

EDITED BY STEN RYNNING

SOUTH ASIA AND THE GREAT POWERS

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND REGIONAL SECURITY



LB.TAURIS

Sten Rynning is Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern Denmark, where he also heads the Center for War Studies. He is currently Scholar in Residence at the School of International Service, American University, Washington, and was previously president of the Nordic International Studies Association and a visiting fellow at NATO's Defense College, Rome. He is the author of *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect* and co-author (with Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, 2012) of *Transforming Military Power since the Cold War: Britain, France, and the United States, 1991–2012* (2013).

“Sten Rynning has assembled some of the globe’s most distinguished and knowledgeable experts to unpack the crucial links between great power competition and regional security dynamics in South Asia. This is a sharply informative exposé of a crucial region’s politics, but, more than that, it is a window on the emerging workings of a changing international system. A signal contribution.”

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“A needed and timely volume with contributions from experts in the field, Sten Rynning’s book offers unique insights into the rapid reconfiguration of regional security in South Asia. The book drives home the imperative to differentiate among our key relationships as the new geostrategic contours of the region come into view. It should be required reading for anyone interested in the growing importance of South Asia to global security.”

Andrew A. Michta, author of *The Limits of Alliance*

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Christian Wagner, Tughrul Yamin, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Sten Rynning

South Asia's security order has become a centre of gravity to the international community on account of the war in Afghanistan, the conflict between human rights and sectarianism, the risk of nuclear proliferation and the potential for wider instability not only in South Asia but also the neighbouring Middle East and Central Asia. These concerns have raised the question of what will happen in the wake of the international combat mission in Afghanistan, which ended in December 2014. It is readily apparent that the region is transitioning from an Afghan war-centric phase to a new phase of regionalized and therefore more diverse engagements. The implications hereof in terms of war and peace are open to question, however. Ultimately, observers will have to grapple with the role played by the region's great powers. The great powers have the capacity to pull together to create a framework for wider social and economic cooperation, just as they have the capacity to tear apart the region's fabric by ideological confrontation and proxy warfare. Critical to the region, and the world beyond, is therefore the question of whether the region's great powers can agree to align power in support of a concept of order.

Such a concept of order can be hard to spot. The war in Afghanistan did not end with the termination of the international combat mission but merely changed in character. Perhaps Afghanistan is at the end game of a war that took root in the late 1970s, but there is much uncertainty attached to the ability of a Taliban movement fractured by leadership challenges to reconcile and transition from war to peace, the will of the

international community to sustain “partnerships” with Afghanistan and also the capacity of mainstream political forces in Kabul to set aside their narrow aspirations and enable government. In addition, the process of regionalization mobilizes stakeholders outside Afghanistan. They will seek reassurance that their adversaries do not come out on top in a new order. Not knowing whom to trust, they might develop hedging strategies that include support for unrest and insurgency in neighbouring countries. It is sobering to keep in mind that this complex and volatile transition involves four regional nuclear powers – India, Pakistan, China, all of which are established nuclear powers, and Iran, a threshold power. It explains why the region’s future is a matter of widespread international concern, just as it explains why the United States – another nuclear power – will never quite leave the region.

For the past 15 years, the United States has been heavily involved in the region and thus offered a focal point for the study of regional order. While fighting in Afghanistan, the United States has been the region’s main power broker capable of offering credible security assurances and structuring the region’s diplomacy. The United States did not succeed in embedding a new concept of order, though, and it is now pulling back – not entirely, but significantly. As the United States pulls back, others will step in.

The situation calls for an engagement with some of the key international relations thinking on the balance of power and regional stability. “Balance of power” is a depiction of a pluralist or diverse international system where domination by any one nation or any one ideal or ideology is infeasible and where the political challenge is to achieve stability by way of equilibrium. In other words, it is a question of whether national decision-makers will come to see their interests as best served by “power equilibrium” as opposed to the pursuit of “power superiority”.¹ A shared or common concept of order encourages policies of equilibrium. Historically, in Europe, evolving concepts of “Europe’s unity” have at times successfully restrained the autonomy and freedom of manoeuvre of the great powers to engender equilibrium and thus stability.² South Asia’s history is different, yet the challenge is similar. In the words of Henry Kissinger, it is to “distill order from multiplicity and restraint” and build common institutions that limit the element of power.³

Transitions

The South Asian challenge can be described as one of transitions: from war to peace in Afghanistan; from US leadership to pluralist management; from mistrust to trust. South Asia's order must self-consciously emerge out of the shadows of the Afghan war, just as it must evolve at the point where US policy concerns intersect with those of regional and other powers.

