

The Merits of Dehyphenation: Explaining U.S. Success in Engaging India and Pakistan

Whether the civil nuclear cooperation agreement with India is completed right away or whether the war on terrorism in Pakistan chalks up more successes in the next few months, the recent U.S. approach toward South Asia represents a dramatically successful example of what many believe Washington is congenitally incapable: the capacity to think strategically over the long term and implement complex policies that require diplomatic adroitness and political agility.

Although specific elements of this policy have been controversial and the gains accruing to them more tentative, the regional approach currently pursued toward India and Pakistan has nevertheless been more successful than could have been imagined when President George W. Bush first took office. The most striking evidence of this accomplishment is that, in sharp contrast to the last several decades, the United States today finds itself in the fortuitous position of enjoying good relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously while both states seek to sustain a durable peace with one another.

This outcome is owed partly to structural changes in global and local geopolitics, as well as to decisions made by visionary regional leaders, but it derives fundamentally from the new tack pursued by the United States in South Asia. Unlike previous administrations, which faced great difficulty in crafting an appropriate policy toward India and Pakistan because they could not balance what were often conflicting demands involving these two countries, the Bush presidency resolved this conundrum by setting out on a new path entire-

Ashley J. Tellis is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was closely involved in South Asia policymaking in various capacities in the Bush administration. The author is deeply grateful to Jack Gill, Frederic Grare, Daniel Markey, and S. Enders Wimbush for their thoughtful comments and for their help in formulating several themes that appear in this article.

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ly. Rather than attempting to reinvigorate the older, failed policies of supporting one competitor or the other, Bush took to its limits the strategy advocated in an influential RAND report prior to his election in 2000, namely, that Washington ought to pursue a differentiated policy toward the region centered on “a decoupling of India and Pakistan in U.S. calculations.”¹

Developing Dehyphenation

To the credit of Bush’s predecessors, U.S. policy had already been moving in this direction, albeit slowly, hesitantly, and inconsistently, since the end of the Cold War. Even during the last years of the Clinton administration, amidst the bitterness surrounding India’s 1998 nuclear tests, the United States had moved some distance toward recognizing the differences between India and Pakistan and acknowledging the need for unique policies toward each of these two states. The sharp contrasts in the character of President Bill Clinton’s visits to India and Pakistan in March 2000 exemplified this point. Clinton spent five days in India, gregariously engaging its elites and its villagers, but spent only five furtive hours in Pakistan, long enough to deliver a somber 15-minute televised speech reminding his listeners that “this era does not reward people who struggle in vain to redraw borders with blood.”²

Although the disappearance of global bipolarity had in fact created clear opportunities for the pursuit of independent strategies toward India and Pakistan much earlier in the 1990s, the United States unfortunately did not move as forcefully as it should have. This outcome could only be attributed to the singular U.S. focus on nonproliferation in South Asia, which had the effect of soldering India and Pakistan ever more tightly in the minds of Washington policymakers, even as they seemed to condone the highly problematic proliferation from China to Pakistan while remaining neglectful of the significant Chinese nuclear threat to India. In any event, the Bush administration moved with alacrity in May 2001, after India expressed unexpected public support for the president’s new strategic framework, which elaborated his plans for reducing offensive nuclear weapons, strengthening nonproliferation and counterproliferation, and creating missile defenses, to incarnate dehyphenation as the hallmark of its regional policy. To its credit, the administration persisted with this approach and its constituent components even when major exogenous events threatened to derail it.³

As the contributing documents to the original RAND report elaborated, a dehyphenated policy in South Asia would have three distinct features:

First, U.S. calculations [would] systemically decouple India and Pakistan; that is, U.S. relations with each state would be governed by an objective as-

assessment of the intrinsic value of each country to U.S. interests rather than by fears about how U.S. relations with one would affect relations with the other. Second, the United States would recognize that India is on its way to becoming a major Asian power of some consequence and, therefore, that it warrants a level of engagement far greater than the previous norm and also an appreciation of its potential for both collaboration and resistance across a much larger canvas than simply South Asia. Third, the United States would recognize that Pakistan is a country in serious crisis that must be assisted to achieve a “soft landing” that dampens the currently disturbing social and economic trends by, among other things, reaching out to Pakistani society rather than [simply] the Pakistani state.⁴

The United States has concertedly pursued all three elements of this policy recommendation, although they were not implemented in integrated form at the beginning of the Bush presidency. Rather, the administration’s initial emphasis, especially after May 2001, focused entirely on India, which was viewed as the centerpiece of its regional policy. The elevated importance accorded to India at the expense of Pakistan derived from the strong perception that although both countries were relevant to U.S. interests in different ways, their respective geopolitical weights were radically divergent, their prospects for success as pivotal states in the international system were remarkably dissimilar, and their significance to U.S. grand strategic interests in various geographic and functional arenas were so unlike that they could not be discussed in the same breath. This view was commonplace among administration officials prior to the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001. Despite the dramatic changes in Washington’s South Asia policy after that, it still remains the broad judgment within the U.S. government.

