

## **Reframing a Regional Approach to South Asia: Demilitarization, Development, and Sustainable Peace**

### **Executive Summary**

- The broad, long-term objective of U.S. foreign policy in South Asia should be facilitating the development of a sustainable peace.
- Long-term, sustainable peace cannot be obtained primarily or even partly through increased militarization of the region. The majority of the world's Muslims live in South Asia, and U.S. foreign policy based on militarization in the region has been a central factor in their radicalization. Continued militarization will only produce more conflict and have the unintended effect of increased recruitment into terrorist organizations.
- U.S. foreign policy based on "Indian exceptionalism" targets only "Islamic terrorism" and ignores the exponential growth of Hindu nationalism or "Hindu terrorism." But a U.S. foreign policy focused primarily on counter-insurgency programs in South Asia detracts from the larger issues of social, economic, and political inequality that feed terrorism and contribute to instability in the region.
- Continued U.S. support of the Pakistan military undermines hard-fought local struggles for justice and government accountability within Pakistan. The U.S. must stop relying on the Pakistani military as its primary partner.
- The focused, short-term goals to achieve sustainable peace in South Asia should be step by step demilitarization of the region.
- To this end, the administration should reverse the priority it currently gives to military assistance over economic and development assistance.
- **Our two-fold recommendation is that:**
  - 1) **The U.S. and NATO set a timetable to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan and Pakistan and replace them with U.N. Peacekeeping forces.**
  - 2) **The U.S. substantially curtail military aid to the Pakistan army, curb arms sales to India, and make economic and development aid the center of its foreign policy in South Asia.**

## **Reframing a Regional Approach to South Asia: Demilitarization, Development, and Sustainable Peace**

### **Introduction:**

Nine scholars of South Asia – Amrita Basu, Shah Mahmud Hanifi, Nyla Ali Khan, David Ludden, Zia Mian, Senzil Nawid, Sahar Shafqat, Kamala Visweswaran, and Chitrallekha Zutshi – met at New York University’s Institute of Public Knowledge on March 6, 2009, to discuss the politics of knowledge concerning South Asia as it connects academic and policy work in the US. We represent a range of social science, humanities, and scientific disciplines, and our research focuses on India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, although some of us also have broader areas of expertise. Our discussions focused on these three countries because they are at the center of current U.S. policy debate. We met with three goals in view:

- 1) To think of ways of creating academically-informed public knowledge about US policy,**
- 2) To write a “thought document” that might help reframe key concepts and interventions in U.S foreign policy, and**
- 3) To open a conversation between scholars of South Asia and the Obama administration about how area studies knowledge might better inform U.S. policy in South Asia.**

In our review of several South Asia policy documents to prepare this paper, we found that most of the time we were not in disagreement with the basic facts, but rather with the framing and emphasis given to those facts. Yet these crucial differences of framing warrant further discussion and review of the administration’s recently announced policy in the region.

At no time has South Asia figured more prominently in U.S. foreign policy. The Obama administration has an unprecedented opportunity to transform U.S. foreign policy in South Asia, and therefore to transform the region. President Obama is already executing a renewed U.S. commitment to multilateralism. After his proclamation in Turkey on April 6, 2009 that the “U.S. is not at war with Islam” we are optimistic about the current administration’s aim of reversing the deleterious effects of the last eight years by building relationships with the Muslim world based on mutual respect and seeking common ground. This reorientation toward dialogue and diplomatic engagement will be of particular value in South Asia where the majority of the world’s Muslims reside, and where half of the region’s eight countries have Muslim majorities. Yet despite the administration’s recent jettisoning of the language of the “War on Terror,” we are concerned that its underlying framework remains unchanged and will generate another decade of failed policy in the region.

## **Outline and Rationale of the Document**

We recognize the complexity of the security situation in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and the very real threat that terrorism poses to the peoples of the U.S., South Asia, and other parts of the world. We appreciate the fact that the new administration has already undertaken a comprehensive policy review of the region, and that there are no simple solutions to conflicts in South Asia. We can also understand the new administration's desire to combine an "integrated counter-insurgency strategy" with increased economic, development, and "civilian assistance." But we feel **the central stated goal of U.S. policy, "disrupting terrorist networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan," is too narrowly drawn and counter-productive. The broad, long-term objective of U.S. foreign policy in the region should be facilitating the development of a sustainable peace. The focused, short-term goals to achieve that objective should be step by step demilitarization of the region.** We recognize the steep challenges posed by a shift from an older, entrenched paradigm centered on military aid and intervention to one of active demilitarization. A transitional process of step by step demilitarization requires careful thought and planning and will be difficult and precarious. But the reverse scenario—increasing military aid and troop build-up in the region—is as precarious, with known multiple negative consequences for the region. While there may be short term negative consequences from demilitarization,<sup>1</sup> the overall benefit from a human security perspective will be both immediate and long-term. It thus makes ethical, political and economic sense to undertake strategies of demilitarization to stabilize the region. **We recommend that:**

- 1) The U.S. and NATO withdraw their troops from South Asia and replace them with UN peacekeeping forces**
  
- 2) The U.S. substantially curtail military aid, especially to the Pakistan army, curtail arms sales to India, and make economic and development aid the center of its foreign policy in South Asia.**

Our logic is as follows. Increasing numbers of Pakistani and Afghan civilian deaths have fueled anti-American sentiment against what is now popularly understood in South Asia as an American occupation of Afghanistan, and an American war against Pakistanis. In this situation, the U.S. can best demonstrate its commitment to peace in the region by announcing a plan for phased withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops and replacement with UN peacekeeping forces. This will sound counter-intuitive to some, but by removing a major source of recruitment to neo-Talibani and jihadi groups—American authorized bombing of civilians, and the increasing presence and visibility of U.S. troops—popular support for these groups will inevitably erode.<sup>2</sup> When this happens, the

---

<sup>1</sup> We fully understand the precariousness of the situation in Pakistan, but a fuller discussion of it is beyond the scope of this paper, and awaits future dialogue and conversation with policymakers.

