

The China-India-Pakistan Triangle: Scenarios for the 21st Century

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Introduction

The ties and equations between and among China, India and Pakistan represent one of the key drivers of Asian security. Constituting a strategic triangle, these three countries are locked in complex relationships that strategically pit China and Pakistan against India. The Sino-Pakistan strategic nexus is half-a-century old and growing stronger, as evidenced by several developments, including nuclear, missile and conventional-military cooperation, major new Chinese strategic projects in Pakistan, and the reported presence of soldiers of the People's Liberation Army in the Pakistani-held part of disputed Kashmir, whose control is divided among the three countries. The bilateral equations, as well as the relationship of each of these three players with the United States, have an important bearing on the regional security dynamics. Even as India's relationship with the U.S. has grown closer, its ties with China have come under strain, largely due to Beijing's territorial assertiveness contributing to new military and political tensions.

History continues to cast a shadow on the China-India and India-Pakistan political relationships. But with the Sino-Indian commercial ties continuing to thrive and rapidly expand, political differences and disputes are not a barrier in the economic sphere, except when artificial trade barriers have been erected, as Pakistan has done vis-à-vis India. While Tibet is at the center of the Sino-Indian divide, the

borders of China, India and Pakistan actually converge in the old princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Coming to terms with history so that history is not a barrier to charting a better future remains a basic challenge in the region. In relation to Pakistan, however, the real issue is not its relationship with India but its own future trajectory: Whether it will continue to sink in extremism, terrorism and militarism, or emerge as a stable, moderate Islamic state.

The larger Asian landscape

The China-India-Pakistan strategic triangle is integral to the larger Asian picture, which is characterized by new security challenges and changing power dynamics. The Sino-Indian relationship in particular, and the decades-old flow of Chinese military aid to help prop up Pakistan as a counterweight to India, can be understood only in the context of Asian geopolitics.

Asia has come a long way since the momentous events leading to two Koreas, two Chinas, two Vietnams and India's partition. It has risen dramatically as the world's main creditor and economic locomotive. The ongoing global power shifts indeed are primarily linked to Asia's phenomenal economic rise. How fast Asia has risen economically can be seen from a 1968 book, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations*, written by Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, who went on to win the Nobel prize in economics. In the book, Myrdal bemoaned the manner impoverishment, population pressures and resource constraints were weighing down Asia. The story of endemic poverty has become a tale of spreading prosperity.

Yet, Asia faces major challenges. It has to cope with entrenched territorial and maritime disputes, harmful historical legacies that weigh down all important interstate Asian relationships, sharpening competition over scarce resources, especially energy and water, growing military capabilities of important Asian actors, increasingly fervent nationalism, the rise of religious extremism, and the large numbers of people that still remain poor. Asia, however, is becoming more interdependent through trade, investment, technology and tourism. But while Asia is coming together economically, it is not coming together politically. If anything, with the gulf between the politics and economics widening, Asia is becoming more divided politically.

The reality is that, there is neither any security architecture in Asia nor a structural framework for regional security. There are some regional consultation mechanisms, but they remain weak. Differences persist over whether any security architecture or community should extend across Asia or just be confined to an ill-defined regional construct, East Asia. The United States, India, Japan, Vietnam and several other countries wish to treat the Asian continent as a single entity. China, on the other hand, has sought a separate "East Asian" order.

One key difference between Asian and European security is that while the bloody wars in the first half of the 20th century have made wars unthinkable today in Europe, the wars in Asia in the second half of the 20th century did not resolve matters and have only accentuated bitter rivalries. A number of interstate wars were fought in Asia since 1950, the year both the Korean War and the annexation of Tibet started. Those wars, far from settling or ending disputes, have only kept disputes lingering. China, significantly, was involved in a series of military interventions, even when it was poor and internally troubled.

A recent Pentagon report has cited examples of how China carried out military preemption in 1950, 1962, 1969 and 1979 in the name of strategic defense. The report, titled *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2010*, states: "The history of modern Chinese warfare provides numerous case studies in which China's leaders have claimed military preemption as a strategically defensive act. For example, China refers to its intervention in the Korean War (1950-1953) as the 'War to Resist the United States and Aid Korea.' Similarly, authoritative texts refer to border conflicts against India (1962), the Soviet Union (1969), and Vietnam (1979) as 'Self-Defense Counter Attacks.'" The seizure of Paracel Islands from Vietnam in 1974 by Chinese forces was yet another case of preemption in the name of defense. Against that background, China's rapidly accumulating power raises important concerns today.

In fact, it is the emergence of China as a major power that is transforming the geopolitical landscape in Asia like no other development. Not since Japan rose to world-power status during the reign of the Meiji Emperor in the second half of the nineteenth century has another non-Western power emerged with such potential to impact the global order as China today. But there is an important difference: When Japan rose as a world power, the other Asian civilizations, including the Chinese, Indian and Korean, were in decline. After all, by 19th century, much of Asia, other than Japan and Taiwan, had been colonized by Europeans. So, there was no Asian power that could rein in Japan, whose rise opened the path to imperial conquests.

