

IMPERIAL AMERICA AND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

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Imperial America: Imperious, not Colonial

America entered the Subcontinental scene during the Second World War not directly within British India but in the context of the mobilization of the China-Burma military supply effort following the conquest of Southeast Asia by Japanese forces. American merchants, military and missionaries had direct involvement and experiences in China but Americans lacked a deep involvement in Indian affairs, and they did not possess a deep understanding about Indian politics and society. Marco Polo knew more about the region than Americans did.¹ After 1947, America's involvement in the Subcontinent was shaped by the Cold War, by British attitudes towards Pakistan and India and by American bureaucratic politics and foreign policy. This developed in the context of the politics of Bureaus of Middle East and South Asian affairs in various US government departments where American concerns with oil, Cold War and Muslim politics prevailed. American practitioners brought two attitudes into play in their approach to the Subcontinent. First, there was an imperious attitude born of American experiences in securing superiority in North America and the Pacific Region by military and technological means. America's diplomatic, economic and military experiences achieved dominance in South America, and in select parts of Asia in the 1800s. The attitude reflected a belief in a go it alone and can do attitude, a conviction that America

¹ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, London: Penguin Books, 1958.

was destined to lead the world, and a belief in building asymmetrical power relationships in military, economic and psychological terms. These were deemed to be necessary to advance American interests and to create advantages. So America did not believe in formal colonization or occupation or annexation except in a few instances (e.g. Philippines, Hawaii and Cuba) but its faith in its manifest destiny and in progress through asymmetry meant that it required a domineering position in areas of interest. The analyses by American scholars Louis J. Halle and Karl E. Meyer² help us understand America's imperialistic culture. The analysis by American scholar Owen Lattimore shows America's reliance on military power and military policy in dealing with political problems. Lattimore notes the problems created by an over-emphasis on a militaristic approach in dealing with Asian questions where nationalism is strong.³

Secondly, despite its naval and political rivalry with Britain in the Pacific, the rivalry between American and British oil companies in the Middle East, and in the Caribbean and South American region, its inexperience with Subcontinental affairs led America to turn to imperial Britain for its diplomatic schooling. This was to each side's advantage. Britain, obviously aware of its declining international importance needed the American connection. Its global outlook and imperial experience was a valuable trade off with America. So when the Cold War emerged, British practitioners were there to induce American involvement in critical regions with a view to create turnaround situations in moments of crisis. The Truman Doctrine was announced in response to Britain's unwillingness to carry the burden of defeating the communists in Greece.

2 L.J. Halle. *The Cold War as History*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967, chapters 3, 6, and 11. K.E. Meyer. *The Dust of Empire*. New York: Century Foundation Book, 2003, ch. 1.

3 O. Lattimore. *The Situation in Asia*. Asia, Boston: Little Brown, 1949, chapters 4 and 10.

When India and Pakistan became independent America was initially uninterested in Subcontinental affairs because no significant American interests were at stake in the area. British practitioners like Sir Olaf Caroe, former Governor of the strategic Northwest Frontier province were sent by the British Foreign Office to convince the State Department about the importance of Pakistan as the inner circle of Western defence in the strategic Persian Gulf region and the southern belly of the Soviet empire. The record of Anglo-American official conversations and deliberations and policies on American-Pakistan Relations by K. Arif and others show the high level of British complicity in the making of American policies towards Pakistan and India during the 1950s; these were the formative years of American diplomatic experience in the Subcontinent.⁴ Karl E. Meyer's analysis also shows that the successor to British imperialism in the Subcontinent was America despite its anti-imperial, anti-colonial posture. But America never succeeded in achieving the mastery of the Subcontinent as Britain did. America turned out to be a failed imperialist in the area despite its enormous military and economic strength and its determination to teach lessons to those who opposed its will and interests.