<sup>2</sup> Recent analyses of al-Qaeda show that its "Islamic" principles are quite recent in formation, comprised of a pastiche of Wahhabi and other tenets (cf. Faisal Devji 2005. *Landscapes of the Jihad*, Cornell University Press) which a majority of the world's Muslims do not support. Yet Osama bin Laden's analysis of U.S. military intervention in the Middle East and South Asia ("U.S. imperialism") is one that resonates broadly across classes in these regions.

Taliban and other groups will use force to extract people's compliance (a process already in play), and it will be the role of U.N. peacekeeping forces to help protect the Afghan and Pakistani peoples from terrorist violence. It will take time to build U.N. support for this mission. To engage the U.N. in this endeavor, the U.S. will need to persuade the U.N. and the international community of the positive and primary role it can play in demilitarizing the region.<sup>3</sup> It will also need to transfer the billions it spends on military aid to Pakistan and Afghanistan to the U.N. so that it can hire peacekeepers from other nations to serve in South Asia. Care will also have to be taken to ensure that U.N. peacekeeping forces are not seen to be implementing U.S. directives or hidden agendas, but emerge from international commitment and concern. Peacekeeping forces must therefore be selected in consultation with non-governmental organizations and civilian government agencies within Pakistan and Afghanistan to build a popular mandate. Most importantly, as President Obama has already indicated, the U.S. will have to demonstrate that it is willing to abide by international law and be a more humble and cooperative member of the international community. "American exceptionalism" has resulted in uniquely American quagmires<sup>4</sup> and it cannot expect the international community to respond to a U.S. appeal for U.N. peacekeeping forces without a major restatement and reorientation of American goals and identity. **Such a restatement of American identity must recognize that the interests of the American people are inseparable from, and are thus coeval with, the interests of South Asian (and other) peoples:** if peoples elsewhere are injured by the effects of U.S. foreign policy, then the American people are also more vulnerable to attack and injury. This principle follows from the following points of analysis we outline in this document:

1. Conflict in South Asia must be understood as a set of "wicked problems" that involve interlocking systems and multiple forms of causality. Enacting a change at one level of the system impacts other parts of the system, and other interlinked systems. Put simply, an analysis of unintended effects ("blowback") must be a part of any South Asia foreign policy consideration.
2. A regional policy focus on South Asia cannot focus primarily on anti-terrorist or counter-insurgency measures, but must evolve a framework for understanding the shared histories, cultures, and social movements that are resources for long-term peace in the region.
3. An emphasis on social movements, democracy and civil society, rather than partnership with militaries in the region, forms the core of a viable alternate regional approach to South Asia.

---

<sup>3</sup> To date the U.N. has largely focused on development-related assistance to Afghanistan, but has never sent peace-keeping forces. A summary of the U.N. Special Mission on Afghanistan (UNAMA) and U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) activities is available at:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0726-e.htm> accessed on 3/28/09.

<sup>4</sup> Like the U.S. war in Iraq, U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 proceeded without U.N. sanction; some legal scholars also dispute the legality of the intervention for relying on an expansive interpretation of U.N. Article 51, the "right to self-defense." See

<http://www.americansc.org.uk/Online/Forum/Afghanlegality.htm> accessed on 3/28/09.

4. “Indian Exceptionalism”—the idea that India’s size and status obviates the need for recognition of shared problems and thus shared problem-solving in the region --is incompatible with a sustainable regional approach to South Asia.
5. Including diverse groups of South Asia scholars in future policy conversations can play a constructive role in reframing decades of failed policy in the region by helping to think through the role of scholars in developing long-term objectives for enabling sustainable peace in the region.

## 1. Understanding Conflicts in South Asia as ‘Wicked Problems’

The idea of “wicked problems” was first proposed in 1973.<sup>5</sup> Since then the concept has been widely used in planning and design,<sup>6</sup> with recent applications in the field of public policy.<sup>7</sup> Wicked problems are characterized by social complexity, a large number and diversity of players, and a high degree of fragmentation. Wicked problems are also defined by contested and multiple forms of causality. Different stakeholders in the conflict fail to arrive at a common definition of the problem, often because they disagree on the cause of the problem.