Today, China is rising when other important Asian countries are also rising. The expansionist impulses of a rising China are, to some extent, checkmated by the rise of other Asian powers. Militarily, China is in no position to grab the territories it covets. Indeed, there has not been a strong China, a strong Japan and a strong India at the same time in history before. Still, with its unconcealed ambitions, expanding capabilities and increasing assertiveness, China today is casting a growing shadow over Asia. As the U.S. National Intelligence Council's 2008 report, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, predicted, China is "poised to have more impact on the world over the next 20 years than any other country." With its defense spending having grown almost twice as fast as its GDP, China is now beginning to take the gloves off, confident that it has acquired the necessary muscle. Rising power is emboldening Beijing to pursue a more muscular foreign policy in southern Asia as well as in the region extending from the South China Sea to Northeast Asia.

This has been exemplified by several developments — from China’s inclusion of the South China Sea in its “core” national interests on a par with Taiwan and Tibet, an action that makes its claims to the disputed Spratly Islands non-negotiable, to its bellicose reaction to the South Korean-U.S. joint anti-submarine exercises off the Korean Peninsula. In 2010, Chinese naval forces conducted provocative exercises first near Japan’s Ryukyu Islands chain, with a Chinese military helicopter even circling a Japanese escort ship, and then in the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea. In Tibet, the official *PLA Daily* reported several new significant military developments in 2010, including the first-ever major parachute exercise to demonstrate a capability to rapidly insert troops on the world’s highest plateau and an exercise involving “third generation” fighter-jets carrying live ammunition. In addition, the railroad to Tibet, the world’s highest elevated railway, has now started being used as a supply line to enhance the mobilization capabilities of the People’s Liberation Army in the Himalayan border regions. According to the *PLA Daily*, the railroad has helped significantly strengthen transportation to supply “combat readiness materials for the Air Force of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLAAF)” at the air bases and airstrips in Tibet.

At a time when tensions between an increasingly ambitious China and its neighbors have spread all over the regional geopolitical landscape, there has been subtle shift in America’s Asia policy. U.S. President Barack Obama, significantly, restricted his 10-day Asian tour in late 2010 to Asia’s leading democracies — India, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea. These democracies circle China and are central to managing China’s rise. Yet he spent the whole of 2009 assiduously courting Beijing in the hope that he could make China a global partner on global issues ranging from climate change to trade and financial issues. The catchphrase coined by Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg in relation to China, “strategic reassurance,” actually indicated a U.S. intent to be more accommodative of China’s ambitions — a message reinforced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she went out of her way to downgrade human rights during a visit to Beijing. Obama, for his part, declared that America’s “most important bilateral relationship in the world” is with China.

But now, with his China strategy falling apart, Obama is seeking to do exactly what his predecessor attempted — to line up partners and thereby build an insurance policy in case China’s rising power slides into arrogance. The U.S. “hedge” strategy seeks to strengthen existing security alliances, build new strategic partnerships, expand U.S. involvement in regional forums, hold joint naval and other defense exercises, and build military-to-military interoperability with other nations, thereby constricting China’s opportunities for regional domination. Other players on the grand chessboard of Asian geopolitics also are seeking to build new equations, as they concurrently pursue hedging, balancing and bandwagoning.

A fast-rising Asia has become the defining fulcrum of global geopolitical change. Asian policies and challenges now help shape the international security and

economic environments. Yet, major power shifts within Asia are challenging the continent's own peace and stability. With the specter of power disequilibrium looming large in Asia, investments to help build strategic power stability has become imperative.

China's lengthening shadow has prompted a number of Asian countries to start building security cooperation on a bilateral basis, thereby laying the groundwork for a potential web of interlocking strategic partnerships. These bilateral deals and partnerships, although not intended to contain China, represent a palpable shift in the Asian diplomatic landscape, with a new emphasis on mutually beneficial security cooperation and a quiet desire to positively influence China's behavior so that it does not cross well-defined red lines or go against the self-touted gospel of its "peaceful rise."

Building genuine partnerships, however, is a slow process because it demands major accommodation and adjustment on both sides. The U.S., for example, has worked hard in recent years to co-opt India in a "soft alliance" shorn of treaty obligations. Yet, despite a rapidly warming rapport between the two and President Obama's statement calling India the "cornerstone of America's engagement in Asia," conflicting U.S.-India expectations and interests often surface, even as the two countries get closer.

The U.S. is now courting Vietnam too, and the two countries are even negotiating a civilian nuclear deal. Although thrust together by a shared concern over China, Vietnam and the U.S. are discovering that the Cold War legacy continues to weigh down their thinking to some extent. Within the Vietnamese Communist Party, there are deep divisions over the country's relations with the U.S. Even as Vietnam moves closer to the U.S. as a hedge against China's muscular strategy, some in its ruling Communist Party fear that Washington remains committed to overthrowing the Vietnamese political system. After all, despite Burma's strategic importance vis-à-vis China and Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house detention, the U.S. continues to enforce stringent sanctions against that country, with the aim of toppling its government. In the process — to the concern of its generals — Burma has become more dependent on China than ever before.

