



Background

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NEEDED: A MORE DYNAMIC U.S. POLICY FOR SOUTH ASIA

INTRODUCTION

South Asia is an area of intense conflicts, perpetual tension, and deep strategic divergence.¹ Dominated by India and Pakistan, the region stretches from the edge of war-torn Afghanistan down to the Indian Ocean. Daily 7.3 million barrels of oil pass from the Middle East along India's western coast. Once unified under the British Empire, three wars have been fought between India and Pakistan since they gained independence in 1947. A fourth border skirmish almost erupted earlier this year. Currently, India has the fourth largest conventional armed forces in the world; Pakistan fields the thirteenth largest. Both countries appear on the threshold of adding nuclear weapons to their arsenals.

The Soviet Union long has recognized the strategic importance of South Asia. While exerting military pressure on Pakistan through Soviet forces in Afghanistan, Moscow patiently has cultivated India as a close friend in South Asia and in the non-aligned movement. Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev toured New Delhi last November and was hailed by Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as a "crusader of peace." Predictably, Indo-Soviet ties continue to increase across a broad spectrum, with India receiving advanced military systems, high-level diplomatic exchanges, and an expanding and favorable balance of trade.

Misunderstanding and Suspicion. By contrast, the United States has lacked a coherent, long-term policy toward South Asia. Misunderstanding and suspicion have resulted from policies that have undergone complete reversals from one presidential administration to the next. Most recently, the U.S. in 1981 edged closer to Pakistan by resuming military and economic aid that had been suspended in 1979 because of Pakistan's continued nuclear weapons development; the aid shipments were resumed

1. S. D. Muni, "SAARC and Security," Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, November 1986, p. 1.

in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Although mutual hesitations have prevented a full fledged U.S.-Pakistan alliance, Islamabad shares short-term interests with the U.S. and cautiously has accepted its growing ties with Washington.

This year, the Reagan Administration's proposal of a \$4 billion, six-year package of military and economic assistance for Pakistan signals an important crossroads in U.S. relations with South Asia. Almost 60 percent of the package comes as economic grant aid; the remainder will be credits for the purchase of U.S. military hardware. Some of Pakistan's desired purchases are controversial. Heading this list is the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), an advanced early warning aircraft to be used along the volatile Afghan-Pakistani border. Other military purchases being considered are the M-1 tank, additional F-16 fighters, and the Multiple Launch Rocket System.

Approving Aid to Pakistan. If controversial portions of the military assistance segment of this package are approved, U.S.-Indian relations, which showed some promise of improvement after Gandhi's November 1985 visit to Washington, may suffer setbacks. If these systems are not approved, however, the U.S. risks having Pakistan severely curtail its assistance to the Afghan freedom fighters and reconsider its critical allied role in the new U.S. Central Command in the Middle East. A looming nuclear race in the subcontinent, the question of Pakistan's internal stability, and high technology transfers to India further complicate discussions of the aid package.

Steps Washington could take to walk the strategic tightrope in South Asia include approving the aid package to Pakistan, leasing early warning aircraft to Pakistan as part of the U.S. aid package, pushing for regional bilateral nuclear agreements between Pakistan and India, selling select high-tech products to India for non-military purposes, and showing more high-level diplomatic attention to the region.

Any assistance to Pakistan must be part of a more dynamic and comprehensive U.S. policy toward South Asia. Ideally, this should serve the long-term U.S. goal of fostering stability without sacrificing mutual short-term interests with Pakistan. Just as important, the U.S. has to project an image in South Asia of a superpower whose policies are based on more durable strategic principles than the whims of individual administrations. Failure to take such an active interest in the region will result in the Soviet Union expanding its already major role in the subcontinent.

THE U.S. AND PAKISTAN: A NEW ALLIANCE

In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. enjoyed cordial relations with newly independent India and Pakistan. This changed by the early 1950s when India refused U.S. overtures to join one of the emerging regional defense agreements designed to contain the spread of Soviet and Chinese communism. Pakistan, in contrast, readily accepted membership in the U.S.-sponsored Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and Central Treaty Organization, and signed a Mutual Defense

Agreement with Washington in 1954.² While these moves probably were prompted as much by fear of India as by opposition to communism, Pakistan proved to be a supportive ally in return for plentiful U.S. arms deliveries. Pakistan also provided facilities for U-2 spy planes flying missions over the Soviet Union.

