

## Chapter 3

# Pakistan and Afghanistan

### Pakistan's Troubled Identity

Pakistan is India's most difficult neighbour and cannot be dealt with like India's other South Asian neighbours for a number of reasons—its mindset; its strategic significance for outside powers; its military, nuclear and missile capabilities and its territorial dispute with India over Kashmir. However, the most important difference between Pakistan and India's other neighbours is that for India the relationship with Pakistan is as much a domestic as a foreign policy issue, even if Indian politicians are reluctant to admit this. Pakistan's *raison d'être*, simply put, is that the Muslims of India allegedly cannot live and prosper in a single State dominated by Hindus. India obviously feels differently, and this gave rise to Pakistan's political compulsion to prove otherwise. Hence the centrality in India's political discourse of so-called secularism—a concept that arose in medieval Europe against the history of Church–State conflict but which, transplanted on an alien Indian soil, has acquired a totally different meaning that has much to do with politics and little with religion. In India, where faith and religion is a central and integral part of the lives of most people, the State needs to treat all religions equally. It has to be active in educating the people in the essential tenets of all religions, not be indifferent to religion. It is because secularism has become a political football that there is so much sensitivity in India

to the religious divides rather than the far more deep-rooted and pernicious caste divide that all parties are unfortunately encouraging and exploiting. It inevitably complicates relations between India and Pakistan when Pakistan, seen as pursuing policies that undermine India's security, arrogates to itself the role of being the protector of the rights and welfare of Indian Muslims.

Six decades after its Independence, Pakistan continues to search for a durable and credible identity, other than it being 'not Indian'. Pakistan's rulers constantly strive to show how Pakistan is equal to, if not better than, India in all respects. The complex psychology of the Pakistani ruling elite, dominated by the military, is seen in a small but telling illustration—some of Pakistan's missiles are curiously named after various foreign invaders who ravaged India, including the territory of present-day Pakistan, centuries ago! In particular, even after more than three and a half decades, the Indian role in the creation of Bangladesh continues to rankle, with the Pakistani military in search of 'revenge' for its humiliating defeat in 1971. The mindset of the ruling elite is a cocktail of arrogance and brashness, at times bordering on cockiness, which has of late become even more potent with the addition of a measure of fundamentalism. This has led to a policy of unrelenting hostility towards India that occasionally breaks out into conflict. The Pakistani ruling elite's perception of Pakistan's place in the region and the world has led to Pakistan pursuing policies that have held back economic and social development and progress not only in Pakistan but also in South Asia as a whole. The deleterious consequences of Pakistan's approach have been the creation of artificial barriers between India and Pakistan, and the expending of tremendous resources, time and energy to sustaining Indo-Pakistan tension, confrontation and wars that have vitiated the overall atmosphere in South Asia. Regrettably, outside powers have, for their own reasons, encouraged and abetted Pakistan by providing it the money, arms and technology to sustain its aggressive and hostile policies towards India.

India's policy towards Pakistan has oscillated like a pendulum. The two countries have fought military battles on the ground in South Asia, diplomatic battles throughout the world,

and cricket battles on the playing fields. Diplomatic, transport and other links have been disrupted from time to time. At the same time, Indian Prime Ministers from Rajiv Gandhi and Inder Kumar Gujral to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh have frequently given in to romanticized sentimentalism about Pakistan. India has never sought to clinch a decisive military victory against Pakistan, whether it was the 1947–48 war in Kashmir which resulted in the matter being referred to the UN Security Council, the 1965 conflict which led to an uneasy peace brokered in Tashkent in 1966, or the 1971 war which led to the inconclusive 1972 Shimla Agreement. In 2002, after fully mobilizing its forces, India held back from attacking Pakistan.

While India's intention in all these cases was probably not to aggravate the situation, India's reasonableness has invariably been misinterpreted as a sign of weakness and only served to reinforce the traditional Pakistani military stereotype of India as a flabby ineffective giant. Under these circumstances, there is little likelihood of Pakistan being an effective partner in resolving outstanding problems, leave alone the knotty and emotive issue of Jammu and Kashmir. Even after both sides have been assiduously trying for the last three years to find a solution somewhere between the formal positions of the two sides, success remains elusive. Any lingering hopes of a breakthrough have been destroyed by the terrorist attacks launched in Mumbai in end-November 2008 by terrorists who came from Pakistan. India should be patient. There are no quick fixes that will resolve problems with Pakistan. The most realistic hope is that the two countries can manage them. When the time is right, solutions will emerge, as has happened with other long-divided countries like Germany and Vietnam.