In so far as diplomatic leverage follows force numbers, then US influence peaked in 2011 when US forces numbered more than 100,000 – and when the total number of US-led international forces was nearly 140,000. At this point in time the fairly new administration of President Obama sought to streamline the armed engagement behind the objective of degrading and defeating Al-Qaeda and then shifting the policy emphasis to regional reconciliation. Yet complications soon arose and ultimately destroyed the policy momentum. The key aim of detaching the Taliban from Al-Qaeda and reconciling it with the new Afghanistan presumed a peace process that did not exist and was hard to engender for as long as the peace protagonist, the United States, was the main force actually fighting the Taliban. The United States needed a credible partner in peace, therefore, but the two key potential partners, Pakistan and Afghan president Karzai, feared for a loss of influence and did not enable US policy.

In this maze of relationships the Obama administration never managed to fully sort out its regional priorities. It wanted long-term relationships with both Pakistan and India, the two nuclear powers of the region, but in the shorter term it also wanted to coerce not least Pakistan into tightening its control of the Taliban and dampening the insurgency. However, whether that meant fighting the Taliban or seeking peace negotiations was not clear, and in the end it was the fact of transition – thus, to an extent, exit – that tilted the balance in favour of negotiations. The US post-2014 mission has thus moderately alleviated the challenge of procuring diplomatic influence from military presence.

Because the US mission, in the words of former President Obama, is deliberately “narrow” in design, it has brought the effort to induce power-sharing to the fore.⁴ Notably, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah – political rivals – have been tenuously brought together as Afghanistan's executive authority, and power-sharing is

supposed to be embedded in a constitutional review (foreseen for 2016 but likely delayed). The United States maintains a limited force number to support this reconciliation but will also continue to draw down. The initial plan was to draw down the US presence to a normal embassy presence with a security assistance component – altogether around 1,000 service members – by the end of 2016. However, in the course of 2016 the plan was revised and now allows for a presence of some 8,400 US troops by the time President Obama leaves office – in January 2017.⁵

Declining US troop numbers translate into new opportunities. If squandered, they will open the kind of vacuum that power abhors. Regional and international diplomacy is therefore justifiably concerned with the establishment of South Asian political structures that can translate opportunity into restrained anxieties and diplomatic engagement. Tellingly, in his inaugural speech as Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani promised a new foreign policy of stability taking into account the varied interests of neighbours, be they Islamic, Western and Asian countries or the major international institutions.⁶ It was a call for peace, without question, but the carefully drawn distinction among distinct actors and interests was nonetheless remarkable: regional interests are complex and partnerships frail, the hopeful Afghan president was saying. Whether regional security order is possible is the question this book will address.

Contours of South Asia

Regional security in South Asia must build on three complex realities. The first is the intricate geography of the region. In terms of physical geography the region can be hard to delineate. The Indian plate shielded by the Great Himalaya mountain range, its extensions to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south is an obvious place to begin. However, this physical geography excludes much of Pakistan and all of Afghanistan, just as it excludes most of Nepal and Bhutan. The region's geography of language and religion is even more complex and divisive. The case of India is illustrative. Its national census defines 22 main languages and no less than 234 mother tongues, and it categorizes Indians into six religions along with a residual category of tribal and other faiths to which more than six million people adhere.⁷

Ultimately, it is perhaps the political geography defined by the British Empire that best defines the contours of South Asia. It would leave out Myanmar but otherwise include all the other countries that are commonly included in the region.⁸ To define a region predominantly by its imperial geography, however, is to draw attention to legacies of empire that might well reinforce current barriers to cooperation.

One legacy, and the second complexity of the region, is the preeminence of India. It was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, deliberately designed to enable imperial control from a central region outward, and today it remains vastly superior to its neighbours in terms of population and wealth.⁹ A region thus marked by plurality and power asymmetry – or, “unbalanced multipolarity” – will easily be dominated by fear, and those in fear will naturally be the neighbours to the great power.¹⁰ The history of imperial control and restive neighbours has shaped India’s strategic legacy, and it extends back to the fourth century when the Indian doctrine of enabling central control by squeezing neighbours between the centre and its farther afield allies was first articulated.¹¹ It captures the essence of Pakistan’s fear of India and its struggle to prevent India from gaining ground in Afghanistan, just as it captures Pakistan’s unease with the occasional nationalist emphases of Narendra Modi, India’s prime minister since May 2014.

