

courier



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PROVOKING THOUGHT AND ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE ABOUT THE WORLD



**Southeast Asia:
Navigating
the Currents**

Southeast Asia

China Rising

Chinese and American influence in flux in Southeast Asia

How should the United States handle a rising China? While the United States does not seek to dominate the Southeast Asia region, it would be fundamentally against US interests if any other nation, including China, were to do so.

And the United States must look beyond the single issue of the war on terrorism when formulating policies on the Southeast Asia region and consider broader economic, political, and security interests.

Those were among the assessments that emerged at a roundtable discussion on China that was part of the Stanley Foundation's 44th Strategy for Peace Conference entitled "New Security Challenges in Southeast and South Asia."

Security Issues for China

All participants in the discussion agreed that China's diplomatic efforts in recent years have become very sophisticated, marking a significant shift and improvement on previous policies. This is partly due to the changing geopolitical environment in recent months and years, such as the war on terrorism and the North Korean nuclear crisis. But it is also in line with China's effort to be taken seriously on the global stage, with its membership in the World Trade Organization and its role as host to the 2008 Olympics.

China's approach toward the countries of Southeast Asia has been soft and unthreatening, not asking very much of the region. But whatever its long-term goals, China has a number of weaknesses that could limit the expansion of its influence.



Housing Boom. A saleswoman shows prospective buyers a model of a new property development in Beijing. Home ownership and the consequent boom in property development, financial services, and interior decoration were some of the main factors driving China's economy toward double-digit growth last year.

The current political system will likely not allow Beijing to give consistent priority to external considerations, one participant said. Another argued that serious domestic problems—such as China's economic fragility, social tensions, and environmental problems—could curb its aggressive push into Southeast Asia.

Still another participant observed that China's lack of transparency, particularly when faced with unpredictable issue like SARS, hurts its

ability to build trust in the region. Despite great strides in bolstering its image and credibility in the region since the mid-1990s, China still struggles with a perceived lack of shared values among its neighbors.

Security in Southeast Asia

What Southeast Asian countries want most, one participant argued, is stability in the region. But there was disagreement over whether the region sees China or the United States, or perhaps the presence of both, as the provider of stability.

Whatever its long-term goals, China has a number of weaknesses that could limit the expansion of its influence.

Cover photo: A Cambodian woman paddles her fishing boat on the Mekong River—one of the millions whose life source is threatened by China's moves to dam the river for hydropower upstream.

AP/Wide World Photo

Terrorism is obviously one of the most pressing security issues for the region. For many, this is not a new concern. And for most, terrorism has to do with internal domestic struggles and the role—or lack

thereof—of well-functioning domestic political and administrative institutions. Several countries in the region, including China, are concerned with separatist movements that pose a serious threat to political and economic stability.

But one participant argued that since 9/11 there has been an important recognition that longer-term US strategic interests lie very much in the region, noting that President Bush was traveling in the region at the time of the roundtable discussion.

Participants agreed that the region suffers from significant political and economic weakness. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is also weak, due largely to a lack of leadership arising out of Indonesia's political and economic woes.

One constraint on the United States in making Southeast Asia a foreign policy priority is the differing styles of diplomacy and politicking. In the United States, there is little patience for the perceived "chaos" and "messiness" of politics in Southeast Asia. Investing time and energy to cultivate relationships with the region is necessary to build trust and confidence—a strategy China has successfully adopted, though the United States may not be able to follow suit.

Economic Issues for China

Regardless of its motives, China will naturally become economically engaged in the region because it is a bordering neighbor, and the result will be positive economic and security gains for both the region and China.

Participants agreed that the United States should send more consistent foreign policy messages and be more actively involved in the region to counteract a precipitous increase in anti-American sentiments there.

While China is not an overt competitor in the region, the country does appear to be promoting China-centered regional economic cooperation, much as Japan did after World War II. This marks a significant economic reorientation for the country.

They also recommended that the United States not push Southeast Asia into a corner and force it to choose between the United States and China. Instead, it should seek goals that are mutually agreeable to the United States, the region, and China.

