The events of September 11th prompted the United States to revise its fundamental assumptions about the post-Cold War world and devise an ambitious new grand strategy to ensure its security in a dramatically altered global environment. Over the past five years, policymakers and the general public have generally focused on the pursuit of this strategy in the Middle East. The strategic significance of South Asia has only recently entered the limelight. The reconstruction of Afghanistan presents a major challenge to U.S. policymakers in their war on terror. Pakistan sits at the intersection of the two salient threats of the post-Cold War world: terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. India embodies the model of a large

The U.S. State Department includes Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in the South Asian region. Three states stand out due to their strategic significance to the United States: Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. Indeed, these were the only three countries of the region that were mentioned in the National Security Strategies of 2002 and 2006. The United States has a long history of involvement with these states. Afghanistan has been the battleground where the United States has countered – directly and indirectly – the primary threat to its national security in two very different eras. Pakistan has been its regional strategic partner in both these campaigns. India has enjoyed a shifting relationship with the U.S. since its birth into the Cold War world in 1947.

This paper investigates the role that India and Pakistan have played in successive U.S. grand strategies. It argues that the difficulty of simultaneously managing its relations with the two adversarial nations is the central dilemma faced by the United States in pursuit of its strategic objectives in South Asia.
Historically, America’s relationships with India and Pakistan have tended to be mutually exclusive; cooperation with one has engendered estrangement with the other. However, in order to attain its current strategic objectives in the region, the United States will not only need to ensure its own strong bilateral ties with India and Pakistan but also a cooperative relationship between the two adversaries. Otherwise, it will continue to be thwarted in its ambitions, as its strategic priorities will be perpetually out of tune with those of its regional partners.

9/11 and U.S. Grand Strategy

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 fundamentally transformed the nature of the international system: the U.S. could no longer continue with Cold War assumptions about ensuring its national security. States were no longer the primary threats to the international peace and stability; the U.S. was now under attack by shadowy terrorist networks that had no clearly defined territory to protect. The de-territorialized nature of this new threat meant that previous notions of deterrence and containment – which arguably kept the international system stable during the 20th century – had lost their relevance. In response to this altered global security environment, the Bush Administration devised its first National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2002. The report adopted a grand strategic perspective: “to defeat this threat we must make use of every tool in our arsenal – military power, better homeland defenses, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut of terrorist financing.”

The broad ends that this new strategy aimed to achieve were not limited to the United States, but rather enveloped the entire world: “political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity.” The report identified eight broad strategies through which it would pursue its larger objective. All but one of these strategies dealt with America’s external relations:

i) The vigorous promotion of “human dignity”; rule of law, freedom of speech, religious and ethnic tolerance, gender
equality, and respect for private property;

ii) Forming global alliances to crack down on operations and funding of terrorist groups;

iii) Diffusing regional conflicts with political, economic, and military resources;

iv) Proactive counter-proliferation and nonproliferation efforts to diffuse the threat posed by Weapons of Mass Destruction;

v) Promoting economic growth through the promotion of free markets and free trade;

vi) Promoting development in third world countries by encouraging domestic reform;

vii) Establishing cooperative ties with global power centers;

viii) Transforming America’s national security institutions to meet the emerging challenges of a new security environment.

The Bush Administration released its second National Security Strategy in 2006. It was broadly consistent with the previous report and retained the same overarching goal and supporting strategies. To the eight basic strategies, it added another one: evolving mechanisms for the effective management of the process of globalization. It recognized that while globalization has produced many new opportunities for prosperity, it has also engendered new challenges such as the spread of public health pandemics, illicit trade in goods and humans, and environmental disasters that cut across national boundaries.

These two documents outlined an ambitious new plan for America’s role in the world. In particular, they highlighted America’s resolve to pursue two important new strategies: preemptive action and democratization. The logic of preemptive action was to eliminate threats around the world through military action before they could endanger America’s domestic security: “that the United
States would henceforth act multilaterally where possible but unilaterally where necessary, to take out terrorists before they could hit their intended targets.”