The lopsided distribution of power combined with nationalism can thus corrode a unifying idea of South Asia and with it the collective attachment to diplomatic restraint. It could leave a mere chessboard on which primarily India, China and the United States will move to seek influence, akin to a new version of the Great Game. The contours of such a game are eminently traceable.¹²

China is aiming to “go West” via new land and maritime Silk Routes, and though its land corridor runs from its far-western Xinjiang province through Pakistan to the Arabian Sea, it must reckon with India whose rivalry with Pakistan is well-known and whose control of the Indian Ocean is increasing. China’s naval presence is enabled by emerging “bases” (at present mere stations) in Gwadar, Pakistan and Hambantota, Sri Lanka, but India not only has two carrier battle groups patrolling its seas, it is also controlling one of the choke points leading into, or out of, the South China Sea, namely the Andaman and Nicobar Islands off the northern tip of Indonesia. As far as the United States is concerned, it is

pulling out of Afghanistan in an effort to “pivot” further east, but it cannot fully disengage from the wider South Asia region. Given India’s role in the region’s maritime strategy, and its role in the India–Pakistani nuclear balance which – if things turn out badly – could extend first to Iran and then to Saudi Arabia (both of which have received nuclear assistance from Pakistan), the United States notably must sustain its partnership with India and leverage it in regional stabilization efforts. The two countries entered a Strategic Dialogue in 2009. Before this point, in 2004, the United States made Pakistan a “major non-NATO ally” but this relationship has proven difficult and, considering the end of Afghan combat and the US pivot, is destined for further change. Finally there is India itself. Like Britain before it, independent India will seek to secure the Indian realm in its northern mountains and by way of maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean. It is a growing power, and it must learn to grow and simultaneously manage the anxiety of its neighbours as well as the interests of non-regional powers such as the contestants, China and the United States.

This capacity to sustain balancing diplomacy brings us to the third regional complexity, namely the character of the states themselves. South Asian states are weak in the sense that their borders are in places disputed and their national institutions are young, contested and of limited capacity.¹³ India is an amalgam of continental entities brought together first by the Muslim Mughals, then the British; Pakistan is a Muslim reaction to independent India in 1948–9; and the two continue to be at war over the region of Kashmir where there is no settled border but merely a “line of control”.

Afghanistan’s independence is of older vintage but its national institutions are exceptionally weak as a result of outside meddling, a weak agricultural base that engenders weak economic institutions and then a complex geography – the Hindu Kush separates north from south, east from west, and its rivers do not connect to any body of water. Its amalgam of people comes from its surrounding regions, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent, but Pashtuns define the dominant group. Pashtuns have historically ruled Afghanistan but have also, given that they straddle Afghanistan and Pakistan, been called one of the largest stateless nations on earth. In consequence, the Afghan–Pakistan border, the Durand Line, has little meaning for most Pashtuns and is for this reason not yet recognized by Afghanistan, to Pakistan’s

consternation. President Ghani has, since his election in 2014, reached out to Pakistan in a way that his predecessor, President Karzai, never did. However, Pakistan remains sceptical and continues to consider its relationship to the Taliban as its ace in the hole. For as long as Ghani fails to muster a governing coalition inside Afghanistan that can promise durable Pashtun influence, Pakistan is unlikely to change its calculus.

This type of social and political fragmentation, along with insecurity, feeds government by political patronage.¹⁴ To patronage we may add the concept of “geostrategic curse” to capture the way in which outside powers time and again have found it convenient to invest in the power of local despots rather than social and political transformation.¹⁵

In sum, South Asia’s contours emerge at the intersections of physical, power and socio-political geographies. Can they combine to support peace and stability? On some occasions observers express hope that stabilization can happen bottom-up, perhaps not least because of demographics and the exposure of young generations to international trends and taste.¹⁶ In a country riveted by decades of war, such as Afghanistan, one side-benefit of the international troop presence has been the internationalization of large segments of young society. Such changes could be further reinforced by both processes of liberalization – of trade, investment and human interaction across borders – and exploratory, informal diplomatic dialogues known as “track two” diplomacy.¹⁷ However, traditional diplomacy should not be left out of the equation. Such diplomacy is geared to manage the first two challenges outlined here – a complex political geography and the preeminence of India – and will, if not properly managed, have every potential to wreck bottom-up “track two” diplomacy.