But China's growing economic role, if it reaches a level of creating regional economic dependency, may translate into political leverage—something the United States should be concerned about. Another participant observed that Japan is being eclipsed by China as the economic provider in the region and that the United States needs to be mindful that Japan is the real loser in this competition.

—Loren Keller

Resources

The Policy Bulletin entitled "China and Southeast Asia" is available at reports.stanleyfoundation.org or see page 10 to order.

US Interests

Current US policy interests in Southeast Asia are largely related to the global war on terrorism. Most participants expressed concern that in the United States there is currently no sense of urgency in making Southeast Asia a foreign policy priority. This is in stark contrast to the leadership in China, which has given priority to the region.

The United States should send more consistent foreign policy messages...to counteract a precipitous increase in anti-American sentiments.



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

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The new US focus on counterterrorism as an organizing principle in foreign policy is a mixed blessing for Southeast Asia.

South East Asia

Fighting Terrorism on the “Second Front”

Distinguishing between political and extremist Islam is key in Southeast Asia

Since the intervention in Afghanistan in late 2001, the United States has focused attention on “second fronts” in the war on terrorism, assuming that Al Qaeda would disperse its operatives and resources more widely.

Southeast Asia, a region of prime importance during the Cold War, holds both threat and promise in the new era of US counterterrorism efforts. Indonesia, the largest country in the region, is home to more Muslims—about 170 million—than all Arab states combined.

Southeast Asian Islam has traditionally been moderate, but in the

past decade radical Islamists—indigenous and foreign—have made strides both underground and in the public arena.

The new US focus on counterterrorism as an organizing principle in foreign policy is a mixed blessing for Southeast Asia. On the one hand, it has returned the region to the US “policy screen.” On the other, it views the region in a single dimension—that of Islamic extremism—which can result in unbalanced, even myopic, US policies.

To address the difficulties of formulating new policies in the post-9/11 era, the Stanley Foundation examined political Islam and coun-

terterrorism as one topic at its 44th Strategy for Peace Conference on “New Security Challenges in Southeast and South Asia.”

Political Vs. Radical Islam

Most participants agreed that US counterterrorism policy tends to conflate political Islam with radical terrorism worldwide.

But political Islam “is no more or no less necessarily dangerous to the body politic than political Christianity,” said participant Karl Jackson, director of the Asia Studies Program for the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at the John Hopkins University.



No Clowning Around.

An Indonesian Muslim protester points his toy gun at Ronald McDonald during an antiwar demonstration in Jakarta last year. Muslims in Indonesia—the world's most populous Islamic nation—have warned that the war in Iraq could cause more terrorist attacks around the world.

“Radical Islamic terrorists always attack political Islam because moderate political Islam is their real enemy,” he said. “They account for about .02 percent of the population—a tiny fragment. But if they can convince the West that there’s no difference between that small fragment of the community and the larger (Islamic) community, then you can be assured that policy responses from the West will be malaprop and dysfunctional.”

Since the October 2002 bombing in Bali that killed more than 200 people and the August 2003 car bomb attack that killed 12 at the Jakarta Marriott hotel, Indonesians have been more supportive of the

crackdown on militants. But the country harbors growing resentment of the United States and its war on terror, which many believe is undermining Indonesia’s progress toward democracy and human rights.

Much of US policy is still centered on pre-9/11 concepts in the region and has failed to address the root causes of terrorism, said Catharin Dalpino, who chaired the conference discussion.

Indonesia has struggled in its attempt to move from an authoritarian government to a democracy. The military remains one of the country’s strongest institutions while regulatory structures are almost nonexistent. The country’s legal system is in shambles, and civilian law enforcement agencies, led by the police, are corrupt, poorly trained, and incapable of responding to serious violence, according to Human Rights Watch.

“We need to replace counterterrorism policy—which is fairly narrow and specific—with a broader concern for strengthening Southeast Asian domestic security,” said Dalpino, an adjunct professor of Southeast Asian Studies at Georgetown University who also teaches at Johns Hopkins. “It would de-emphasize terrorism and Islam in a way that would make cooperation easier.”