### **Recent Encouraging Trends**

Some encouraging changes in Pakistan's attitude towards India have been visible for the last decade or so, ever since its disastrous Kargil misadventure, and more particularly

after 9/11. Among the indicators of a more nuanced policy on Kashmir and relations with India have been the abandoning of UN resolutions and a plebiscite for solving the Kashmir problem; former President Musharraf's commitment not to let territory under Pakistan's control to be used for terrorist activities directed against India; call for an internal Pakistani debate on new options to resolve the Kashmir dispute and Musharraf's search for 'out-of-the-box' solutions to Kashmir problem. On the ground, a ceasefire has been in place since 2003 although it has begun to unravel since mid-2008. A regular composite dialogue at the Foreign Secretary level, supplemented by a high-level political dialogue, has been going on since 2004. India and Pakistan are seriously talking about building a pipeline to transport Iranian gas across Pakistan to India and another to transport Turkmen gas across Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. These initiatives were unthinkable a few years ago. At the popular level, the traditional public hostility towards India has dissipated, first seen in the unexpectedly warm reception that the visiting Indian cricket team received in Pakistan in early 2004. No longer are cricket matches between India and Pakistan regarded as surrogate military battles. All sections of Pakistani society—journalists, academics, artistes and businessmen—have displayed enthusiasm and self-confidence in wanting normal and more intensive ties with India. Against the background of unremitting hostility, war and absence of dialogue for long periods, these are encouraging signs. Despite Pakistan's continued propensity for creating trouble for India, including through deniable channels like Bangladesh and Nepal, these signals collectively signal a sub-conscious Pakistani recognition of its weakness vis-à-vis India, and perhaps a search for Indian acquiescence and legitimization of continued Pakistani control over Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and the Northern Areas.

No less important are some glimmers of change in the Pakistani mindset that give rise to cautious optimism. There are welcome attempts to trace the roots of Pakistan not to the two-nation theory but to the economic and religious insecurity of the Muslims in pre-Independence India, and to rediscover the secular elements in Jinnah's heritage, with reference

frequently being made to Jinnah's speech of 11 August 1947. A law has been passed that minorities will enjoy the same rights as the majority. The poor showing of the Islamist parties in the February 2008 elections has shown up the weak popular support that the jihadi elements have among the Pakistani people. Second, the Pakistani Army Chief, Gen. Kayani has taken some steps to depoliticize the army. The Pakistani Army did not interfere in the February 2008 elections; military officers have been banned from making contact with politicians; many officers occupying civilian positions have been recalled and steps have been initiated to end the Army's involvement in developmental agencies like the Frontier Works Organization and the Special Communications Organization. As Pakistan People's Party (PPP) President, Asif Zardari's statement in early 2008 to put Kashmir on the backburner took Indians by pleasant surprise. As Pakistan's President, Zardari conceded in an interview to the *Wall Street Journal* in October 2008 that Kashmiri militants were terrorists, that 'India has never been a threat to Pakistan,' and that Pakistan's economic survival requires that it trade with its neighbours first. Even though there have been the expected denials, the fact that such statements were made in the first place is significant.

What explains the winds of change blowing in Pakistan? With both India and Pakistan now having nuclear capabilities, a traditional war of the kind fought by the two countries in the past is ruled out. After Kargil, which remained a localized war, India and Pakistan almost came to war in 2002 but India's aggressive posture could not be sustained beyond a few months, and it had to demobilize its troops. The Kargil fiasco demonstrated to Pakistan that India could not be defeated even in a localized war. Besides, in both cases, neither India nor Pakistan could resist the international pressure that was applied to prevent the situation from escalating. At the diplomatic level, in recent years Pakistan has been unable to generate much sympathy for its traditional viewpoint on Kashmir, the most recent concrete instance being the European Parliament's report on the subject in 2007. Instead, what defines Pakistan's image in the world is its role as a global centre of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and nuclear proliferation.

