

# AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE 2009

Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan

## **AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE**

The Australia-India Strategic Lecture is a public diplomacy initiative to strengthen the bilateral relationship with India with a particular focus on security and strategic issues. In addition to burgeoning economic links (over thirty per cent annual growth in Australian exports to India over the last five years), there is growing convergence of India's and Australia's strategic interests. The lecture series is a joint venture between the Australia-India Council (AIC) and the Lowy Institute, and provides a program of annual lectures in Australia by eminent Indians in the fields of regional and international politics and security. The Lectures will provide a forum in which areas for cooperation in this developing aspect of the bilateral relationship can be discussed, thereby strengthening understanding and contact between the two countries. The Australia-India Strategic Lecture series complements the existing Crawford Lecture (held in India) and Narayanan Oration (held in Australia) that have an economic/reform focus.

## **THE LOWY INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY**

The Lowy Institute is an independent international policy think tank based in Sydney. Its objective is to generate new ideas and dialogue on international developments and Australia's role in the world. Its mandate is broad. It ranges across all the dimensions of international policy debate in Australia - economic, political and strategic - and it is not limited to a particular geographic region.

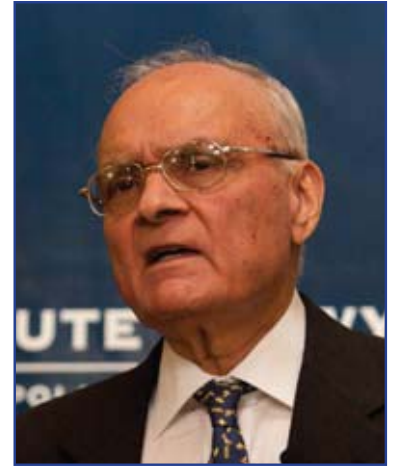
## **THE AUSTRALIA-INDIA COUNCIL (AIC)**

The Australia-India Council (AIC) was established on 21 May 1992, following an inquiry into Australia's relations with India. The Council's purpose is to broaden the relationship between Australia and India by encouraging and supporting contacts and increasing levels of knowledge and understanding between the peoples and institutions of the two countries. The Council initiates or supports a range of activities designed to promote a greater awareness of Australia in India and a greater awareness of India in Australia, including visits and exchanges between the two countries, development of institutional links, and support of studies in each country of the other.

# INDIA'S SECURITY CHALLENGES: AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE  
SYDNEY, MAY 11, 2009

**AMBASSADOR CHINMAYA GHAREKHAN**



India is situated in a tough neighbourhood and it is getting tougher by the day. The environment in our region is unstable and highly volatile. Leaving aside Pakistan for the moment, nearly all our immediate neighbours are facing serious problems of internal instability which often motivate them to look for a scapegoat in India to divert the attention of their citizens. Let me deal briefly with the other neighbours first.

Since the overthrow of the monarchy in Nepal, the anticipated establishment of peaceful and harmonious relations among the various players has not materialised. The coalition government in Kathmandu is, or was headed by the leader of the extreme left Maoist party. He sacked the chief of army a few days ago, but the president refused to act on the dismissal, prompting the prime minister to resign. The situation is extremely unstable. Given the fact that the border between India and Nepal is completely open, with the citizens of Nepal not needing visas to enter India, we have every reason to be seriously concerned at the instability in Nepal. We have our own Maoist Naxal menace in India. It is, therefore, not difficult to appreciate the apprehension that is felt by many in India about the possible link-up between the ruling Maoist regime in Kathmandu and the Indian left-wing extremists.