No Counterterrorism

“Quick Fix”

Confronting terrorism in the region is a problem with no technological or military “quick fix” but will be a “very long, hard slog that will consume not one but several decades of effort,” Jackson said.

But the good news is that competition among Southeast Asian countries for global power has had a moderating effect on political Islam, Dalpino said, and that the two terrorist attacks in Indonesia have led to a “gradual enfranchisement” of

more Southeast Asian governments and populations in the war against terrorism.

Counterterrorism cooperation between the United States and Southeast Asia has met with some success. Greater awareness of extremist networks in the region has resulted in tighter law enforcement and the arrest of some key terrorists. But at the same time, the United States remains at risk of encouraging greater radicalism in Southeast Asian Islamist communities with policies that do not reflect local conditions and concerns.

Taking the Long View

US policy, the group agreed, should be based on a long-term view of Southeast Asia. The group recommended reduced visa and immigration requirements, encouraging partnerships in educational efforts based on a Muslim approach, job creation in the region, emphasizing police over military action against terrorism, building programs that encourage the rule of law, strengthening intelligence operations, and encouraging more dialogue between the United States and Southeast Asian governments.

Bronson Percival, counterterrorism coordinator for the State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said the short-term US goal in the region should be to help governments arrest terrorists. The mid-term goal should be to increase the capability of countries to catch terrorists, and the long-term goal should be to help build a society that resists the appeal of terrorists.

“This is not an American-driven policy,” Percival said. “There’s no way the United States can do this unilaterally, so the emphasis, at least in Southeast Asia, has been on diplomacy.”

—Loren Keller

The United States remains at risk of encouraging greater radicalism in Southeast Asian Islamist communities with policies that do not reflect local conditions and concerns.

Resources

The Policy Bulletin entitled “Political Islam and Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia: An Agenda for US Policy” is available at reports.stanleyfoundation.org or see page 10 to order.

Southeast Asia

Closer Than We Think

Border-hopping nature of some challenges demands regional solutions

Increasingly, conflict and instability in Southeast Asia are being generated by problems like disease, environmental degradation, and corruption—problems often called “nontraditional security threats” because they can affect a country’s well-being as seriously as traditional concerns like military aggression, internal conflict, or terrorism.

As the countries of Southeast Asia become more tightly linked to one another and the rest of the world—and as technology becomes more sophisticated—an epidemic, pollution source, or criminal network in one country is no longer an isolated problem. It affects every country in the region, and even some outside it. This includes the United States, whose trade, travel, and

military links with Southeast Asia are rapidly expanding.

As part of the Stanley Foundation’s 44th annual Strategy for Peace Conference, entitled “New Security Challenges in Southeast and South Asia,” participants in the roundtable discussion on nontraditional security threats closely examined that link, recognizing that discontent and conflict elsewhere has direct consequences for the United States.

Three of the most important nontraditional security threats facing Southeast Asia today are HIV/AIDS, environmental and food security, and crime and corruption.

HIV/AIDS

If nothing is done to combat the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in

Southeast Asia, the region could soon have an infection rate comparable to that of sub-Saharan Africa. As in other parts of the world, the problem of HIV/AIDS does not exist in a vacuum but is related to other problems like poverty and crime. Specific issues are more or less important in individual countries; for example, drug use is thought to be the primary cause of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Indonesia, while sex trade is probably the chief culprit in Burma.

Possible answers to the HIV/AIDS problem in Southeast Asia include targeting government programs to high-risk sectors of the population; extending education and treatment to people who are not getting it now because they are poor, live in remote areas, or face

...an epidemic, pollution source, or criminal network in one country is no longer an isolated problem.



The Needle and the Damage Done. Students carry a giant needle during a rally marking World AIDS Day in Jakarta, Indonesia. Drug use is thought to be the primary cause of the spread of the virus in the country.

cultural barriers; and reducing reproductive tract infections that leave people at increased risk of catching HIV/AIDS.