A key reason for a possible re-think on the part of the Pakistani military establishment is that the jihadis have begun targeting the Pakistani State itself, and have shown up the vaunted Pakistani military to be incapable of retaining effective control over all parts of Pakistan itself. With Pakistan's western front—NWFP, the tribal belt and Afghanistan—today posing the greatest threat to the security of the Pakistani State, it makes sense for Pakistan to want to reduce tensions with India. Within Pakistan, the experience of the last four decades has taken the sheen off the Pakistani Army's image among the Pakistani people, who are no longer taken in by empty slogans. For all the exertions of Pakistan over the last six decades, India has decisively forged ahead of Pakistan, whether it is in terms of economic growth, maturity of political institutions, or engagement with the rest of the world. The earlier desperate attempts by Pakistan to equate itself with India have turned out to be futile and hollow, and have harmed Pakistan more than India. There is a growing sentiment among the people of the sub-continent that the partition of undivided India has hurt all—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There is recognition that the time has come to set aside differences and move towards mutually beneficial cooperation. As a result of all these factors, more and more people in Pakistan today are less convinced about an imagined threat from India that has traditionally provided the justification for the Pakistan Army's privileges and perks, and more concerned about the Pakistani Army's abuse of power and rapacious loot of the resources of the State.

Despite all these positive developments, there is still a long way to go. Reality checks came in July 2008 with the disruption of harmony in Jammu and Kashmir over the Amarnath Shrine land transfer controversy; the bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul; the series of terrorist attacks in Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Delhi and more recently Mumbai as well as the breakdown of the military ceasefire along the Line of Control in Kashmir. The peace process, already under strain because of these developments, was completely derailed by Pakistan's non-cooperative attitude in investigating and bringing to book the individuals and institutions in Pakistan behind the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. As a

result of the tumultuous political developments in Pakistan during 2007 and 2008 leading to the historic February 2008 elections, the Pakistani army is under pressure but has not lost its power. It may go back to its old ways when the situation calms down. Pakistan is still far from having a genuinely democratic government that wields effective power. A tug-of-war is under way. It is not ruled out that the spate of terrorist acts and disruptive activities against India are intended to show up the ineffectiveness of the Pakistan civilian government and create suspicions in India about its bona fides, and pave the way for the Pakistan military to reassert itself openly in Pakistan's political arena.

### **India's Approach**

It is necessary for India to follow a carefully nuanced policy with the new civilian government in Pakistan. India's approach should have a strategic perspective that needs to be worked out in confidential consultations with the major political parties in India in order to generate a broad political consensus within India itself. Persuasion and incentives must be combined with pressure. India must be realistic enough to recognize that real changes in Pakistan's policy will require time and patience. There are likely to be many, hopefully only temporary, setbacks. India's focus should be on areas where the objectives of the Pakistani civilian government and India coincide. Given Pakistan's history and the entrenched position of the military in Pakistan, it is no mean achievement for the people of Pakistan to have managed to first make Gen. Musharraf give up his uniform and then the Presidency. The most important priority is to strengthen the new civilian government's hands vis-à-vis the Pakistani military. In this context, India should welcome the civilian government's new trade policy that liberalises imports from India and seeks Indian investments in selected projects in Pakistan. Another area where India's interests coincide with those of Pakistan is in weakening the

jihadi elements in Pakistan. The next stage would be to work towards reducing foreign military presence in the region, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan itself. Improbable as it may sound today, Afghanistan is a possible area of cooperation.

The festering sore of Kashmir will no doubt have to be tackled. Till mid-2007 or so, there were ongoing back-channel discussions with Gen. Musharraf to try to produce a mutually acceptable compromise solution. Although the talks were being held in great secrecy, the following appear to be the elements of a possible solution as gleaned from material leaked to the media—no territorial changes; ‘soft’ borders; greater autonomy and self-governance in both parts of Jammu and Kashmir state; a cross-Line of Control consultative mechanism and demilitarization of the State at a pace that would be determined by the decline in cross-border terrorism. While a back-channel dialogue may suit a military dictatorship, the disadvantage is that this does not create the ground for public and political opinion to give its inputs and reactions on such an emotive and vexed issue, whose solution would have to be widely accepted in both countries. In an open, democratic polity like India, particularly when there is a coalition government in power, any major foreign policy initiative should enjoy a broad political consensus if it is to succeed. Expectedly, the new elected civilian Pakistani government has disavowed Musharraf’s initiative.