The differing perceptions of India and Pakistan among U.S. national security elites only reinforced the imperatives flowing from these other considerations. India, the larger and more strategically important country, was incontestably a success story that now manifested itself as a rising global power, whereas Pakistan, the weaker and less significant state, appeared to be a troubled country teetering repeatedly on the brink of failure.

Given these realities, Bush personally recognized even before he entered office that the character of U.S. ties with each of these two countries would have to be different from one another. U.S. relations with Pakistan, for the foreseeable future, would be characterized dominantly by a desire to avoid the *summum malum*, whereas U.S. relations with India would have to be trans-

The U.S. today enjoys good relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously.

formed precisely because they offered the hope of securing the *summum bonum* that eluded both sides during the Cold War.⁵

The president's strategic instincts thus comported perfectly with the logic of dehyphenation in the RAND report and its two essential components: first, the recognition that India was a rising power and hence merited not only far greater attention than in the past but also a concentrated focus unconnected to any issues involving Pakistan; and second, a stipulation that Pakistan be recognized not as a peer of India but as an especially vulnerable entity that must be nursed back to health because its decay or failure would be detrimental to "the peace of the region."⁶ The Bush team pursued both of these elements of the dehyphenation policy with great success at the regional level, but unfortunately with lesser accomplishment bilaterally with Pakistan.

A Rising India in Asian Geopolitics

The effort to build a new partnership with a rising India was shaped clearly by Bush's determination to consolidate U.S. primacy in the face of prospective geopolitical flux caused by new rising powers in Asia, such as China. With a worldview informed greatly by the imperative of successfully managing great-power relations, Bush and his advisers saw the necessity for a transformed relationship with a large democratic state such as India from the very beginning.

With its huge population, growing economic strength, and significant military capacity, a friendly India would not only be an important partner for the United States in its own right but would also serve as a critical source of geopolitical balance vis-à-vis a rising China, an issue that concerned both New Delhi and Washington. Not surprisingly, then, Bush signaled his personal intention to consolidate this new relationship on several occasions, including prior to his election. In a major speech in November 1999, Bush noted that

[o]ften overlooked in our strategic calculations is that great land that rests at the south of Eurasia. This coming century will see democratic India's arrival as a force in the world. A vast population, before long the world's most populous nation. A changing economy, in which three of its five wealthiest citizens are software entrepreneurs.

India is now debating its future and its strategic path, and the United States must pay it more attention. We should establish more trade and investment with India as it opens to the world. And we should work with the Indian government, ensuring it is a force for stability and security in Asia.⁷

His future national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, further clarified the geopolitical foundations beneath Bush's thinking when she insisted that the United States "should pay closer attention to India's role in the regional bal-

ance” in a significant preelection article in *Foreign Affairs*.⁸ Chiding the Clinton administration for its “strong tendency conceptually to connect India with Pakistan and to think only of Kashmir or the nuclear competition between the two states,” she admonished her readers to remember that “India is an element in China’s calculation, and it should be in America’s, too.”

The necessity for renewed U.S.-Indian relations would also figure, for the first time, in the Republican Party’s 2000 election platform. After Bush assumed office, his interest in India would find echoes in the confirmation testimony of Secretary of State–nominee Colin Powell:

Dehyphenation does not ignore the effects of U.S. policies toward one state on the other.

There is another country, Mr. Chairman, that I want to mention before I leave this regional perspective, a country that should grow more and more focused in the lens of our foreign policy. That country is India.... We must deal more wisely with the world’s largest democracy. Soon to be the most populous country in the world, India has the potential to help keep the peace in the vast Indian Ocean area and its periphery. We need to work harder and more consistently to assist India in this endeavor, while not neglecting our friends in Pakistan.⁹

Pakistan’s Violent Return to the Policy Agenda

While thus serving notice that developing a new relationship with India would be a priority and that such a relationship would be intense and multifaceted, going far beyond the previous singular focus on arresting regional proliferation, Bush barely mentioned Pakistan in the months prior to the September 11 attacks. Although the president and those around him recognized the necessity of not forgetting Islamabad, their interests initially centered on New Delhi. This allowed the administration not only to distinguish itself from its predecessor but also to concentrate on repairing ties with India, an outcome that was seen as critical to managing U.S. relations with the other great powers.

This approach did not imply that nuclear proliferation as a problem was suddenly forgotten, but that the focus of U.S. antiproliferation efforts had changed. Unlike the 1990s, when the stress lay primarily on capping, rolling back, and ultimately eliminating India’s and Pakistan’s strategic nuclear programs, the Bush presidency, recognizing that nonproliferation as a policy objective had failed in South Asia, chose not to reinforce failure but rather to seek success where it really mattered for core U.S. national security interests. Accordingly, it correctly focused its energies on controlling outward prolifera-

tion, that is, preventing the diffusion of strategic technologies from the region, mainly Pakistan, to the rest of the world.¹⁰

This objective grew in importance after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, but the attacks in New York and Washington also threatened to rudely interrupt the president's larger vision in other ways. As had occurred many times before in U.S.–South Asian relations, Pakistan, which had until then been marginalized through multiple U.S. sanctions, for nonproliferation since

1990 and for military usurpation in 1999, was once again restored to Washington's good graces thanks to the need for Islamabad's cooperation in the prosecution of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

This sudden strategic necessity for Pakistan resulted in a sharp reversal of official administration attitudes toward Islamabad. Within a matter of months after the September 11 attacks, the almost decade-long sanctions on Pakistan were withdrawn, and a substantial as-

sistance program was resumed as recompense for Islamabad's support in the campaign against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Although Pakistan was still under a military dictatorship at this point, the Bush administration quickly reconciled itself to President General Pervez Musharraf's presence at the helm of affairs in Islamabad.