Like HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation is usually linked to issues like poverty, as when people who can afford no other source of fuel remove too many trees from sensitive forests. Another example is the 1997 forest fires in Indonesia created a cloud of smoke that caused health problems all over Southeast Asia, underscoring the essential lesson that nontraditional security threats are no respecters of borders. "Transboundary" events like the Indonesian fires might be easier to contain in the future if multinational institutions that are capable of responding to such crises are strengthened. It would also help to use nongovernmental organizations to provide local governments with the technical assistance they need to manage their natural resources in a sustainable way.

Crime Networks

Organized crime networks, especially those involved in the drug trade, are widespread in Southeast Asia. While it is obviously important to take strong measures against criminal enterprises, it is also important to remember that unrestrained police or military action can lead to human rights abuses. It is also important to remember that many poor Southeast Asians would lose their livelihoods were drugs and other crimes to be eliminated entirely without providing viable, legal alternatives.

Any solution to any nontraditional security threat in Southeast Asia should have at least three characteristics: it should be people-based, multilateral, and multi-sectoral. Although traditional, government-based responses will always be necessary to address every kind of security threat, nontraditional threats—which are intimately bound up with culture and individual behavior—also require

responses that involve communities, families, and individuals.

Seeking Multilateral Solutions

Participants in the discussion agreed that solutions to nontraditional security threats should be multilateral. In most cases, a significant cause of the threat is the failure of neighboring states to work together. The border-hopping nature of these challenges demands regional solutions.

Finally, there is no such thing as a nontraditional security threat that can be addressed by people from a single area of expertise. Such threats are so complex that solving them will require the cooperation of multiple entities from government, business, and civil society.



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

Treacherous Road. A truck hauls logs on the island of Borneo for an industry that has caused a range of environmental problems in Southeast Asia. Environmentalists have partly blamed logging companies for the 1998 wildfires in the region—one example of a nontraditional security threat that may demand a multilateral solution.

One example is the advancing destruction of the forests along the Burma Road in what is now the country of Myanmar. The over-logging of these forests is simultaneously an environmental problem (soil run-off from over-logged forests affects ground-water systems), a law-enforcement problem (drugs are smuggled inside the logs), a public health problem (logging

truck drivers who use prostitutes spread HIV/AIDS), and a military problem (the spreading network of logging roads could provide access for troops and military vehicles moving between India and China). To successfully address one nontraditional security threat, parties must also address related issues.

—Elizabeth Constantine

...nontraditional threats... require responses that involve communities, families, and individuals.

Resources

The Policy Bulletin entitled "Nontraditional Security Threats in Southeast Asia" is available at reports.stanleyfoundation.org or see page 10 to order.

India and Pakistan

Threading the Needle

Balancing the war on terror with efforts to prevent deadly conflict in South Asia