Democratization was designed to remove what the architects of the plan deemed to be the long-term causes of terrorism: unrepresentative institutions of governance which breed frustration and resentment against domestic and international actors.

Yale professor John Gaddis, a historian specializing in grand strategy, considers the 2002 NSS to be the most comprehensive restructuring of United States’ grand strategy in six decades. He contends that it is only the third time in American history that such a far-reaching redrawing of America’s approach to the world has taken place. He traces the origins of the grand strategic objectives to a speech delivered by President Bush at West Point in June 2002 in which the former President set three tasks for American grand strategy: “We will defend the peace by fighting terrorists against tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.” These ambitious objectives stand in stark contrast to the rather modest task outlined by President Clinton in 1999: “To enhance America’s security; to bolster America’s economic prosperity; to promote democracy and human rights abroad.”

While the theoretical scope of America’s new grand strategy has been global, in practice its primary regional focus has undoubtedly been the Middle East. The two NSS documents describe the threats emerging from the Middle East and the efforts required to counteract them in much greater detail than those from other regions of the world. The first document devotes considerable attention to the threat posed by Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The second document – while undoubtedly more global in its orientation than the first one – retains this special emphasis on the Middle East. It outlines the challenges posed by post-Saddam Iraq, the implications of the election of Hamas in the Palestinian territories, and the role of Iran in destabilizing Iraq and its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Over much of the past five years policymakers’ attention and public discussion has centered on Iraq.
America’s preoccupation with the Middle East has diverted attention away from its other major military commitment: Afghanistan. Efforts to rebuild Afghanistan and weed out remaining al Qaeda and Taliban elements are not being carried out in a vacuum, but rather in close cooperation with Pakistan. America’s relationship with Pakistan, in turn, is influenced by its emerging long-term multi-sectoral partnership with India. Thus U.S. policies vis-à-vis Afghanistan are closely intertwined with its relations with the South Asian region in general. Eventual success in the rebuilding effort will depend upon its ability to simultaneously manage relations with its two allies in the region.

Pakistan and India have their own independent relevance to U.S. grand strategy. Pakistan is perhaps the only country in the world in which the United States confronts every major challenge identified in the NSS reports: terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and authoritarian rule. The confluence of all these challenges in a single country recently led The Economist to conclude: “The war against Islamist extremism and the terrorism it spawns is being fought on many fronts. But it may well be in Pakistan that it is won or lost.”

If Pakistan represents a volatile mix of everything that could go wrong in the new global environment, India occupies the opposite end of the spectrum. It contains two of the characteristics that the United States is trying to promote in other parts of the world: democratic governance and a liberal free-market economy. These considerations have led many to characterize India and the United States as “natural allies,” a perception that has intensified since the Indo-U.S. nuclear cooperation deal.

In order to realize its grand strategic objectives, the United States has to pursue its short-term strategic goals with respect to Pakistan in confluence with its long-term partnership with India. Managing this relationship between two bitter rivals is the primary challenge the United States must overcome in the region. In order to contextualize of the dilemma faced by the U.S. in negotiating its vital strategic relationships with India and Pakistan, it would be instructive to look at the manner in which it pursued its strategic objectives in the region during the Cold War and the challenges it faced in this endeavor.

**Containment and South Asia**

The Soviet Union emerged from the Second World War as a super power; occupying much of Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans. This new-
found influence caused consternation in many quarters in the Western world; a sentiment perhaps best expressed by Winston Churchill in what came to be known as his “Sinews of Peace” speech. Initially, the United States attempted to accommodate the Soviet Union through bargaining and inclusion but soon realized the limitations of this approach. The subsequent formation and evolution of U.S. grand strategy devised to confront the challenges posed by the Soviet Union can be traced through three documents: “the long telegram”, Truman’s speech laying out the “Truman Doctrine”, and the NSC-68. These documents designed the strategy of containment which was to guide U.S. approach towards the Soviet Union through much of the Cold War.