The Empire of Disorder and Asymmetrical Conflicts

Alain Joxe, an important French strategic thinker reveals the general American orientation to strategy and diplomacy.⁵ America does not want to conquer the world and to take responsibility for protecting subjugated societies. Rather it sees itself as the

4 K. Arif, ed. *America – Pakistan Relations*. Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd, vol. I & II, 1984.

5 A. Joxe, *Empire of Disorder*, translates from French, Semiotext, Distributed by MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass: 2002, pp. 13-14, 63, 80, 92.

head of a global empire where it uses its financial and military means to regulate disorder. This is why Henry Kissinger maintains, maybe tongue in cheek or maybe seriously, that America has chosen to know everything.⁶ But is American knowledge and leverage used to advance an American interest in conflict resolution or is it meant to promote situations of manageable instability, of frozen regional peace process(es) or hurtful stalemates so that regional rivals can cancel each other's power and influence and remain tied to regional rivalries? The latter option makes sense provided regional rivalries remain manageable and the great powers are not drawn into local conflicts, and such situations give American power and diplomacy an access into regional affairs. Hence America's need of enemies during war and peace time as it creates a focal point for American military, diplomatic or economic pressure. One cannot imagine a period in American diplomatic history when it did not face enmities, real or notional. As in the recent case of the 'axis of evil' countries the enmities express asymmetrical conflicts. Asymmetrical threats are preferred because they provide an advantage to American power, whereas symmetrical threats as in the Second World War in Europe requires the aid of other powerful allies who would demand a piece of the victory as the price for its sacrifice. Given that the big band of the American strategic bureaucracy is compartmentalized and is geared to manage sub-critical international situations, and its strategic machinery gets mired in internal debate and stalemate when it is faced with high risk situations which require decision making at the highest level of government, asymmetrical conflicts are preferred over high risk symmetrical conflicts.

Karl E. Meyer describes the situation in the following way.

⁶ Kissinger quote is in Joxe, p. 38.

“It is a long-standing characteristic of American diplomacy to have it both ways: to pride ourselves on our republican virtue, our devotion to human rights, our belief in self-determination and our anti-colonial heritage – while enjoying the prerogatives of our asymmetrical power, pressing others to open their markets while selectively closing our own, entering into secretive security arrangements that mortgage the sovereignty of our partners and, when deemed necessary, using our leverage, overtly and covertly, to alter another country’s policies or even its leadership. This is the essence of the informal empire that Schlesinger described, and the pretense that it does not exist constitutes the kind of humbug that exasperates, and occasionally infuriates, even our friends.”⁷

But America’s diplomatic and military experience in Asia in the last century indicates that its imperial strategy has not been a rewarding experience for the US government. It worked as long as the natives did not revolt against American power and strategies. America failed to win over the Chinese communists during the civil war in the 1930s and the 1940s, and it was unable to ensure that its protégé, Chiang Kai-shek, stayed in power in mainland politics. Even in asymmetrical conflicts as in the Korean and the Vietnam wars, it was not able to have its way. With Stalin’s and Churchill’s help America defeated Germany in the sense it was physically occupied by Allied ground forces and its internal political and economic structure was re-constituted. America bombed Japan into a surrender but unlike Germany it was not physically occupied by American forces and defeated. Japan’s political class wisely chose to accept a compromise peace but its ‘unconditional surrender’ did not make Japan a permanent member of America’s subsidiary alliance system because as Lattimore points out, Japan is nobody’s ally.⁸ With India, America followed the British imperial strategy that rested on the foundation of an organic link between Western (at that time British, and after 1947, Anglo-