The U.S.-China relationship itself is likely to remain uneasy, but overt competition or confrontation suits neither side. For the U.S., China's rising power actually helps validate American forward military deployments in the Asian theater. It also helps the U.S. to keep existing allies and find new ones. The China factor thus is coming handy to Washington to enlarge its strategic footprint in Asia. Still, the security thrust of America's Asia policy is unlikely to change — maintenance of a balance of power.

While the U.S. is likely to remain a key factor in influencing Asia's strategic landscape, the role of the major Asian powers will be no less important. If China, India and Japan constitute a strategic triangle in Asia — a *scalene triangle* with three unequal sides — with China representing the longest side, Side A, India Side

B and Japan Side C, the sum of B plus C will always be greater than A. Not surprisingly, the fastest-growing relationship in Asia today is probably between Japan and India.

If this strategic triangle is turned into a strategic quadrangle with the addition of Russia, it will create the ultimate strategic nightmare for China that will box in that country from virtually all sides. Japan plus Russia plus India, with the U.S. lending a helpful hand, will extinguish not only any prospects of a Sino-centric Asia, but would amount to a strategic squeeze of China. Yet, as underscored by developments in 2010 over the first post-Cold War visit of a Russian leader to any of the four islands seized from Japan at the end of World War II, a Russian-Japanese rapprochement remains distant. The islands, part of the disputed Northern Territories (South Kurils in Russia), were captured when Japan was reeling under U.S. nuclear bombings and its surrender to the U.S. seemed imminent. Soviet troops launched a treacherous attack on Japan on August 9, 1945 — the day the U.S. dropped a nuclear bomb on a second Japanese city.

Against this background, Asia's power dynamics are likely to remain fluid, with new or shifting alliances and strengthened military capabilities continuing to challenge major equations. The year of the tiger in Chinese astrology, 2010, fittingly turned out to be the year China roared by ratcheting up tensions through escalating territorial feuds with neighbors stretching from Japan to India. In fact, 2010 will be remembered as the year Beijing undercut its own interests by kindling fears of an expansionist China and inadvertently helping the U.S. to come back to the center of the Asian stage.

China-India territorial and water disputes

The rising border tensions and sharpening geopolitical rivalry between the two Asian giants, China and India, partly reflect the fact that they represent competing political and social models of development. The two became neighbors only after China annexed Tibet in 1951. Eleven years later, China's invasion of India did not settle matters because China's dramatic triumph in that war only sowed the seeds of greater rivalry and India's own political rise.

Since 2006, China has publicly raked up the issue of Arunachal Pradesh, the northeastern Indian state that Beijing calls "Southern Tibet" and claims largely as its own. Indian defense officials have reported a rising number of Chinese military incursions across the entire 4,057-kilometer Himalayan border in recent years. That the Tibet issue remains at the core of the India-China divide is being underlined by Beijing itself by laying claim to additional Indian territories on the basis of alleged Tibetan ecclesial or tutelary links to them, not any professed Han connection. Such attempts at incremental annexation have drawn encouragement from India's self-injurious recognition in 2003 of Tibet as "part of the People's Republic of China."

China originally fashioned its claim to Arunachal Pradesh as a bargaining chip to compel India to recognize its occupation of the Aksai Chin plateau, in the Ladakh region of the original state of Jammu and Kashmir. For this reason, China withdrew from the Arunachal Pradesh areas it invaded during the 32-day war with India in 1962 but retained its territorial gains in Aksai Chin, which provides the only passageway between its rebellious regions — Tibet and Xinjiang. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 even broached the exploratory idea of a package settlement in which New Delhi would accept the Chinese control over Aksai Chin and Beijing, in return, would drop its claim to Arunachal, subject to “minor readjustments” along the line of control. The more-recent resurrection of its claim to Arunachal Pradesh has coincided with Beijing eyeing that state’s rich water resources. In fact, Beijing has recently unveiled its plan to build a dam more than twice as large as the Three Gorges Dam near the Tibet-Arunachal border — the 38-gigawatt Motuo Dam.

China’s resource-driven resurrection of its long-dormant claim to Arunachal parallels the way it became covetous of the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands — which it calls Diaoyu Islands — only after the issue of developing petroleum resources on the continental shelf of the East China Sea came up at the beginning of the 1970s. China had expressed no objection to the Senkaku Islands coming under the administration of the United States under Article III of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Nor did it object when in 1969, the Okinawa Reversion Treaty was signed between the United States and Japan, under which Okinawa and the “southwestern islands,” including the Senkaku chain, were returned to Japan in 1972. In fact, a world atlas published in China in 1960 specified the Senkaku Islands as part of Japan’s Okinawa Prefecture. The authoritative *People’s Daily* — the Chinese Communist Party’s mouthpiece — published a report in 1953 describing Japan’s Ryukyu Islands chain as “dispersed between the northeastern part of our country’s Taiwan and the southwestern part of Japan’s Kyushu Island” and including the Senkaku Islands.

