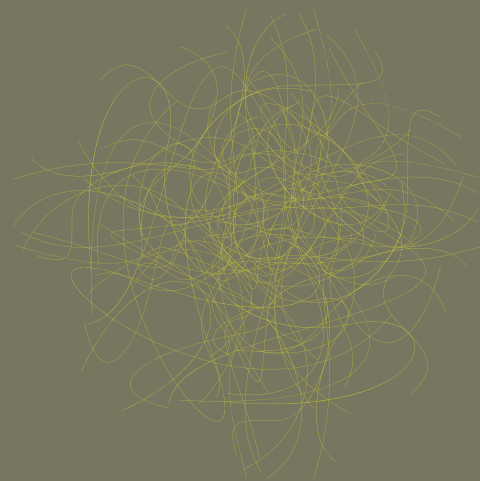


**Sources of Tension
in Afghanistan and
Pakistan: A Regional
Perspective**

**Perspectives
from the Region
in 2013:**

3. INDIA

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CIDOB Policy Research Project

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Introduction

In line with the focus for 2013 under CIDOB's "Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Regional Perspectives (STAP RP)" policy research project on the regional powers and their interests, this series is a product of field research visits to a number of the key regional powers identified in the 2012 Mapping Document <http://www.cidobafpakproject.com/> by the STAP RP project team.

Understanding the perspectives of the five main regional powers with an interest in outcomes in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a critical element in relation to this volatile region, which is currently in a state of flux as 2014 approaches. Identification of opportunities for dialogue, peace building, improved bilateral relationships and the development of regional organisations as mechanisms for dialogue, as well as examining how the regional powers see Afghanistan and Pakistan from a broader geopolitical and foreign policy perspective are key elements in enhancing this understanding.

This report is a product of STAP RP consultations with individuals and institutions held in New Delhi, India in October 2013. It is jointly authored by Roberto Toscano and Francesc Badia y Dalmasas (CIDOB). A list of those consulted is at the end of this report.

While many experts contributed to the findings presented, the final responsibility for the content is that of CIDOB alone.

The Context

A series of discussion meetings with a range of institutional and individual interlocutors were held in Delhi in October 2013. Institutions consulted included: the Observer Research Foundation, the Forum for Strategic Initiative, the Centre for Policy Research, the Institute for Defence Strategy & Analysis, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, and representatives from Jawarhalal Nehru University and the Jamia Millia University.

These consultations allowed the STAP RP project team to confirm some of the assessments and forecasts drawn from exchanges with experts in other countries in the region during its process of regional consultations in the course of this year. At the same time, they also revealed some original, and sometimes counter-intuitive, Indian perspectives, in particular as far as Afghanistan is concerned.

In spite of India's very active role in regional engagement under the Istanbul Process, some interlocutors in fact challenged the very focus of the STAP-RP project, in the sense that they expressed deep scepticism on the possibility that the regional powers, and in general international actors, can have a significant impact on future developments in Afghanistan. From this perspective, the only realistic approach instead would be to allow Afghans to reach a new and sustainable equilibrium, through a mix of conflict and agreements.

Most experts, moreover, stressed that they did not share an excessive fixation on 2014, expressing the opinion that the impact of the withdrawal of Western (particularly US) military forces will probably not be as dramatic as generally expected, and some interlocutors count on the continued US-Western support for the Afghan National Army in the years to come. Due to historical events, from the Anglo-Afghan Wars, to the Soviet Invasion, to the post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan, western public opinion tends to view the latter from a military perspective and as a permanent source of threats and instability. In the view of these interlocutors, this feeds the "ungovernable country" myth, whereas India on the other hand is considered to have a more nuanced historical perspective that goes back to the Mughal period, when large chunks of Afghan territory were part of India. Thus, as was pointed out in several separate discussions to Indian eyes, Afghanistan is part of India's historical neighbourhood and will remain so when today West's "long term commitment" has faded away.

Furthermore, all Indian interlocutors tended to shift the discourse from Afghanistan to Pakistan, which actually became the main focus of the consultations. One interlocutor, challenging the very concept of "Af-Pak", noted that it only referred to "a mere theatre of operations in military terms" and was not politically useful.¹

The outcomes of discussions around specific thematic areas are presented below.