It is not realistic to believe that there can be any viable solution to the problem of Jammu and Kashmir other than the status quo. The long term, and sinister, motive of the Kashmiri separatist groups and even the so-called mainstream Kashmir political parties in starting and stoking a controversy over the transfer of land to the Amarnath Shrine Board was to put a spoke in the wheel of the steady progress that had been painfully achieved towards normalization of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. India cannot continue to pander to separatist sentiments in Kashmir. Logically, there is no reason why India and Pakistan should be more concerned about the human suffering of the people of the divided state of Jammu and Kashmir than they have been about divided communities in other parts of the sub-continent such as Bengal and Punjab, the continuing human suffering of the Mohajirs in Pakistan



and their kin in India, or indeed the divided communities in the border areas of Rajasthan. Both from security and political perspectives, there cannot be 'soft' borders between Jammu and Kashmir and POK while the rest of the India–Pakistan border is fenced. Another thing to bear in mind is that in India, because of the protection afforded by Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, the demographic profile of Jammu and Kashmir has remained unchanged since 1947. This is not so in POK where large-scale immigration of settlers from Punjab has taken place. Finally, the pre-1947 princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was an administrative rather than a coherent political entity. It has at least five distinct regions, namely Jammu, Kashmir valley, Ladakh, POK and the Northern Territories. Why should India show greater concern about keeping the pre-Independence character and boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir than it has shown about other Indian States? Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and other Indian states have been reorganized for political and administrative exigencies. If a more self-assured and self-confident Pakistan is prepared to treat Jammu and Kashmir like any other state of pre-Independence India, then perhaps the two countries can get on with trying to improve their bilateral relations. On the Indian side, if the sharp divide between Jammu and Kashmir regions turns out to be unbridgeable, it may become necessary to think of separate Jammu and Kashmir states, and Ladakh as a Union Territory. Whatever their other differences, neither India nor Pakistan want to see an independent Kashmir, as that would pose security threats to both countries.

Taking a long-term view, India must try to persuade Pakistan that the two countries can together make South Asia a formidable force in the world. India–Pakistan confrontation is only helping outside powers. However, Pakistan's principal foreign backers, namely the US, China and Saudi Arabia have their own interests and therefore their own policies vis-à-vis Pakistan. It would be realistic to recognize that continued India–Pakistan tensions and confrontation probably suit one or more of them. Gandhi's speech at his prayer meeting on 4th January 1948 may turn out to be prophetic. He said:

Mistakes were made on both sides. Of this I have no doubt. But this does not mean that we should persist in those mistakes. For in the end we shall only destroy ourselves in a war and the whole of the sub-continent will pass into the hands of some third power. That will be the worst imaginable fate for us. I shudder to think of it.

That is something for both India and Pakistan to ponder over. India, of course, needs to try its best to persuade Pakistan's foreign backers to change their current approach and make way for a more stable, democratic Pakistan that has close ties with India. But as *realpolitik* dictates that this is unlikely to bear fruit, India must have an autonomous Pakistan policy that combines a juicy carrot with a heavy stick.

### **Leverages against Pakistan**

What can India do to exert pressure on Pakistan? India seems to have ruled out a military solution to its problems with Pakistan. After having threatened to go to war against Pakistan in 2002, India had to demobilize its troops after a few months. Perhaps the nuclear 'balance of terror' was at work. Moreover, the international community, led by the US, will do its utmost to avert a war between two nuclear-armed adversaries, as it did in 2002. The US, which has a number of bases close to India's borders, has vastly improved monitoring capabilities of India's military manoeuvres and will not be caught by surprise as it was at the time of Pokharan-II. Were the international community to think that India is seriously contemplating military action against Pakistan, they would exert enormous and not-so-subtle economic and other pressures on India. Nor have India's periodic 'leaps of faith' (Indus Waters Treaty, Shimla, Lahore, Agra) with military or military-dominated regimes in Pakistan worked. The latest such initiative, starting with former Prime Minister Vajpayee's speech in Srinagar in April 2003, has lasted over five years and has yielded some results, but has foundered of late. There is little hope for a lasting deal with a Pakistani

military regime. India's long-term goal vis-à-vis Pakistan has to be the emergence of a lasting genuinely democratic government. If military means are ruled out to effect a 'regime change' in Pakistan, India should think of employing effective non-military means to achieve this covert objective.