After staking a claim to the Senkaku Islands in the 1970s, China went one step further in 1992 by listing the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in its “law for territorial waters” and declaring its intent to use force to expel foreign ships entering any part of its territorial waters as defined in the promulgation. While the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands have become potent symbols of nationalism in China and Japan, Taiwan also has defined its territory through national legislation in a way to include the very same eight uninhabited islands, which it calls Tiaoyutai. These islands occupy an area of only 7 square kilometers but their surrounding seas are believed to hold rich hydrocarbon reserves.

The rising China-India border tensions are reflected in the fact that there were 270 Chinese military incursions across the disputed Himalayan frontier and another 2,285 instances of “aggressive border patrolling” by the PLA in 2008. Although the Indian government has released no new figures since then, such a pattern of aggressive patrolling and intrusions has persisted to this day. In addition, in

Pakistan-held Kashmir, thousands of PLA troops are currently engaged in building strategic projects in the northernmost Gilgit-Baltistan region bordering India and Xinjiang. Washington-based regional security expert Selig Harrison has reported an influx of 7,000 to 11,000 soldiers of the People's Liberation Army into the Gilgit and Baltistan areas (which are closed to the outside world) to work on key projects, including a new railroad, an upgraded highway, dams and secret tunnels, spurring wider concern that those strategic borderlands could get "overwhelmed, like Tibet, by the Chinese behemoth."

Such activities reinforce the fact that China, which occupies one-fifth of the original state of Jammu and Kashmir, is an important third party in the Kashmir dispute. Moreover, the reported presence of Chinese troops in the Pakistani part of Kashmir, even if in the form of construction battalions, means there are Chinese troops on both flanks (east and west) of Indian Kashmir. The Sino-Pakistan nexus, extending far beyond the increasing Chinese footprint in Pakistani Kashmir, actually presents India with a two-front theater in the event of a war with either country.

The military developments on the Sino-Indian front need to be seen in a larger context. China and India are very old civilizations but relatively new neighbors. Throughout history, the interaction between China and India was minimal. Today, the two may be close neighbors geographically but their societies couldn't be more different. India has more in common with Europe than with China.

Today, Chinese growing cyberwar and space capabilities, along with Chinese muscle-flexing on territorial issues, probably pose a bigger challenge for India than for any other Asian nation for several reasons. One, China is mounting both direct military pressure (as underscored by the abnormally high level of continuing cross-border incursions) and proxy threats against India, including by shoring by its longstanding strategic nexus with Pakistan. Two, the largest real estate China covets in Asia is in India. Arunachal is almost three times bigger than Taiwan, or more than twice as large as Switzerland. Three, India has no formal security alliance with any other power and thus must rely on its own defense capabilities. And four, by seeking to badger India on diplomatic, security and multilateral fronts, China is signaling that its real, long-term contest is more with India than with the United States.

The countries around India have become battlegrounds for China's moves to encircle India. By assiduously courting these countries as proxies in its geopolitical competition with India, China has managed to make deep inroads into India's strategic backyard — from Sri Lanka to Bangladesh, and from Nepal to Burma. A group of Canadian researchers has spotlighted the growing cyber threat India confronts by disclosing how a China-based cyber spying ring systematically stole top Indian defense and security secrets for a number of months. Yet, the world knows more about China's moves in the South and East China Seas than its actions against India.

Water, for its part, has emerged as a new source of friction between China and India because of Chinese damming of rivers that flow to the Indian subcontinent from Tibet. This includes the Brahmaputra, the Indus, the Sutlej and the Arun. New evidence from China in 2010 indicated that, as part of its planned diversion of the waters of River Brahmaputra, China has started preliminary work on building the world's biggest dam at the river's so-called Great Bend, located at Tibet's corner with northeastern India. The dam, by impounding water on a gargantuan scale, will generate, according to a map of planned dams put up on its Web site by the state-run Hydro China Corporation, 38,000 megawatts of power, or more than twice the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam. Such is its scale that this new dam at Motuo will by itself produce the equivalent of 25 percent of India's current installed electricity-generating capacity from all sources.

In March 2009, the chairman of the Tibetan regional government unveiled plans for major new dams on the Brahmaputra. Besides the Motuo Dam, six dams will come up in the upper-middle reaches of the Brahmaputra, to the southeast of Lhasa, with construction of the first — Zangmu — beginning in 2009 itself. This cascade is in addition to the more than a dozen smaller dams China already has built on the Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

The most ominous plan China is pursuing is the one to reroute a sizable chunk of the Brahmaputra waters northwards at the Great Bend, the point where the river makes a sharp turn to enter India, creating in the process a canyon larger and deeper than the Grand Canyon in the US. The rapid infrastructure work in this area is clearly geared at such water diversion and hydropower generation. In fact, a new Chinese State Grid map in 2010 showing that the Great Bend area will be connected to the rest of China's power supply was a pointer to the impending launch of work on the mammoth dam there — a scheme recently supported by leaders of China's state-run hydropower industry.

