

US Army War College
USAWC Press

Monographs, Books, and Publications

3-1-2003

Strategic Effects of Conflict with Iraq: South Asia

Amit Gupta Dr.
USAF Air War College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs>

Recommended Citation

Gupta, Amit Dr., "Strategic Effects of Conflict with Iraq: South Asia" (2003). *Monographs, Books, and Publications*. 797.
<https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/797>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Monographs, Books, and Publications by an authorized administrator of USAWC Press.

**STRATEGIC EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT
WITH IRAQ: SOUTH ASIA**

Dr. Amit Gupta

March 2003

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This report is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave., Carlisle, PA 17013-5244. Copies of this report may be obtained from the Publications Office by calling (717) 245-4133, FAX (717) 245-3820, or by e-mail at *Rita.Rummel@carlisle.army.mil*

Most 1993, 1994, and all later Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) monographs are available on the SSI Homepage for electronic dissemination. SSI's Homepage address is: *http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/index.html*

The Strategic Studies Institute publishes a monthly e-mail newsletter to update the national security community on the research of our analysts, recent and forthcoming publications, and upcoming conferences sponsored by the Institute. Each newsletter also provides a strategic commentary by one of our research analysts. If you are interested in receiving this newsletter, please let us know by e-mail at *outreach@carlisle.army.mil* or by calling (717) 245-3133.

ISBN 1-58487-123-7

FOREWORD

War with Iraq signals the beginning of a new era in American national security policy and alters strategic balances and relationships around the world. The specific effects of the war, though, will vary from region to region. In some, America's position will be strengthened. In others, it may degrade without serious and sustained efforts.

To assess this dynamic, the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) has developed a special series of monographs entitled *Strategic Effects of the Conflict with Iraq*. In each, the author has been asked to analyze four issues: the position that key states in their region are taking on U.S. military action against Iraq; the role of America in the region after the war with Iraq; the nature of security partnerships in the region after the war with Iraq; and the effect that war with Iraq will have on the war on terrorism in the region.

This monograph is one of the special series. SSI is pleased to offer it to assist the Department of Army and Department of Defense in crafting the most effective strategy possible for dealing with the many consequences of war with Iraq.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

AMIT GUPTA is a Visting Fellow in the Program in Arms Control at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Building an Arsenal* (Praeger), and co-editor with Raju G. C. Thomas of *India's Nuclear Security* (Lynne Rienner). Dr. Gupta was educated at the University of Delhi and the Australian National University, and has a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois.

STRATEGIC EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT WITH IRAQ: SOUTH ASIA

Conclusions:

India and Pakistan, the major countries of South Asia, have distanced themselves from the proposed U.S.-led military action in Iraq. Both countries remain concerned that a prolonged war would affect their domestic security situation and their economies adversely.

The war will not change either country's long-term relationship with the United States. They see the United States as an important strategic and economic partner.

India and Pakistan will continue to provide strong support in the war on terrorism. Increased security cooperation is taking place with India.

India, especially, could be a partner in the post-war reconstruction of Iraq's economy, its civil society, and its military.

Background.

India and Pakistan have shied away from President Bush's call for a military effort to change the regime in Baghdad. India's official position was given in a joint statement during the official visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi in December 2002. The two governments agreed that:

Both sides strongly opposed the unilateral use or threat of use of force in violation of the UN charter as well as interference in internal affairs of other states . . . [Further,] it was stressed [in their talks] that the comprehensive settlement of the situation around Iraq is possible only through political and diplomatic

efforts in strict conformity with the rules of international law only under the aegis of the United Nations. . . .¹

For Pakistan, being an American ally in the war on terror has placed some domestic pressure on the Musharraf government. This makes Islamabad reluctant to participate in another military operation that is viewed as being anti-Muslim in its orientation.² Leaders of the Islamic fundamentalist party, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), that has formed provincial governments in Balochistan and the crucial, to the war on terror, North West Frontier Province, made it clear that, if General Musharraf followed the American policy line, they would not allow the government to function. More importantly, MMA ministers have begun to call for a revival of the Taliban and resistance to the Karzai government in Kabul. The ministers have also said that they will use force to oppose the operations of the FBI and American forces on Pakistani soil.³

Added to the anger of the Islamic groups is a broad public movement against U.S. policy in Iraq that could be used to help launch an agitation against the Musharraf regime. Pro-democracy forces in the country may use any potential movement to further their own agenda. In such a situation, Pakistani observers believe that it would be hard to continue Pakistan's policy to support the war on terrorism.