South Asian Multilateralism

Multilateral institutions define a tried and trusted method for bringing countries closer together. South Asia is not blessed by a plethora of multilateral institutions but rather a growing number of bilateral security relations, the downside of which is the uncertainty that all too easily can rekindle historical animosities and rivalry. The notable exception is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which Pakistan helped found in 1985 and which Afghanistan joined in 2007. In 2006, SAARC gave birth to a South Asian Free Trade

Area (SAFTA), which is encouraging but whose impact has been limited, as is the case with the SAARC itself.

The United States has mostly been successful in entering bilateral agreements but less so in converting these into a design for regional rapprochement. The United States and Afghanistan have an *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement* and, as mentioned, Pakistan is a designated major non-NATO ally while India has been drawn into a Strategic Dialogue. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that ran the combat mission in Afghanistan has followed suit with a training mission (Operation Resolute Support), which will run for 2015–16, and is preparing a civilian-led advisory mission for post-2016.¹⁸ Another multilateral option is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has a footprint mainly in Central Asia but which trains Afghan border police and which has been singled out by Pakistan as a potential vehicle for regional cooperation. The United Nations has welcomed the full range of regional partnerships and sponsors the international effort to move Afghanistan into a “transformation decade” that formally began in 2015.

The United States did begin in 2011 to outline its own vision for a regional framework that went beyond the ill-fated “Af-Pak” strategy of 2009–10 that accompanied the troop surge in Afghanistan. The new initiative comes in the shape of a Silk Road project that links energy-rich Central Asia via Afghanistan to coastal South Asia. There are two main pillars in the project – a regional hydroelectricity grid (CASA 1000) designed to bring hydropower from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to neighbouring countries and a pipeline project (TAPI) that connects Turkmenistan’s riches in gas and oil via Afghanistan and Pakistan to India – but success has not come easily.¹⁹

China has different and more substantial Silk Road projects defined as late as in 2013 that could engender multilateral cooperation not least given China’s staying power in the region and its economic muscle. China has one Silk Road project running inland and through Central Asia (in addition to the China–Pakistan economic corridor) and another running through the maritime waters of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean,²⁰ and it has with success organized the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that covers Central Asia and includes Russia, and which in 2015 decided to enlarge (by 2016) to India and Pakistan.

Afghanistan, an SCO observer since 2012, decided in 2015 to seek full SCO membership. This expanded SCO membership offers a prospect for an emerging SCO-centric security order. However, it presupposes the continued diplomatic reconciliation of China and India and then also support from both Russia – inside SCO but with its own plans for a customs union in Central Asia – and the United States.

A final multilateral forum that needs emphasis is the Heart of Asia process – aka the Istanbul process – that Turkey initiated in November 2011. It is a “process” focused on confidence building measures, and it does not have the organizational pretensions of SAARC or SCO: its membership includes 14 countries but then also a network of proper international organizations and a group of supporting countries drawn from across the globe. The Heart of Asia process may not have achieved great advances but it has led to a series of ministerial conferences that offer opportunities to test new policy ideas and shape regional diplomacy. Afghan President Ghani has thus been able to advance his ideas for Afghan reconciliation at Heart of Asia meetings first in China, October 2014 and then in Pakistan, December 2015.

Oddly, therefore, South Asia finds itself in the position where it has too few established options of multilateral cooperation and too many emerging ones. The established frameworks – SAARC and SAFTA – risk running aground given local animosities (notably between India and Pakistan) and a lack of interest on the part of outsiders. Conversely, new initiatives offer opportunities but also bring with them the uncertainty that may nourish political anxiety and inflame the security dilemma whereby confrontation prevails over cooperation.