Water is becoming a key security issue in Sino-Indian relations and a potential source of enduring discord. China and India already are water-stressed economies. China is now pursuing major inter-basin and inter-river water transfer projects on the Tibetan plateau, which threatens to diminish international-river flows to India and other co-riparian states. China's opaquely pursued hydro-engineering projects threaten the interests of India more than those of any other country.

The greatest impact of the diversion of the Brahmaputra waters, however, would probably be borne by Bangladesh. The Brahmaputra is Bangladesh's most-important river, and the Chinese diversion would mean environmental devastation of large parts of Bangladesh. In fact, China is presently pursuing a separate cascade of major dams on the Mekong, the Salween, the Brahmaputra and the Irtysh-Ily, pitting it in water disputes with most of its riparian neighbors — from Kazakhstan and Russia to India and the countries of Indochina Peninsula.

Through its giant projects on the Tibet plateau, China is actually set to acquire the capability to fashion water as a political weapon against its lower-riparian neighbors. Such a weapon can be put to overt use in war or employed subtly in peacetime so that the level of cross-border water flows becomes a function of political concession. With China determined to exploit its riparian dominance, New Delhi's self-injurious acceptance of Tibet as part of China is becoming more apparent. Just as India has retreated to an increasingly defensive position territorially, with the spotlight on China's Tibet-linked claim to Arunachal Pradesh than on Tibet's status itself, New Delhi's policy straitjacket precludes an Indian diplomatic campaign against Beijing's dam-building projects. Accepting Tibet and the developments there as China's "internal" affairs has proven a leviathan misstep that will continue to exact increasing costs for India.

Pakistan's future trajectory

Pakistan seems so internally torn and battered by rising extremism and fundamentalism that one could easily overlook the fact that its future direction is an issue tied to international security. Given that the majority of major acts of international terrorism since the 1990s have been traced back to Pakistan, how that country evolves is an important issue both for regional security and global security. If Pakistan charts a stable and moderate future, its relationship with India will automatically improve, facilitating greater bilateral cooperation and mutually beneficial trade and economic ties. But if Pakistan descends into further chaos, it will spell trouble not just for India and Afghanistan but also for international security. The India-Pakistan relationship thus is not as much important as the very future of Pakistan. If Pakistan becomes a more governable state, with elected civilians fully in charge, regional and international security will tangibly benefit.

Hobbled by an all-powerful military, militant Islam, endemic corruption and dependency on foreign aid, Pakistan remains a main breeding ground of global terror and the hideout of the most-wanted terrorists. Pakistan indeed has emerged as a common thread in the investigations of most acts of international terrorism. As its then military ruler, Pervez Musharraf, acknowledged in 2005 after the London subway bombings, "Wherever these extremist or terrorist incidents occur in the world, a direct or indirect connection is established with this country."

The terrorism scourge in Pakistan, however, emanates not so much from the *mullahs* as from the whiskey-drinking military generals. The Pakistani military reared the forces of jihad, fathered the Taliban, and maintained longstanding ties (through its infamous Inter-Services Intelligence agency) with terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba. Yet by passing the blame for the disastrous jihadist military policies to the mullahs they control, the generals have made many outsiders believe that the key is to contain the religious fringe, not the military, which to this day remains not answerable to the government in office.

Pakistan today faces major challenges. One challenge about which little is spoken about but which is contributing to the rising extremism is the population bomb that is ticking in Pakistan. The focus has been on the other bomb — the nuclear bomb — to such an extent that little thought has been given to how the population bomb is creating conditions for a more dangerous Pakistan. Pakistan's explosive population growth has to be seen in the context of the fact that it already is the world's 6th largest country and 2nd most-populous Islamic state. Pakistan, according to United Nations and World Bank projections, would surpass the population of Brazil by 2015 and Indonesia before 2035, placing it fourth in the world population rankings behind China, India and the United States. Average fertility rates in Pakistan have declined from the peak of 6.8 children per woman between 1960 and the mid-1980s. But they remain high by the global average of 2.54 (India's is 2.62), with Pakistan's population increasing by 4 million annually.

Pakistan's demographic crisis is exacting serious social, economic and political costs, with the ramifications extending to the water sector. The severe flooding in the summer of 2010 distorted the picture: Pakistan's real problem is not too much water, but too little water, especially clean water. Per-capita freshwater availability in Pakistan, once higher than in India, has declined markedly due to the high population growth. Indeed, it has fallen dramatically in the past two decades. After all, the quantity of water (much of it coming from the rivers from India) has remained the same since Pakistan's creation, but the size of the population has grown phenomenally.

When it was established in 1947, Pakistan (excluding its eastern wing which later became Bangladesh) had the same population as Iran, roughly 15.5 million, according to United Nations estimates. But between 1947 and 2010, Pakistan's population swelled almost 12-fold. Now Pakistan has 182 million people, or more than twice Iran's 75-million population. While Pakistan's population has ballooned, the quantity of water in the single river system on which the country is dependent has remained the same.