**Ongoing forms of conflict in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are characterized by decades of failed U.S. policy and are classic examples of wicked problems.**

Consider the assumption that fixing the security situation<sup>8</sup> in South Asia is foundational for the region to address its other pressing problems. Here we might question the claim that terrorist violence, rather than poverty and economic under-development, is the primary form of violence and deprivation people in South Asia face.<sup>9</sup> Each dollar that is spent on military aid is a dollar not spent on economic development. And spending money on both armaments and economic aid tends to cancel out the effectiveness of the latter since a highly militarized environment means that development projects and normal forms of job employment cannot take place (as is the case in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir). Ongoing militarization directly and negatively impacts the welfare of women and children, polarizes and brutalizes society, and perpetuates an ongoing cycle of economic underdevelopment which feeds recruitment into militant groups.

In the “fix the security situation” view, terrorism is the cause of, or motor that drives, U.S. foreign policy. **But suppose terrorism is not only a cause, but also an effect of U.S. policy in the region?** Such an understanding would lead us to conclude that if past policy has actually produced or escalated terrorist activity, a continuation of

---

<sup>5</sup> See Horst, Rittel and Melvin Webber. 1973. “Dilemmas in a general Theory of Planning” *Policy Sciences* 4, Elsevier Scientific Publishing: Amsterdam. Pp. 155-9.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.poppendieck.com/wicked.htm>; and <http://cognexus.org/wpf/wickedproblems.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications07/wickedproblems2.htm> accessed on 3/28/09

<sup>8</sup> Here we assume the conventional definition of security found in the Security Studies literature; our own view is that it is more production to speak of ‘human security’ in the development sense.

<sup>9</sup> See for example the section on “Advancing a Strategy for Economic Stability and Growth” in the Center for American progress report, “Partnership for Progress: Advancing a New Strategy for prosperity and Stability in Pakistan and the Region” pp. 49-56 at

[http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/11/pakistan\\_report.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/11/pakistan_report.html) accessed on 4/6/09.

this policy, even in the guise of an “integrated counter-insurgency policy,” would only lead to more terrorism and deepened conflict.

Wicked problems require holistic forms of analysis that consider the possible effects of changes to other elements in the system rather than strictly linear forms of problem-solving. The “presentist” orientation of U.S. foreign policy leads to a linear and narrow set of objectives which attempt to address a wicked problem as if it were a “tame problem.”<sup>10</sup> For example, the administration’s declared objective of sending more troops to Afghanistan to eliminate or destabilize al-Qaeda is too narrowly defined and fails to take into account that increased U.S. military presence in the region will only escalate and prolong the conflict. In this case, the narrowness of goal itself stems in part from a misreading of the causes of the conflict, with the result that the policy is doomed to failure. The cold war policy that resulted in U.S. support of the Afghan mujahiddin in the 1980s failed to anticipate the future effects this alliance would create and the “blowback” that would eventually put American citizens at risk on 9/11. The more Pakistanis and Afghans die from U.S. drone and larger-scale targeted bombings, the more agricultural land, and other resources are damaged by such attacks, the more anti-Americanism will grow, and the more likely it is that al-Qaeda and the Taliban will recruit larger numbers of Afghans and Pakistanis to fight a war against the U.S. The cycle will only repeat and create more blowback which will again put American citizens at risk. For this reason alone, **the interests of the peoples of South Asia who are affected by U.S. foreign policy cannot be seen as separate from the interests of the American people.** There can be no separate calculation of U.S. interest in the region without taking into account the needs of the peoples of South Asia and their desire for long-term sustainable peace.

Wicked problems require that *all* possible stakeholders in an issue be included in solving the problem. **One of the major difficulties of attempting to find solutions to conflicts in South Asia is the failure to identify the peoples of South Asia as major stakeholders in the processes of resolving conflict.** In this document we go on to identify key ways in which the peoples of South Asia can be recognized as stakeholders whose views are necessary to the resolution of conflict in the region.

The goal of U.S. foreign policy should be to facilitate peace in the region, but this is a complex, wicked problem that cannot be solved primarily, or even partly, through military intervention. Continued militarization of the region has only created more violence and instability with devastating consequences for the peoples of South Asia. A U.S. foreign policy in South Asia that fails to build an analysis of blowback into its calculation is unsound foreign policy. While clearly not all of the violence in the region can be linked to the history of U.S. intervention, **American foreign policy in South Asia has continued to make the tragic mistake of assuming it understands the problems**

---

<sup>10</sup> According to Jeff Conklin (2005:11) common attempts to “tame” wicked problems include: 1) Locking down a problem definition 2) Asserting the problem is solved 3) Casting the problem as “just like” a previous problem that has been solved 4) Specifying objective means by which to measure success; “benchmarking” 5) Limiting the range of possible solutions 6) Abandoning the attempt to find a good solution. See <http://cognexus.org/wpf/wikedproblems.pdf>

**of the region when it has actively failed to acknowledge its role in creating problems of the region—another classic symptom of a wicked problem.**

## **2. Defining an Alternate Regional Approach to South Asia**

At its inception, U.S. area studies were a product of the cold war system; the result of a narrow definition of American interest. The emergence of critical regional and area studies over the past three decades, however, points to their heightened value in informing policy considerations. Consider, for example, the redefinition of American interest from anti-communism to anti-terrorism reflected in the administrative organization of regions so that the Near East and South Asia (NESA) division within the National Security Council (NSC) includes Pakistan and Afghanistan, while India (and China) fall under the “Asia” division of the NSC.<sup>11</sup> The rationale for this organization lies doubly in a form of “Indian exceptionalism” (discussed below) which sees India and China primarily as markets to be courted, and the Near East and South Asia as an “arc of Islamic terrorism” to be combated.<sup>12</sup> This “courtship vs. combat” framework results in several problems:

- 1) The increasing threat of Hindu nationalism or of “Hindu terrorism” in India can neither be conceptualized, nor addressed.**
- 2) It fails to see that it is decades of failed U.S. policy in South Asia and the Middle East which have also sustained and produced these new alignments between groups in these regions.**
- 3) Under this framework, the view of these new alignments leads to a conflation of entire groups of Muslims as “terrorists,” where the attempt to distinguish “good” Muslims from “bad” Muslims through “counter-insurgency” operations further divides and debilitates Kashmiri, Pakistani, and Afghan societies.**
- 4) This framework ignores the fact that the majority of the world’s Muslims live in South Asia, and that U.S. foreign policy in the region has been a central (if not the only) factor in their radicalization.<sup>13</sup>**

In this document, we relocate Afghanistan in South Asian Studies, not only because it is the most recent member of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), but because understanding Afghanistan apart from Central Asian and

---

<sup>11</sup> [http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/01/26/new\\_nsc\\_nesa](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/01/26/new_nsc_nesa) accessed on 4/6/09

<sup>12</sup> A recent proposal to understand the “Indian Ocean” as the proper area of focus (see <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64832/robert-d-kaplan/center-stage-for-the-21st-century> ) does not dislodge this framework, and also obscures the plural and composite cultures that emerged historically through the Indian Ocean trade (see Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Ed). 2004. *Maritime India*, Oxford University Press; Sugata Bose. 2006. *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, Harvard University Press).

<sup>13</sup> The story of CIA support of the mujahideen, and their relationship to the Pakistani ISI, the Taliban, Lakshar-e-Taiba and other militant groups in Kashmir is too well-known to rehearse here.

Middle East Studies (or NESAs policy debates) allows us to see continuities of histories, cultures and religious experience which are resources for peace-building in the South Asia region. In locating Afghanistan within South Asian Studies, we are not concerned with arguing against the validity of South Asia and Middle East comparisons, especially where a different comparative analysis of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq might help us question whether continued war in Afghanistan is the “right war” or the “good war.” We also feel that a comparative analysis of U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia and South Asia is extremely useful in evaluating the lessons of the Viet Nam war as a warning against expansion of U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> Yet the full ramifications of the Viet Nam legacy have not been considered. When Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, said that he wanted to make “Afghanistan the Viet Nam of the Soviet Union” we saw the extension of cold war ideology into South Asia during the 1970s and 1980s. Key members of the policy establishment see U.S. support of the mujahideen in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Soviet withdrawal from the region, and its subsequent collapse, as evidence of the “largest and most successful” covert action program in recent U.S. history. In fact, we should draw the opposite conclusion: the spiraling violence and instability in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan is the “blowback” from decades of a failed U.S. policy of covert action, military aid, and military intervention in the region. The U.S. needs to rethink the history of its legacy of cold war politics in South Asia whereby Pakistan and Afghanistan were mere pawns in “Great Power” politics.

Modern South Asia is marked by extensive linguistic, religious and cultural diversity. While the emergence of nationalist movements tends to lead to a reification of bounded identities, social and religious practices throughout contemporary South Asia also defy narrow community, regional or political identities. Even as the Partition of India separated Punjabi Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, Punjabis continue to share a rich cultural and linguistic heritage despite national boundaries. Indian Bengalis and Bangladeshis share much in common, including not only language and music, but composite religious practice. Although the nationalist histories of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan tend to ignore them, the Pathans of the Northwest Frontier Province under the leadership of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan also shared with Gandhi a tradition of non-violent resistance to British colonial rule.<sup>15</sup> It would be a mistake to think that the Pathans/Pakhtuns/Pashtuns as a transborder social group are somehow inherently militaristic or prone to violence. Basic scholarship on these groups is sparse and marked by the methodological legacies of British colonialism and the Cold War; as such more caution needs to be exercised in drawing policy conclusions about them.

Finally, it is important to recognize that there are strong, secular political traditions in South Asia which are linked to socialist, democratic movements. This is not to deny that some communist groups in the region resort to violence, but to emphasize that in the name of anti-communism, the historical alignment of U.S. foreign policy with religious

---

<sup>14</sup> Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young (Eds). 2009. BOMBING CIVILIANS: A TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORY. The New Press.

<sup>15</sup> See Mukulika Banerjee. 2001. The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the Northwest Frontier. Oxford University Press.

extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan and with Islamic military dictatorships in Pakistan and Bangladesh has over time, led to a weakening of the secular fabric in those countries. Even today, amidst the demise of state socialism, movements for secularism, minority rights, and nuclear disarmament are anchored in socialist, democratic, and secular frameworks which provide powerful counterweights to authoritarian, religious extremist tendencies in the region.