The end of the international combat mission in Afghanistan has stirred a general awareness that the international community can ignore South Asia only to its peril. Policy-makers and observers often refer to the lesson of the early 1990s and profess to have learnt it – that an abrupt withdrawal from a theatre of war, Afghanistan, provoked regime change, radicalization and ultimately terror and renewed war. Yet the regional legacies outlined in this introduction are a reminder that it is one thing to learn a lesson, it is something else entirely to convert it into cooperative engagement. The feasibility of this conversion defines the inquiry of this book.

The Approach of the Book

The central question in the abstract is whether regional cooperation will prevail over conflict but more specifically whether the main stakeholders can agree to principles of restraint and peaceful change. Restraint is possible if the stakeholders bend their own multilateral designs toward a middle ground where three conditions – following from the region's geography – obtain:

- *No fear of exclusion.* Some stakeholders may fear exclusion on account of geography or politics. Such exclusion would feed political revisionism and challenges to the very idea of multilateralism and should therefore be avoided. It concerns notably the United States and China but not only. Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan all fear for their exclusion from key decisions. Conversely, India may fear that the momentum is on the side of China, historically aligned with Pakistan in opposition to India.
- *Equilibrium.* The balance of power must be brought to support political pluralism and counter projects of power aggrandizement. Pluralism is about domestic principles of legitimacy, and the fear that these principles are threatened will feed nationalism and unrest. The challenge is therefore to enable the balance of power by way of common principles – for instance of non-intervention and minority rights – embedded within a wider concept of order.
- *Embedded opportunity for economic and social change.* The regional “market” for economic growth and opportunity must be politically embedded to develop. The challenge is thus to align the politics of regional development, which notably involves the various national Silk Road projects but also the multilateral capacity – of global and regional institutions – to connect issues and generate funding.

These conditions will be assessed throughout the chapters of the book, though varying degrees depending on the topic and approach. To ensure a comprehensive treatment of the main issues, the book is organized in three sections: transitions, national interests and perspectives.

Part 1 on “transitions” provides broad assessments of the dynamics involved in moving the region from war towards peace. It is composed of

three chapters by Ronald E. Neumann, Vanda Felbab-Brown and Alessandro Marrone and Paola Sartori. Chapter 1 by Ronald E. Neumann addresses the political and historical record of regional cooperation, offering a macro-perspective of how the Great Game outlasted the rivalry of Britain and Russia and actually stabilized for the good of Afghanistan during the Cold War. Later phases were less generous, involving first war and radicalization beginning in 1979 and then from 2001 the effort to build and embed a new state and shield it from insurgent resistance. A new phase is opening up and we should be cognizant of the way in which politics trump economics, an argument accentuated by Neumann's direct experience in the region as US ambassador. Peace, Neumann argues, is possible only if external players restrain their involvements and help countries of the region engage in "Track II" diplomacy. Chapter 2 by Vanda Felbab-Brown is a macro-assessment not of the region's history but the stakes involved in the transition years, 2015–16. These years will decisively shape countries' view of who can hope to emerge stronger from Afghanistan's wars and how this distribution of fortune ties in with regional alignments. Felbab-Brown argues that a critical issue to follow is the ability of Afghan President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah to provide for coherent governance. The resilience of these Kabul executives and their capacity to make power-sharing a practical reality could forebode the permanence of the republic set up in 2001. Conversely, failure on their part would signal not peace but renewed conflict and rivalry in the country and the region. Chapter 3 by Alessandro Marrone and Paola Sartori looks to mainly NATO but also the EU and the OSCE to detect whether these key Western forums reflect a durable and strong commitment to Afghanistan and regional stability. There is cause for pessimism in this regard, the authors conclude: the institutions have a role to play but an increasingly marginal one, and they will be pulled toward other engagements closer to home. The sum of these "transitional" engagements is an opportunity for international-led stabilization but a narrow one at that. The defining factor will be the restraint that both Afghan decision-makers and other countries can infuse into their national policies.