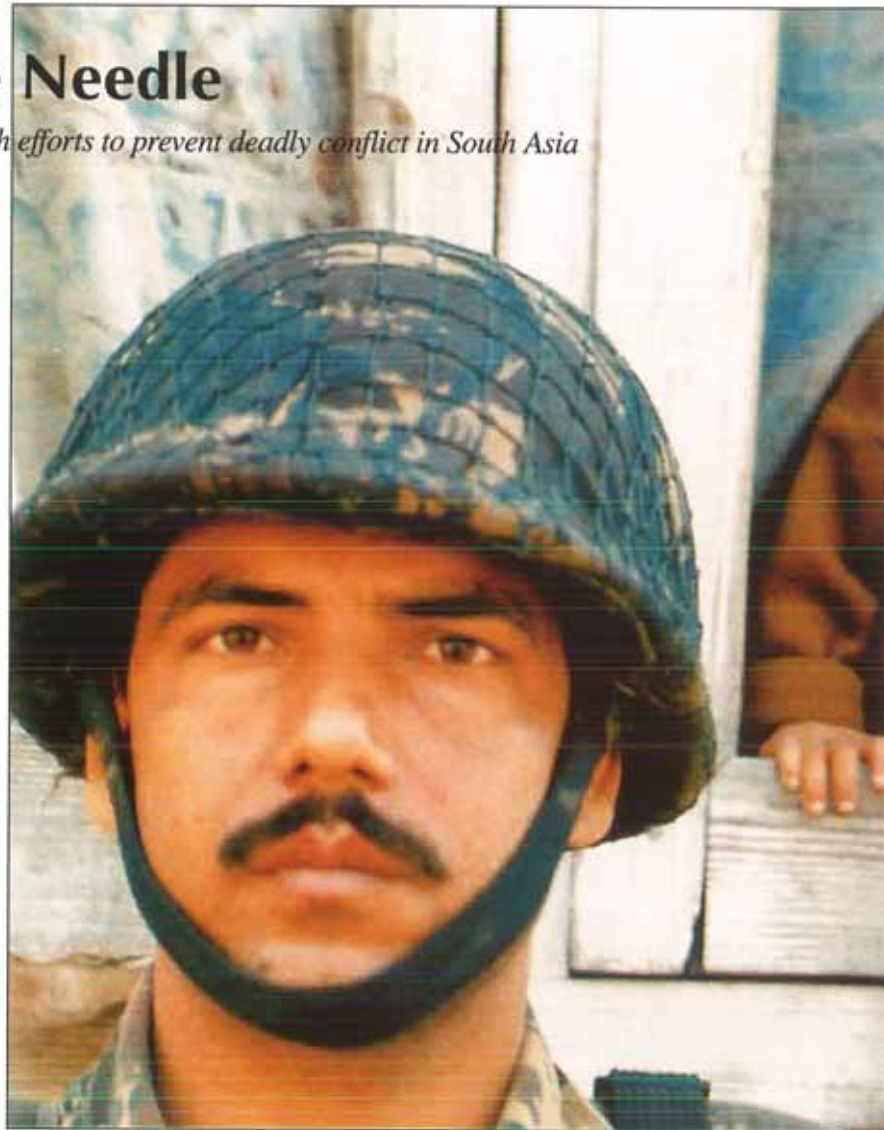
As a global power, the United States is often confronted with clashes between short-term and long-term interests in the world's most unstable regions.

Nowhere is this clash more apparent than in South Asia, home to one of the oldest international rivalries in the developing world. The bilateral confrontation between Pakistan and India currently encompasses every known indicator of conflict: an ever-present and growing military standoff between sizable conventional, nuclear, and missile arsenals; a history that encompasses three major conventional wars and innumerable paramilitary clashes around disputed borderlines; severe difficulties with indigenous minority groups; and weak government legitimacy among many ethno-religious groups in outlying provinces.

Moreover, all of these various strains of confrontation are increasingly focused in the low-intensity paramilitary campaign between contending Islamic and Hindu groups in the disputed province of Kashmir, an Indian-held territory that has been dubbed the world's most likely "nuclear flashpoint." Since an uprising against India's rule was begun by indigenous Kashmiri's in 1989, the province has become a center of guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and state repression, as India has attempted to clamp down ever tighter on groups who are believed to be directly supported by Pakistan.

Untying the Kashmir Knot

In the end, many regional experts believe that the key to conflict resolution in South Asia is untying the Kashmir knot—but currently, neither India nor Pakistan wants to



untie it, given their dependence on the struggle in Kashmir to define their own domestic identities. India has been governed for five years by a coalition of right-leaning, Hindu-nationalist parties who view past conciliatory foreign policies toward Pakistan with disdain.

