliance as its local agent has had important long-term ramifications. As discussed above, many influential members of the new Afghan government were prominent Northern Alliance leaders, meaning a traditionally Pashtun-dominated country was now heavily Tajik-influenced at the highest levels of power. The long-term instability of such an arrangement should have been immediately evident. Moreover, what had been before 2001 a relatively minor proxy-struggle between India and Pakistan (with India supporting the Northern Alliance and Pakistan the Taliban) had now been vaulted to the centre

66. Fair, “The US-Pakistan relations after a decade of the war on terror,” 247.

67. Michael O’Hanlon, “A flawed masterpiece,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 3 (2002): 47.

68. *Ibid.*

of the international war effort. Major fault lines, although long established, had been fractured open by the weight of US military might (however “lightly” they might have wanted to tread). As William Dalrymple explains: “By aligning with the Tajiks of the northern provinces against the Pashtuns of the south, the US . . . was unwittingly taking sides in a complex civil war that has been going on since the 1970s—and that had roots going back much further than that.”⁶⁹ Pakistani concerns in this regard were initially ignored. Among Musharraf’s early requests, for example, was that time be given for Pakistan to form a “moderate Taliban” government and, at the very least, that the Northern Alliance not be the expeditionary force tasked with occupying Kabul.⁷⁰ The momentum of Operation Enduring Freedom meant, however, that such concerns were lost to the winds of war. Victory was at hand. As such, the structure of current Indian–Pakistani competition (India supporting the government and Pakistan the insurgency) was largely precipitated by US decision making in the early stages of the intervention.

Second, the US has continued to pursue increased cooperation and closer relations with India. The signing of the US–India civilian nuclear agreement in 2005, for example, sent a clear message to Pakistan that US–Indian relations were a priority for Washington. Predictably, Islamabad viewed such developments as indicative of America’s true allegiances in the region. “American strategists,” Fair writes, “did not recognize the impossibility of successfully pursuing the twinned policies of cultivating Pakistan’s support in the struggle against violent Islamist extremism (at a significant cost to the Pakistani state) while also pledging American support to help India become a global power. Equally problematic, the United States has encouraged Indian involvement in Afghanistan without regard to Pakistan’s concerns.”⁷¹

Of course, it could be argued that policymakers were aware of the basic trade-off at stake, and simply valued the benefits of a closer relationship with India more than Pakistan’s cooperation in Afghanistan. Yet this recognition does not obviate the fact that US–Indian rapprochement *did* anger the Pakistanis. More likely, given the much-publicized emphasis on Pakistan’s importance to coalition success, the US felt it could manoeuvre between the two, with significant aid and diplomatic tact offsetting any resentment over perceived biases toward India. As the rivalry framework would predict, however, Islamabad has not been so understanding, viewing US support as essentially zero-sum. Ultimately, US support for India, and concomitant increases in Indian activity in Afghanistan, have significantly exacerbated Pakistan’s rivalry-related fears and insecurities.

The point is not to suggest that policymakers made fatal mistakes in either the execution of Operation Enduring Freedom or in building closer ties with New Delhi over the past decade. The benefits of either action (swift military victory, a strong relationship with a viable regional partner) might well outweigh the

69. Dalrymple, “A deadly triangle,” section 2.

70. Rubin and Rashid, “From great game to grand bargain,” 38.

71. Fair, “The US–Pakistan relations after a decade of the war on terror,” 250.

present costs. But to the extent that each of these developments helped created an environment in which the India–Pakistan rivalry has become central to the war in Afghanistan, policymakers should be made aware of the trade-offs that were generated. If, as is widely acknowledged, Pakistan’s continued support of militant groups in Afghanistan is a key inhibitor of stabilization efforts and overall mission success, a better appreciation of regional political and strategic realities—and how US/NATO actions worked to disturb them—might have afforded alternative courses of action and an avoidance or mitigation of the Pakistani problem. Musharraf’s early concerns about the Northern Alliance could have been taken more seriously. Recognizing the pre-existing civil war situation, the US and its allies may have opted to minimize tensions by remaining relatively neutral about who would hold power in a post-Taliban era. A more purposeful Pakistani role in this regard (one that went beyond simply being a logistical convenience) might have been useful—given their influence with the Taliban and many Pashtuns more generally—and simultaneously alleviated Pakistani fears regarding strategic encirclement as India’s proxy remained marginal rather than central to power structures in Afghanistan. Similarly, greater sensitivity about the *extent* of Islamabad’s Indian concerns might have engendered more diplomatic caution in dealing with New Delhi. At the very least, the impossibility of a “twinned” policy would have been recognized.

Conclusion

One returns, then, to Roland Paris’ dual observations: 1) that a “lack of familiarity with the political and social environment” in Afghanistan “rendered [international action] ineffectual or counterproductive”; and 2) that “persistent short-termism” caused “decision makers...to reach for the most expedient fixes without fully considering the context or consequences of their actions.”⁷² These insights are reflected by coalition experiences vis à vis the India–Pakistan rivalry, as evidenced by policies which served to augment, rather than diminish, its centrality to the war. What Paris points to, ultimately, is the necessity not only of knowing local history but also incorporating the implications of that history into one’s strategic planning. Success, in other words, requires understanding context and considering the potential consequences deriving from it. International rivalry as a theoretical concept emphasizes not only what the history *is* (context) between two nations but also what that history *means* (consequences) for how they behave. This essay demonstrates that both India and (even more importantly) Pakistan are driven—as a result of rivalry—to behaviour that undermines coalition efforts. Context has had powerful and far-reaching consequences.

The international community should be wary of this lesson. Future international interventions (whether on the scale of Afghanistan or smaller conflict-stabilization missions) must account for the strategic and political realities of any given region.

72. Paris, “Afghanistan: What went wrong?” 545.

Moreover, the presence of proximate international rivalry portends serious complications for civil conflict environments. Rivals may exploit new opportunities for confrontation—particularly when conventional conflict is perceived as too costly—by injecting themselves into ongoing civil conflicts, supporting opposing sides, and seeking to gain even limited strategic, economic, and/or tactical advantage over their enemy. The practical policy implications of this insight are immediate. As the world contemplates the appropriate course of action in Syria, for example, the looming presence of multiple international rivalries in the Middle East should engender caution, forcing the reassessment of many basic assumptions.

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