Although this change in policy compelled Musharraf to renounce Pakistan's traditional ties to the Taliban, the United States enjoyed lesser success, at least in the beginning, in convincing him to terminate his country's support for various other terrorist groups operating in Kashmir and elsewhere. Yet, it hailed him nonetheless as a pragmatic and enlightened partner in the new global war on terrorism.

Although U.S. policymakers would quickly concede privately that Musharraf was often an ambivalent partner in the struggle against terrorism, his support for U.S. operations in Afghanistan against al Qaeda was judged to be worth the price of overlooking his recalcitrance to attack the Taliban cadres bivouacked in the frontier areas of Pakistan, his continuing support for anti-Indian terrorism, and his failure to implement the myriad internal reforms necessary to push Pakistan away from the extremist path it had been following since the late 1970s.

The Bush administration therefore clearly understood that Musharraf and his regime were undoubtedly compromised instruments in the global war on terrorism, but it also recognized that Pakistan's geographical proximity to Afghanistan, its intestinal linkages with major terrorist groups, and its possession

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of nuclear weapons made it a necessary, if not always a comfortable, partner. Furthermore, senior administration officials were conscious that the war on terrorism had inadvertently ended up displacing their prewar emphasis on India and had provided an opportunity for Pakistan to take center stage in U.S. policy once again.

Such an unanticipated, exogenous shock could have irreparably undermined the president's intention to implement a dehyphenated policy in South Asia and, if not managed adroitly, could have ended up repeating a history that Bush was personally interested in avoiding: another tilt toward Pakistan that further alienated India and sacrificed his vision for a transformed U.S.-Indian relationship in the process. As it turned out, however, the administration managed the unexpected intrusion of Pakistan into U.S. strategic calculations after the September 11 attacks far better than might have been expected early on, an accomplishment for which it has still not received sufficient credit. In large measure, this successful recovery of equilibrium was due to the singular efforts of Ambassador Robert D. Blackwill and the U.S. embassy in India.

These exertions would have been less than successful, however, were it not for the encouragement of the senior National Security Council staff in the White House, particularly Rice and her then-deputy, Stephen J. Hadley, and the senior Department of Defense leadership consisting of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, with critical support from the Department of State's Director of Policy Planning Richard Haass.

The Logic of Dehyphenation

The success of U.S. policy in South Asia was secured despite the tumultuous shocks of the September 11 attacks because these key individuals continued to promote the new engagement of India with an eye to larger geopolitical interests, even as they quickly turned the unexpected return of Pakistan to center stage in U.S. decisionmaking into a new strategic objective: constructing, however belatedly, a partnership that could assist Islamabad to achieve the "soft landing" advocated by the original RAND strategy. Although the policies adopted in each case would later become the subject of controversy in the United States, India, and Pakistan for different reasons, Washington nevertheless was able to pursue a differentiated policy toward the region that successfully advanced its own interests.

The occasionally voiced criticisms of the decoupling, or dehyphenation, strategy are therefore curious and mistaken. In an early judgment rendered in 2003, for example, South Asia specialist Robert Wirsing urged "Washington [to] discard its ill-advised plan, made explicit after Kargil [the brief

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border war that India and Pakistan fought in May–July 1999], to ‘decouple’ India and Pakistan for purposes of U.S. policymaking in the region.”¹¹ Saying that it was “never a practical option in the face of the interlinked pattern of subcontinental security issues,” Wirsing argued that “decoupling in the cur-

rent environment had to be understood as being also terribly reckless.” As late as 2008 and despite subsequent successes of the dehyphenation policy, analysts Joseph McMillan, Eugene B. Rumer, and Phillip C. Saunders would also argue, in the context of a discussion about U.S. policy toward South Asia, that “the facile solution to Pakistan’s concerns is for the United States to simply dehyphenate its relations with the two major South Asian powers [India and Pakistan].... While it may sound plausible in

theory, ignoring the effect that U.S. relations with one of these two countries would have on relations with the other—and on the bilateral dynamic between the two—would be impossible in practice.”¹²

Such thoughtful scholars’ essentially identical criticisms of the dehyphenation policy suggest at the very least that its logic has been misunderstood. The notion of dehyphenation does not entail ignoring the effects of U.S. policies toward one state on the other. Still less does it involve overlooking the regional or global consequences of U.S. actions toward one or the other. Rather, dehyphenation takes its bearings from the guiding assumption that the United States must be less concerned with the Indian-Pakistani relationship or its own role in that relationship than with the quality of its distinctive bilateral ties with New Delhi and Islamabad. In other words, the policy of dehyphenation is based on the judgment that the character of Washington’s diplomatic engagement with each South Asian capital autonomously is of far greater importance to U.S. interests than husbanding the complex and often frustrating relationship that exists between the two subcontinental states.