Bangladesh and India have had a somewhat uneasy relationship since the creation of the state of Bangladesh in 1971. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation in 1975, Bangladesh has alternated between periods of army rule and democratic governments in which two women leaders have taken turns at becoming prime minister. The leadership of the two countries, in an act of statesmanship, managed to remove one of the most difficult irritants with the conclusion of an agreement in the 1970s on the sharing of the waters of the River Ganges. Unfortunately, there are

## AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE 2009

---

elements in the Bangladesh establishment which feel that they can come to or retain power only by adopting a posture hostile to India, in the belief, in my view a mistaken one, that the people of Bangladesh do not want friendly ties with India. (Incidentally, Mrs Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan had made a similar miscalculation while contesting elections which she lost in the 1990s; she was honest enough to admit later that she had made a serious mistake by campaigning on an anti-India platform.) In recent years, jihadi elements have taken significant roots in Bangladesh with the help, we believe, of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence. The coming to power of Begum Hasina through a democratic election last year holds out a promise for a better relationship, but both sides will have to be vigilant and sensitive to each other's concerns and interests.

The situation in Sri Lanka is too well known to be described in any detail. Our relations with our neighbour to the south have improved dramatically over the last decade, especially after India made many unilateral concessions while concluding

a Free Trade Agreement with Colombo. However, the Tamil insurgency in the north of the country has always been a major factor, not only in our bilateral relationship, but even in India's domestic politics. The Tamil community in Sri Lanka, which constitutes about 20 per cent of the population, has had legitimate grievances which successive, majority Sinhala-dominated governments in Colombo did practically nothing to satisfy over the years, leading to the outbreak of armed insurgency by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1983. When the Tamil Tigers assassinated India's prime minister in Chennai, formerly Madras, in 1991, they lost all sympathy in India. The Sri Lanka Tamil factor came out most forcefully in the ongoing general elections in my country. The manner in which President Rajapakse handles the situation, as and when he manages to neutralise the Tamil Tigers and its top leadership, will have an important and lasting impact on India-Sri Lanka relations.

Among our smaller neighbours, Bhutan

---

is our ideal partner. Bhutan has enjoyed an unparalleled period of peace, stability and prosperity, thanks largely to the wise leadership of its monarch, which was fully reciprocated by India's enlightened approach to the kingdom. India has tapped into Bhutan's considerable hydroelectric potential. India buys all the power at a handsome price, with the result that Bhutan has the highest per capita income in South Asia. There is similar immense potential in Nepal which we have not been able to exploit due to mutual suspicions.

Maldives witnessed a peaceful transfer of power in 2008 when President Gayoom lost the elections after having been in power for 30 years. India has cordial relations with the government in Male. However, recently, disconcerting reports have appeared suggesting that Maldives is being used by jihadis for training before moving to Pakistan.

Thus, if you add Pakistan and Afghanistan to the above brief description of the state of affairs among our neighbours, you will come to the

conclusion that India is a vast island, or sub-continent, of stability and economic development, surrounded by significant pockets of instability and violence.

Before I move to Pakistan and Afghanistan, I should mention that it has been India's consistent endeavour to forge cooperative relations with all our neighbours. It was, and remains our hope that the governments and peoples in those countries would realise that they have a lot to gain from India's rapid economic growth. India offers an unlimited market for their products. In 2007, the Prime Minister of India announced the grant of zero-duty access to products from least developed countries with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008. One of our prime ministers, Mr IK Gujral, propounded a doctrine in early 1990s, which has come to be known as the 'Gujral Doctrine', according to which India offered unilateral concessions and benefits to all its neighbours, without expecting them to make reciprocal gestures to India. The dilemma for a big country is that even when it makes a generous offer,

## AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE 2009

---

it is viewed with suspicion by its smaller neighbours. We shall, however, continue to hope that with more effort on our part and some understanding on their part, and given India's continued growth, albeit at a slower rate in the current gloomy global economic environment, the atmosphere in the sub-continent would improve.