7 Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

8 Lattimore, *op. cit.*, ch. 6.

American) power and Indian Islam.⁹ The post 1947 Anglo-American strategy in the Subcontinent was formed by Lord Louis Mountbatten and his predecessors, the Viceroys of India. Mountbatten was also India's first Governor General and a strategist by profession, and his main Indian collaborator was the first Indian prime minister, J. L. Nehru, who bought into the Mountbatten approach to Kashmir and the Indo-Pakistani questions.¹⁰ During the Cold War, American policy in the Subcontinent made it the catalyst of change in the sense that it helped maintain a situation of Indo-Pakistani polarity and manageable instability. Great powers' interventions in situations of Indo-Pakistani wars and conflict over Kashmir and in moments of economic crisis in the Subcontinent were opportunities for the American practitioners to inject their policy prescriptions on strategic and economic questions of great public importance in Pakistan and India. The Anglo-American strategy worked up to a point in the Subcontinent as long as the two regional powers did not decide to increase their internal military and economic weight and to develop strategies which enabled them to act as catalysts of regional change.¹¹

America was active, calculating and confident in its dealings with India and Pakistan during the Cold War but ultimately it had pursued wrong headed policies which failed to serve American national policy aims. Here is a list of significant American policy failures in the Subcontinent during the Cold War. (1) Despite strenuous efforts by global strategists President Richard Nixon, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Chinese

9 P. Spear, *A History of India*, vol. 2, London: Penguin Books, 1965, Introduction outlines the organic link.

10 H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1969, 1985.

11 I have discussed this in a forthcoming book chapter in a book on India and Pakistan edited by T.V. Paul (Paul volume). Also see retired U.S. State Department official, Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947 – 2000*. London: the John Hopkins University Press, 2001, and *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1961 – 91*. Washington, DC: Natural Defence University Press, 1993.

premier Chou en-Lai, this strong international combination failed to prevent the breakup of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. (2) America failed to secure its traditional aim of Indo-Pakistan parity in the diplomatic and the military spheres. (3) America failed to achieve its international aim of nuclear and missile non-proliferation in the Subcontinent. (4) Finally, it failed to prevent the emergence of India as a regional power and to contain India as a potential regional hegemon. The US-India and US-Pakistan situations were asymmetrical in terms of the distribution of military power, but America was neither able to maintain a situation of manageable instability and disorder in the region nor was it able to achieve a mastery of the region as Britain had achieved for almost three centuries.

Lessons Not Learned, 1950s – 1990s

The parameters of American policy towards South Asia were set in 1949. They must be understood because wrong inputs into policy produced wrong outcomes, and past American mistakes are the basis of current American problems with Islamic terrorism and nuclear proliferation in the Middle Eastern-Asian region. A State Department report in 1949 held that Pakistan was worthy of American support because it could lead a strong Muslim bloc in the Middle East to counter 'Hindu imperialism' and to provide a balance of power in Asia and South Asia. To quote:

“With regard to Pakistan’s endeavor to assume leadership of a Middle East Muslim bloc, it may in time become desirable critically to review our concept that Pakistan’s destiny is or should be bound with India. There is increasing evidence that Pakistan is a viable state and that it can continue to develop independently if not interfered with. There is reason to question whether solidarity with India will ever be achieved although Pakistan may be forced to cooperate in some degree with India on economic matters. It is probable, also, that Pakistan and India would

collaborate in the defense of the subcontinent if faced with a Soviet attack, but these would be expedients. The schism which led on the break-up of the old India was very deep, and this was further deepened by the slaughter of 1947-48 and by India's arbitrary actions in Junagadh and Hyderabad. Therefore the development of a Pakistan-India *entente cordiale* appears remote. Moreover, the vigor and methods which have characterized India's execution of its policy of consolidating the princely states, and its inflexible attitude with regard to Kashmir, may indicate national traits which in time, if not controlled, could make India Japan's successor in Asiatic imperialism. In such a circumstance a strong Muslim bloc under the leadership of Pakistan and friendly to the US, might afford a desirable balance of power in South Asia.¹²

American practitioners had a strong view about the positive role of Islam, and

Assistant Secretary of State George McGhee noted the following:

"The Minister then reverted to his favorite theme of the importance to the United States at this time of the establishment of a new bloc of nations even if held together only by the basic principle of religion, which bloc could be considered as a check to any ambitions of the USSR for further territorial expansion. He stated that the only practical way to bring these countries together was on the basis of religious appeal and that he was determined to go ahead with it. He believed that the forthcoming visit of the Shah of Iran would be helpful in his plans, but he admitted that Egypt and certain other countries presented a very difficult problem. Again and again he reverted to the importance of the fight which Pakistan was making for independence, both political and economic, and *insisted the new Middle East grouping was essential in Pakistan's fight with India.*"¹³

As well, the UK was America's agent in South Asia. While the US government sought to project its impartiality in Indo-Pakistani disputes, Washington favoured friendly UK-Pakistan ties, and tried to avoid actions which could weaken them. This was State Department policy as of 1 July 1951.¹⁴ Note that American policies made no reference to the importance of political principles like democracy and freedom in South Asia. Instead, later, American opportunism in relation to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan

12 Arif, op. cit. pp. 30-1.

13 Ibid, p. 25.

14 Ibid, p. 61.

tolerated and strengthened Pakistani militarism, Islamic terrorism and nuclear proliferation, and it stimulated regional forces which produced disorder on a scale which the American empire failed eventually to control. The 1971 war displayed the worst features of Pakistani militarism which produced genocide in East Pakistan and a war which American-China-Pakistan could not manage; and American globalism produced a strategic alignment with China which polarized the Subcontinent into two camps: the US, China and Pakistan against India and the USSR. This created an incentive for India to engage in self-help and to rely on military methods to deal with regional problems. This is the first time that the American empire lost its grip in an asymmetrical conflict between America and India. This is the first time that India could take on a stronger combination by bringing Moscow to its side and winning a war through a straight fight. It showed that the problem of asymmetry could be managed if the cause was just, if it had external legitimacy, and if asymmetry in the distribution of power could be narrowed by bringing in an international power to its side. Here India and the USSR were playing by American strategic rules which relied on military strategy to first escalate conflict and then to negotiate its end.

America did not learn lessons from the 1971 experience and it continued to maintain the parameters of the losing US-China-Pakistan coalition. Having denounced China-Pakistan links in the 1960s, America embraced the alignment, and it sought to use it to carry on with its policy orientation of the 1950s. Anti-Sovietism and anti-Indiaism remained the guiding lights, and by its policies America reinforced the Pakistani motive for revenge of its 1971 defeat. Pakistan promoted insurgency in India's border provinces and the USA looked the other way until September 11, 2001.

Pakistan wanted strategic space for its interventionist policies in relation to India and Afghanistan. Through tolerance of Pakistani policies or through direct or indirect support, American policies allowed Pakistan that space to continue with its old policies. There was no compulsion for America to change its orientation towards India and Pakistan at the time because there was a situation of manageable instability in the region.

India's refusal to abide by the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (1968) and its action in 1971 against Pakistan and American interests in the region should have convinced America that India was turning its back to Nehru and India was seeking a hegemonic position in the region, albeit in its eyes a benign one. India was emerging as a catalyst of regional change and America's ability to maintain its imperial position in the region was under attack. But this is not the lesson the American government learned because its political system lacks a capacity for critical self-examination, a capacity to think outside the box and to develop a plan for mid-course correction unless external events handcuff America and limit its maneuverability. America made the cardinal mistake of a great power. It failed to recognize its limits and it failed to appreciate the options which lesser powers have in asymmetrical power situations. Limits and options depend on the character of the regional and the international situation, the character of the international system and the internal characteristics of a country's decision making machinery and its orientation.