These close U.S.-Pakistan relations underwent a sharp reversal in 1965 when Washington failed to stand firmly behind Islamabad in the brutal two-month Indo-Pakistani war. Pakistan saw this as an act of betrayal never to be forgotten.³ The U.S. again withheld strong support during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war.

Low Point. It was not until the Carter Administration, however, that U.S.-Pakistan relations slid to their low point. Citing Pakistani nuclear research and alleged human rights abuses, Jimmy Carter cut off all development and military aid to Pakistan, which then amounted to less than \$20 million annually, and openly expressed interest in closer U.S.-Indian ties.

Pakistan suddenly took on new significance in 1979 following the fall of the Shah's pro-U.S. government in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. More than ever, Washington found it needed a South Asian ally as a bulwark against further Soviet expansion. A \$3.2 billion, five-year U.S. aid package was approved in 1981, divided equally between military and economic assistance. Part of this aid included forty F-16 fighters, enhancing Pakistan's deterrent capability against attack from either Afghanistan or India. These sophisticated aircraft have helped foster stability in the subcontinent by redressing the substantial imbalance of forces between India and Pakistan. India still holds, however, a 2 to 1 advantage in combat aircraft.⁴

Bulwark Against Soviet Expansion. The renewed U.S. aid encouraged strong Pakistani cooperation with Washington for programs supporting the Afghan *mujahadeen*. Late last year, for example, Islamabad ignored strong pressure from Moscow and allowed the U.S. to deliver Stinger surface-to-air missiles to the Afghan freedom fighters. Additional missile deliveries arrived earlier this year and have proved highly effective in countering Soviet airpower over Afghanistan. Pakistan also shelters more than three million Afghan refugees in border camps, shouldering about half of the annual \$360 million cost of their support.⁵ U.S. military aid to Pakistan is also viewed favorably by the People's Republic of China, which shares common interests with both Islamabad and Washington in maintaining a strong Pakistan as a bulwark against further Soviet expansion from Afghanistan. Pakistan and China long have been allies, each viewing India as a hostile neighbor in the subcontinent.

2. Stanley Wolpert, *Roots of Confrontation in South Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 142.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

4. *Journal of Defense and Diplomacy*, Volume 5, Number 1, p. 51.

5. *The Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 1987, p. D2.

Pakistani military cooperation has grown increasingly important for the U.S. as the American presence has increased in the Middle East. Since 1983, Pakistan has granted landing rights to U.S. maritime patrol aircraft tracking the Soviet fleet through the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. More important, Pakistan has assumed a critical "allied" role as part of the new U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) to defend U.S. interests in the Middle East in emergency situations. With 222,000 U.S. military personnel from the Rapid Deployment Force assigned, CENTCOM's area of operations includes the nineteen nations bordering Southwest Asia, the Gulf of Arabia, and the Horn of Africa. In its allied role, Pakistan reportedly is constructing additional forward airfields across the country for emergency CENTCOM use. Consideration also is being given to reestablishing electronic monitoring facilities on Pakistani soil aimed at Soviet testing sites.⁶

Pakistan quietly has become a key source of military assistance in the Islamic world. Highly skilled Pakistani technicians and pilots can be found in many of the smaller oil shiekdoms, totalling some 30,000 overseas contract personnel in 1986. In Saudi Arabia alone, 10,000 Pakistanis bolster the Saudi Arabian National Guard. This Pakistani "force" was dispatched to Saudi Arabia after the 1979 siege in Mecca, in which 229 people were killed during two weeks of fighting by Islamic fundamentalists.⁷

PAKISTAN'S INTERNAL STABILITY

Questions remain about Pakistan's long-term internal stability. Early last year, the return home of exiled Benazir Bhutto, daughter of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who was executed in 1977, shook Pakistan and the government of President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq. A crowd of 500,000 supporters greeted her arrival, followed by similar massive displays of support in her native Sind province as well as in the troubled Punjab region. Bhutto capitalized on the growing movement, calling for massive demonstrations in July 1986 and demanding general elections for last fall.⁸ With the example of Filipino "People Power" still fresh, many thought the Zia government was on the verge of collapsing before a wave of popular protest.