1. In common with both Afghanistan and Pakistan themselves, both of which abhor the term.

1. Afghanistan: “An Uncertain Future”

Several interlocutors questioned what they termed as “*the Western obsession*” with preventing a civil war in Afghanistan, saying that the 2001 American intervention did not solve, but only froze the then ongoing civil war, as if it were in suspended animation. That process will have to run its course (“*let them fight it out*”, said one expert) through a sequence of violent phases, but also truces, pacts, and alliances until the country – which is now artificially dependent on external forces in terms of both security and the economy – can reach a domestically-generated, and consequently non-artificial, sustainable, internal balance. The international community, according to this view, “*should not be overly afraid of chaos*”.

In agreement with a widely shared opinion, Indian interlocutors also stressed the inevitability of negotiating with the Taliban, given the fact that they have not been and will not be defeated. At the same time, most of them questioned the possibility of defining “the Taliban” as a unified bloc, pointing out the effect that the last ten years have had on a process of diversification of the movement, via a combination of continued armed struggle and economic development of the country (albeit limited). Thus, significant internal dynamics are at work, not only between different groups, but also within each of them (the Haqqani network, the Quetta Shura, etc). The Taliban, one expert said, have proved to be “*Protean*”.

Most experts harbour no illusion on the possibility of more moderate voices within the Taliban gaining ascendancy, allowing for a degree of pluralism and perhaps some type of power sharing arrangement. They agree however that the Taliban will not be to exert power in an exclusive fashion. If it is true that they have not been defeated, their opponents, the mainly non-Pashtun Northern Alliance, maintain a significant fighting potential which the Taliban cannot afford to ignore.

Power-sharing, in short, was seen as a necessity, but it was also pointed out that a realistic approach should avoid making predictions on the process through which such power-sharing will take shape (which was considered likely to be contradictory and less than peaceful, in real terms).

While assessing the future of Afghanistan, most experts seemed rather doubtful about the hypothesis that the present government might be able to maintain continuity within the framework of a power-sharing deal with the Taliban. However, they also believed that the forces that support the latter will inevitably be a part of such power-sharing, albeit via different and currently unpredictable realignments.

None the less, other interlocutors expressed a more optimistic view on the capacity of the present government to avoid being replaced by a coalition in which the Taliban would in effect exert substantial hegemony, given the improvement of the fighting capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). These experts, voicing criticism toward what in their opinion is an unwarranted dismissal of the credibility of the present government, expressed the belief that the presidential elections of 2014 will be an important element in determining the shape

of what will certainly be a complex transition. In this view, throughout his twelve years in power, despite continuous manoeuvring, reportedly gross corruption and what appear to be permanent setbacks, President Karzai has managed to consolidate a thin, weak but functional administration and to build an increasingly capable army that might be able to keep the Taliban at bay in their southern rural strongholds, thus preventing them from taking Kabul and progressing northwards.

According to the prevailing view in Delhi, the political sustainability of a post-2014 Afghanistan will in any case be the outcome of a cessation of the distorting presence of US and other Western troops and the difficult, probably still bloody, but inevitable, search for an internal balance.

On the other hand, interlocutors were unanimous in maintaining that it is not true - if indeed it ever was - that "*whoever rules Kabul rules Afghanistan*".

If indeed the substance and modalities of power-sharing at the centre are unforeseeable, what is certain, in the view of those consulted, is that in the next few years, Afghanistan will be moving towards a degree of decentralization of power that will be even higher than the present one. Although only a very few of our interlocutors hinted at the possibility of a formal breakup of the country, all of them agreed that it would be impossible for any future government in Kabul, whatever its composition and political nature, to aspire to exerting uniform power over a country in which traditional ethnic, religious and regional diversity has been further dramatized by the imperative of survival and safety by decades of armed conflict.

It was recalled by one expert, in this context, that countries can maintain formal unity, while being de facto characterized by regional components with substantial levels of quasi-independence, as in the case of Iraq and its Kurdish northern province. While scepticism about any potential deal with "moderate" Taliban is clearly dominating in Delhi, should such an arrangement unfold, it will clearly need to involve some sort of devolved government.

Economic Prospects

Interlocutors were clearly aware of the very uncertain prospects for the country's future economic sustainability. It is in fact taken for granted that a government which includes the Taliban, even as a component of a coalition, will most probably bring about a significant drop in international assistance, both governmental and non-governmental. It will indeed be extremely difficult for Western governments to justify the continuation of assistance programmes, once a movement that is considered an archetype of backwardness and violation of human rights is installed in power in Kabul.