The Past is the Present for America and South Asia

John Steossinger's Nations in Darkness makes the point that the past is the present because historical experiences and cultural as well as military encounters among nations create institutional and national images. They shape attitudes, beliefs and policies that are based on past experiences as well current and anticipated threats. A. B. Bozeman's work too stresses the pivotal role of history, culture and politics in the theory and practice of diplomacy and military strategy.¹⁵ American practitioners unfortunately do not take a historical view of their policies. The 'can do' attitude begins with a definition of the current policy issues, and devises policies to meet the challenges to American interests. This paper insists that the issues concerning America's relationship with South Asia be examined in a historical perspective because American agendas of the past have shaped the contemporary regional strategic situation, and the US government has become a part of the regional problem although it seeks to be a part of the solution; and furthermore, American policies in South Asia have become costly for America itself as September 11, 2001 attack on American targets demonstrated. During the Cold War the US government was physically immune to an attack from forces located within the South Asian region, but this protection was lost in the 2001 attack. The question then is not about the durability of the India-Pakistan conflict as the core issue in south Asia. It is about the role of America diplomatic attitudes and practices (as well as the role of other external powers such as China and

15 J. Stoessinger, *Nations in Darkness*, New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1994, and A.B. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.

Saudi Arabia) which facilitated not conflict resolution but the extension of a situation of manageable instability in the region since the 1950s.

Today America faces two major international issues in the South and Southwest Asian region. In combining the two areas I am suggesting that the diplomatic and military boundaries of South Asia and the Gulf –Middle Eastern region are no longer distinct. They interact as a result of the growth of transnational terrorism, transnational nuclear and missile proliferation and efforts to build transnational economic linkages in trade, oil pipelines and commerce. The first issue is that the region is now the hub of international terrorism but this hub has been in the making since the 1980s when American aid along with that of its allies was channeled to build up Islamic fundamentalist groups like Hekmetyar. US policy facilitated the growth of Pakistani policies and institutions which favoured regional intervention in the name of Islamic liberation. Pakistani intelligence and military services were involved in the rise of the Islamic militants in the 1980s, and in the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s.¹⁶ The US government and its allies (Saudis, Egyptians, and Chinese) armed and trained the Islamic 'freedom fighters' to expel the USSR from Afghanistan and to expand Pakistan's strategic space in Afghanistan, Kashmir and the Indian Punjab. US National Security Adviser Z. Brzesinski was the architect of this policy of complicity with Zia-ul-Haq's policy of acting on the one hand as America's frontline agent in Afghanistan against the USSR, and on the other hand, as a supporter of Pakistani policy of liberating the region

16 A. Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

by Islamic force.¹⁷ Earlier, in the 1971 Bangladesh war, the US government through the agency of Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon, were complicit in facilitating Pakistani army genocide in the area.¹⁸ USA did not justify Pakistani military's genocide but it tolerated it because of its global policy of containment of the USSR and India.

The second issue concerns the development of the region as the principal hub of horizontal (further) nuclear weapons and missile proliferation despite American and international efforts to create a global regime to stop it. The region is the hub in the sense that it contains two declared nuclear weapon states, one undeclared nuclear power (Israel) and one potential nuclear weapon state which is party to the NPT (Iran). The way this hub emerged raises important questions about the cluster of issues and players which have shaped this hub. Does the international non-proliferation regime address regional security questions such as the rivalry and strategic concerns of dyads like India-China, India-Pakistan, Iran-Israel, Israel-Iraq (before its disarmament)? Does the international non-proliferation and missile control regime create opportunities for nuclear and missile trade as in the case of North Korea-China-Pakistan-Saudi-Iran links which have been reported in the media?¹⁹ Was America complicit in tolerating Chinese proliferation activity vis-à-vis its strategic partner Pakistan and its other Middle Eastern buyers because strategic interests of China and America including their bilateral relationship and their global concerns were more important than non-proliferation? Was

17 Meyer details Brezezinski's role in promoting Pakistan's agenda and Islamic militancy in the region. See Meyer op.cit. pp. 132-133.

