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## H-Diplo | ISSF Article Review 31

**John Mitton.** "The India–Pakistan Rivalry and Failure in Afghanistan." *International Journal*, 69:3 (2014): 353-376. DOI: 10.1177/0020702014540281.

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In a timely article, John Mitton seeks to show how the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan has hampered NATO's efforts in Afghanistan and contributed to its failure. The author is careful in noting that while the rivalry is not the only reason for failure, it certainly is a factor. The author also cites many noted regional specialists who also have argued that the Indo-Pakistani rivalry has played a role in determining the outcome of the current war in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> In that sense, the author is correct in considering such regional factors to explain the failures in Afghanistan. The

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<sup>1</sup> The author cites the following well known authors: Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs* 63, no.1 (2009): 127–140; Shashank Joshi, "India's Af-Pak strategy," *The RUSI Journal* 155, no. 1 (2010): 20–29; Anwesha Ghosh, *Afghanistan from "Enduring Freedom" to "Enduring Chaos"? Implications for India* (New Delhi: Center for Air Power Studies, 2012); Harsh V. Pant, *India's Changing Afghanistan Policy: Regional and Global Implications* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2012); Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, *India's and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan: Implications for the United States and the Region* (Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy, 2012); William Dalrymple, "A deadly triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan, & India," Brookings Institution, June 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india-c> (accessed 30 September 2013); for an exception, see Stephen P. Cohen, *Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Conundrum* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012).

article also raises many more interesting questions worth exploring. In this review, I summarize the argument and findings, point out its strengths and weaknesses, and highlight the possible directions future research in this area could take, given the article's conclusions.

As noted by Mitton, the Indo-Pakistan rivalry has been a part of all the datasets on rivalries and qualifies as a rivalry regardless of which set of criteria one applies. India and Pakistan were born as rivals in 1947, and there has never been a sign of de-escalation. The author seeks to show how the the Indo-Pakistani rivalry, which has been a constant for over six decades, — has influenced the war outcome in Afghanistan. The author notes that the flux in the region allowed for a spatial escalation of the rivalry which in turn led to failure of NATO efforts to stabilize the nascent Afghanistan government and clamp down on various militant groups. This makes sense because we do not observe such spatial escalation before NATO efforts began in Afghanistan. Therefore the argument holds if we include the initial flux created by the American intervention in Afghanistan starting in 2001 as a contextual factor.

This means that there could be a two-way causal relationship. There has been a co-evolution of NATO efforts and the Indo-Pakistani rivalry such that each has contributed to the developments in the other. The Indo-Pakistan rivalry has complicated matters for the war efforts in Afghanistan; it has also added another issue to the already complex Indo-Pakistan rivalry. The author notes that India has made significant investments in Afghanistan over the last decade and has been involved in many developmental projects, with the Afghan parliament building being in some ways the symbolic centerpiece. Importantly, Pakistan has perceived this as India's encirclement strategy and has used various militant organizations to attack Indian targets in Afghanistan. The principle rivalry dynamic outlined by the author seems to be twofold: 1) India's intention of strategically consolidating its position in Afghanistan and 2) Pakistan's active efforts to destabilize every Indian undertaking and efforts in Pakistan. It is this dynamic that seems to have hampered the NATO efforts.

But a critique of this viewpoint centres on whether it is the Indo-Pakistan rivalry which is the problem or Pakistan's threat perception (some would say paranoia) that is the problem.<sup>2</sup> It is well known that Indian investments in Afghanistan are protected by NATO forces, not by Indian forces. India, has at no point deployed its troops in Afghanistan, despite multiple attacks on its embassy and the death of many Indian workers in the country. Moreover, what concerns Indian strategists is how India would protect its investments in Afghanistan once U.S. and NATO forces leave. While Indians have been involved with training Afghan forces, they do not seem to have a strategy to protect their investments in Afghanistan, which shows a clear indication that there is hesitation in Delhi regarding deploying troops or the use of hard power to protect its investments in Afghanistan. Whether the Indians will introduce a hard-power element to their Afghanistan strategy is to be seen.<sup>3</sup>

The author clearly points out the differences in the strategies of India and Pakistan in Afghanistan, but it remains unclear what implications this has for how the two sides view the rivalry framework in the Afghan context. Based on the evidence given by the author, India seems to view access to Central Asian resources as the key issue, while Pakistan views its encirclement as the key issue. Does this mean

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Katzman .Afghanistan: Post – Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy. Congressional Research Service, October 9, 2014, 13-17, 47-48.

<sup>3</sup> Niharika Betkerur. India Stepping Up to the Plate in Afghanistan, *The Diplomat*, May 7, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/india-stepping-up-to-the-plate-in-afghanistan/>

the two sides view their rivalry with each other with different degrees of importance? The evidence presented here seems to suggest this to be the case.

Therefore the rivalry dynamics is peculiar, with one side attacking while the other side mostly enduring the attacks, seeking American cover, and eyeing Central Asian resources. The question then becomes whether it is the rivalry that explains NATO's frustration or whether Pakistan's behavior is causing the frustration.

The argument that the Afghanistan issue is an extension of the Kashmir conflict is an interesting hypothesis that needs further investigation. As the author himself notes, this could be a positional battle over India's role or emergence as a hegemon, rather than a purely spatial dispute. The Kashmir dispute is the underlying problem that defines the rivalry itself. Therefore any positional or additional spatial contestations between India and Pakistan would be in addition to the Kashmir issue. But that is different from saying that it is an extension of the Kashmir dispute itself. We must be able to distinguish between Indo-Pakistani contestation in Afghanistan as an extension of the Kashmir dispute and it being a positional battle between two old enemies.

Put differently, it is difficult to conceive of how the Indo-Pakistani competition in Afghanistan would have much effect on the outcome of the Kashmir dispute. Even if India were to withdraw completely from Afghanistan, would that lead to a change in the contours of the Kashmir dispute? That is unlikely. Conversely, if the Kashmir issue were to be solved tomorrow, would that change India's Afghanistan strategy? If we believe that India sees this as an opportunity establish itself as a regional hegemon and access Central Asian resources, the fate of Kashmir wouldn't affect its policy. So while there may be some associations between these issues, whether one is an extension of the other in the context of the rivalry is unclear.

The author is right to point out that the India and Pakistan rivalry matters in Afghanistan. This may very well make establishing stability in Afghanistan harder. A policy relevant question is whether the United States and NATO can truly stay out of Afghanistan in the long run or whether some presence of the United States and NATO is inevitable. From a theoretical perspective, this article speaks to the growing scholarship on how neighborhood factors can influence rivalry initiation, maintenance, and termination. The article shows how rivalries – which are dyadic – can have adverse effects for regional stability. This is a welcome article that reinforces the fact that rivalries should be studied within their regional or political contexts and not in isolation. The article also proves to be a rich resource for those who want to understand the security dynamics of South Asia and how they have global consequences.

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