Another factor that has contributed to the spread of the jihad culture in Pakistan is the withering away of secular public education. In its place has come not only the mushrooming *madrassas* but also a heavy Islamized curriculum in public schools. As a result, young, impressionable minds grow up with an Islamist and anti-Western mindset. The Islamization of the public education system was a process introduced by military dictator Zia ul-Haq in the late 1970s.

A third factor in the spread of the jihad culture is Pakistan's badly skewed economy, with rampant unemployment endemic. In a country where the poor subsidize the rich, Pakistan has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world, making it difficult for the country to kick its dependency on foreign aid. The tax-to-GDP ratio has declined to less than 9 percent. The generous foreign aid that is coming its way now — with Pakistan becoming the largest recipient of U.S. aid in the world, ahead of Israel — cannot serve as a substitute to domestic revenue-raising and policies to generate employment.

To overcome its dependency on foreign aid, Pakistan needs to generate sufficient resources at home. Take agriculture: It is not only the country's main foreign-exchange earner, but also the principal moneymaker for the country's feudal elites, who dominate the national and provincial politics. Yet, agriculture remains untaxed, along with vast sections of the economy.

Today, the burgeoning population of young radicalized men, many of them unemployed, serves as an easy base to find recruits for terrorist organizations and other jihadist groups. To deal with its terrorism problem and to arrest its explosive population growth and meet future challenges, Pakistan needs a fundamental restructuring of both its public education system and its economy. Without that, its multitudes of angry unemployed young men will pose a growing threat to regional and international security. It is not an accident that Pakistan's most-radicalized region is not its border area with Afghanistan but its heartland — Punjab province, home to more than 55 percent of the country's population. It is the Punjab province that is the seat of the most-dangerous terror organizations like the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Coming to the other bomb, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in 2009 that the “unthinkable” could happen in Pakistan: Islamists could get “the keys to the nuclear arsenal.” That raises the question whether America has a contingency plan to avert an Islamist takeover of Pakistan's “crown jewels” and, if so, whether it can work, given the failures of U.S. policy thus far. Pakistan's nuclear-stockpile security is handled by the so-called Strategic Plans Division, which has under its command a special unit of some 1,000 troops. But as Ms. Clinton acknowledged, the Pakistani nukes are “widely dispersed,” with the storage sites extending beyond the Punjab heartland to Sind and Baluchistan provinces. Add to that America's limited knowledge on the location of these sites. The U.S. thus may have few good options to preemptively seize the nuclear arms if a national meltdown became imminent.

The choice in Pakistan is not between Islamists and U.S.-sponsored generals, who actually reared the forces of jihad and still nurture many jihadists. The only sensible course is to strengthen civilian institutions in Pakistan, including the fledgling civilian government, which still allows the military to call the shots on foreign policy and national security. Pakistan's descent into a jihadist dungeon actually occurred not under civilian rule but under military rule. While one military dictator, General Zia ul-Haq, let loose the jihadists he reared, another dictator, Musharraf, pushed Pakistan to the very edge of the precipice. Before Musharraf's nearly nine-year rule, few in the world looked at Pakistan as a failing state.

How can Pakistan become a “normal” state if its military, intelligence and nuclear establishments remain outside civilian oversight and the decisive power remains with the military? Yet when the new civilian government ordered the ISI in July 2008 to report to the interior ministry, it did not receive support from Washington, allowing the army to quickly frustrate the move. The army chief, Gen. Ashfaq

Parvez Kayani, has the command and control over Pakistan's nuclear weapons. In such a deviant setting, can the United States really hope to prevent jihadist control of Pakistan's arsenal of nuclear and biological weapons, including pathogens no less dangerous than (as Senator Richard Lugar in the U.S. has pointed out) the H1N1 virus?

With Pakistani officials doggedly deflecting U.S. requests for fuller details, Washington today admits it does not know where all of Pakistan's nuclear-storage sites are located. Although the U.S. has provided more than \$100 million worth of technical assistance to Islamabad under its International Nuclear Materials Protection and Cooperation program, American personnel have been denied access to Pakistani nuclear sites, even when they have made a case for on-site installation and training. Like to China, the U.S. has declined to sell Pakistan "Permissive Action Links" (PALs) — primary electronic locks embedded in weapon design. But it has helped Pakistan design a system of controls, barriers and sensors. But rather than let Americans enter its nuclear sites, Pakistan sent its personnel for on-site training in the U.S. on intrusion detectors, portal monitors, secondary locks and material-accounting equipment. Put simply, the U.S. has not been allowed to see how its money has been put to use in practice.

In any event, modern security and accounting systems can be of little value in the face of insider threats. The real threat of an Islamist takeover of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal comes not from jihadists outside, but from jihadists within the system — specifically, from the jihadist-infiltrated military, intelligence and nuclear establishments. If there is any good news, it is that Pakistan, seemingly, has emulated India's example in storing nukes in disassembled form, with the warheads and delivery vehicles stowed in separate facilities. For outsiders to acquire even one complete bomb, capture of at least two facilities would be necessary, along with the expertise to mate the fissile "core" and trigger with the delivery vehicle. This is unlikely to happen without military generals and other senior insiders actively colluding with the outsiders.