18 F.S. Aijazuddin, *From a Head, Through A Head, to a Head: The Secret Channel Between the US and China Through Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

19 For data about China - Pakistan nuclear links, and US response see A. Kapur, 'Pokhran II and After', in A. Shastri and A.J. Wilson, eds., *The Post-Colonial States of South Asia*. London: Curzon Press, 2001, pp. 345-6. For the China-Pakistan-Saudi links see, T. Woodson, 'The Sino-Saudi Connection', *China Brief*, Jamestown Fonnonton, vol. 2, issue 21, Oct. 24, 2002. (Woodson is former China analyst at the Defence Intelligence Agency).

America compliant in tolerating Pakistani nuclear weapons proliferation in the 1980s because of its frontline status in the fight in Afghanistan? These issues relate to American pragmatism which requires selective non-proliferation (with enemies) and tolerates selective proliferation (with friendly states) and thereby undermines the establishment of a rule based - with common standards and common obligations – international society.

Learning About Great Power's Limits and Regional Powers' Options

In 1949 Owen Lattimore warned Americans about learning to recognize the limits of its power and to develop the habit of negotiating with nationalistic Asian states. To quote:

“Asia, to sum it up, has become a part of the world where the great powers can no longer lay down the law as they did in the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. We must negotiate; and we can only negotiate successfully if people in Asia are as well satisfied with what they get out of negotiated agreements as we are with what we get out of them. This limitation applies to Russia as well as to the other great powers.”²⁰

South Asia is one Asian region where the history of America's diplomatic and military record reveals the limits of American power and the validity of Lattimore's advice. This section makes two points. First, even in asymmetrical power situations USA has limits to the use of its power. The scale of the limitation depends on its ability to understand the character of the international system (is it really unipolar or is it multipolar at the international, continental and subcontinental levels?), the internal character of America's

²⁰ Lattimore, op. cit. p.4

strategic decision making community (the biases and distortions it creates because wrong inputs lead to wrong outputs), and the character of the regional and the international situation. These factors inhibit the ability of America, despite its enormous power, to initiate, maintain and to terminate regional conflict. Note that in no conflict of major importance in Asia since 1945 did America succeed in bringing closure to the fight on its own terms: i.e. the conflicts in the Korean peninsula (1950 – present), Indo-China (1960s – 70s), India-Pakistan (the wars in 1965, 1971, and crises in 1997 and 2000), the Afghanistan conflict (1980s), Iran (1979-2003) and Afghanistan and Iraq (2001-2003). The contrast is with America's ability to bring closure to the Second World War in Europe that culminated in the defeat of Hitler's armies and the reconstruction of the new German state and society on American terms. According to Lattimore, the Japanese surrender in 1945 to America should be judged as a compromise peace, and not the permanent defeat of Japan. To quote Lattimore:

“The rulers of Japan were maneuvering to find a way of surrendering that would leave them with some of their old power within the country. Their only hope was conflict of policy among the victors, and especially between America and Russia. By using the bombs as a reason for surrendering promptly, they could end the war with the power position and the advantage of prestige all over the Far East heavily in America's favor. If they hesitated, the surge of the Russian advance through Manchuria would within a week or two immeasurably improve the Soviet position. They did not hesitate.”²¹

Lattimore notes that Japan retains the option to tilt towards Russia and China, and it is not a permanent ally of the USA.

My second point is that regional powers have options in asymmetrical regional power politics where international, regional and local powers interact. The regional and

²¹ Ibid, pp. 111-12.

local powers have options and room to maneuver vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the international powers. This depends on their ability to understand the character of the regional and international situation, the sophistication of their internal diplomatic and military machinery and the character of the international system. American scholars and strategic practitioners have failed to grasp the interaction between great powers' limitations and regional/local powers' options and ability to maneuver because their mental road map is fixated with the idea of great powers' dominance and small states' subordination. Most American scholars, unlike British scholars like the late Professor Martin Wight, do not take the idea of regional power seriously.²²

Let me validate this discussion by discussing the interaction between American limitations in South Asia and the options of regional state players: Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Iran. These are summarized below.