By mid-summer of 1986, however, the comparison proved false. Zia retained support of key economic constituencies. Pakistan's social problems also were never as serious as those of the Philippines. Meanwhile, Bhutto alienated some of the opposition and received a dissapointing turnout at the July demonstrations. Her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been unable to present itself as a credible

6. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 18, 1986. p. 26.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

8. Ted Galen Carpenter, "Fortress Built on Quicksand: U.S. Policy Toward Pakistan" (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, January 5, 1987), p. 3.

alternative to the ruling government.⁹ By early 1987, PPP-led demonstrations were no longer viewed as a critical threat.

Islamic Extremism. In addition to political conflict, Pakistan's stability may be threatened by Islamic extremism. Although a Shi'ite minority has criticized the government for expanding ties with the U.S., Zia has secured the support of virtually all of the powerful religious leaders in Pakistan. With 80 percent of its population composed of Sunni Moslems, Pakistan has more in common with Turkey than the extreme Shi'ite movement in Iran.¹⁰

MOVING TOWARD DEMOCRACY

Highly encouraging are Pakistan's moves toward democracy. President Zia, the army chief of staff who seized power in a 1977 coup d'etat, remains the center of power. In 1985, however, a civilian cabinet was appointed and a draft constitution was presented for approval by the national assembly, which showed surprising strength in curtailing Zia's powers. Prime Minister Mohamed Khani Junejo, approved by the national assembly in March 1985, also is proving much more assertive than originally anticipated. After martial law was lifted in December 1985, Junejo moved immediately to legitimize political parties.¹¹

Further steps toward democracy continue. During a parliamentary session this March, public debate was held over a proposed presidential amendment for the first time in over two years. Junejo is now believed to wield considerable power; yet Zia remains the critical bridge between the military and civilian leadership. In an effort to separate the two, Zia has made recent changes in the armed forces leadership, placing less politically ambitious generals in top positions. National elections are slated for 1990.¹²

With the government growing more effective, Pakistan experienced a respectable 7.3 percent growth in gross national product during 1986, despite the strain of supporting over 3 million Afghan refugees. Inflation in 1986 remained the lowest in South Asia.

THE U.S. AND INDIA: DEMOCRACIES AT ODDS

Although the largest democracy in the world, India's relations with the U.S. rarely have been close. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru spurned U.S. offers in the

9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

10. Thomas Perry Thornton, "Pakistan," FPI Policy Briefs, Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, March 1987, p. 3.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

12. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 21, 1987, p. 19.

early 1950s to align with the U.S. Instead, he flirted with Moscow. In return for substantial Soviet aid, Nehru took tough anti-U.S. positions in world affairs and at international forums. Although the Kennedy Administration tilted toward India and came to New Delhi's direct assistance during its 1962 war with China, close U.S.-Indian ties never developed.

In the 1970s, these ties continued to sour. Personal differences between President Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (mother of the current Prime Minister) fueled the friction. In August 1971, India signed a 20-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. The pro-Indian sentiment of the Carter Administration and a highly touted visit to the U.S. by Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 have not changed India's pro-Soviet brand of non-alignment. India's tilt remains pronounced. Examples:

◆◆ In the 1986 United Nations General Assembly, India voted only 10 percent of the time with the U.S., while voting against the Soviet Union only once on the year's ten key issues. Even the Soviet Union voted with the U.S. 12 percent of the time.

◆◆ Virtually alone among the non-aligned movement, India has refused to condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia.

◆◆ Soviet leader Gorbachev was warmly welcomed to New Delhi last November. Rajiv Gandhi, meanwhile, has been to the Soviet Union three times, including a July visit to inaugurate an Indian Festival in the USSR.