### **3. The Importance of Social Movements, Democracy, and Civil Society**

As Amartya Sen reminds us, social movements for justice are good for democracy.<sup>16</sup> People's movements for water resource planning and development communicate between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Feminist movements and women's organizations share information and develop shared political and legal strategies for advancing women's rights in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Gay rights activists have made recent strides in India that are being discussed in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Micro-credit models developed in Bangladesh or Sri Lanka are debated in India, Pakistan, and Nepal. Peasant movements from Okara in Pakistan to the Terai region of India and Nepal seek land rights for those who till it. "Right to Information" movements have emerged in India and other parts of South Asia to hold local, state and national governments accountable for policy implementation and expenditures. In short, the U.S. needs to develop a regional foreign policy attentive to the heritages, languages, cultures, and social movement politics that bring the peoples of South Asia together. **The U.S. must have a stated policy of overt support for people's movements that seek greater accountability and transparency from South Asian governments.** And the U.S. government must also model this process on its own domestic front.

If the U.S. wants to support democracy in South Asia, it should recognize and respect the democratic aspirations of its peoples, and their capacity to effect meaningful change and reform without U.S. military intervention. The lawyer's movement in Pakistan is an example of a mass-based movement that successfully sought to restore the rule of law and to challenge a deeply undemocratic military government. There is much talk of Afghanistan and Pakistan being "failed states." From a statist or "security studies" standpoint, these states "fail" with regard to being unable to contain terrorism. From a people's or "human security" standpoint, however, they "fail" because they are unable to provide for the basic needs of their citizens.

While the scholars of Afghanistan in this group identify a number of important sectors for continued institution building with U.S. support, they also express concern about existing areas and forms of institutional expansion in the country. We agree, however, that U.S. support for the Pakistan military has historically impeded the growth of democracy in Pakistan. The continued and exclusivist focus on getting the Pakistan government and Pakistan military to concentrate on counter-insurgency activities buttresses the power of the latter at a time when large sections of Pakistani society are

---

<sup>16</sup> See Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen. 2002. India: Development and Participation. Second Edition. Oxford University Press.

mobilizing to re-establish a *civilian* rule of law, after decades of military rule. The lawyers' movement is only the latest instance of a broad-based social movement in Pakistan seeking to constrain the military and to make the government responsive to the needs of all its citizens, including women, workers, and ethnic, and religious minorities. The reinstatement of the judiciary in Pakistan was the result of a historic, non-partisan social movement has successfully pressed its demands in a peaceful manner. This form of grass-roots democratization should be acknowledged and supported by cutting U.S. aid to the Pakistani military. The Pakistani military is an unreliable partner to engage in the process of establishing long-term peace in the region, due to its own interests in maintaining ongoing conflict with Afghanistan and India as well as unrest within Pakistan. **Continued U.S. support of the Pakistan military undermines hard-fought local struggles for justice and government accountability. The U.S. must stop depending upon the Pakistani military as its primary partner in Pakistan. And it must curb its arms sales to India which contribute to the military build-up on the border with Pakistan.**

When South Asian states are unable to democratically represent their peoples, U.S. foreign policy must recognize that since sovereignty is always vested in the peoples of any nation, those peoples have the right to have a say in the decisions that affect them. If the objective of U.S. foreign policy in South Asia is demilitarization to help bring peace to the region, then the peoples of Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan also have the right to participate in crafting a sustainable peace process that will best meet their needs over the long-run. In Kashmir, for example, the Kashmiri people have never been made partners in a peace-process, despite sixty-odd years of war, conflict and on-again-off again negotiations between India and Pakistan. The insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, which has extracted an enormous price from the people of the state, was generated by the systemic erosion of democratic and human rights, discrimination against the Muslims of the valley, socioeconomic marginalization and relegation of the right to self-determination to the background. However, **the independent, non-partisan People's Tribunal to inquire into the ongoing violence in Kashmir<sup>17</sup> can help bring Kashmiris into the peace-process (and is perhaps also a model for helping to resolve territorial disputes in the FATA region on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border).** Without a means of hearing people's grievances, their needs cannot be addressed. Combined Indian forces in Kashmir number approximately 500,000—far more than total U.S. forces in either Afghanistan or Iraq—with devastating consequences for the Kashmiri peoples and their society. The security laws in place in Kashmir (as in Northeast India) are also punitive and severe. The objective of the International People's Tribunal in Kashmir is not to recommend that Kashmir should go either to India or Kashmir, (although the ideas of decentralized autonomy and soft borders are popular in the region); rather it is to take that first, crucial step toward recognizing that Kashmiri peoples are legitimate, indeed necessary, stakeholders in any sustainable peace process. Like the lawyers' movement in Pakistan, the independent tribunal in Kashmir is a good example of local efforts to ask for accountability from the Indian state.

---

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.kashmirprocess.org/premise.html> accessed on 3/28/09.

Women's organizations in Afghanistan and other parts of South Asia have also been among the major champions of peace and human rights. In November 2007, an intra-Kashmir women's conference, 'Connecting Women across the Line of Control (LOC),' was organized in Srinagar by the Delhi-based Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, in collaboration with the Women's Studies programs at the Universities of Kashmir and Jammu. Women delegates from both sides of the LOC participated in the conference to productively discuss concrete methods of rehabilitating victims of violence, either state-sponsored or militancy-related. Women from Indian- and Pakistani-administered Jammu and Kashmir discussed the socioeconomic hardships, psychological trauma, and political marginalization caused by dislocation, dispossession, and disenfranchisement. Delegates at the conference sought mobilization of women for effective change in political and social structures. They vehemently endorsed diplomacy and peaceful negotiations in order to further the India-Pakistan peace process; withdrawal of forces from both sides of the LOC; decommissioning of militants; rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits to rebuild the syncretic fabric of Kashmiri society; and rehabilitation of detainees. The conference highlighted the ability to imagine confidence-building measures that grapple with normative structures and underscore the decisive role that women can play in raising consciousness, not just at the individual but at the collective level as well. Historically, cultural, societal, and market constraints have denied Kashmiri women access to information about the outside world. But the sort of advocacy concretized by the intra-Kashmir women's conference helps overturn the historical seclusion of women and provide them with routes to make forays into mainstream cultural and socioeconomic institutions.