Pakistan

Despite its dependence on American military and diplomatic support and economic assistance since the early 1950s, Pakistan developed the option to build a strategic alignment with China against the opposition of the Kennedy administration to such a move. Furthermore, Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons as a way to reduce its dependency on American and Chinese military and diplomatic support in a crisis and at the same time it tied up the two countries to Pakistan's fate. Pakistan's strategic creation and its political skills enabled it to build its options. Under the cover of its frontline status in the fight against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan in 1980s, Pakistan

²² Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, New York: Penguin Books, 1979 edition, ch. 5.

developed a number of aims. (1) To enlarge Pakistan's strategic space by its interventions in Afghan and Indian affairs. (2) To build the nuclear weapons option despite American opposition to further nuclear and missile proliferation, and to force America to choose between support for Pakistan as a frontline state in the global campaign against Soviet aggression in Afghanistan or to oppose Pakistan in the global campaign against nuclear and missile proliferation. (3) Finally, to use the cover of Pakistani nuclear deterrence to engage in low risk insurgency against Indian interests in the region. This pattern of calculated risk-taking in Pakistani behavior and a buildup of its options re-occurred after September 11, 2001 when Pakistan's frontline status was reinstated in America's fight against international terrorism. In comparison America faced a number of limitations. (1) It could not fight Al Qaeda and the Taliban alone. (2) Its local intelligence was defective and incomplete. (3) It needed Pakistan's bases and airspace for its military campaign against Afghanistan. (4) America could not object to Pakistan's nuclear and missile trade with China, North Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia for fear of losing Pakistan's cooperation in the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

India

Despite India's enormous economic and military weakness at the time of its independence and despite its poor relationship with America, India was able to develop a multipolar pattern of alignments with three international powers (USA, USSR and China), and to develop special ties with countries like Canada and France in the 1950s. They enabled it to extract valuable nuclear aid and technology and to build its nuclear weapons potential despite American insistence on international controls over the atom

since the late 1940s. Despite Pakistan's strategic ties with America and China, India developed a strategy to outmaneuver seasoned international practitioners like Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and Chou En-lai in the battlefield in Bangladesh in 1971. The 1971 war showed the limitations in the use of power on the part of the stronger combination of America, China and Pakistan. In military terms, China had the means to open up a military front in the Himalayas close to Bangladesh. America had the naval power to harm India through the Indian Ocean. Pakistan had the capacity to widen the war in the West. Again in 1998, after the world community had extended the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty indefinitely and the comprehensive Test Ban agreement had been approved by the UN General Assembly, India used its nuclear option to cross the nuclear threshold and to damage the international agreement and the norm it represented. India's nuclear behavior was followed by a process of strategic dialogue between India and America which sidelined the nuclear and missile proliferation issue and instead established an Indo-US defence relationship. This now includes coordinated naval patrolling of the strategic Malacca Straits, cooperation in the fight against terrorism, high technology transfers from America and Israel to India, and plans for ballistic missile defence cooperation. At the same time with the robust development of Indian coercive diplomacy and nuclear and missile capability, India has now the confidence to seek a new pattern of ties with China and Pakistan from a position of strength. In other words, America's ability and opportunity to apply its asymmetrical power vis-à-vis India to America's advantage has shrunk, and India's ability to develop options with the stronger international powers has increased during 1947 – 2003.