This distinction conveys the true revolutionary import of dehyphenation. Until Bush entered office, U.S. regional policy toward South Asia was defined primarily in terms of managing the security interdependence between India and Pakistan with the intent of reducing the threat of nuclear war, resolving the dispute over Kashmir, or moderating the arms race supposedly occurring within the region. Such an approach, although well intentioned, only exacerbated the security dilemmas enveloping these two asymmetrical competitors.

Because U.S. interventions in South Asia were invariably exploited by the smaller revisionist state, Pakistan, as cover in its rivalry with India, Washington’s regional policies frequently irked New Delhi even as they often proved

ineffective in assisting Islamabad to secure its desired political goals. The traditional U.S. approach therefore managed to alienate India and Pakistan simultaneously, making the bilateral frictions between these two countries more difficult to resolve. Even worse, it resulted in sacrificing all the gains that could have accrued to the United States from an effort to cultivate good bilateral ties with each South Asian country independently based on the intrinsic weight and value of each to enduring U.S. interests.

The Framework for a Strategic Partnership

Thankfully, despite the criticisms occasionally voiced, the Bush administration persisted after the September 11 attacks with its differentiated approach toward India and Pakistan. The evolving policy toward Pakistan, which garnered the most public attention, essentially consisted of endorsing Musharraf's regime as legitimate both in the context of Pakistani politics and as a partner in the war on terrorism; assisting Pakistan through a multibillion-dollar assistance package that was oriented primarily toward the support of coalition military operations and befriending the Pakistani military through modest arms sales, with a lesser priority on economic and development assistance; and removing all residual sanctions on Pakistan as a lever to secure physical access to Pakistani bases and various other forms of operational cooperation. These policies, implemented in the glare of great national and international attention in Bush's first term, might have suggested that Pakistan had once again conclusively displaced India in Washington's strategic calculations. That, however, was not the case.

The "twin peaks" crisis, prompted by the terrorist attack on India's parliament in December 2001 and a May 2002 attack by militants in Jammu, resulting in a nearly year-long military standoff between India and Pakistan in 2001–2002, confronted the administration with the necessity of facing its complex partnership with Islamabad in the context of its desire for a transformed relationship with New Delhi. When faced with this crisis, the Bush presidency adjudicated the limits of its support for Musharraf's regime in a way that only underscored the conflicted nature of the prevailing U.S. dependence on Pakistan, while strengthening the strategic value of ties with India.

Declaring that Pakistan was part of the solution to defeating terrorism, the administration also unequivocally owned up to the fact that Islamabad was equally part of the problem during Hadley's quiet December 2002 visit to New Delhi. In a previous visit to South Asia in June 2002, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had formally conveyed to Musharraf not only Washington's evidence of continuing Pakistani involvement in terrorism but also the U.S.

conviction that such association must cease if Islamabad's return to good standing in the eyes of the United States and the world was to be sustained.

Far from exonerating Pakistan's involvement in anti-Indian terrorism, therefore, the 2001–2002 crisis, which at first sight appeared to have bestowed

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Islamabad with an apparent victory, provided Bush a chance to convey U.S. concerns about the behavior of its ally. At the same time, it opened the door to strengthening the relationship with India in more significant ways that were intended both to compensate for Washington's inability to rapidly cure the Pakistani addiction to terrorism and to convey the president's determination to forge a strong relationship with New Delhi for strategic reasons that would outlast the current war on terrorism.¹³

To carry this differentiated regional policy to its hilt, as exemplified by the recognition of India as a major partner at precisely the time when U.S. dependence on Pakistan was at its maximum, the Bush administration quietly set forth on a path that would conclusively distinguish it from its predecessors. While public attention in the subcontinent and in the United States was galvanized by the war on terrorism and renewed assistance to Pakistan, Washington and New Delhi quietly began a sustained two-year conversation that would ultimately result in a breakthrough diplomatic achievement, the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP). This agreement, which was announced in January 2004 after many months of negotiation, drew its inspiration from the Bush-Vajpayee Joint Statement of November 2001.¹⁴

Although its material benefits would in retrospect seem quite modest, especially in comparison to what Bush would propose to India in his second term, the NSSP, which Under Secretary of Commerce for Export Administration Kenneth Juster shepherded after Blackwill's departure from New Delhi, was nevertheless a critical breakthrough in U.S.-Indian strategic collaboration. Despite continuing disagreements on other issues such as trade, Iraq, and the United Nations, it committed both countries to collaboration in four difficult arenas—civilian nuclear energy, civilian space programs, high-technology trade, and missile defense—in which India's possession of nuclear weaponry outside of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) framework had previously made any meaningful cooperation all but impossible.