There is also an active, grassroots India-Pakistan peace movement that deserves recognition and support. Over the past few years, the Indo-Pakistani peace movement has been undertaking limited cultural exchange (hampered by government reluctance), although travel between families split by the border has been facilitated in recent years. Such activities, if stepped up by both governments, will both obviate the need for, and defuse the military build-up on the India-Pakistan border. Such cultural and family exchanges across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border need not be seen primarily as transgressive and thereby as threatening and dangerous (though some threatening and dangerous individuals do traffic across this border), but as normal forms of social intercourse and exchange between groups that are split by an arbitrary nation-state boundary. As with the Punjab-based bus travel between India and Pakistan, **a key element in solving the Kashmir and Afghanistan conflicts may be to work toward decriminalizing and normalizing border-crossings rather than militarizing and hardening the borders.**

#### **4. "Indian Exceptionalism" and Counter-Insurgency: Policy Asymmetries**

India has made great strides in development in recent years, and has the largest population, the largest economy, and the largest standing army in South Asia. For all these reasons, India feels that it should be seen as distinct from other countries in the region. Yet, despite its recent economic growth, India still shares much in common with

neighboring countries in South Asia with regard to poverty. Indeed, on some poverty indicators, India does worse than other countries in the region. In terms of rural poverty and the struggle for land rights, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal share much in common; in the latter two countries Maoist or Naxalite insurgencies have grown stronger; resulting in Nepal's recent election of a Maoist government. Large parts of India, in Kashmir and the Northeast, are under military occupation, suggesting structural similarities between Bangladesh's military occupation of the Chittagong Hill tracts, and Sri Lanka's current military occupation of Jaffna. **The creation of large, externally and internally-displaced, traumatized, resource-deprived, and thus volatile refugee communities in these areas creates fertile ground for militant resistance, as it did in Afghanistan.** A viable solution to conflict in Kashmir might thus be enabled by better understanding the practices and effects of military occupation in South Asia than by exclusivist attention to either the Indo-Pak or "Af-Pak" borders. For all these reasons-- social, economic, and political-- the development of a coherent and sustainable U.S. foreign policy in South Asia must locate India as part of a region whose development needs predominate.

U.S. foreign policy however, continues to exercise a form of "Indian exceptionalism" which sees India primarily as a market. We are certainly not against trade or other forms of economic exchange between the two countries, but the recent U.S.-India nuclear deal and the latest high-profile sale of military equipment to India contributes to tension on the Indo-Pak border and instability in the region. Such deals do not contribute to economic and social development but occur at the expense of it. Defense spending in India is more than three times as high as the combined expenditure of its central and state governments on health.<sup>18</sup>

Although the current administration has wisely jettisoned the language of the "War on Terror" much work remains to be done to overcome its legacies. As we noted in the last section, the current conceptual framework underlying U.S. foreign policy in South Asia defines U.S. allies according to their focus on anti-terrorist or "counter-insurgency" activities. In the South Asian context, this means that Hindu nationalists in India are often well-positioned to seize power riding crests of opportunistic "anti-terror" populism. While the 11/26 attack on Mumbai was a grave tragedy, it is worth noting that the top police official investigating the September 2008 Malegaon blasts who identified the participation of current and former Indian army officials and "Hindu terrorist" organizations<sup>19</sup> in the blast was killed in the siege. The police investigation into this last installment of Hindu nationalist violence may now stall, following an all too familiar pattern.<sup>20</sup> In Gujarat too, the rhetoric of anti-terrorism was selectively employed to

---

<sup>18</sup> See Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen. 2002. *India: Development and Participation*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press, p. 289.

<sup>19</sup> For reports on former and current army officials and Hindu nationalist organizations in the Malegaon blasts see: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/hindu-group-behind-malegaon-blast-police/376802/>, <http://www.zeenews.com/Nation/2008-10-25/478850news.html>. Accessed on 4/10/09.