“The Long Telegram” authored by George F. Kennan in February 1946 and published in Foreign Affairs magazine in July 1947 aimed to explain the “sources of Soviet conduct”. Kennan argued that Soviet intransigence resulted from ideological and psychological necessities and hence could not be influenced through unilateral concession on the part of the United States. The threat of an external enemy was maintained for three purposes: to ensure unquestioned internal legitimacy and authority, excuse the domestic use of repressive tactics, and generate influence beyond the immediate borders of the Soviet Union through an international communist movement. In view of these internal causes that generated external aggression, Kennan believed that the only way to check the Soviet threat would be to embark on a “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies.”

Gaddis considers this document to be the cornerstone of future U.S. policy and that the ideas presented therein “can be taken as a guide, not only to the intellectual origins of containment, but to much of its early implementation as well.” This influence is obvious in the Truman Doctrine, elucidated by President Harry S. Truman in March 1947, according to which the U.S. had an obligation to support “free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities and outside pressures.” Thus, he generalized about the obligation to offer economic and military support to Turkey and Greece, and about a commitment to resist Soviet expansionism everywhere in the world.

The National Security Council Report 68 (NSC 68) issued in April 1950 laid out the blueprint for America’s national security strategy. As opposed to Kennan’s emphasis on economic and political pressure, the new report emphasized the importance of embarking upon a conventional and nuclear military buildup through the extensive mobilization of economic resources. It advocated an enormous increase in peacetime military spending. While
Kennan had contended that only the global centers of military-industrial capability had to be kept out of Soviet hands, the NSC 68 took a much broader view of containment: “any substantial further expansion of the area under the domination of the Kremlin would raise the possibility that no coalition adequate to confront the Kremlin with greater strength could be assembled.”

In the initial years, South Asia was not a part of the strategic calculus of containment. It did not feature in the list of regions Kennan identified the U.S. could not permit to “fall into hands hostile to [the United States]”. The most important theatres of war were to be in Western Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. At the time of their independence in 1947 the states of South Asia were deemed too strategically insignificant to be useful. They had large populations but no industrial base, skilled workforce, or militaries to speak of. But under the NSC 68 “the assault on free institutions is worldwide now and in the context of the present polarization of power a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere.”

Thus Kennan’s strategy of defending selected “strong points” was replaced with perimeter defense whereby all points on the perimeter would be of equal importance. This thrust South Asia into the Cold War.

The United States began its strategic engagement with South Asia in the 1950s. Due to the ongoing hostilities between the two South Asian neighbors, the United States could choose to engage either India or Pakistan, but not both. When faced with the choice of picking a regional partner, it opted for Pakistan. There were a number of reasons why this arrangement was sought by both countries. Pakistan needed an offshore partner that could help offset the overwhelming economic and military superiority enjoyed by India. The United States displayed a strong preference for Pakistan because it, unlike India, was geographically contiguous with the Soviet Union. It did not have an influential domestic communist movement like that of India. Finally, Pakistan would always prove to be a more pliable partner than India because of its desperate need for U.S. assistance. India was too independent-minded to be a reliable partner; its leadership role in the non-aligned movement did
not particularly endear it to U.S. policymakers.\textsuperscript{17} 

The U.S.-Pakistan security relationship began with a mutual defense assistance agreement with the Eisenhower administration in 1954. These relations were cemented when Pakistan joined the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and became a signatory to the Baghdad Pact, which later became the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).\textsuperscript{18} This was the beginning of the patron-client relationship between Pakistan and the United States which would set the tone for their bilateral ties for decades to come. The nature of this partnership deeply influenced Pakistan’s domestic power distribution as well. The magnitude of the military assistance and exclusively strategic nature of the partnership allowed the Pakistan military to emerge as the strongest state institution in the country. This was to have far-reaching implications for the domestic politics and the foreign policy posture of Pakistan.

