

**Envisioning a Different Future  
for US Relations with India, Pakistan and Afghanistan**  
AN ORFALEA CENTER POLICY DISCUSSION

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Where will US relations with India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan lead in the future? The past has been clouded with Cold War issues and relationships. The present has been influenced both by the global economy and by the “war on terror.” Will US policies in the future track in a different direction?

US policy is currently buffeted by recent events: the Congress Party’s overwhelming victory in India, the Zardari government’s attempts to control Islamic insurgency in Pakistan, and the Karzai government’s attempts to establish legitimacy in Afghanistan. The situation is different in each of these countries, yet US policy is also shaped by its approach to the South and Central Asia region as a whole.

The Obama Administration has taken a major initiative to refocus US foreign policy on fighting terrorists in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. After appointing Richard Holbrook as a special envoy it has deployed an additional 21,000 military personnel in Afghanistan, conducted tripartite negotiations in Washington with President Karzai of Afghanistan and President Zardari of Pakistan to coordinate their efforts, and pledged a substantial increase in military and economic aid. The recent US military operations in Afghanistan, air strikes in the border areas of Pakistan and the US-backed military offensive by the Pakistan Army in Swat region add a new urgency for a re-examination of the US policy toward the region.

Several questions are important to consider at this moment in South Asia’s history. How did the US reach this point of involvement in the region? What have been the internal pressures within India, Pakistan and Afghanistan and how have they positioned themselves vis-à-vis each other? What is the role of non-state actors, both religio-political organizations and civil society groups? What is the role of the military, and does US policy strengthen the process of militarization in the countries? What should be the role of the UN and regional cooperation organizations such as SAARC (in which India, Pakistan and Afghanistan are members) and SCO (in which these three are observers; their central Asian neighbours, China and Russia are members). Does US policy factor in the tradition of self-determination of the people of the region?

Can we envision a different future for US relations with the countries of South Asia where forces of peace and democracy, autonomy and self-governance, development and social harmony are strengthened through regional and global cooperation? These will be some of the questions that will guide our discussions.

*-- Manoranjan Mohanty and Mark Juergensmeyer*