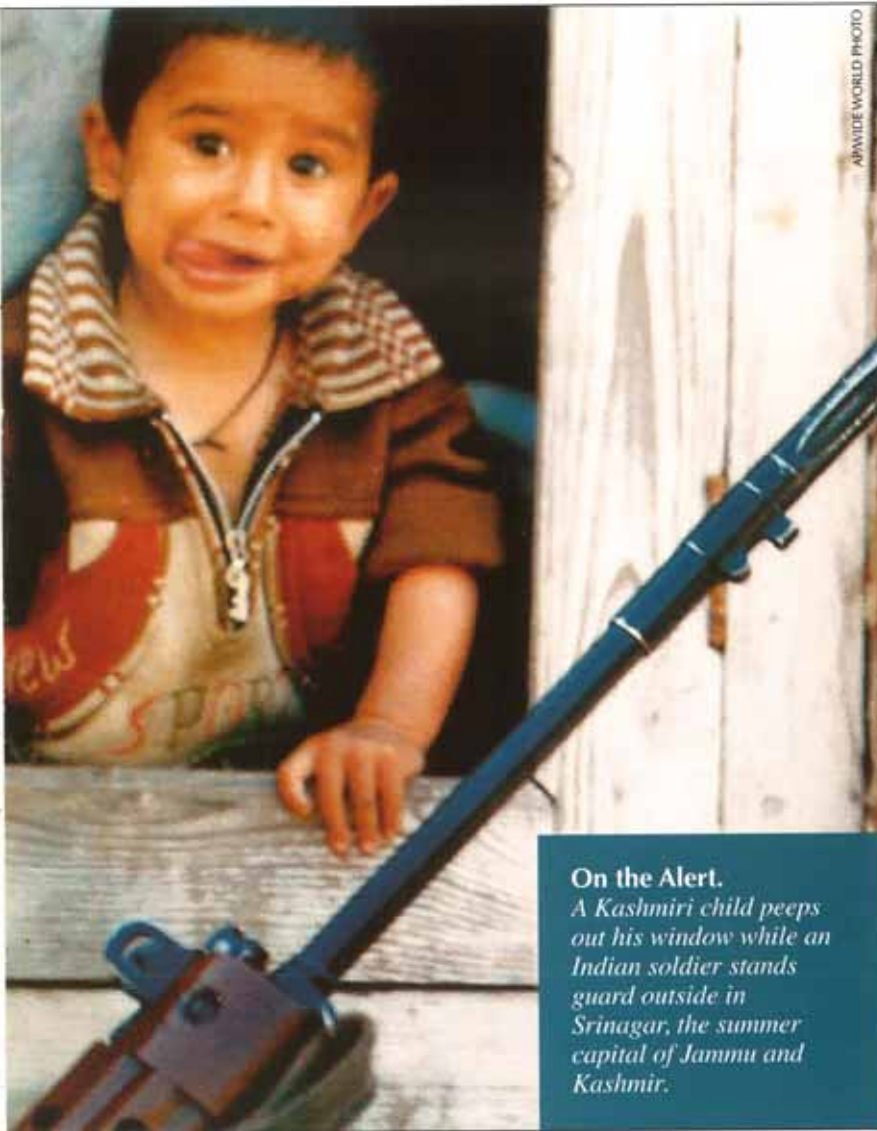
Meanwhile, the military rulers in Islamabad are continually prone to incendiary actions in Kashmir because Pakistan defines itself as a haven for Muslims being persecuted in Hindu-dominant India. Further, Pakistan must constantly keep the issue of Kashmir's status alive to retain a modicum of domestic legitimacy. To this end, it regularly supports and uses Islamic groups against its domestic opponents and supports "madrasas"—religious

schools short on basic reading, writing, and arithmetic but strong on spreading Koranic teachings and the ethic of jihad among its largely poor and working-class students.

Although India and Pakistan have both committed to a series of talks on all outstanding issues—signaling a potential long-term thaw in their relations—past peace talks have repeatedly foundered due to unpredictable terrorist attacks or the need of central political leaders to play up the conflict in order to appeal to domestic audiences.

So what is the United States to do? Traditionally, US strategy has been one of "conflict management": rather than allying with one party against another or trying to reach a

Many regional experts believe that the key to conflict resolution in South Asia is untying the Kashmir knot....



On the Alert.
A Kashmiri child peeps out his window while an Indian soldier stands guard outside in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir.

reform its educational, financial, justice, and political systems to rid it of corruption and religious extremism, it could become a failed state like Afghanistan in 10 to 15 years—albeit one with strategic nuclear weapons arsenals that could be aimed at US friends and allies in neighboring regions.