The view in Delhi, however, is not necessarily sombre. What seems to prevail is the belief that Afghans will somehow manage to maintain, a certain capacity for economic survival, whatever the political situation, with one expert stating that the need to avoid a catastrophic interrup-

tion of external aid may well induce the Taliban to accept a low profile within a future coalition. The role of the international community will certainly be more difficult, but still necessary and possible.

Certainly the cross-border export of drugs will continue to be a significant component of Afghanistan's economy, but other factors should also be considered. Some interlocutors put a major emphasis on migration (mainly to Iran, but also to India and other lesser destinations),² pointing out that this "safety valve" worked massively since the beginning of the war against the Soviets, and has continued with ebbs and flows. It is indeed impossible to distinguish clearly between refugees and economic migrants within these massive population movements, since Afghans have continued to leave their country for a mixture of conflict-generated insecurity and extremely harsh economic conditions, in particular unemployment. Thus, interlocutors suggest that in India it is not expected that even an end of armed hostility within Afghanistan will bring about the interruption of the outward flow of people, nor the opposite, with the return of those who have left in previous years.

According to interlocutors, however, the most significant potential source of economic sustainability will come from a phenomenon to which not enough attention has so far been given: the development of a very lively and highly profitable set of local economic activities conducted by a dynamic class of entrepreneurs who have been able to operate also in conditions of endemic conflict, counting on the protection given by the vested interests of local political and military players. It was noted that militia leaders have consolidated their power also by extracting revenue from merchandise transit and economic activities in the areas under their control. Local economic development could thus become the engine of growth, in the absence of a powerful and centralised state.

In other words, the economy of a future Afghanistan will be as decentralized economically as it will be politically.

Another significant aspect of the economic future of Afghanistan is the interest that the country will continue to generate possibly increasingly as a source of raw materials. Pointing at the 3-trillion US \$ potential of Afghanistan as a supplier of minerals (although scaled down to 1-trillion by the US government), one interlocutor stated categorically: "*Afghanistan will not be abandoned*". For this reason, it is to be expected that China's interest in the country will probably increase: (the Chinese Metallurgical Group & Chinese Jianxi Copper Company bought a 30 year lease of deposits at Mes Aynak for US \$3 billion, worth \$100 billion of copper - that is, five times more than the current Afghan US\$20bn GDP). However, most interlocutors seemed to rule out a major Chinese presence in the future economy of Afghanistan, adding that it actually might turn out to be less significant than that of Japan. An Indian consortium has also bought an iron-ore mine lease.

2. Somewhat surprisingly, Pakistan was not mentioned, although it has been a major destination for Afghan refugees in the past.

India's Interests & Role

Both India's historical links with Afghanistan and its present involvement in terms of economic assistance and political support to the Karzai

government are the obvious starting point of any exchange of views on Afghanistan. Indeed, interlocutors insisted on existence of the political will to maintain continuity in this relationship. Yet, the strong elements of uncertainty as to the future of the country are inducing the Indian establishment to take it for granted that the political-strategic shifts that are to be expected in the country will also impact on India's role and presence.

Most experts consulted were open to considering even scenarios that are radically different from the present situation, implicitly discarding the possibility that the present government will be able to hold on to the main share of real power.

Conventional wisdom would point to a stark and ominous scenario for India: the Taliban acquire all or most of power in the country, thus turning it into a staging ground for armed Islamist radicalism with a potential for spill over to Kashmir and even, by acts of terrorism, the rest of India. Those consulted did not seem to share this concern. They pointed out that a totally Taliban-dominated Afghanistan is not really on the cards, given the strength of anti-Taliban forces and their significant fighting potential. And even in case that the Taliban, though formally just one component of a coalition, were to be able to establish a *de facto* hegemony, this would not necessarily bring about a higher security threat for India.

One element that mitigates the fear of a total Taliban takeover is the widespread conviction expressed by Indian experts consulted, that even after 2014 there will be some form of US military presence in Afghanistan. It was pointed out that even in the case that a Status of Forces Agreement not being reached and US military forces were limited and without combat roles, the already-substantial numbers of security contractors already operating in the country may well increase after 2014.