Insider threats, however, have repeatedly been exposed — from the A.Q. Khan-led ring that sold centrifuge technology and bomb designs to the jihadist charity set up by two senior nuclear scientists, Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood and Abdul Majeed. Dr. Mahmood, who once served as A.Q. Khan's boss and designed the Khushab reactor, advocated that the Pakistani nukes were the property of the whole *ummah* and that Pakistan had a duty to share nuclear technology with other Muslim states. Programs to screen and monitor personnel can achieve little when jihad-spouting personnel abound in the military and nuclear establishments. Such personnel can serve as sleepers for extremist groups. Furthermore, while Pakistani authorities say they have made their nuclear arsenal safe by incorporating improvised secondary locking devices, it is unclear how locks can be put on weapons that supposedly are stored in disassembled form.

In truth, safeguarding Pakistani nuclear assets from jihadists demands the creation of a stable, moderate Pakistan — a daunting challenge indeed. That challenge, in

turn, demands sustained international political investment in building and strengthening civilian institutions. But can progress be made in that direction without a clear break from U.S. policies that still seek to prop up a meddling Pakistani army and fatten the ISI — the very institutions controlling the country's foreign policy and nurturing terror groups. With President Obama determined to end the U.S.-led NATO war in Afghanistan, the United States needs the Pakistani military and intelligence for its exit strategy in much the same way it relied on them to start and sustain the war. Yet if America's regional approach continues to be dictated by political expediency, an Islamist takeover of Pakistan could result from one of two possible scenarios: A collapse of central authority or, more likely, an intra-military struggle in which the jihadists gain ascendancy.

Pakistan's fate has always been in the hands of three As — Allah, army and America. Yet if Pakistan is to realize its potential by becoming a beacon of progress in the Islamic world, the militarization of the Pakistani state will have to be reversed. Some other states whose polity and culture were also militarized have managed to achieve civilian control over the military and rebalance their civil-military relations. South Korea, a U.S. ally, is one such example. There is no reason why Pakistan should not seek to emulate such an example.

Looking ahead

How Asia's geopolitical landscape will evolve over the next couple of decades is not easy to foresee. But it is apparent that an increasingly assertive China is unwittingly reinforcing America's role in Asia as the implicit guarantor of security and stability. For the foreseeable future, the Sino-Pakistani strategic nexus will remain an enduring aspect of the China-India-Pakistan triangle, although Pakistan's own future trajectory remains uncertain. Kashmir, for its part, is likely to remain a festering territory dispute, which can, at best, be managed well by the three disputants. In fact, calls to resolve that dispute are equivalent to asking that an irretrievably broken down marriage be fixed.

More broadly, the power dynamics in Asia are likely to be characterized by shifting equations. While China aspires to shape a Sino-centric Asia, its actions hardly make it a credible candidate for Asian leadership. Brute power cannot buy leadership. After all, leadership can come not from untrammelled power, but from other states' consent or tacit acceptance. In any event, China's power may be vast and rapidly growing, yet it lacks the power of compellence. In other words, China does not have the capability to militarily rout or compel any rival, let alone enforce its will on Asia. Six decades of ruthless repression has failed to win China acceptance even in Tibet and Xinjiang, as the Tibetan and Uighur revolts of 2008 and 2009 attested. Leadership involves much more than the possession of enormous economic and military power. It demands the power of ideas that can galvanize others. The Cold War, for example, was won by the U.S. and its allies not so much by military means as by spreading the ideas of political freedom and

market capitalism to other regions that, in the words of analyst Stanley A. Weiss, “helped suck the lifeblood out of communism's global appeal,” making it incapable of meeting the widespread yearning for a better and more-open life.

China has shown itself good at assertive promotion of national interests and in playing classical balance-of-power geopolitics. But to assume the mantle of leadership in Asia by displacing the United States, it must do more than just pursue its own interests or contain potential peer rivals. If anything, China, through its actions, has proven a diplomatic boon for Washington in strengthening and expanding U.S. security arrangements in Asia. South Korea has tightened its military alliance with the U.S., Japan has backing away from getting the U.S. to move its Marine airbase out of Okinawa, and India, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, among others, have drawn closer to the United States. In terms of power-projection force capabilities or the range of military bases and security allies in Asia, no power or combination of powers is likely to match the U.S. in the next quarter of a century. In other words, the U.S. is expected to remain the main security player in Asia, as in Europe.

As before the 1962 Chinese attack on India, the China-India-U.S. triangle today is at the center of the Himalayan tensions, with India's growing strategic ties with America emboldening Beijing to up the ante against New Delhi and to aggressively resurrect its claim to Arunachal Pradesh state. One would have expected Washington to caution Beijing against crossing the red lines. Yet Washington has chosen to chart a course of tacit neutrality on the Arunachal issue. The U.S. has sold India weapons worth more than \$5 billion in recent years, but signaled that its relationship with New Delhi will not be at the expense of its fast-growing ties with Beijing.