By embarking on a course of action that would permit India more access to controlled technologies even though New Delhi would continue to subsist formally outside the NPT, would not surrender its nuclear weapons program, and refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, cease production of fissile

materials, eschew weaponization of its nuclear devices, or avoid missile testing, production, and deployment, as demanded by the Clinton administration, Bush gave clear notice of his judgment that India was part of the solution to nuclear proliferation rather than part of the problem. Even more importantly, however, by offering such cooperation to India only and not to Pakistan, despite the grave U.S. dependence on Islamabad, Bush underscored his desire to deal with New Delhi in such exceptional ways that would convey his recognition of India as a friendly rising Asian power.

The NSSP, together with other breakthroughs in bilateral diplomatic collaboration, military-to-military relations, counterterrorism cooperation, and public diplomacy witnessed during the first term, then not only assuaged Indian sentiments at a time when U.S. reengagement with Pakistan was at its most intense but also kept India well ensconced within the global antiterrorism coalition, despite the U.S. inability to deliver on its promise to end Pakistani-sponsored terrorism against India.¹⁵

Beyond F-16s to Pakistan

The asymmetrical valuation of these clearly separated bilateral relationships has been unmistakably on display in the president's second term. After months of secret deliberation, Bush finally phoned Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India in March 2005 to inform him that the United States would resume the sale of F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan after a hiatus of some 15 years. Although this decision received the bulk of media attention in the United States and caused some consternation in New Delhi because of the symbolic import of the F-16 in the history of U.S.–South Asian relations, the more radical conclusions of Washington's regional policy review were largely neglected.

Senior officials announced that the United States had in fact reached the decision “to help India become a major world power in the twenty-first century.”¹⁶ By further asserting that “we understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement,” the administration effectively reiterated the principle of dehyphenation but did even more this time around. It suggested that global U.S. interests would be best served not simply by respecting the natural evolution of the balance of power in South Asia but rather by accelerating it through a committed buildup of India's national capabilities. Accordingly, the administration forthrightly declared its willingness to support New Delhi's requests for “transformative systems in areas such as command and control, early warning, and missile defense.”

Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns later summarized the rationale:

India is a rising global power with a rapidly growing economy. Within the first quarter of this century, it is likely to be included among the world's five largest economies. It will soon be the world's most populous nation, and it has a demographic distribution that bequeaths it a huge, skilled and youthful workforce. India's military forces will continue to be large, capable and increasingly sophisticated. Just like our own, the Indian military remains strongly committed to the principle of civilian control. Above all else, we know what kind of country India will be decades from now. Like the United States, India will thrive as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual democracy, characterized by individual freedom, rule of law and a constitutional government that owes its power to free and fair elections.¹⁷

Burns then delivered the punch line: "By cooperating with India now, we accelerate the arrival of the benefits that India's rise brings to the region and the world."¹⁸

The manner in which the F-16 episode was handled clearly communicated the administration's confidence that the United States could preserve good relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously because of the conviction that both countries represented different kinds of strategic opportunities for the United States. Rice explained that "India ... is looking to grow its influence into global influence ... which ... is a goal we support, and Pakistan ... is looking to a settled neighborhood so that it can deal with extremism inside its own borders."¹⁹

This distinction, articulated clearly but subtly, underscored the constituent elements of the administration's regional strategy that would be followed throughout the second term. It would manifest itself in the July 18, 2005, joint statement signed by Bush and Singh in which the president reversed more than 30 years of U.S. nonproliferation policy by committing to engage in full civil nuclear cooperation with India, despite the fact that New Delhi would not accept full-scope safeguards and would continue to maintain its nuclear weapons program.²⁰ This initiative, popularly referred to as the "nuclear deal," has not yet been completed at the time of this writing, but the enormous effort associated with its implementation confirms beyond all doubt that immense transformations have occurred in the bilateral relationship since the beginning of the Bush presidency.

Meanwhile, Back in Islamabad

The improvement in U.S.-Pakistani relations continued simultaneously, albeit in different ways and at different levels of intensity compared to U.S. relations with India. Whenever Islamabad reached for parity in treatment, for example, when it sought a similar form of civilian nuclear cooperation with the United

States, the administration rejected those overtures decisively on the grounds that, as Bush declared, “Pakistan and India are different countries with different needs and different histories. So, as we proceed forward, our strategy will take in[to] effect those well-known differences.”²¹

During the second term, just as in the first, the administration therefore focused its energies on building strong collaborative bonds with Islamabad but, as the president gave notice, “that partnership begins with close cooperation in the war on terror.”²² Accordingly, the United States focused disproportionately on providing Musharraf’s regime with continued military assistance and budgetary support while over time supporting the general’s efforts, to a greater or lesser degree, in holding on to office.²³

By the second half of Bush’s second term, however, the administration, like Musharraf himself, was startled by the transformations that had been occurring within Pakistan. Some changes were hopeful, but others were more troubling. The hopeful changes included a widespread and increasingly obvious public desire to enthrone constitutionalism at the center of Pakistan’s political life; a clear disenchantment with the military’s role outside of counterterrorism, internal security, and external defense; a yearning for a return to civilian rule with its associated emphases on economic development, peace with India, and normal politics; and a rejection both of extremist Islam and of the overmilitarized counterterrorism policies pursued by Musharraf with U.S. support, which only resulted in a deeper entrenchment of the military in areas outside of its natural competence.