While US talents at conflict management are formidable, at some point the pot is likely to boil over, with unpredictable consequences for US national security and global interests in the 21st century. It is time for a thorough overhauling of US strategy toward South Asia.

The surest path for amendment of US policy strategy seems to be the one already enunciated by the Bush administration in repeated public statements since 9/11: consistent support of democratic and economic reform in the most unstable regions of the developing world. More specifically, if India's efforts to achieve military superiority over Pakistan were constrained through arms control measures, and if Pakistan were to seriously commit itself to a positive path of reform of all its state institutions, there would be much more hope of reaching a feasible agreement on Kashmir through concerted US mediation in the long term. But for this process to begin, the United States must help Pakistan to undertake painful domestic reforms, and it must work with other nations to convince India to moderate its military buildup so that Pakistan does not feel constantly threatened by India's superior resource base. If successful, such measures could allow for peaceful negotiations and a substantial lessening of nuclear tension in South Asia in the long term.

—Michael Kraig

While US talents at conflict management are formidable, at some point the pot is likely to boil over, with unpredictable consequences for US national security and global interests in the 21st century.

Resources

A web report entitled "A New US Strategy for South Asia: Going Beyond Crisis Management" is available at reports.stanleyfoundation.org or see page 10 to order.

long-term, durable settlement of all issues, the United States has tried to get short-term help from both sides on matters of core importance (such as fighting terrorist groups) while acting as mediator between Pakistan and India during periodic military crises.

Currently, the United States is enjoying the best relationship with India in decades—including higher levels of trade and new joint training exercises between Special Forces units with antiterrorist missions. At the same time, it continues to rely on Pakistan to fight the ever-present battle against international terrorist groups in the Afghani hinterlands. Simply put, Pakistan "rents out" its substantial military and intelligence resources

and its superior geographic position to the United States in the current war on terror. Meanwhile, US nuclear nonproliferation priorities have taken a definite back seat, with little concerted effort to restrain or cap the nuclear and missile arsenals of either India or Pakistan since the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

Could Pakistan Become a Failed State?

The problem is that traditional US practices are increasingly unsustainable. Pakistan's military leader and president, Pervez Musharraf, is threatened more than ever by domestic discontent—as evidenced by two major terrorist strikes on his presidential motorcade in December 2003. Many experts now predict that if Pakistan does not

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Fight Hunger & Disease to Prevent War

Poverty and Security: The Connection

1/1000 of rich countries' wealth could save 8 million

One cent out of every \$10...that could be enough to fight deadly diseases—including malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, and diarrhea—and save 8 million of the world's poorest people, mainly children, who would otherwise die each year.

That's according to Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and a special advisor to the United Nations, who commissioned a World Health Organization study that found such diseases could be fought for a mere 1/1000 of wealthy countries combined gross national product—or about \$25 billion a year.

"This could change our planet in a way that people have dreamt about for ages but is now possible because of just how rich we are and just how good our science and technology and proven results are," Sachs recently told *Common Ground*, the Stanley Foundation's weekly radio program on world affairs.

There is a connection between fighting global poverty and national security, Sachs said.

"When societies don't prosper... things fall apart," he said. "When you get that kind of downward spiral of economic collapse and social calamity and the governments aren't functioning, you can get revolution, terrorism, civil war—all the things that pull the US into one mess after another. And yet we seem to wait until the mess arrives rather than trying to get at the root cause."

The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals—which call for cutting the world's extreme hunger and poverty in half by 2015—are within reach, Sachs said.

"But it's also tragically true that we're just not on course to accomplish it because we're spending all our time thinking about things like Iraq in this country," he said. "We're not spending our time



Help Wanted. An indigenous Venezuelan woman begs with her baby in her lap in downtown Caracas, Venezuela.

thinking about the problems of disease and hunger, which are the root causes of the Iraqs of the world."

—Loren Keller

Resources

This interview with Dr. Jeffrey Sachs is available on the Web, program #0350, at commongroundradio.org/2003.shtml.

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