Following the general pattern which would continue into the 21st century, America’s choice of one regional partner estranged the other. Closer ties with Pakistan engendered suspicion and resentment on the part of India. In 1954, Nehru charged that the United States was trying to generate instability by bringing the Cold War into the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{19} India resented the “military aspects of American alliance policy... [which established] a strategic and moral equivalence between India and Pakistan...that was not justified by the objective military, economic, and strategic capabilities of the two states.”\textsuperscript{20} U.S.-India relations reached their lowest ebb when India conducted its first nuclear tests in 1974, prompting the United States to impose nonproliferation sanctions against it.\textsuperscript{21}

However, it would be incorrect to characterize U.S. relations with India as being consistently hostile throughout the Cold War. The United States provided India with piecemeal support whenever it was in line with the larger strategic objective of containing communism. It supported India during the war between India and China in 1962.\textsuperscript{22} Senator John F. Kennedy provided India with economic aid amidst fears that a large-scale domestic economic crisis might lead to domestic pressures on India to turn communist. He argued that the sheer scale of India’s deprivation made it a decisive ideological battleground; “a world power with a world audience.”\textsuperscript{23} The United States refused to back either country during the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict.

American military assistance to India in the 1962 conflict led to the initiation of Pakistan’s strategic partnership with China, indicating the persistent dilemma the U.S. had to face in its relations with the two states. Henceforth, whenever forced to choose sides, the United States consistently backed Paki-
Pakistan because of the relative importance of its geostrategic position. During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, President Nixon ordered the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal to demonstrate support for Pakistan.24 Often, this unconditional support came despite dissenting opinion from within the U.S. administration. During the Bengali Liberation War of 1971, American Consul General to East Pakistan, Archer K. Blood wrote a demarche to the State Department, signed by 29 members of his staff, condemning continuation of U.S. support for the West Pakistani government despite the atrocities it was committing in East Pakistan. The document, which later came to be known as ‘the Blood telegram’ asserted that:

Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities. Our government has failed to take forceful measures to protect its citizens while at the same time bending over backwards to placate the West Pakistan dominated government and to lessen any deservedly negative international public relations impact against them. Our government has evidenced what many will consider moral bankruptcy.

Pakistan’s importance only escalated after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, propelling it to the status of a “frontline state” in the war against the Soviet Union. The Pakistan military funneled American funds and weapons to equip the Afghan Mujahideen for Holy War against the “Godless communists.”26 Due to the salience of Pakistan’s cooperation during this period the United States continued to support it despite reports that it was close to acquiring a nuclear weapon – an issue which would become a major source of tension between the two countries over the next decade.27

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 brought with it the end of the Cold War and also the policy of containment. The United States’ strategic priorities in South Asia changed dramatically and so did its choice of regional partner. Over the next decade the U.S. would begin to distance itself from Pakistan and start laying the foundation for a long-term strategic and economic partnership with India. As India moved out of the shadow of the Cold War and initiated market reforms, the United States began to forge a closer partnership with the largest free market democracy in the world. The “Agreed Minute on Defense Relations”, a security pact signed between the two countries in 1995, marked a watershed in U.S.-India strategic relations.28

Predictably, improved relations with India translated into an increasing estrangement with Pakistan. The United States was no longer compelled
to provide Pakistan with the leeway it had enjoyed during the Cold War. In 1990 the United States cut off aid to Pakistan because it had crossed key thresholds in its nuclear weapons program. In 1993 Pakistan was included in the annually published list of countries that supported acts of international terrorism. Sanctions were imposed after Pakistan’s nuclear tests in 1998, and intensified after General Pervez Musharraf overthrew the democratically elected government of Nawaz Sharif in 1999.29

The reversal in U.S. policy towards South Asia was perhaps most vividly demonstrated during Bill Clinton’s visit to the region in 2000. The visit to India lasted five days, whereas the stopover in Pakistan was five hours. In India, President Clinton and Prime Minister Vajpayee signed the “Vision Statement” which agreed on a “mutual resolve to create a closer and qualitatively new relationship between the United States and India... on the basis of common interest in and complementary responsibility for ensuring regional and international security.”30 In contrast, while in Pakistan President Clinton publicly refused to shake General Musharraf’s hand as a sign of protest against his recent military coup.