These sentiments came together in a remarkable display of democratic revenge when Pakistani voters used the 2008 national elections to reject Musharraf’s constitutional machinations by ejecting his favored political party, the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam), and returning his opponents, the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), with their restorative political agendas, back into office.

The more troubling elements now visible in Pakistan remain: the upsurge in domestic terrorism, some linked to the restive tribes of the northwestern frontier and some linked, mercifully to a lesser degree, to al Qaeda; the troubling connections between the Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan and the sanctuaries enjoyed on the Pakistani side of the border; the continued presence of extremist sympathizers in the military and intelligence services; the persistent weaknesses of the Pakistani economy, many of which were obscured in the past only because of high levels of U.S. financial assistance; the growing disenchantment with

U.S. bilateral engagement with Islamabad has borne less than reassuring fruit.

It would be unwise to pursue radically different alternatives to the framework in place.

counterterrorism because of the strong national perception that this war remains the province of the United States rather than Pakistan; the continued inability to develop a comprehensive antiterrorism strategy that knits together domestic economic and political change with effective intelligence, law enforcement, and military operations; and the unremitting weakness in social and developmental indicators relating to literacy, health, and social development.²⁴

The more or less unmitigated persistence of these vulnerabilities in Pakistan despite almost a decade of strong U.S.-Pakistani interactions suggests that, for all the successes of the Bush administration's regional strategy, its bilateral engagement with Islamabad has borne less than reassuring fruit. Although there have been some frustrations in the bilateral relationship with India as well, these disappointments for the most

part derive from New Delhi's inability to advance boldly forward thanks to constraints imposed by the weak governing coalition in power.

The failures in Pakistan, on the other hand, often represent a true retrograde movement that is costly for Islamabad as well as Washington. In part, the Bush administration's policy shortcomings in regards to Pakistan can be attributed, at least initially, to the complexity of that nation's problems, which are unfortunately viciously self-reinforcing.²⁵ In the final analysis, however, the administration cannot escape some share of the blame, and that conclusion derives from its one major deviation from the original RAND approach: while the vision articulated in 2000 endorsed the idea of assisting Pakistan toward a soft landing, it especially emphasized the notion of reaching out to Pakistani society rather than merely expanding engagement with the state.

The pressures of the war on terrorism inevitably pushed Washington toward a deeper interaction with an already suffocatingly strong military regime, but the administration failed to maintain the appropriate balance in its outreach to the state vis-à-vis Pakistani society. Even worse, it became complicit, often knowingly and at other times inadvertently, with Musharraf's effort to penetrate, dominate, and disenfranchise those state and societal civilian institutions that could have posed a challenge to his rule. Consequently, even though the administration adopted the rhetoric about strengthening Pakistan writ large, it ended up in practice mainly buttressing Musharraf's military regime rather than consistently encouraging it to strengthen civil society and, by implication, pave the way for the army's departure from politics.

The initial circumstances defining the terms of U.S. reengagement with Pakistan, of course, played a critical role in shaping this erroneous course. The

inauguration of the global war on terrorism in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks almost guaranteed that cooperative military operations, rather than efforts to mitigate societal vulnerability, would become the centerpiece of the renewed U.S.-Pakistani relationship, at least to begin.

Not surprisingly then, most U.S. aid, when it did start pouring in from 2002 onward, was oriented primarily toward compensating Islamabad for its counterterrorism activities (57 percent) and supporting its military procurements (18 percent). The more modest residual allocation for economic activities (25 percent) mainly took the form of budgetary support through direct cash transfers (16 percent). This component, although necessary initially to help Pakistan tide over its most serious moment of economic crisis, eventually became counterproductive because it assisted Musharraf's military regime in avoiding the lasting institutional changes necessary to sustain sound economic policies over time, exculpated it from responsibility for its decisions, and inexcusably liberated it from the necessity of having to make difficult choices, not to mention helping to destroy whatever notions of democratic responsiveness may have survived within the polity. Only the remainder (9 percent) was allocated toward targeted development and humanitarian assistance.²⁶

Although U.S. aid therefore unwittingly had the effect of further strengthening the Pakistani state against its own society, the administration's decision to stand aside while Musharraf pursued a series of political manipulations designed to increase his own power unconstitutionally only enervated the Pakistani polity further. Musharraf's tired yet calculated attempt at emasculating political parties through yet another "devolution plan," his assault on the higher judiciary in Pakistan, and his convoluted effort to cling to office through various provisional constitutional and legal framework orders, none of which evoked any opposition from the United States because of his perceived indispensability to the war on terrorism, all contributed in bits and pieces toward reinforcing military domination of the state rather than buttressing Pakistan's civil society, strengthening its political institutions, inculcating a civic nationalism, and promoting a democratic culture.

The failure to pursue these latter objectives systematically contributed to prolonging all the political pathologies now familiar in Pakistan—the dalliance with terrorism, the prevalence of extremism, the absence of strong and legitimate centers of moderation and modernity, and the continuing dominance of a rural feudal elite—and to that degree has undermined the prospect for a "soft landing," even though that was implicitly the administration's most minimal goal for Pakistan from the very beginning.