Washington thus has chosen to abandon elements in its ties with New Delhi that could rile China, including a joint military drill in Arunachal Pradesh and another 2007-style naval exercise involving the U.S., India, Australia, Japan and Singapore. Even further trilateral U.S. naval maneuvers with India and Japan are now on hold so as not to raise China's hackles. The United States, however, should actively be partnering India to deny China a substantial presence in the Indian Ocean region. A strategic partnership must have more content than just the sale of arms.

When Chinese actions pose a challenge to U.S. interests in Asia, Washington, however, has been willing to send out a clear message, such as on China's move to enforce its claim to almost the entire South China Sea as its “historical waters.” That move collides with U.S. interests, including the traditional emphasis on freedom of navigation. The move indeed appears to be part of China's “access denial” strategy aimed at keeping the U.S. navy from operating freely in the South China Sea. Washington also has rebuffed Chinese demands that the U.S. halt further military exercises in the Yellow Sea, which Beijing virtually claims as its exclusive military-operation zone.

Thus far, the United States has chosen to play a delicate balancing act. It has sought to reassure Asian partners and allies that it will remain engaged in Asia and will work for a peaceful resolution of the territorial and maritime disputes, including claims over islands, undersea mineral wealth and fishing rights. That reassurance, however, has been conveyed in such a way as to shield its equally important interest to build closer ties with Beijing, including a healthy military-to-military dialogue. It is important for the United States to lay down markers when China's actions not only infringe on U.S. interests, but also seek to disturb the territorial status quo in any Asian region because that runs counter to the U.S. interest of ensuring Asian power stability.

Respect for boundaries is a prerequisite to peace and stability in any continent. Europe has built its peace on that principle, with several European states learning to live with boundaries they do not like. Efforts at the redrawing of territorial and maritime frontiers, as China is still seeking to do, are an invitation to endemic conflict in Asia. Through its overt refusal to accept the territorial status quo, Beijing indeed only highlights the futility of political negotiations. After all, a major redrawing of frontiers has never happened at the negotiating table in world history. Such redrawing can only be achieved on the battlefield, as China has done in the past.

Another question with a bearing on future Asian security scenarios is U.S. policy on Tibet. Even though the United States stopped doing anything for Tibet long ago, with the issue of Tibet now coming up only in relation to a presidential meeting with the Dalai Lama, the future of Tibet has become an issue that extends beyond China's internal security to the ecological interests of much of Asia. The Tibetan plateau is a barometer of climatic conditions in southern, southeastern and central Asia, as well as in mainland China. And the degradation of Tibet's natural ecosystems — as well as the accelerated thawing of its glaciers, watershed deterioration and soil erosion — hold important implications for Asian nations that depend on rivers flowing in from the Tibetan plateau. The plateau is the source of most of Asia's great rivers. As water woes have aggravated in its northern plains owing to environmentally unsustainable intensive farming, China has increasingly turned its attention to the bounteous water reserves in Tibet, which it has cartographically dismembered. China's inter-basin and inter-river water transfer projects involving international rivers carry seeds of interstate conflict.

In fact, the state department in 2010 wisely upgraded water as “a central U.S. foreign-policy concern.” And America seems interested in playing a constructive role in the water issues between China and its neighbors, including India and the countries of Indochina Peninsula. But on human rights in Tibet, the U.S. now pursues a “don't ask, don't tell” approach with Beijing. When President Obama finally met with the Dalai Lama, it was a low-key meeting, with no joint public appearance or photo opportunity before reporters. The White House bent backward to explain that it was a private meeting, not an official meeting, and that it took place in the Map Room, where presidents stage private meetings, and not in the Oval Office.

Two questions arise in this context. If the United States is to remain cagey about Tibet and the Dalai Lama, what example will it set for India, the country left carrying the can? India is the host of the Dalai Lama and the seat of his government-in-exile. Also, if downplaying human rights becomes an enduring feature of U.S. policy on China, the world's biggest executioner, how acceptable will it be to target only the small kids on the Asian block, the Burmas and the Kyrgyzstans, over their human-rights record? Nepal, after years of adhering to an UN-brokered agreement to allow Tibetan refugees safe passage to India, has now — under Beijing's pressure — started arresting escapees from Tibet and handing them over to Chinese authorities. A more consistent U.S. human-rights policy will be able to stand up in defense of such hapless Tibetans.

In keeping with Asia's growing role in world affairs, Asian states need to pursue policies that break free from history and are pragmatic, growth-oriented and forward-looking. The imperative for building Asian power equilibrium cannot be ignored. The specter of power disequilibrium has only reinforced the necessity to find ways to stabilize major-power relationships in Asia and to promote cooperative approaches to help tackle festering security, energy, territorial and history issues. Rather than be the scene of a new Cold War, Asia can chart a stable future for itself through shared security and prosperity.