Further, a large Pakistani diaspora population lives in the Middle East—although not in Iraq—and the Pakistani government is concerned about the adverse impact of any military operation on this community. Both Pakistan and India, as net energy importers, are concerned about the short-term spike in oil prices that any conflict will bring. A protracted war would lead to an economic downturn in both states, but Pakistan would face more severe economic problems because of the fragile state of its economy.

India does not support military intervention because it has approximately four million citizens working in the Persian Gulf region, and it fears that a conflict would endanger the lives and livelihood of this diaspora group.

Further, the Indian government traditionally has maintained strong ties with the government in Baghdad: Indian military personnel have trained Iraqi officers since the early 1960s; hundreds of thousands of Indians have worked in Iraq; and the Indian government has maintained strong links with the Baathist government in Baghdad because of its secular credentials.

There is also the concern that any military operation would be viewed as being anti-Muslim rather than anti-Saddam. Participating in the war effort could lead to sectarian violence in India as sections of India's Muslim community (which is over 120 million people) may protest the government's decision to participate in the war.

A unilateral use of force by the United States would cause concern in India since it believes that multilateralism should be the bedrock of a post-Cold War international system. A use of force against Baghdad which is not sanctioned by the United Nations would, therefore, lead to a formal Indian expression of concern. At the same time, however, the long-range benefits of a U.S.-Indian strategic relationship, coupled with the possible fallout of a war, will see New Delhi continue to push for a closer relationship with Washington.

Such a maturing of the relationship would be aimed at strengthening the joint efforts against the war on terrorism, enhancing India's military capability, and, possibly, reacting to the military lessons of an Iraq war.

Counterterrorism and South Asia.

Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, India remain important allies in the war against terror. The recent arrest of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed suggests that the war on terror is succeeding, as Pakistan is permitting American law enforcement and security agencies to assist in tracking suspected al-Qaeda within the country.

The CIA and the FBI are providing training and equipment to Pakistani police and agents as part of their efforts to apprehend al-Qaeda operatives. The U.S. Justice Department, for its part, has allocated \$73 million to boost Pakistan's border security. The program will provide all-terrain vehicles, Apache helicopters, and radio communication equipment, in addition to training for provincial and tribal police and army troops.⁴ Additionally, Pakistan and the United States are expected to set up a Joint Working Group on counterterrorism.

The United States-India Counterterrorism Joint Working Group was established in January 2000. The group reached the following agreements in counterterrorism cooperation:

- Broadened their exchange of information and assessments on the international and regional terrorist situation;

- Strengthened intelligence and investigative cooperation;

- Qualitatively upgraded and expanded anti-terrorism training programs for Indian law enforcement officials;

- Signed a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty;

- Launched a bilateral Cyber Security Forum, with a wide-ranging program of action to address challenges of cyberterrorism and information security;

- Introduced military-to-military cooperation on counterterrorism to supplement the initiatives of the U.S.-India Defense Policy Group in this area;

- Worked together closely on multilateral initiatives on terrorism, including on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1373;

Initiated dialogue and cooperation in homeland/ internal security, terrorist financing, forensic science, transportation security and border management; and,

Taken concrete steps to detect and counter the activities of individual terrorists and terrorist organizations of concern to the two countries.⁵

The joint anti-terrorism efforts with both India and Pakistan are, therefore, getting increasingly comprehensive and, in the case of Pakistan, have started to yield satisfactory results.

Impact of a Conflict.

The impact of a new Gulf War on South Asia, and on the U.S. standing in the region, may well depend on the duration of the war, its economic impact, and on the possible use of the war by al-Qaeda to achieve its own objectives. The prospective role offered to both South Asian countries in a post-war environment also would determine the attitudes about the conflict.