Afghanistan

Historically a buffer state, it was an object of attention of neighbours as well as great powers throughout recorded international history. This country has many attributes which enable its rulers to develop options despite the poverty of the country and its limited resources. Its location has strategic value. With a fiercely independent political culture, and a history of changing internal and external alignments, Afghanistani practitioners have been able to bargain with stronger external players. By all objective measurements of power, Afghanistan is at best a local power and a small state. But even so it is able repeatedly to play external powers against each other to the advantage of the Afghan elite. In recent history Afghanistan has learnt to play a major role in the development of criminal, non-governmental globalization of drug trade which affects the distribution of economic wealth. This is one form of globalization. Secondly, it has shown the ability to promote transnational Islamic militancy since 1994 under the auspices of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This is the second kind of globalization. The Taliban and Al Qaeda were based in Afghanistan up to September 2001, and now are headquartered in the frontier zone of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Afghanistan now is the center of gravity of international conflict that ties up the strongest power on earth with the hub of Arabized (Wahabbi) Islamic militancy. This affects the international system to the extent that it pressures modern Western society and especially America to change its policies to correspond to Islamic norms and policy preferences in the Middle East. On the other hand it pressures moderate Muslims in the Subcontinent and

in Southeast Asia to adapt Saudi Arabian norms. Afghanistan politics thus spawn a fierce debate between two international doctrines: just war and holy war.²³

Iran

Despite the asymmetry between American and Iranian power, the Khomeini revolution unleashed a major confrontation between the two countries. America's policy was to isolate Iran in the region and in the world community, and to contain its power through a policy of sanctions, but Iran was able to maintain an autonomy in the region and to exert its influence in the affairs of Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and in Central Asia. Since 1979 and following the end of the Cold War, Iranians have been engaged in a bitter internal controversy on economic and social policies that pits the Islamic clerics against the modernizers. Still, Iran's authorities have been able to develop a variety of options to intervene in Middle Eastern issues through Hamas, to function as an economic force in Central Asia with reference to the politics of oil and oil pipelines, to function as a regional rival of Iraq as well as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and to contend with Israel. Under difficult international circumstances Iran has developed nuclear and missile links with Russia, China and Pakistan, and commercial links with the Europeans. Recently it moved to build military links with India. Despite the controversy with America as a member of the 'axis of evil' and with the IAEA on the nuclear issue, Iran is a negotiating partner of the USA and major European governments who value Shiite Iran's role in promoting stability in post-Sadaam Hussein Iraq . With hindsight one could argue that Iran appears to have won two major wars: against Iraq since the 1980s and against the USA since 1979.

23 Martin Wight, *Systems of States*, Lancaster, Lancaster University Press, 1977, pp. 34-5, outlines the doctrines.

Saudi Arabia

Riyadh's options are evolving in the context of a situation where the Saudi regime opted in the 1980s to expand its ideological space in its neighbourhood by promoting the export of Wahabbism in an area extending from the Caucasus region (Chechniya and Dagestan) through Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indian Kashmir and into segments of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Phillipines and cells operating in places like Singapore) and in North Africa. Saudi oil exports promoted the well being of industrial democracies but the Arabization (Wahabbism) of militant Islam undermined the well being of secular societies in Asia, the Middle East and the West. Now the Saudi regime is caught in a wave of anti-Saudi sentiment in America, and an anti-West sentiment in Saudi Arabia, as well as pressure from its neighbours such as Iran and India, and countries in Southeast Asia which dislike the export of the Wahabbi type of sectarianism into their politics. Because of its growing isolation the Saudi regime now appears to be interested in developing a nuclear option by building oil for nukes trading relations with Pakistan, China and North Korea.

Summing Up

The paper shows that America came to South Asia with attitudes and policies that reflected its global experiences. Its policies had imperial attributes. But as a result of its diplomatic and military encounters with regional forces America has learned to adapt its policies even though it is premature to suggest that America has abandoned its overconfidence in its power and an excessive faith in its capacity to prevail because of its military and economic superiority. The learning curve of American practitioners

has been facilitated by the emergence of regional powers who have developed methods to limit American interventionist impulses and to lock America into a negotiating mode and a strategic dialogue. The America/South Asia diplomatic and military record shows that America is a weak superpower, and not a unipolar player in a world of proliferating regional and local powers in Asia. It is nevertheless a catalyst of international change in a volatile centre of gravity where the politics of oil, Islamic terror, democracy and nuclear power make an explosive combination of issues and players.

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