<sup>20</sup> Few Indian politicians have been prosecuted for their roles in inciting or committing violence, and there is ongoing difficulty in prosecuting Hindu nationalist leaders for their roles in inciting and orchestrating violence against Indian minority groups. The Sri Krishna Commission's inquiry into the Bombay Riots of 1992-3 following the illegal destruction of the Babri Masjid held Hindu nationalist organizations

harass, prosecute, discriminate against, and ghettoize the minority Muslim community, though no evidence was ever found to substantiate Chief Minister Narendra Modi's claims of ISI involvement in the burning of car S-6 of the Sabarmati Express on February 27, 2002.<sup>21</sup> The 2002 violence in Gujarat was justified by Hindu nationalist leaders who claimed that "Gujarat is the payback for Kashmir." And indeed, Hindu nationalist organizations in Kashmir were implicated in escalating the violence around the Amarnath shrine issue last summer.<sup>22</sup> It is ineffective to ask Pakistan to bear down upon terrorist organizations in Kashmir, without also asking India to prosecute Hindu nationalist organizations operating in Kashmir and elsewhere. Any regional focus on terrorism cannot single out "Islamic terrorism" as the single cause and effect of terrorist violence in South Asia. In fact, by not aggressively prosecuting "Hindu terrorists" India has compromised its own judiciary and investigatory apparatus, indeed the very "rule of law" in that country.<sup>23</sup> We encourage U.S. policymakers to adopt a truly regional perspective in approaching the analysis of terrorism in South Asia by understanding the role that both India and Pakistan play in failing to adequately redress this issue.

The primary and intensive focus on "terrorism" and "counter-insurgency" is itself a limited and ineffectual strategy. By starting from the ground up and looking at the variety of religious forms of organization in historical context, South Asia scholars learn the dangers of assuming too easily a conflation of "religious extremism" with political "terrorism." The fact that these two things are so readily aggregated in the case of "Islamic terrorism" and so easily disaggregated in the case of "Hindu nationalism" begs further analysis. In sum:

- 1) U.S. foreign policy based on "Indian exceptionalism" and focused primarily on counter-insurgency programs in South Asia detracts from the larger issues of social, economic, and political inequality that feed terrorism and contribute to instability in the region.**
  
- 2) It also has the unintended effect of buttressing Hindu nationalism in India.**

---

responsible for the violence, but none of its leaders were ever prosecuted. See Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City* (Knopf, 2004), pp. 39-112, and <http://www.sabrang.com/srikrish/sri%20main.htm> Accessed on 4/8/09. Former Deputy Prime Minister, Lal Advani, was indicted for his role in inciting the Babri Masjid violence, but the case against him was eventually dropped.

<sup>21</sup> As senior police official R.B. Sreekumar deposed in the government Nanvati-Shah/Mehta Commission hearings on the violence, Modi was told there was no intelligence to back his claims of ISI involvement; the Commission later concluded there were no findings of ISI involvement. The overall findings of the Commission, however, absolve Modi of wrong-doing (in conflict with much of the evidence presented to the Commission). Similarly, the 2004 Justice U.C. Banerjee (Railway) Commission found that the fire on the Sabarmati Express in Godhra was likely the result of an accident and also contradicts the findings of the Nanavati-Mehta Commission. See: <http://www.thehindu.com/2008/09/26/stories/2008092656730100.htm>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.zeenews.com/Nation/2008-07-03/452826news.html> Accessed on 4/8/09 and <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/vhp-bandh-over-amarnath-land-transfer-issue-today/330769/>

<sup>23</sup> In a promising development, the Supreme Court of India has just appointed a Special Investigation Team to probe allegations of Narendra Modi's complicity in the death of former Congress M.P. Ehsan Jafri in 2002. See <http://www.hindu.com/2009/04/28/stories/2009042857650100.htm> Accessed on 5/1/09.

**It precludes understanding of how people under military occupation in the region may experience violent conflict as forms of “state terrorism.”**

## **5. The Role of South Asia Scholars in U.S. Foreign Policy**

In drafting this paper, our primary aim was not so much to produce a policy document, as to outline the basis for constructing a viable alternate policy framework. In helping to generate new conceptual frameworks, we do not underestimate the amount of planning and strategic analysis necessary to recalibrate short term and long term foreign policy goals for South Asia. But we do believe we can play a valuable part of this conversation, and call upon the administration to broaden the mechanisms through which it might consult with Area Studies scholars and include them in the policy planning process. As scholars, we believe our interdisciplinary expertise is of great value in helping to understand histories of South Asian conflict as “wicked problems.” It is precisely because we remain outside the policy establishment that we can review the same facts as policymakers, but provide different questions and points of analysis to aid in the generation of new policy frameworks. **To this end, the current administration might consider setting up focus groups of academics and policymakers to explore new problem-solving and peace-building methods. It could also consider initiating multilateral commissions of scholars assigned to collaboratively study and evaluate long-standing issues or newly emerging problems with joint recommendations for the governments of South Asia and the U.S.**

We believe we also have a distinct role to play in generating better knowledge than is currently available for use in Washington D.C. We believe that including humanists, as well as social scientists in interdisciplinary knowledge-production produces higher quality knowledge. The U.S. intelligence community lacks good information on South Asia. Scholars who have studied the histories, cultures, and day to day politics of the region provide crucial perspectives that policymakers often miss. For this reason we call upon the current administration to make available to the NSF, SSRC, CAORC, AIIS, AIPS, AIAS, AIBS and other agencies, increased monies for basic research on economic development, resource-based social movements and their integrative functions, and the effects of long-term conflict upon the societies of South Asia and the Middle East. These are just a few of the topics that warrant sustained attention and research. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives also face major conflicts and crises; we envision the formation future working groups to focus on issues of conflict and development that traverse the region and also affect India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

South Asia is increasingly not delimited by the geographic boundaries that define the eight SAARC member countries, and so requires knowledge of its diaspora populations and expertise in diaspora or Ethnic Studies. This is especially true when we consider “trans-nationalist” Hindu and transnational Islamic movements with diaspora communities in the U.S. that pose new challenges for social scientists and policymakers. It is unwise to think that politics in India or elsewhere in South Asia can be cordoned off from political processes in the U.S, or that these politics will not be affected by its diaspora communities here.