The duration of the war would be important because the longer it continues, and the more bloody the confrontation gets, the more likely it is to lead to adverse consequences both for the South Asian countries and, in the short-term, for the U.S. standing in the region. A short war, or perhaps even a rapid regime change, would be the best solution for both South Asian countries since it would mean minimal disruption in the flow of energy supplies and only a short term spike in energy prices. A short war would also most likely prevent a downturn in the economies of the Persian Gulf countries, thus ensuring that the Indian and Pakistani diaspora populations would not face unemployment or be forced to return to South Asia.

The economic impact of a longer duration conflict, possibly one with higher levels of casualties, would be

traumatic for both Pakistan and India. Higher energy costs would lead to spiraling inflation in both countries and to demands for terminating further market reforms. The United States views market reforms as being critical to Pakistan's efforts to become a stable economy and, in the case of India, to develop a stronger economic relationship with the United States. A longer duration conflict could potentially force the expatriate communities of both countries, which provide valuable remittances and hard currency to India and Pakistan, to lose their jobs or, at the very least, to see a sizable reduction in earnings as the economies of the Gulf states weather the consequences of a drawn out conflict.

The War on Terrorism.

As this is being written, the hunt for al-Qaeda and Taliban forces continues in Afghanistan. With it comes the real danger that these organizations could use U.S. attention being focused on Iraq to wage new terror strikes in the region. From an Iraqi perspective, terrorist incidents in South Asia, especially against American troops would complicate, but not effectively hinder, America's war effort against Baghdad. The rise of terrorist attacks must be expected, therefore, if a war breaks out in the Persian Gulf.

Additionally, Kashmiri terrorist groups based in Pakistan may use this opportunity to stage spectacular strikes against Indian civilian and military installations, thus reigniting the near nuclear conflict situation that occurred between the two countries in May-June 2002. Kashmir terrorist groups have been quite successful at ratcheting up the level of violence in Indian Kashmir whenever international attention has focused on the region.

Visits by senior administration officials, both from the Clinton and Bush administrations, typically have been marked by terrorist actions by Kashmiri groups. And the Indian government has made it clear that a serious terrorist attack, one that leads to high casualty levels or has symbolic

value like the December 13, 2001, attack on the Indian parliament, will lead to retaliation against Pakistan. Pakistan, in turn, has signaled that it will not hesitate to use nuclear weapons in a conflict with India. The longer the conflict, therefore, the more likely the possibility of tensions rising in South Asia due to terrorist activities.

India will continue to work with the United States on the war against terror because the two countries' interests are complementary. Eradicating Al-Qaeda and Taliban, both of whom the Indian government believes have provided assistance to the Kashmiri insurgency, is in India's long-term interests. At the same time, clipping the wings of both terrorist organizations constrains the efforts of Pakistan's InterServices Intelligence (ISI) to try to destabilize the Indian political system. India will continue, regardless of the outcome of the Iraq war, to provide the type of assistance the United States needs to fulfill its objectives in the war on terror.

Regional Complications?

A possible concern for U.S. military planners is that a war in Iraq may trigger a war in South Asia with India, possibly seeing the diversion of U.S. attention from South Asia as an opportunity, launching a preemptive strike against Pakistan to resolve the issue of crossborder infiltration. India is unlikely to engage in a preemptive war against Pakistan given the Indian understanding of U.S. interests in Pakistan and the belief that coercive diplomacy would better serve to fulfill New Delhi's interests. India recognizes that the United States will continue to work against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan along the border areas with Pakistan. New Delhi, somewhat reluctantly, will restrain its actions against Pakistan.

This has to be qualified. If a serious terrorist incident occurs, like the December 13, 2001, attack on the Indian parliament, then India would be under great domestic pressure to take appropriate military action against

Pakistan. But if the current situation continues, India would prefer to exercise coercive diplomacy—the threat of going to war—to get the United States to rein in the Pakistani government—just as the Bush administration did in June 2002 when it pressured General Musharraf to stop state supported infiltration into Indian Kashmir.

Participation in Coalition Efforts.