Experts coincided in stating that, since the Taliban have not been, and in their view, cannot be defeated militarily, it is only realistic to accept that they should be involved in negotiations and political compromises. All external actors, starting with the US, have accepted this fact, but right now the process is complicated by the fact that it is not clear who is negotiating with whom, and especially "*with which Taliban*". The opening of the Taliban office in Doha was to a large extent a false start: (irrespective of the outcome, not having including Delhi in the process was seen - not without some bitterness - as dismissive of India's "steadfast" cooperation in stabilising Afghanistan since 2001). It will remain to be seen what Pakistan's role might be in this process. The suspicion expressed in this regard is that the Pakistan ISI has been active in interfering with actors and channels of negotiations that are considered inimical to Pakistani interests.

As for India and the Taliban, some interlocutors said that it is not to be ruled out that India itself is conducting contacts with the Taliban. In effect, despite past scepticism and suspicion, around dealings with the Taliban, Delhi seems to be now convinced of the inevitability of having to do so, and especially of the need for India not to be excluded.

Some experts voiced concern that a consolidation of Taliban power might entail a spillover of armed radicalism along the axis Kandahar-Kabul-Kashmir. A majority of experts, however, appeared confident that the future of Afghanistan, whatever the uncertainties of the situation, will not increase insecurity for India. Such assessment seems to be grounded in the belief that the Taliban will be absorbed by the need to ensure the viability (including, but not confined to economic) of the country; and also that the cost of supporting “global *jihād*” could again become devastating for them, as was the case with Al Qaida because its presence provoked the US attack on Afghanistan and led to the end of the Taliban emirate.

A certain amount of spill over of radicalism from Afghanistan was not ruled out, but the view was expressed that it would take a Northern direction (Central Asia) rather than a South-Eastern one, that would affect India. According to this view, the militant spill over into Kashmir that did take place after 2001 was actually seen as a consequence of a defeat – the US invasion of Afghanistan – rather than the product of an expansive *jihadi* design.

What is significant is that experts agree that, though there will inevitably be changes in its profile and composition, the Indian presence in Afghanistan – mainly in terms of trade and economic relations as well as development assistance - will not be discontinued, even in a future political stage characterized by some sort of governmental role by the Taliban. It was pointed out that India’s presence in Afghanistan is extensive and substantial, especially in terms of infrastructure and development initiatives, and that the Indian government – keen to dispel its image as a supporter of non-Pashtuns - has lately made it a point of focusing on Pashtun areas. Finally, the likely increase in decentralization, both political and economic, will in any case allow for a diversified presence of Indian initiatives in different parts of the country.

2. Pakistan: “A Worrisome Neighbour”

Whilst in the case of Afghanistan, interlocutors gave the impression of not ruling out that the future of the country might turn out to be less dramatic, and less threatening than expected in terms of security, their views on the prospects for Pakistan were almost uniformly bleak.

Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan was branded by interlocutors as being well beyond that of a mere “spoiler” but, rather, characterized by its total negativity, insofar as that (as one expert put it) “*most extremists groups would not even exist without Pakistani support*”.

Other interlocutors, on the other hand, agreed that no solution for Afghanistan is conceivable without a positive Pakistani role. In the majority view, it was felt that India would welcome the “strategic shift” on Afghanistan announced in 2012, but at the same time expressed scepticism on the fact that such a conceptual shift, in itself credible in terms of Pakistan’s national interest, might be translated into concrete actions. For the time being, it was considered that there seems to be no indication that this is in fact the case.

While systematic in voicing Indian grievances towards Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, most interlocutors tended to express very sombre, most pessimistic views - not on Pakistan's international behaviour, but on its internal situation – in other words, not on what Pakistan does, but on what it is. Whilst behaviour can evolve and might hopefully be managed through dialogue and diplomacy, there is no way in which internal developments can be substantially influenced from the outside. India's concern – as was stressed – is not so much the behaviour of the Pakistani state, therefore, but rather its weakness, which might move the state dangerously towards the point of collapse. Indeed, one of the experts went so far as speaking of "*the death throes of the Pakistani state*".

A number of supporting factors for this pessimistic view were identified:

- *The nature of Pakistani elites*. Lacking internal legitimacy because of their perceived detachment from the needs of the non-elites, they need to bank on the negative and threatening image of the "other" - concretely, India. (A contrasting comparison was drawn with Iran, where regime elites are now trying a different, less hostile approach to the "other" which has traditionally been a negative source of legitimacy - the US).
- *No constituency for peace*: The pessimistic conclusion of one of our interlocutors was that the existence of a "constituency for peace" in Pakistan is to be doubted.
- *Increasing violence*: The increasing level of terrorist violence targeting minorities such as Ahmadis, Shi'a, and Christians.³
- *The overwhelming power of the armed forces and intelligence services (ISI)*. The term "deep state" was used to signify the disconnect between the apparent power of constitutional bodies, starting from the President, and the real power within the country. Indian experts are not questioning the sincerity of President Nawaz Sharif in wanting to address this problem, but appeared to be rather sceptical of the possibility he will succeed.