Although the outcome of the February 2008 Pakistani election offers some hope for arresting political decay, and even this is uncertain, given the rivalry between the most prominent civilian politicians in Islamabad, the last eight

years could well turn out to be another lost opportunity in Pakistan's struggle to become a successful, moderate Muslim state. This could be true despite the fact that its all-important relationship with India has finally been brought toward equipoise and the administration's regional strategy has been an unprecedented success.

Dividends for the United States

The policy of dehyphenation broke the previous mold by treating India as a rising global power whose collaboration with the United States offered the promise of realizing vital geopolitical goals on the world stage, while treating Pakistan as a vulnerable but valued partner in the immediate war of terrorism. This approach paved the way for an outcome that had previously eluded Washington: enjoying good relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously.

Furthermore, it produced beneficial outcomes for both states in managing their own bilateral relationship. Because the logic of dehyphenation required the United States to give lesser priority to managing Indian-Pakistani ties, Islamabad was unable to secure from Washington either any external support for or tacit acquiescence to its old revanchist ambitions. Dehyphenation conveyed the point that despite Washington's deep engagement with Islamabad, Pakistan would have to make its peace with India on what are essentially the only sustainable terms over the long run, namely, those that reflect the differential in relative power. Although successive Pakistani governments were gradually converging on this recognition, the Bush administration's policy of strengthening Indian national capabilities provided the fillip for Islamabad to use the composite dialogue with New Delhi and the long-standing "back channel" to engineer a rapprochement with India.

The emphasis on dehyphenation has thus paid rich dividends. It has enabled the United States to advance a diverse variety of goals within the region and elsewhere without becoming hostage to the vicissitudes of Indian-Pakistani relations, while providing the permissive conditions for those bilateral relations to evolve peacefully. In every instance in which critical decisions were required, such as those relating to regional cooperation on counterterrorism, providing Islamabad with economic and military assistance, supporting India in its struggle against Pakistani terrorism, integrating Indian and Pakistani contributions to the conflict in Afghanistan, extending New Delhi's access to the "quartet" of technologies codified in the NSSP, limiting the agreement for renewed civil nuclear cooperation only to India, or refusing to constrain India's and Pakistan's strategic programs, the choices ultimately implemented were always driven fundamentally by a judgment about what objectively advanced U.S. interests.

This observation does not imply that the administration was ever blind to the regional context or the global consequences of its actions. Rather, both the context and consequences were considered and integrated into the options prepared for presidential consideration, with palliatives incorporated into those alternatives as well whenever necessary. What was distinctive about this process was that the benefits and burdens associated with each option were assessed in the context of the intrinsic value of each country to the progress of certain well-appreciated U.S. goals rather than being driven or constrained by misgivings about how Washington's relations with one South Asian state would affect its ties with the other.

The administration's successful implementation of this differentiated regional strategy played a critical role in engendering the gains enjoyed by the United States in South Asia during the last eight years. Secretary of State Rice articulated the administration's perception when replying to an Indian interlocutor's question on the significance of making New Delhi her first stop during a trip to South and East Asia in 2005: "It really is emblematic of how far this relationship has come in the last several years. The president very much values the enhanced relationship between the United States and India, the fact that we are becoming in many ways important global partners as well as regional partners. And he wanted me very much to come here and I'm glad that I was able to come here first."²⁷ Asserting that "we've tried very hard, as a matter of fact, to make the point that this is not a hyphenated relationship," she declared that U.S. ties with each South Asian partner ought to be viewed on their own terms. "This is a relationship with India. We also have a very good relationship with Pakistan and we are concerned about the well-being of both."²⁸

Although other structural factors played a part as well and key decisions made by senior leaders such as Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Singh of India and Musharraf were no doubt indispensable during this period, the vital U.S. contribution consisted of respecting—nay, enhancing—the natural balance of power within the region while encouraging the positive aspirations of both states.

Although the success of dehyphenation therefore certainly derived from the fact that the differentiated U.S. approach toward India and Pakistan successfully accommodated the unequal weight of these two states as they pertained to U.S. interests of the moment and to larger U.S. grand strategy, implementing this approach undoubtedly involved difficult trade-offs and complex policy choices. The logic of dehyphenation, however, mandated resolving such dilemmas in a

Current changes in India and Pakistan will require adjustments in present U.S. policy.

way that was respectful of the fundamental U.S. interest in each state based on its unique geostrategic significance: with India as an entity that was relevant to the global balance of power, especially insofar as that balance had certain material consequences in Asia, and with Pakistan as a locally relevant state whose current and prospective significance derived from its capacity to export a range of destabilizing problems worldwide and from its willingness to aid the United States in mitigating the pernicious consequences of these exports.

Any alternative approach to dehyphenation in such circumstances would only embody a prescription for paralysis or failure, as the historical record now amply confirms. It would either end up leaving every sensible U.S. initiative toward one state stillborn because of fears about how it might be received in the other or it could end up transmuting even good initiatives into sorry compromises that, by attempting to appease both sides, squandered the benefits that might otherwise have accrued to clear U.S. policies.