Both countries have adopted a neutral position on the Iraq crisis, and the Indian government has gone as far as to suggest that it supports a continuation of the UN sanctions and weapons inspection approach to dealing with the problem. Once a war breaks out, however, the attitude of the both governments may change due to the events on the ground. The use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by Iraq, particularly against the civilian populations of the Gulf states, would see both countries provide humanitarian assistance to the affected countries. It would also remove the constraints placed by domestic constituencies on intervention because co-religionists were being targeted with such attacks.

Even then, however, it is unlikely that either country would exercise the initiative to participate militarily in the war. The fear of the military situation deteriorating along the India-Pakistan border would remain in the calculations of both countries. A more practical constraint would emerge from the limited mobility of both armed forces. The Indian Navy can stay at sea for less than a month. The Indian Air Force does not have an aerial refueling capability. Thus, by the time any forces were placed on the ground, the war could well be over.

Post-War Reconstruction.

The most likely area where both countries would be willing to participate would be in post-war reconstruction. India's role would be more significant than Pakistan's because of its large pool of educated personnel and its

long-standing ties to the Iraqi government. At the root of any such analysis is the extent to which regime change will take place in Iraq and the willingness of the United States to commit time and resources to this endeavor. If the U.S. goal is to bring about a total societal change, as was the case in post-World War II Germany and Japan, then it will require the de-Baathification of the country, a restructuring of government machinery, and purging and retraining of the military and police forces. India, particularly, could play a role in the post-war reconstruction effort in the following ways.

First, if there is a major health crisis in Iraq, Indian medical teams could provide the type of assistance required for the country to recover from a longer duration conflict. UN estimates of a worst-case scenario health crisis are that up to ten million people may be affected in a conflict.⁶ Even if one places a conservative estimate and reduces this number to a tenth of the figure cited, it will still be a significant humanitarian crisis. The Indian government would not view its position of neutrality as being compromised by carrying out such an action.

Second, Indian military and police personnel could assist in the retraining of the Iraqi armed forces and police. If successful democratization is to take place in Iraq, the armed forces and police will have to be made into professional forces that respect the rule of law and recognize constitutional limitations. The Indian armed forces, with their long and strong tradition of honoring civilian supremacy over the military, would serve as ideal trainers of a new Iraqi army. They could also provide the peace enforcement capability that post-war Iraq will require. Indian assistance would be welcome since it would be more acceptable to the general Iraqi populace than an American force commitment to carry out these objectives. Indian forces could also remain for a longer period in Iraq, thus freeing American troops for operations elsewhere.

Implications for Long-Term U.S. Strategy and Standing.

Both India and Pakistan view the United States as their long-term partner in both security issues and economic development. Of the two relationships, the one with India is likely to be more significant since it will be based on a range of economic, political, and military concerns.

The Indian government is carrying out market reforms, pursuing a foreign policy complementary to American interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan, and attempting to develop a new military relationship with the United States. The latter goal, if brought to fruition, will see greater sales of armaments and weapons technology to India. There is also a push to have joint operations particularly in the maritime sphere. Additionally, the U.S. position in the war on terror has had significant benefits for India. The Bush administration, in May-June 2002, successfully pressured the Pakistani government to halt cross-border infiltration of militants into Indian Kashmir. Another strategic interest of the two countries that coincides is preventing the proliferation of WMD.

The Indian government views itself as a responsible state and, consequently, refuses to transfer WMD technology to other countries. India also believes that its regional security environment has deteriorated because of the transfer of WMD technology from China to Pakistan, as well as the transfer of ballistic missiles to Islamabad from both Pyongyang and Beijing. The Indian government would, therefore, view with concern an overt development of the Iraqi WMD program since it could mean illegal transfers to state and nonstate actors. The banned Lashkar-e-Taiba, which seeks a violent solution to the Kashmir issue, has, for instance, claimed that the group allegedly had control over two nuclear weapons.