Overall, however, opinions on Pakistan, however, turned out to be far from homogeneous, with a "minority view" of experts defining Pakistan as a society that is more resilient than generally thought in spite of all the elements of internal instability and violence. Democracy – according to this view – is certainly troubled, but remains none the less a reference for a significant part of the population, and in particular for the educated elite. The army seems to have abandoned the temptation of exerting political power directly, and its only "red lines" are seen to be on the one hand, the disintegration of the country; and on the other, any threat to its corporate interests.

India-Pakistan Dialogue: "Difficult, But Necessary"

While most interlocutors expressed an extremely negative, indeed often harsh, view of Pakistan - more for its internal socio-political structure and deep economic and identity problems than for its behaviour per se - when the discourse moved to the ways in which India should address relations with its problematic neighbour, indications were predominantly of a less negative, more flexible nature.

3. There have also been attacks on Hindus in Pakistan, though these were not mentioned by interlocutors.

The reason for this apparent contradiction is that in India even the harshest, most radical critics of Pakistan are aware of the fact that the prospect that Pakistan will become a failed state is the true nightmare scenario for India. Repeatedly, Indian experts voiced the opinion that a stable Pakistan is in the national interest of India (“*stable but not necessarily strong*” – as one interlocutor specified).

Furthermore, the Afghanistan situation ends up also as being seen mainly in this light. In the first place, the collapse of the Afghan state is considered both less likely and less dangerous for India than the collapse of the Pakistani state. There is thus no doubt on where the real priorities lie for India. As much as terrorist spill over from Afghanistan, whatever its internal situation, is not considered a serious possibility, the further weakening of the Pakistani state to the point of collapse or total lack of control by Islamabad, is indeed seen as a major security threat for India.

One expert stated that Afghanistan is definitely not the main cause of India’s problems with Pakistan but, insofar as it is a stumbling block for the success of a policy of improved relations between the two countries (which for India is regarded a real priority), policy toward Afghanistan should be seen in the light of such a priority. Thus, in this view, it would make sense for India to address Pakistani concerns about the need to maintain “strategic depth”⁴ in Afghanistan through a policy of restraint, if not downright “stepping back”; and in the light of the perceived threat represented by India’s presence and activities in Afghanistan. This perception however tends to be branded in Delhi as excessive - if not paranoid - but which needs to be taken into consideration, given its all too real political consequences.

The main difficulty in pursuing a path toward an improvement of relations with Pakistan was certainly not seen as being via Afghanistan, though a less hostile and less competitive approach to the future of the country would be helpful.

More problematic, including for its impact on Indian public opinion, is the situation on the Line of Control (LOC) in Jammu-Kashmir, where recent clashes with Indian casualties have introduced an element of tension that can only be heavily counterproductive for a policy of détente.

But the most problematic issue, also as an element that weighs heavily on India’s internal political debate, relates to episodes of terrorism on Indian territory (mainly the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament and the *Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)*- led 2008 Mumbai assault) carried out by anti-India *jihadi* organizations seen as operating with the support of Pakistani intelligence. It was pointed out that the present government, and in particular Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, are in fact the target of politically costly accusations of insufficient firmness toward Islamabad.

While all interlocutors agreed on the necessity of a dialogue with Pakistan, differences were evident on the best way to pursue it. Some stressed the need to demand that, as a precondition for talks, Pakistan should be forthcoming in terms of concrete actions – for instance on the judicial pursuit of LeT leaders responsible for the terrorist attack in Mumbai. Others advocated a policy of moderation and basic patience. One expert from the latter group said very explicitly “*No talks with Pakistan? This is only good for the Islamist*

4. The doctrine developed out of the 1971 war that resulted in the birth of Bangladesh. “Strategic depth” sees Afghanistan as a secure refuge in case of a potential war with India.

extremists and the Hindu right": a statement that reveals the highly politicised nature of the issue of relations with Pakistan.