India's levers against Pakistan are limited. One, perhaps the only, lever is the flow of Indus waters from India into Pakistan. This is a card up India's sleeve that India should carefully play. Many scholars and historians have pointed out that, more than anything else, it is the desire to control the waters of the Indus and its tributaries that flow from Jammu and Kashmir that lies at the root of Pakistan's obsession with grabbing Kashmir. Water may become a future source of conflict between India and Pakistan. While the situation regarding water availability in the Indian states bordering Pakistan is grave, it is much more serious for Pakistan. Unfortunately, the lever of the Indus waters was signed away in an incredibly one-sided agreement struck in 1960. India cannot abrogate it legally and were it to try to do so, India would probably come under unbearable pressure from the international community. There is also the question of what India's abrogation of such a treaty would mean for India's relations with China, which controls the sources of three major Indian rivers, namely Sutlej, Brahmaputra and Karnali/Ghaghra, that flow into India. Therefore, India should take a subtle, nuanced approach to the Indus Waters Treaty rather than look at a black-and-white situation of either abrogating the Treaty or accepting the current situation.

Under the Indus Waters Treaty, although India is entitled to fully utilize the waters of three Eastern Rivers, namely Sutlej, Beas and Ravi, a substantial quantity of water from these rivers continues to flow into Pakistan, to which Pakistan is not entitled. This is because India has not completed the various planned projects on the Eastern Rivers such as the Indira Gandhi Canal, Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal and the Thein Dam. This needs to be done on a war footing. A political initiative is required to convince the concerned Indian states that they should put aside their differences and not let Pakistan use these waters. If some water is still flowing into Pakistan,

additional schemes/projects should be devised. Perhaps the Indira Gandhi Canal could be extended further south into Rajasthan and Gujarat. Providing more water to Gujarat could well make Gujarat a granary like Punjab and Haryana. Of course, all this would require substantial sums of money, but it would be insignificant and definitely more effective than the thousands of crores of rupees that India continues to spend on military measures against Pakistan. The mere announcement of acceleration of programmes to utilize fully the Eastern Rivers would send a panic among Pakistan's rulers and if India can manage to actually reduce the existing flow of the Eastern Rivers into Pakistan by even as little as 10 or 20 per cent, it would create the conditions for organized opposition by the powerful farmers' lobby against the military regime. It would also be an important psychological move that should do much to convince the Pakistani military establishment that India is not a toothless tiger. Since India is entitled to fully utilize the waters of the Eastern Rivers within the framework of the Indus Waters Treaty, the international community cannot legitimately object to this.

The second prong of India's strategy involves the Western rivers. India should formally tell Pakistan that it wants to renegotiate the Indus Waters Treaty. India cannot be prevented from making this demand (just as the US has done on the ABM Treaty). India's arguments for this are genuine and could go something along the following lines.

The India-Pakistan Indus Waters Treaty is a unique Treaty of water-sharing in the world where the upper riparian has been so generous towards the lower riparian. India did this consciously at great sacrifice to the welfare of the people of India in the interest of better overall relations with Pakistan, and a settlement of the Kashmir question. It was expected that this would reassure Pakistan about possible disruptions in the waters of the rivers flowing into Pakistan from Jammu and Kashmir and thereby facilitate a lasting solution to the Kashmir dispute. Unfortunately, despite India's generosity, Pakistan has not reciprocated. On the contrary, it has followed a deliberate policy of destabilizing India and hurting her

economically. It has not honoured its solemn commitments such as the Shimla Agreement, a generous agreement given by a militarily victorious India to a vanquished Pakistan in the hope of having a long-term peaceful, stable and cooperative relationship between the two countries.

Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism directed against India is not only against the letter and spirit of its various bilateral commitments to India, and the principles of the UN and international law, but it also constitutes a breach of faith and trust and an overtly hostile and bellicose act tantamount to a declaration of war. Second, India's own water needs in Jammu and Kashmir have grown. The people of the state and their elected representatives have been asking for the right to utilize the waters of the rivers flowing through Jammu and Kashmir into Pakistan. India is very keen to see that there should be accelerated economic development of Jammu and Kashmir. India is confident that the rulers of Pakistan, who profess concern for the welfare of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, would not oppose any steps that India takes to promote the welfare and prosperity of the people of the state.

Such an initiative could be projected as an important political initiative of the government on Kashmir that all sides of the political spectrum, both at the Centre and in Jammu and Kashmir, would find difficult to oppose. This would also put Pakistan on the defensive, and perhaps create a rift between Pakistan and pro-Pakistani Kashmiris. Of course, it is highly unlikely that Pakistan will agree to any Indian proposal along the above lines. But at least it will enable India to wrest the diplomatic initiative vis-à-vis Pakistan and simultaneously reach out to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. India should put the revision of the Indus Waters Treaty as one of the principal issues for discussion with Pakistan. Pakistan claims that Kashmir is the 'core issue' between India and Pakistan. India's argument should be that if that is the case, then a discussion of the revision of the Indus Waters Treaty in the interests of the people of Jammu and Kashmir has to be an integral part of the discussion on Kashmir.

More than semantics or verbal dueling, it is only action on the ground taken by India on the Eastern Rivers—and full utilization of the waters of the Western Rivers permitted under the Indus Waters Treaty—that will create the necessary pressure on Pakistan. The panic that was created in Pakistan in September 2008 because of a purported disruption by India in the flow of the Chenab to fill the Baglihar Dam makes it clear that the flow of river waters from India into Pakistan is an effective lever in India's hands. India needs to put in place a long-term strategy in order to fully utilize the Indus waters that it is entitled to use under the Indus Waters Treaty. Moreover, it would also set the stage for a possible abrogation of the Indus Waters Treaty should a decision to that effect be taken any time in the future. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's suggestion in 2007 for joint use of the land and waters of Jammu and Kashmir presages a possible, perfectly logical, Indian demand to this effect.

One would like to hope that wiser heads would prevail in Pakistan so that India does not feel compelled to resort to dire measures. It is clear that a Pakistan dominated by the military is not likely to give up its compulsive hostility to India. Normal relations with India would remove the Indian threat perception that provides justification for its continued rule, either directly or from behind the scenes. The people of Pakistan would then be even more vocal in questioning the need for Pakistan's huge military budget and the military's enormous perks. Whether India and Pakistan are fated to live in a state of confrontation and hostility for ever depends in large measure on whether there will ever be an end to military rule in Pakistan. It is primarily the people of Pakistan who will decide this, and India will have to deal with whoever wields effective power in Pakistan. At the same time, India has no reason to give legitimacy and support to the Pakistani military, which continues to foment terrorist activity directed against India, and has made only tactical adjustments to its overall strategy of weakening and hurting India. India's real friends in Pakistan are the people of Pakistan. Any Indian visitor to Pakistan will testify to the warmth and hospitality they encounter from ordinary people. Those in the forefront of the struggle for democracy in Pakistan were

considerably dismayed at India's tacit support to President Musharraf in his confrontation with the political parties and civil society. India has changed tack but only reluctantly and belatedly. India must not let down the people of Pakistan in their struggle for democracy because this is in India's own interests.

### **India's Interests in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan and India are geographical neighbours and remained so till 1947 when Pakistan was formed. As the base from which over the centuries foreign invaders launched attacks into India, Afghanistan was always vital for India's security. Successive rulers of northern India have sought to exercise control over eastern and southern Afghanistan. After 1947, Afghanistan and India have been naturally drawn closer together by the shared inimical relationship with Pakistan. After the Taliban were overthrown in 2001, India has provided generous assistance (total commitments amount to US \$1.2 billion) for Afghanistan's reconstruction and nation building in diverse sectors. India has a presence in the major provinces of Afghanistan, with Consulates General in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, and projects in many parts of Afghanistan, including the southwest of Afghanistan where India has just finished constructing the Zaranj-Delaram road that connects Afghanistan's girdle road to Zahidan in Iran.