◆◆ India counts as its friends the most anti-American nations in the world. New Delhi regularly offers aid packages, political recognition, and diplomatic support to Cuba, Angola, Nicaragua, North Korea, Libya, Vietnam, and Afghanistan.¹³

◆◆ During the first half of this year, an exchange of high-ranking Indian and Soviet diplomats and scientific delegations has led to promises of increased Indo-Soviet trade, scientific cooperation including research in lasers and atomic energy technology, and plans for Soviet assistance in building an Indian space center.

Moscow and New Delhi also cooperate militarily. Soviet military sales to India totalled \$4.2 billion for the five years ending in 1985, over three times what the U.S. supplied to Pakistan. India currently co-produces many advanced Soviet weapons, including the T-72 tank, and MiG-21 and MiG-23 fighters. In early 1987, New Delhi took delivery of two squadrons of the USSR's advanced MiG-29 fighter, which will shortly be built in India under license. India was also the first nation outside the communist bloc to get the new Soviet Mi-26 Halo, the world's largest military transport helicopter.

Doing Favors for Moscow. For its navy, India in late 1986 received Kilo class submarines, never before delivered outside the Soviet Union. In exchange, among

13. *The Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 1987, p. 20.

other things, New Delhi gives Soviet warplanes the right to fly over India on their way to Vietnam.¹⁴

Soviet efforts to court India's support extend beyond offering advanced military hardware. Moscow permits many of its weapons systems to be built in India, favored by New Delhi because the plants become a source of jobs and enable India to build its own indigenous arms industry. As part of a 34-year old agreement, the Soviet Union allows two-way trade in Indian rupees instead of hard currency.¹⁵

The Soviet Union is the biggest buyer of Indian goods, 60 percent of which are manufactured items. Bilateral trade has increased two and a half times over the past five years, with a surplus in India's favor. Further increases are expected.

U.S.-INDIAN TRADE RELATIONS

Trade too is a highlight of U.S.-India relations. But while the U.S. is India's biggest trade partner, the future for U.S.-India trade is not bright. The U.S. is reluctant to offer India advanced military equipment or to allow systems to be license-built by New Delhi. The reasons for this range from fear of technology leaks to the Soviets, to profit loss, to a reluctance to arm an opponent of Pakistan. At the same time, despite optimism generated during Rajiv Gandhi's first year in office, the enormous Indian domestic market of 784 million people is not opening very quickly to U.S. goods or investors. As a consequence, bilateral U.S.-Indian trade fell by \$100 million to \$4 billion in 1986--less than half the U.S. trade conducted with Singapore, a country with one-three hundredth India's population.

Technology Leaks. New Delhi has shown occasional warmth in its relations with the U.S. because of its interest in U.S. high-technology products. India has approached the U.S. for supercomputers, jet aircraft engines, and technology for India's next generation light combat aircraft (LCA). The U.S. has been somewhat receptive but worries greatly about technology leaks to the Soviet Union. While the jet engine sale was approved in September 1986, proposed assistance for the LCA was delayed for months and reportedly lacked several items that India had desired. India's decision to accept the package is pending. India's supercomputer bid also fell short of expectations; the sale of the advanced Cray system was vetoed by the Pentagon.¹⁶

Technology leaks to Moscow are not the only problem with U.S. high-tech transfers to India. They also may create problems for Pakistan and the other South Asian nations. Such safeguards as on-site inspections by U.S. officials may be able to prevent such technology from being used for Indian military projects. At the same time, predictably, Japan is offering to sell India similar items if Washington

14. *Ibid.*

15. *The Wall Street Journal*, July 24, 1987, p. 18.

16. *The Wall Street Journal*, February 24, 1987, p. 1.

refuses, once again undercutting the U.S. as a potential source of high-tech goods to the non-aligned community.