During the period of the STAP RP consultations in Delhi, Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, addressed this issue on the occasion of the Patel Memorial Lecture, stating explicitly " *When some say 'do not talk to Pakistan until ideal conditions exist and all terrorism stops', this betrays a lack of self-confidence. That is precisely what the terrorists and their sponsors in the Pakistani establishment want: for us not to talk to Pakistan.*"

Beyond nationalist posturing and political propaganda, as manifested in the campaign leading up to the 2014 parliamentary elections in India, this appears to be a mainstream view and one which even a future rightwing government will find difficult to depart from.

3. The United States: "Whose Ally?"

The STAP RP consultations in Delhi coincided with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to Washington, and both analysis in the press and comments by interlocutors consulted, confirmed the importance of the "US factor" for relations between Delhi and Islamabad.

Indian experts are aware of the constraints on Washington and of the fact that US relations with Pakistan, though often tense and rife with mutual grievances, must be maintained for self-evident strategic reasons. According to some experts, this will continue to be true after 2014, in the sense that whatever presence the Americans will be able to maintain in the country will be exposed to hostile attacks by militant groups on which Pakistan is notoriously able to maintain a certain degree of control.

Yet the prevailing view in Delhi is that Americans are excessively indulgent with Pakistan's behaviour, and do not seem capable of at least curtailing the worst and most blatant aspects of Pakistani (and in particular ISI) actions that are in direct contradiction with US policies and even the security of US troops.

Nawaz Sharif's visit to the US has rekindled this critical view, so that both experts and public opinion would agree with a blog⁵ that commented on the visit by stating: "*Obama has gone out of its way to court Pakistan*". It was certainly not appreciated in Delhi that President Obama commended Pakistan, which not long ago the Indian Prime Minister had defined as "*the epicentre of terrorism*", for its sacrifices in the fight against the latter.

For India, the problem goes well beyond Afghanistan, in the sense that what is considered in Delhi as Washington's "excessive openness" toward Islamabad is a source of concern for a number of reasons, starting from Kashmir. India, in fact, has always feared and rejected any form of "internationalization" of the Kashmir issue (both in a multilateral and bilateral mode), and is particularly wary of any signal that the US might be tempted to take the initiative of any sort of mediation. The reference of the Joint Statement released after Nawaz Sharif's visit to Washington to "*outstanding territorial disputes*" (with an encouragement to Pakistan and India to address them through dialogue) was read by Delhi in this light.

5 "Indian Punchline" by Ambassador (ret.) MK Bhadrakumar, dated October 24

More generally, on the issue of relations with the US, there appears to be a strong sense of disappointment in Delhi, caused by the fact that the re-orientation of traditional Indian policy away from traditional non-alignment toward a closer relation with the US - (a reorientation that was very significant also in terms of internal Indian politics) - is considered as not having been correspondingly matched by the US. America's "balancing act" between India and Pakistan is a source of disappointment and resentment in Delhi, and the suspicion is widespread that the US - not having really reviewed its priorities of the Cold War era - still continues to consider Pakistan, and not India, as its key ally in South Asia.

On this issue, however, more sober, less polemical views were also expressed by some of those consulted, with one of the experts pointing out that the improvement in US-India relations starting around ten years ago was never "about Pakistan". According to this view, the Indian government is well aware of the fact that one cannot expect Washington to deal with Islamabad disregarding Pakistan's importance, in the light of two vital US priorities: nuclear weapons and terrorism; and the nightmare scenario of the combination of the two. The idea that Washington might "choose" India over Pakistan is in this view, consequently not realistic.

4. Other Regional Players

4.1 China

Concern about China in India tends to be deep, but is not usually made very explicit. Talking to experts in Delhi, it quickly becomes evident that India is realizing that China is beginning to project its power on a global scale and also starting to formulate its own approach to themes that were once disregarded as being outside the scope of basic strategic and economic interests.

This is true also in relation to both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In both countries, China has one main concern and one main goal: the concern is avoiding any subversive influence on the region of Xinjiang; and the goal is that of increasing its economic presence, with a special interest in mineral resources.

In order to pursue those priorities, China is ready to deal with any counterpart, including the Taliban. This echoes the views expressed during the regional consultations in China for the STAP RP, in April 2013.

What has been noticed by Indian experts is that more recently China's policy seems to have become both more active and wider in scope, and it is inevitable that this increased activism will be considered here in terms of a possible challenge to India and its interests.