India has a strong interest in ensuring that Afghanistan remains sovereign, stable and united and free from outside influence. As long as there is an antagonistic India-Pakistan relationship, India would not want Afghanistan to come under Pakistan's exclusive sphere of influence. That is why the revival of the Taliban remains a matter of deep concern for India. Although India's security is deeply affected by what happens in Afghanistan, India's disadvantage is that it is not involved in Afghanistan's security in any meaningful way. This has begun to change, following the visit of the Afghan Defence Minister to

India in April 2008 when it was agreed that India would share its experience in counter-insurgency with Afghanistan and also train Afghan pilots and help in the maintenance of Afghanistan's fleet of helicopters. The response of the Taliban and its patrons in Pakistan to growing Indian influence in Afghanistan was the suicide car bombing at the Indian Embassy in Kabul in July 2008. India is leery not just of Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Throughout history, India did not want to see Afghanistan under the control of outside powers; today too it is not in India's interest to have a long-term presence of NATO forces so close to its borders. NATO may be benign towards India today, but not necessarily tomorrow.

The US did a commendable job in unseating the Taliban from power but, like many other powers in the past, has predictably got bogged down in Afghanistan. Seven years of the US' so-called Global War on Terror have only aggravated the problems they were intended to resolve—al-Qaeda has not been controlled, much less eliminated; the Taliban's hold and influence in Afghanistan has resurfaced and narcotics trade is booming unprecedentedly. US anger and frustration is rising particularly as Pakistan has shown itself to be unable or unwilling, probably both, to cooperate to US' satisfaction in tackling the terrorist menace. At the same time, the efforts by the US military forces and the NATO-led and supported International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to find a military solution to Afghanistan's turmoil are unlikely to succeed. The continued presence of Western troops in Afghanistan constitutes a major roadblock to bringing lasting peace, reconciliation and stability to Afghanistan. Foreign troops in Afghanistan only give a sharper edge to the nationalism of the fiercely independent Afghan people, without changing their lives for the better. The West's push to artificially recreate a Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan is a strategic error. The defeat of the Taliban in 2001 represented the military defeat of the Pashtuns at the hands of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups represented by the Northern Alliance, assisted, of course, by the US military. Both logic and prudence dictated that these non-Pashtun groups should not have been deprived of a share in power, much less marginalized, as the Karzai government



has done. It will be impossible to recreate the old Pashtun-dominated State of Afghanistan; what is feasible is the setting up of a federal or quasi-federal State that takes care of the interests of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Rather than continue with the present sterile policy, the US could achieve more success in rooting out terrorism if it were to lean hard on Pakistan to wholeheartedly cooperate in stopping the flow of weapons to Afghanistan, in closing down training camps in Pakistan, and in curbing trafficking of narcotics, which is an important source of funding for the Taliban. Then there is some hope for the stability of Afghanistan. However, the US and ISAF appear to have no intention of withdrawing from Afghanistan any time soon. This may not be just out of concern for the activities of the al-Qaeda in the region. Afghanistan's strategic location may have tempted the US to keep a long-term presence there to enable it to monitor developments in the region as a whole and, should it choose, to put pressure on any country in Afghanistan's neighbourhood.

### **Tackling the Root Causes**

Unless the root causes that have created the present situation are understood and tackled, Afghanistan will never become stable. Despite the warring tribal and ethnic diversities and rivalries, Afghanistan has an identity as the strategic space between India, Iran and the Central Asian deserts and steppes beyond the Amu Darya River. Because of its strategic location, Afghanistan was often incorporated into the territory of the surrounding States for the sake of their own security rather than because Afghanistan by itself was a tempting target. Strong empires in India and Iran like the Mughals and the Safavids competed in Afghanistan; when they weakened, the Afghans asserted themselves and invaded these countries. Tsarist Russia's push to the south in the 19th century brought another player into the equation. Throughout history, Afghanistan has survived because of its geographical location that made it an