The military lessons of the war, both offensive and defensive, will also shape Indian thinking on how to direct

the emerging relationship with the United States. U.S. offensive measures will lead to a demand from the Indian military and government to get the types of technology that made such efforts successful. Offensively, India is already expecting to test a 3000-kilometer range ballistic missile by the end of the year. The war would certainly provide an incentive for India to develop its nuclear forces but would not lead to a major, and rapid, push for conventional force modernization. India's concerns remain Pakistan and the deterrence of a Chinese attack in the Himalaya. In both cases, Indian force levels are sufficient to achieve its military objectives.

Defensively, if the Iraqis use WMD, India will press the Bush administration for assistance in getting the Arrow ABM system, as well as any other civil defense and countermeasures that the United States may employ to protect troops and civilians. From the Indian perspective, a use of WMD could be replicated by Pakistan supported insurgents in India. While this may be an exaggerated fear with respect to nuclear weapons, it may be more credible in the case of biological or chemical weaponry—although the Indians would point to Pakistan's transfer of nuclear technology to North Korea as an example of how even the nuclear taboo is being broken by Islamabad.

For India, therefore, the Iraq conflict will not change what is a serious move to consolidate and build upon the goodwill generated by the Clinton and Bush administrations in making overtures toward that country.

Pakistan, similarly, will continue to welcome U.S. interest. The short-term economic stabilization of Pakistan that followed the September 11, 2001, attacks has been implemented due to the help provided by the United States and other western nations. Pakistan's military rulers recognize that any moves towards long-term stabilization of the economy will require continued western assistance and goodwill. Iraq, in that sense, will not impact significantly on the relationship. Pakistan recognizes its limited leverage

with the United States comes from the ability to capture or neutralize Taliban and al-Qaeda elements. It will not, therefore, rock the boat on the issue of Middle East politics. Pakistan's economic problems, therefore, serve as an incentive for Islamabad to toe the American line.

Moreover, some Pakistanis believe that Iraq provides an opportunity for Pakistan to reap economic benefits. They point out that if anti-western sentiments rise because of a Gulf war, then Arab investors, out of a sense of anger, may put money in Pakistani banks. This is an optimistic assessment and unlikely to happen because of the precarious state of the Pakistan economy.

An alternative scenario is one where the United States has a diminishing interest in the region. This could be caused by a downsizing of forces after an Iraq conflict as the administration attempts to shift resources from military expenditure to stimulate the economy. It could also happen if a major victory in the war on terror—the capture of Osama bin Laden or compelling evidence that he is dead—occurs. But even if there is a lowering of interest, a change in the U.S. perception of India and Pakistan is unlikely. The Bush administration will push ahead with its plans to develop a stronger relationship with India, and it will also remain engaged, at the very least economically, with Pakistan.

In conclusion, the principal South Asian countries view the conflict with Iraq as one that could hurt their economies and complicate their domestic political situations. This has led both India and Pakistan to oppose the use of force to resolve the dispute with Iraq. Both countries, however, believe that they can play a role in post-war democratization. They also view a stronger long-term relationship with the United States as desirable and, therefore, will not connect events in the Gulf to these bilateral relationships.

ENDNOTES

1. Available at <http://meadev.nic.in/ind-ter/for-med/russiaindiaopp.htm>.

2. It should be pointed out, however, that the Pakistan military, which would be the major challenger to President Musharraf's policies, remains a disciplined and loyal organization that supports the current leadership.

3. "Iraq's Blowback and Pakistan," *The Daily Times*, January 9, 2003.

4. Ryyko Huang, "South Asia and the United States: Assessing New Policies and Old Problems," *Center for Defense Information Terrorism Project Brief*, May 24, 2002.

5. "U.S.-India Counterterrorism Joint Working Group," U.S. Department of State Press Statement, July 18, 2002.

6. Colum Lynch, "Iraq War Could Put 10 Million In Need of Aid, U.N. Reports," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2003.

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

**Major General Robert R. Ivany
Commandant**

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

**Director
Professor Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr.**

**Director of Research
Dr. Steven Metz**

**Author
Dr. Amit Gupta**

**Director of Publications
Ms. Marianne P. Cowling**

**Publications Assistant
Ms. Rita A. Rummel**

**Composition
Ms. Kimberly A. Rockwell-Jacoby**