What is especially worrying India is that - as its crisis deepens and if relations with the US deteriorate (which is not to be excluded, also because of the deep anti-Americanism of Pakistani public opinion) - Pakistan will probably have no other choice but to intensify relations with China.

In assessing priorities for India's global strategies in the area, one is tempted to refer to Russian dolls, with the smallest and less important (Afghanistan) contained within a larger one (Pakistan), with both being included in the biggest and most important doll, China – the most thought about, but the least mentioned.

4.2 Iran

Iran's role was considered by interlocutors as eminently positive, since it is founded on Iran's vested interest in stability, security and the prevention of terrorism and the cross-border activities of radical *ihadis*. The "Herat model", according to interlocutors, shows what Iran wants for – and from – Afghanistan. Iran is considered in India to be second only to Pakistan, as far as the influence on the future of Afghanistan is concerned. It was also emphasised that both the US and other regional players (Russia and China in particular) share this assessment, though in the view of the experts consulted, "the Americans are reluctant to admit it". Some interlocutors, however, expressed a certain caution, stressing that even today Iran seems to be hedging its bets between support for Karzai and covert links with some wings of the Taliban movement; and that it cannot be taken for granted that Iran's role in Afghanistan will necessarily continue to be benign, given the fact that it will be determined by wider strategic considerations, and in particular Iran's relations with the United States.

4.3. Saudi Arabia

Passing concern was expressed about the role of Saudi Arabia, with some interlocutors expressing the view that the Saudis are not only historically behind much of Sunni radicalism from North Africa to Central Asia, but have in particular allowed Pakistan, by both economic and political support, to carry out its policy of support of Sunni extremism in Afghanistan.

5. Conclusions

India is caught in a difficult political quandary, especially in relation to Pakistan.

On one hand, it holds deep grievances toward Pakistani support of extremists and terrorists both in Afghanistan (where Indian targets have been attacked by terrorists belonging to the notoriously (reportedly) ISI-supported Haqqani Network) and in India, but on the other, has a vital stake in the avoidance of a total collapse of the Pakistani state.

It insists in demanding a more forthcoming and cooperative attitude in relation to the prevention and repression of terrorism on Indian territory, but at the same time, knows that considering such behaviour as a pre-condition for dialogue would, in the present situation, result in the impossibility of proceeding towards the improvement of relations with Islamabad, a goal that appears to be overwhelmingly shared by the Indian political class.

Consultations in Delhi revealed a combination of analytical pessimism and political flexibility - a flexibility necessitated by both a lack of alternative op-

tions and by the need to make the most of available options - however unpalatable they may be - in order to avoid worst case scenarios.

There seem to be very few "red lines" for India, and as far as Afghanistan is concerned, practically none, since there is confidence here that the worst can be avoided or in any case contained.

With respect to Pakistan, two possible "red lines" were identified from the Indian perspective:

- i. A total collapse of the Pakistani state, with a scenario of anarchy and even territorial division. This concern, shared by practically all our interlocutors, was so strong that it recalled South Korean fears about a possible collapse of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the consequent scenario of a spillover of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe and uncontrollable population flows.
- ii. A new episode of a major terrorist attack in India that could be traced to Pakistani agency. On this, even the most moderate interlocutors, categorically favorable to dialogue with Pakistan, admitted that it would be politically impossible for any government to repeat the remarkable self-restraint that was shown by the Indian government in 2008 at the time of the Mumbai terrorist attack.

Experts Consulted

Sunjoy Joshi , Director, Observer Research Foundation (ORF)
Ashok Singh, Programme Coordinator, ORF
Wilson John, Senior Fellow, ORF
Ambassador (ret.) K.C Singh, Forum for Strategic Initiative (FSI)
Maj. General (ret.) Dipankar Banerjee, FSI
S. Nihal Singh, FSI
Dr. Onkar Marwah, FSI
Srinath Raghavan, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research
Maroof Raza , Security Watch India (SWI)
Pratful Bidwai, Fellow, Transnational Institute (TNI)
Ambassador (retd.) Jayant Prasad, former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan
Air Marshal SG Inamdar, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)
Brigadier Arun Sahgal, IDSA.
Rajeev Bhargava, Director, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)
Suresh Sharma, Associate Fellow, Institut d'Etudes Avancées de Nantes (IEA)
Anuradha Chenoy, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University
Mujibur Rehman, Assistant Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia University

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