indispensable overland trading link between India and the rest of the world. But Afghanistan as a State within its present political boundaries is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Afghanistan today has an image problem in the rest of the world. Yet there is nothing in the Afghan character that makes Afghans intrinsically fundamentalists, terrorists or drug-pushers. Afghanistan has floundered and fallen into a morass because the roots of its economic life have been sapped by Pakistan's policy of restricting Afghanistan's deep-rooted economic, cultural and people-to-people contacts with India to ensure that Afghanistan can remain Pakistan's economic and strategic backyard. Now, as in the past, Afghans look principally to India's large and rich market for sustaining their livelihood. Afghanistan on its own does not have the resources that can enable it to be even semi-independent economically. Throughout history, eastern and southern Afghanistan, which has dominated Afghan political and economic life, has always been economically anchored to the Indian sub-continent. Once these links are restored, one may see a radical transformation take place in Afghanistan. In the 21st century, Afghanistan can on its own be an important source of hydropower and minerals to India. It can also earn large sums of money as a tourist destination and a transit country for Central Asian gas and oil to India as well as for trade between India and countries to the West like Iran, Turkey, Central Asian Republics, Russia and even Europe.

### **India–Pakistan Cooperation in Afghanistan?**

Afghanistan's problems cannot be resolved without Pakistan's cooperation. At the same time, given the traditional hostility and suspicion between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Pakistan's policy of wanting to keep Afghanistan under its thumb, neither the Afghans nor India or the rest of the world want to let Pakistan have a free hand in Afghanistan. From India's perspective, there have been only temporary gains in

the present situation insofar as Pakistan is now forced to pay more attention to security problems on its western frontier, which relieves some pressure on India. But in the long term, a Pakistan in turmoil is not desirable either, as Pakistan is the buffer that protects the whole of the Indian sub-continent from the turbulent lands to its west. Once US and other foreign troops leave Afghanistan, as they no doubt will one day, Pakistan and India will have to jointly deal with a possible security threat to the sub-continent that could emanate from an Afghanistan in chaos or one controlled by an outside power, as well as the threats to social harmony and stability in both countries that Islamic fundamentalism of the Taliban type poses.

As Pakistan grapples with security problems on its Afghanistan frontier, Pakistan may be more amenable to the proposition that its essential interests in Afghanistan coincide in many respects with India's, and that India has many capabilities that could be very useful in Afghanistan. Pakistan will first have to get out of its mindset of 'strategic depth', which makes sense if Pakistan wants to position its airfields out of range of Indian aircraft but is perhaps not a relevant consideration today when both sides have missiles. If India and Pakistan were to cooperate in Afghanistan, the prospects of an early return to stability in Afghanistan would improve. The first thing that Pakistan must be persuaded to do is to give India transit access to and from Afghanistan. India, for its part, needs to assure Pakistan that it respects Pakistan's genuine security interests in Afghanistan. As a confidence-building measure, India could consider shutting down its consulate in Jalalabad or Kandahar if Pakistan reciprocates by giving up its objection to India playing a prominent role in Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Undertaking this cooperation within a regional framework can assuage Pakistan's fears about India's presence in Afghanistan. In any case, Afghanistan's other neighbours like Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have a legitimate interest in Afghanistan and will have to be involved in the quest to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. Nor can Russia be left out. A century ago, Russia had a decisive role to play in settling with British India the status of Afghanistan; 30 years ago, it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that set

off the chain of events that has led to Afghanistan's current turmoil. China too may have to be involved. In today's world, Afghanistan's neighbours and other powers with a legitimate interest in Afghanistan's affairs can do no better than convert Afghanistan, like Switzerland, into a neutral nation that brings benefits to all but poses a threat to none. As the world's superpower, with a military and other controlling presence in Afghanistan as well as significant presence and influence in Pakistan, the US must be persuaded to play a role in bringing this about. The initiative for this should be taken by India, which is the greatest loser in the larger strategic game, and which has much to gain were Afghanistan and Pakistan to be re-integrated into the South Asian framework. The US itself would gain enormously, not only because of the stability that this would bring to the region but also because this would mitigate a source of grave insecurity that this region is seen as posing directly to the US itself. As new governments prepare to assume office in both India and the US over the next few months, and given the fresh outlook that the recently elected civilian government in Pakistan has shown, this is a good moment to try to strike a 'grand bargain' between the US, Pakistan and India involving not only Afghanistan but Iran too. Is it too much to expect that one day both Iran and Afghanistan can be economically integrated with South Asia?