Terrorist attacks on American soil would soon change America’s policy toward the subcontinent. Strategic considerations would once again necessitate closer partnership with Pakistan, and South Asia would assume a prominent role within U.S. grand strategy. However, the altered international environment would make managing relations between the region’s nuclear-armed adversaries more important, and, at the same time, more difficult.

U.S. Grand Strategy and South Asia

The United States’ current grand strategy necessitates maintaining stronger relations with both India and Pakistan. However, the nature of these bilateral relations will be completely different. The U.S. partnership with India is a product of ideological affinity whereas partnership with Pakistan is motivated by strategic necessity. The National Security Strategy 2002 clearly expressed this distinction: “With Pakistan our bilateral relations have been bolstered by Pakistan’s choice to join the war against terror and move towards building a more open and peaceful society. The Administration sees India’s
potential to become one of the great democratic powers of the 21st century and has worked hard to transform our relationship accordingly.” The 2006 NSS report puts it more bluntly: “America’s relationship with Pakistan will not be a mirror image of our relationship with India.”

Enlisting Pakistan’s support was crucial for the success of America’s military campaign and subsequent reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Pakistan was the most important military and diplomatic sponsor of the Taliban regime. Withdrawing this support would ensure a swift and resistance-free campaign for the coalition forces. The long-standing involvement of the Pakistan military - and more specifically of ISI - in Afghanistan made it the most important source of intelligence and a vital partner in mobilizing domestic Afghan groups against the Taliban. Pakistan’s geostrategic position would allow U.S. jets operating from Pakistani air force bases to provide cover for ground offensives.

Pakistan’s support was also essential because the problem of militancy in Afghanistan is intricately linked with Pakistan’s own tribal areas. In order for the military campaign in Afghanistan to be successful, coalition forces would have to crack down on militants operating inside Pakistani territory as well. Initial failures in this area allowed senior al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership to flee Afghanistan and regroup in Pakistan.

Finally, Pakistan’s support was to prove crucial not only in winning the war but also in winning peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan had been a central actor in Afghanistan’s internal politics ever since the retreat of the Soviet Union. It had played a leading role in arming the Afghan warlords during the civil war in the early 1990s and engineering the subsequent rise of the Taliban. It would not be possible for the United States to rebuild a stable Afghanistan if Pakistan were not on-board, as it possessed the resources and experience to play a spoiler role in any future arrangement.

There were compelling reasons for Pakistan to enlist in the coalition as well. It meant the end of a decade-long diplomatic isolation from the international community and resumption of desperately needed military and development aid for a country teetering on the brink of economic collapse only ten years ago. If Pakistan chose not to cooperate, then the U.S. could always recruit India as a willing partner, in which case U.S. and Indian forces would be violating Pakistani territorial sovereignty to launch operations in Afghani-

Pakistan is now the third-largest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel and Egypt.
stan. On the level of leadership, strategic cooperation with the United States ensured the continuation of General Musharraf’s rule, which otherwise seemed increasingly unlikely at the time. But, perhaps most importantly, American Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had reportedly threatened to “bomb Pakistan back to the stone age” if it did not comply with U.S. demands.33

In the run up to the war, Pakistan provided the United States with blanket flyover and landing rights, access to naval and air bases, fuel supplies, logistical support, and access to Pakistan’s ports to supply troops to landlocked Afghanistan. All this material support was provided without any formal agreements or fees normally required for such privileges.34 During the war, Pakistan made two-thirds of its air space available for coalition operations, suspending its own civilian and military usage of the airspace. Since September 2001, it has provided extensive assistance in the war on terror by capturing more than 600 al-Qaeda members and their allies. These have included high value targets such as al-Qaeda operations chief Zayn al-Abidn Muhammed Hasayn Abu Zubaydah; Ramzi bin Alsbih, al-Qaeda financier known for being Mohammad Atta’s roommate in Hamburg; and most importantly, Khalid Shaikh Mohammad, the third-highest ranking member of al-Qaeda and the alleged mastermind of 9/11 attacks.35