## Workshop Participant Biographies

**Dr. Amrita Basu** is Professor of Political Science and Women's and Gender Studies at Amherst College who has a particular interest in women's movements and other social movements, [abasu@amherst.edu](mailto:abasu@amherst.edu). Her publications concern the contested meaning of feminism and the complicated relationship between feminist and women's movements, the prominent role of women in the religious right and the relationship of local movements to larger global forces. She teaches courses on women's activism, human rights and post colonial nationalism. Her most recent volume is *Beyond Exceptionalism: Violence, Religion and Democracy in India* (Seagull Press: Delhi and London, 2006). Her current work is focused on Hindu nationalism in India.

**Dr. David Ludden** is Professor of History at NYU who works on economic development, agrarian conditions, health environments, empire, inequality, social conflict, [david.ludden@nyu.edu](mailto:david.ludden@nyu.edu). Among his many books and articles is the recent edited volume, *Capitalism in Asia: Readings from the Journal of Asian Studies*. (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2004). He now works in Bangladesh and sees South Asia from this vantage point, but is also developing a solid Nepal perspective. **He is the contact person for the IPK Working Group on South Asia. (212)998-8631 (o); (267)709-3568 (c).**

**Dr. Nyla Ali Khan** is Associate Professor of English and Multiculturalism at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, [khanna@unk.edu](mailto:khanna@unk.edu). She is the author of *The Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Transnationalism*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), and *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009).

**Dr. Shah Mahmoud Hanifi** is Assistant Professor of History at James Madison University where he teaches courses on the modern Middle East and South Asia, [hanifism@jmu.edu](mailto:hanifism@jmu.edu). He is also the Coordinator of the Interdisciplinary Minor in *Middle Eastern Communities and Migrations* in the General Education Program. His publications include *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan* (<http://www.gutenberg-e.org/hanifi/index.html>), and "Material and Social Remittances to Afghanistan" in (<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Converting-Migration-Drains/Gains/ChapterIV.pdf>).

**Dr. Zia Mian** directs the Project on Peace and Security in South Asia, at the *Program on Science and Global Security*, [zia@princeton.edu](mailto:zia@princeton.edu). His research interests include nuclear weapons and nuclear energy policy in South Asia, and issues of nuclear disarmament and peace. He is Associate Editor of *Science & Global Security*, an international journal for peer-reviewed scientific and technical studies relating to arms control, disarmament and nonproliferation policy. In addition to his scholarly articles, he is the editor of several books and has helped make two documentary films on peace and security in South Asia.

**Dr. Senzil Nawid** is currently a research scholar affiliated with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and Southwest Institute for Research on Women at the University of Arizona, [s.nawid@att.net](mailto:s.nawid@att.net). The focus of her research is the social and political history of Afghanistan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her major work, Religious Response to Social Change in Afghanistan: King Aman-Allah and the Afghan Ulama, 1919-1929, focuses on the state-clergy relations and the reaction of clerical groups to King Aman-Allaha's push for modernization early in the twentieth century. It also addresses the challenges of political legitimacy in the Afghan-Islamic social context. She is currently working on a manuscript titled, "Women, the State, and Revolution in Afghanistan," which will be an analysis of the effects of political developments in Afghanistan on women with particular focus on the impact of the revolutionary ideology of the Marxist regime.

**Dr. Sahar Shafqat** is a specialist in comparative politics and is currently Associate Professor of Political Science at St. Mary's College of Maryland, [sshafqat@smcm.edu](mailto:sshafqat@smcm.edu). Her main areas of interest are democratization, ethnic conflict, and social movements. Among her recent articles is *In India's Shadow: The Evolution of Pakistan's Security Policy* co-authored with Kaniskhan Sathasivam. In *Conflict in Asia: Korea, China, Taiwan, and India Pakistan*, ed. Uk Heo and Shale A. Horowitz. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003). She spent most of last year in Pakistan, and her current research is on the movement to restore the judiciary there. A recent op ed of hers on this subject can be found at: <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/balop.viewpoint12mar12,0,40607.story>

**Dr. Kamala Visweswaran** is Associate Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies at the University of Texas, Austin, [kvis@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:kvis@mail.utexas.edu). Her areas of teaching and scholarship include South Asian social movements, ethnic and political conflict, gender and human rights, transnational and diaspora studies. She has worked in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, India. She is the author of Un/common Cultures (Duke University Press, 2010) and the textbook Perspectives on South Asia (Blackwells, forthcoming). She is finishing another book for Duke University Press called "A Thousand Genocides Now: Gujarat in the Modern Imaginary of Violence."

**Dr. Chitrlekha Zutshi** is Associate Professor of History at the College of William and Mary, [cxzuts@wm.edu](mailto:cxzuts@wm.edu). Her primary areas of expertise are the history of Kashmir; Islam in South Asia; and the interaction between nationalist, regional and religious movements in the Indian Subcontinent. She is the author of Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir, (Oxford University Press, 2004) and is currently working on how Kashmiris think about and record their past.