That the administration could sustain antinomic policies toward India and Pakistan simultaneously while helping to repair their bilateral relations even as it strengthened U.S. ties with each country in different ways is ultimately a tribute to Bush's political vision and the manner in which he implemented the differentiated strategy vis-à-vis India and Pakistan. The history of the subcontinent and of U.S. ties to this critical region during 2001–2008 might have been very different were it not for his ironclad determination to maintain the decoupling, or the dehyphenation, in U.S. relations between these two major South Asian states.

The Future of Dehyphenation

As Bush's presidency draws to a close, the imperfections of its bilateral policy toward Pakistan, although real and significant, ought not to obscure the achievements of its larger regional approach toward South Asia. The president's emphasis on dehyphenation has paid off handsomely from the perspective of U.S. interests, although some of the constituent elements of that policy will require further refinement over time.

Given this fact, it would be unwise for any of his successors to pursue radically different alternatives to the framework currently in place. The history of U.S.–South Asian relations since 1950 has been littered with the consequences of alternatives that have been tried and found wanting. With the changes that have been occurring in the region since about 1980, the benefits of dehyphenation will only become more apparent over time. Bush's successors would therefore be well advised to stay the course in this instance.

The changes occurring in India and Pakistan will, however, require adjustments in present policy. Because India now appears to be well along the way

to becoming a major global power after many decades of faltering, future U.S. policies should aim to further consolidate the transformation in U.S.-Indian relations, which has been underway since the final years of the Clinton administration and which received such dramatic impetus in Bush's two terms, in order to entrench India in the ranks of U.S. friends and allies permanently.

At the very least, this effort will require the successor administration to complete the U.S.-Indian civilian nuclear initiative, if this monumental policy project is not completed by the time Bush leaves office. A failure to complete this initiative, when India fulfills its end of the deal, would risk reopening the disagreements that characterized the bilateral relationship since 1974, with unhelpful consequences for consolidating the growing partnership that is now possible thanks to the strong congruence of interests, values, and societal ties witnessed for the first time in its history.

In a more general sense, future U.S. policy toward India ought to be characterized by enhanced policy continuity, such as expanding defense cooperation, enlarging economic intercourse, and deepening societal bonds. The current approach toward this rising power has produced significant gains and has advanced important U.S. regional and global interests.

The adjustments in bilateral policy vis-à-vis Pakistan will have to be more dramatic. Because of the immensity of the problems facing Pakistan and because these difficulties are almost certain to persist for a long time, the next U.S. administration must intensify efforts to assist Islamabad in achieving the soft landing that reverses the still-disturbing political, economic, social, and ideological trends characterizing Pakistan.

It will have to change its lines of approach considerably to emphasize assisting Pakistan to transform itself into a successful and moderate state for its own sake, rather than primarily as an instrument for advancing U.S. purposes. This will require strengthening Pakistan's society through greater targeted assistance, but it may also sometimes require a more respectful distance from the state that allows Pakistan's new civilian rulers to be supported as they renegotiate the character of their country's civil-military relations, reaffirm their chosen constitutional framework, refurbish the institutions pertaining to civilian rule, and recast the struggle against extremism and terrorism as part of their own evolution toward liberal democracy. These objectives cannot be achieved if Pakistan does not move quickly to consolidate the peace process with India. Consequently, the next administration must invest in encouraging Islamabad to complete the reconciliation process along the lines already

Adjustments in bilateral policy with Pakistan will have to be more dramatic.

agreed to in the back channel with New Delhi. This task will be eased considerably if India and Pakistan can resolve the less significant territorial disputes relating to the Siachen Glacier and Sir Creek and if Islamabad can integrate itself economically into a larger regional trading system that connects the sub-continent to Central and Southeast Asia.

In this context, although the United States should maintain its existing good links with the Pakistani military, these ties should now be directed beyond the immediate demands of the war on terrorism, particularly toward strengthening the current army leadership's desire to remain the guardian, rather than become the master, of the state. Earlier this year, Rice finally articulated the necessity for "Pakistan ... to find a way to have very solid civilian control of the armed forces."²⁹ Aiding the new government in Islamabad in this task will be a tricky but important challenge for the next administration.

Although addressing these numerous burdens will obviously require a long and demanding engagement spanning several administrations, U.S. objectives would be satisfied if Pakistan continues to exhibit sufficient progress so that the trend lines pertaining to good governance, stable macroeconomic management, focused investments in human capital, responsible foreign and strategic policy behaviors, and moderate ideological orientation are positive and durable.

These tasks involving India and Pakistan will require continued attention in the United States, but success in the future will require exactly those ingredients that have materialized in the recent past: a continued emphasis on dehyphenation that accords with the divergent trajectories of the two states; the concentrated attention of policymakers at the highest level, including the president; and the presence of informed and committed individuals at key levels of government in Washington and in the field capable of shaping and implementing policies that amalgamate knowledge of the region with a specific vision of U.S. interests. If the next administration can incarnate these ingredients in its policymaking, there is every justification to be hopeful that the current success initiated by the implementation of a dehyphenation policy will be enjoyed by the United States in South Asia and persist for a long time to come.

Notes

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