FUTURE U.S.-SOUTH ASIAN RELATIONS

U.S. relations with South Asia will be spotlighted later this year when the Reagan Administration's six-year \$4 billion aid package to Pakistan is considered by Congress. This assistance comes after the five-year \$3.2 billion pledge rushed to Islamabad in 1981 following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Divided equally between military and economic assistance, the 1981 aid package contributed to South Asian security by making Islamabad more militarily secure and less likely to act irrationally against its greatest regional rival, India. Pakistan also used its forty F-16 fighters to counter increasing military pressure along its 1,400 mile border with Afghanistan.

The Afghan threat has been mounting. This March 30 and April 16, Pakistani F-16 jets had to shoot down intruding Afghan military aircraft at least six miles inside Pakistan. Afghan air attacks on Pakistani border camps, meanwhile, have increased from 250 in 1985 to 750 in 1986 to 425 during the first six months of 1987. Over 340 civilians were killed and over 500 wounded this year, more than the entire 1986 total.¹⁷

Secret Agents. Sabotage operations by the Afghan KHAD secret service spread terror inside Pakistan. On April 9, four KHAD agents with Soviet explosives were caught trying to destroy an International Red Cross hospital for Afghan refugees;¹⁸ on April 24, three more agents were apprehended with toy-shaped cluster bombs near Peshawar, Pakistan.¹⁹ In the worst attack to date, a terrorist bomb attributed to the KHAD killed 73 people on July 14 in a Karachi bazaar.

The proposed \$4 billion aid package, with 60 percent going to the military, is designed to enhance Pakistan's security. The most expensive and controversial segment of the military assistance package is the proposed sale of the advanced U.S. Air Force's E-3 Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System, popularly known as AWACS. Currently deployed by the U.S., NATO, and Saudi Arabia, the AWACS is the most advanced early warning aircraft in existence, capable of tracking low flying targets within a range of over 250 nautical miles. A fleet of three E-3s--sufficient to defend a nation the size of Pakistan--costs from \$600 million to 700 million.²⁰

17. *The Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 1987, p. D2.

18. FBIS, April 9, 1987, p. F1.

19. FBIS, April 24, 1987, p. F2.

20. Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, *AWACS: The New Destabiliser* (New Delhi: Lancer Press, 1987), p. 46.

Eyeing the Hawkeye. A less expensive alternative also is being considered by Pakistan: the E-2 Hawkeye. Though the Hawkeye has a slightly lower service ceiling, slower cruising speed, and shorter flying time without refueling than the AWACS, it can track over 600 targets in a 260-mile nautical range--though not at so low an altitude as the E-3. The aircraft offers a comprehensive early warning capability in the Pakistani setting. Four E-2s would cost about \$450 million.²¹

India condemns the proposed sale of AWACS to Pakistan, warning that this would destabilize South Asia militarily. India has no AWACS; a system offered by the Soviet Union is inferior. If Pakistan gets the AWACS, India would be forced to redeploy some of its forward air units away from the Pakistani border because of its perceived vulnerability to a combined AWACS-F-16 first strike.

Pakistan argues that it does not want the AWACS to use against India, but against incursions from Afghan aircraft. To ease India's fears, the U.S. could lease the early warning aircraft to Pakistan with U.S. civilian technicians aboard. Guarantees could then be given India that the planes would be deployed solely on the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. This also would ease Indian concerns about Pakistan giving AWACS technology to China, with which India is having mounting border tension. Eventual sale of the AWACS to Pakistan could be at a later date and possibly conditioned to Islamabad's continued observation of nuclear non-proliferation.

Nuclear Dilemma. The nuclear weapons issue has become the major sticking point in U.S. aid to Pakistan. India was the first nation to introduce atomic weapons to the sub-continent with its "peaceful" nuclear blast in 1974. Its capability demonstrated, New Delhi then declared its intention of neither developing nor stockpiling nuclear weapons. Pakistan responded with accelerated nuclear research. It is this which prompted the Carter Administration to halt aid. Islamabad has since kept its nuclear research ambiguous, though it is believed Pakistan is probably capable of assembling a nuclear device. Both President Zia and Prime Minister Junejo declared this April that Pakistan has neither the intention nor the capability to make a nuclear bomb, but India is threatening to renew its own nuclear weapons program in response to the perceived Pakistani threat.²² India, moreover, fears the nuclear potential of the neighboring PRC. Recent attempts by a Pakistani national to steal materials for nuclear military applications further underscore the seriousness of nuclear development in South Asia.