In return for these services, the United States has stepped up its economic assistance to Pakistan, providing debt relief and support for a major effort for education reform. During General Musharraf’s visit to the United States in 2003, President Bush announced that the United States would provide Pakistan with $3 billion in economic and military aid over five years. This assistance package commenced in 2005.36 In his autobiography, Musharraf has mentioned that Pakistan has turned over hundreds of al Qaeda operatives to the United States in return for millions of dollars in bounties. Pakistan is now the third-largest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel and Egypt. In 2004, the United States recognized closer bilateral ties with Pakistan by designating Pakistan as a major non-NATO ally.

The United States has expressed its intention to pursue its relationship with Pakistan alongside its relationship with India. The National Security Strategy of 2002 identified India as one of the three emerging global powers.37 It laid out the rationale for stronger ties with India on the basis that the two countries are “the two largest democracies, committed to political freedom protected by representative government. India is moving toward greater economic freedom as well. We have a common interest in the free flow of commerce, including through the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. Finally, we share
an interest in fighting terrorism and in creating a strategically stable Asia.”

Due to its system of government and growing economic strength, the United States is beginning to see India as a natural ally. U.S. cooperation with India has little to do with the war on terror. Unlike its relationship with Pakistan, it is premised on a much broader range of endeavors.

In the current era of relations with South Asia, the United States is consciously trying to avoid past patterns of involvement in the region and maintain strong ties with both of the South Asian neighbors. The NSS 2002 states that: “This Administration invested time and resources building strong bilateral relations with India and Pakistan.” NSC 2006 echoes that sentiment: “Progress with India has been achieved even as the United States has improved its strategic relationship with Pakistan. For decades outsiders acted as if good relations with India and Pakistan were mutually exclusive. The Bush administration has shown that improved relations with each are possible.”

Tensions between the two countries continue to hamper U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, however. According to a report by the New York Times in December 2007, Pakistan has been diverting millions of dollars from the Coalition Support Fund meant to fight al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters to acquire weapons systems designed to counter India. These tendencies will remain as long as Pakistan’s military continues to believe that Pakistan is fighting the wrong war and that its resources are better utilized against its traditional enemy. The sentiments have an obvious impact on the willingness of policymakers and military commanders to pursue serious counterinsurgency measures along the western border.

**Conclusion**

South Asia has had an enduring relevance for U.S. grand strategy ever since the birth of India and Pakistan in the middle of the 20th century. The region served as an important avenue for U.S. containment policies and subsequently for its war on terror. The United States has had to rely on regional partners in South Asia to attain its global strategic objectives.

The primary challenge to U.S. engagement in South Asia stems from the rivalry between India and Pakistan. Historically, closer alignment with one has necessitated disengagement with the other. This was possible during the Cold War because the U.S. could attain its strategic objectives with the aid of a single partner. However, today the U.S. requires stronger relations with both India and Pakistan – albeit for very different purposes.
The ability of the U.S. to achieve its objectives will rely not only on its own bilateral ties with India and Pakistan but also the nature of the relationship between the two South Asian neighbors. As long as India and Pakistan continue to share antipathy, their strategic priorities will never completely align with those of the United States, undermining U.S. efforts to combat terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and cultivate a lasting relationship with India.

-Benjamin Shatil served as lead editor for this article.

NOTES

3 Ibid.
5 Bush, George W. “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point”, June 1 2002.
16 Ibid, p. 89.
18 Ibid, p. 61.
20 Fair, Christine C. “Counterterror Coalitions: Cooperation with Pakistan and India” (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation: 2004), p. 67.