This brings us to Part 2 on "national interests" and the six chapters by Anthony H. Cordesman, Jo Inge Bekkevold and Sunniva Engh, Meena Singh Roy and Christian Wagner, Houchang Hassan-Yari, Tughral

Yamin and finally Mohammad Mansoor Ehsan. The logic is to start with the big players and gradually zoom in on the core country of the past 15 years, Afghanistan. Chapter 4 by Anthony H. Cordesman traces US policy from 2009 when the Afghan surge was defined to the present when the United States seeks to 'pivot' away from Afghanistan to East Asia. The "pivot" was not an afterthought but an integral component of the surge, Cordesman argues. Moreover, now that the United States has carried out the surge and is well into the policy of "transition," the country's strategic focus has simply shifted. The United States remains engaged notably with India, but the sum of its policies is a kind of strategic minimalism that should warn us against assuming that the United States will remain as a pillar of a restrained balance of power in South Asia. Chapter 5 by Jo Inge Bekkevold and Sunniva Engh turns to the obvious alternative, China. They examine China's impressive Silk Road projects, but also take note of China's historic reluctance to become engaged in the politics of peace making in Afghanistan. There are signs that China is in fact nudging Pakistan in the direction of peace talks and is actively supporting them, but the effort will remain secondary to the larger Silk Road project. The devil in the detail is not only the capacity of Afghan war to upset Chinese investment plans, including by way of unrest in China's Xinjiang province, but also the challenge that countries in the region could begin more overtly to balance China out of a fear of encroachment or simply because they fear that Chinese projects will serve only China. China cannot simply invest its economic muscle, Bekkevold and Engh continue, but must also invest its diplomacy in its growing regional footprint. A good indicator of whether restrained or rather unrestrained balance of power policy will follow is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that India, as mentioned, recently joined.

Chapter 6 by Meena Singh Roy and Christian Wagner takes us to India, therefore, the regional hegemon and holder of the region's asymmetrical balance of power. However, as the chapters on the United States and China have demonstrated, India cannot act simply at its will but must manage the engagements that these two global powers bring. India is likely to hedge its options, Roy and Wagner conclude, and invest in both its multilateral and bilateral policy tracks. The implication is that India is wary to get out in front on the issue of regional restraint but maintains an option for moving in this direction.

Awaiting this opportunity, the authors continue, India should invest more in its “soft power” diplomacy in Afghanistan and take care not to antagonize Pakistan, but the situation remains fragile and the foreign policies involved are volatile and guarded. In Chapter 7 we turn to Iran, geographically at the periphery of South Asia but historically at the heart of its politics. Houchang Hassan-Yari traces a continuous Iranian desire to belong to the balance of power of the region, not least to help secure its own eastern border, but he also notes a lack of political continuity that could enable Iranian inclusion in the balance of power. Iran’s executive is split, and Iran’s relationship to post-Karzai Kabul is uncertain. In short, Iran would likely support power restraint but has at present no obvious framework of action.

Chapters 8 and 9 take us inside Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively. In Chapter 8, Tughrul Yamin examines Pakistan, a country whose multifaceted role in Afghanistan’s wars has been a source of intrigue and frustration among outside observers. Clearly there is a need for foreign policy change in Pakistan, Yamin notes, but change will not be driven by a traditional foreign policy calculus – in other words, it will not come at the behest of the best and the brightest among Pakistan’s diplomats and thinkers – because the conservative element is too strong. Rather, change will emerge bottom-up from society, Yamin argues. A new Pakistani foreign policy will result from improved governance at home and notably the need to shape a foreign policy in support of better economic and social governance inside Pakistan. In Chapter 9, Mohammad Mansoor Ehsan defines a similar challenge for Afghanistan. The country was at first a delineated space; next it needed to build a state and community, a process that has been as painful as promising and which has introduced various forms of legitimizing strategies on behalf of its rulers. The process is far from complete, Mansoor Ehsan offers, and if Afghanistan is to stabilize its foreign policy, it can only happen as an integral part of this nation-building process and especially in regards to reconciliation between Afghanistan’s Pashtun and other communities. The challenge appears also in Chapter 8 on Pakistan, as the Pashtun’s span the Afghan–Pakistan border and nourish the claim that neither country is properly defined and therefore the fear of irredentism. For Pakistan and Afghanistan, the conclusion is that foreign policies are intrinsically tied in with community building and that positive change, if possible, will be slow and contested. These observations connect readily to the point made by Neumann in

Chapter 1 regarding the need for patient regional “Track II” diplomacy to enable gradual but enduring social and economic change.