To forestall a nuclear arms race in the subcontinent, India and Pakistan have held talks on reducing nuclear tensions. Negotiations in 1985 produced a significant agreement promising not to attack each other's nuclear facilities. Agreement on bilateral on-site inspection of facilities has yet to be reached. It remains likely that both countries will retain their current policies of intentionally ambiguous nuclear development.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

22. *The Washington Times*, April 2, 1987, p. 1A.

CONCLUSION

U.S. policy in South Asia should reflect the region's importance. It is an area dominated by the second and ninth most populous countries, as well as the fourth and thirteen largest armed forces in the world. U.S. interests in Afghanistan and the Middle East hinge on a more coherent policy in South Asia. There are several steps the Reagan Administration should take to improve its posture in the subcontinent. Among them:

1) **Approve the \$4 billion aid package to Pakistan.** Failure to do so will jeopardize U.S. strategic interests in Afghanistan, invite Pakistan to reconsider its growing role in support of the U.S. Central Command, and leave Washington without leverage against further Pakistani nuclear development. A congressional vote against aid will leave Islamabad at a growing strategic disadvantage against India, creating instability from a threatened and possibly irrational Pakistani government.

2) **Lease E-2 or E-3 Early Warning aircraft to Pakistan** as early as possible. Lease of the aircraft will demonstrate Washington's continued support of Pakistan, as well as help maintain Pakistani resolve to assist the Afghan resistance in the face of growing Soviet pressure.

3) **Push for a bilateral India-Pakistan nuclear agreement.** India will continue to oppose nuclear agreements so long as the Chinese nuclear threat remains. Pakistan will not sign an agreement without India. However, agreements can and have been reached between the two countries concerning nuclear intentions. The U.S. should encourage such measures as the Pakistani proposal to accept International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, joint inspections of each others' nuclear facilities, and signing a joint declaration denouncing the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

4) **Sell selected U.S. high-tech products to India.** If the proper safeguards can be met--including on-site U.S. inspections for controversial "dual-use" items--the U.S. should sell high-tech equipment to India for non-military applications. For example, supercomputers are being requested to help forecast monsoons across South Asia. Such sales would prevent the U.S. from losing the Indian market to foreign competition, while signalling other non-aligned countries that the U.S. is ready to become the primary supplier of high-tech goods. Such a sale would also be a symbol of U.S. support of India, as well as a demonstration of the benefits the U.S. holds over the Soviet Union in the field of high technology. Safeguards imposed on such a sale could also set a precedent on how the U.S. will deal with preventing technology leakages to the USSR.

5) **Encourage more high level U.S. delegations to visit South Asia.** U.S.-Indian relations showed signs of improvement after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Washington in 1985. Further U.S. diplomatic exchanges with both India and Pakistan could help ease tensions between the two countries, while increasing U.S. visibility as a diplomatic ally and trading partner in the subcontinent.

Long-term U.S. strategic goals in South Asia are linked to eased tensions between India and Pakistan. Continued conflict only serves to unravel U.S. policy in Afghanistan, consolidate the Soviet position on the subcontinent and undermine vital Pakistani support of U.S. interests in the Middle East. Heightened tensions could also throw India and Pakistan into their fourth major war. With the potential to add nuclear weapons to their arsenals, the results could be catastrophic.

In reducing tensions, U.S. policy must acknowledge the interests that it shares with Pakistan concerning Afghanistan and the oil-rich Islamic world. At the same time, closer U.S. relations with India, the world's largest democracy, should be pursued within the limitations set by New Delhi's brand of non-alignment. By adopting a more dynamic role in South Asia, the U.S. will demonstrate its long-term concerns for the region. More important, it will remove some of Moscow's edge as the major superpower on the Indian subcontinent.

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