The final section on “perspectives” returns to the connections between the West and South Asia. Chapter 10 by Peter Viggo Jakobsen turns the attention to the United States, which may not at present have a coherent strategy for the South Asia region, as noted by Cordesman in Chapter 4, but which has significant potential to help shape regional politics nonetheless. The key is not to get lost in the details of force numbers and financial commitments but to focus on the larger strategic narrative that, if invested in, can build consensus in Washington first and next in the region. Obama successfully managed this challenge in 2009–16, Peter Viggo Jakobsen concludes, and could set his successor as president in 2017 up for similar success if he resists the temptation to simply turn the US back to the region. Finally, the conclusion sums up the arguments presented throughout the chapters and their modest optimism or outright pessimism as far as the three analytical themes – no fear of exclusion, power equilibrium and social and economic opportunity – are concerned. There is some ground for optimism, the conclusion finds in a review of the chapters. Most of the big players involved in the region are acting with visible restraint. The challenge is the lack of coordinated action and therefore the risk of renewed conflict and hostility, but perhaps countervailing trends can bolster restraint: political leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan are visibly aware of and concerned with domestic challenges to their governments; both Iran and India seem eager to stabilize their borders for the sake of national development projects; China is building up a long-term strategy of trade and investment; and the United States is increasingly ready to play the role as a honest broker in the region, a role hitherto precluded by its immense engagement in the Afghan war. Yet restraint and equilibrium will not emerge by virtue of an “invisible hand”: they require that external powers navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of the region – the threat that weak state institutions and hotly contested local politics capture great power designs for restraint and reconciliation, and then the threat that regional fragmentation follows from the desire of the great powers themselves to enlist South Asia in their contest for Asia–Pacific influence. In this balancing act, the conclusion continues, India is the key that can unlock regional relations and revive the region’s diplomatic art of restraining power.

Notes

1. Wolfers, Arnold, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 124.
2. See for instance Hinsley, F. H., *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
3. Kissinger, Henry, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), p. 4.
4. Obama, Barack, *Statement by the President on Afghanistan*, 27 May 2014. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/27/statement-president-afghanistan>.
5. Shear, Michael D. and Mark Mazzetti, "U.S. to Delay Pullout of Troops from Afghanistan to Aid Strikes", *New York Times*, 24 March 2015; Nordland, Rod and Mujib Mashal, "Afghans See American General as Crucial to Country's Defense", *New York Times*, 10 September 2015; Rosenberg, Matthew and Michael D. Shear, "In Reversal, Obama Says U.S. Soldiers will Stay in Afghanistan to 2017", *New York Times*, 15 October 2015.
6. "Inaugural Speech by Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai as the President of Afghanistan", 29 September 2014, <http://president.gov.af/en/news/36954>.
7. These data are drawn from the 2001 census and available at <http://censusindia.gov.in/>.
8. Jaishankar, Dhruva, "Does 'South Asia' Exist?", *Foreign Policy*, 26 September 2013. Available at http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/26/does_south_asia_exist; Dossani, Rafiq, Daniel C. Snider and Vikram Sood (eds), *Does South Asia Exist? Prospects for Regional Integration* (Washington: The Brookings Institution 2010).
9. In terms of population, India has 1.2 billion people where Pakistan has 196 million and Afghanistan 31 million; in terms of Gross Domestic Product (official exchange rates, 2013) India's economy totaled \$1.67 trillion in contrast to Pakistan's \$236 billion and Afghanistan's \$21 billion. Source: CIA's World Factbook.
10. Mearsheimer, John J., *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 44.
11. Kissinger, Henry, *World Order*, pp. 194–7.
12. Kaplan, Robert, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012), p. 254; also Dash, P. L. (ed), *India and Central Asia: Two Decades of Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Dombrowski, Peter J. and Andrew C. Winner (eds), *The Indian Ocean and U.S. Grand Strategy* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2014); Mahnken, Thomas G. and Daniel Blumenthal (eds), *Strategy in Asia: The Past, Present, and Future of Regional Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
13. Paul, T. V. (ed), *South Asia's Weak States: Understanding the Regional Security Predicament* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Abraham, Itty, Edward Newman, and Meredith L. Weiss (eds), *Political Violence in South and Southeast*

- Asia* (Tokyo: UNUP, 2010); and Ollapally, Deepa M., *The Politics of Extremism in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
14. This phenomenon has in part been captured by the widespread but also contested concept of “Oriental despotism”. See Franco Venturi, “Oriental Despotism”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24/1 (January–March 1963), pp. 133–42; also Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).
 15. Paul, T. V., *The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
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