Pakistan has fought three wars with India and has been waging a proxy war for the past two decades through encouraging and supporting cross-border terrorism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is a matter of historical record that all the wars were initiated by Pakistan. Pakistan was established on the basis of its religious identity, one of two countries to have been so created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extremely bloody events surrounding the partition of undivided India in 1947 have left a bitter legacy, which might yet take generations to fully overcome. India never accepted the two-nation theory according to which Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations. The concept of Pakistan

was propagated on the basis that the Muslims of the sub-continent could not be safe in Hindu-majority India, and Pakistan was supposed to be the refuge for all the Muslims in India. What happened was that an overwhelming majority of Muslims preferred to stay on in India; those who migrated to Pakistan are, even today, not fully integrated into Pakistan's society and they have to have their own political party. This theory was definitively laid to rest when the then East Pakistan broke away from West Pakistan, although both were, and are, overwhelmingly Muslim states.

The basic problem is the mindset of the ruling establishment in Pakistan, primarily the army, but also the bureaucracy and the feudal elements. Pakistan has convinced itself that India does not wish it well. At least, this is its professed conviction. Hence their policy that they must do everything to harm and destabilise India. This explains the support of extremism in Kashmir, the infiltration of terrorist elements in other parts of India, and the staging of audacious

---

terrorist attacks such as the one on the Indian parliament in December 2001 and the attack on Mumbai in November 2008. I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen, India wishes absolutely no harm to Pakistan. Indeed, we wish Pakistan to enjoy peace and stability and prosperity; it is not in our interest to have a weak, unstable Pakistan, even more so today. Pakistan will not succeed in its design and endeavour to create divisions in India. The Muslim community in India, which is 150 million strong, is, and feels Indian. Thomas Friedman, the foreign affairs columnist of *The New York Times* noted in his piece in February this year that the bodies of nine young Pakistanis had been lying in a Mumbai hospital morgue since November 29 as no local Muslim charity was willing to bury them in a cemetery. The leadership of India's Muslim community has called these nine terrorists by their real name – murderers – and not martyrs. He quotes MJ Akbar, a prominent Indian editor, as saying that Indian Muslims are proud of

being both Indian and Muslim and that the Mumbai terrorism was a war against both India and Islam. Friedman goes on to state that India's Muslims, the second largest Muslim community in the world, and the one with the deepest democratic traditions, are rendering a great service to Islam by delegitimising suicide-murderers by refusing to bury their bodies. They, Indian Muslims, are not intimidated by extremist religious leaders and are not afraid to speak out against religious extremism in their midst. That is why so few, if any, Indian Muslims are known to have joined al-Qaeda.

The anti-Indian obsession among the Pakistani establishment leads them to the conclusion that whatever causes harm to India is good for Pakistan even if, in the process, Pakistan itself might get hurt. Ahmed Rashid, the well-known Pakistani journalist and an authority on Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Taliban, has revealed in his book *Descent into Chaos* that in 1988, Pakistan could have obtained recognition of the Durand Line as the

## AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE 2009

---

border between Pakistan and Afghanistan at the time of the agreement ending Soviet occupation, despite the United Nations prodding Pakistan to do so. Afghanistan never recognised the Durand Line and had voted against Pakistan's membership in the United Nations in 1947. Rashid quotes General Yaqub Khan, who had been Pakistan's foreign minister, to the effect that the military deliberately did not seek recognition of the Durand Line in order to gain 'strategic depth' against India. Pakistan's thinking was that if there is no recognised border, Pakistan cannot be accused of violating international law and would be free to cross into Afghanistan as well as to send all kinds of help to Taliban and other destabilising elements.

The United States seems finally to have understood the problem. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has publicly stated that the US is leading an unprecedented effort to convince Pakistan to change its traditional focus on India as a threat and instead concentrate on Taliban extremists. She has

said that it is the extremist insurgency, not India, which poses an existential threat to Pakistan. If the US can manage to convince Pakistan to change its mindset about India, it would be a significant step, perhaps even towards dealing with the situation in Afghanistan in a meaningful way.

The United States, and others, would like India to do more in Afghanistan. We are willing. We have already provided a substantial amount of assistance to Afghanistan. However, the fact of the matter is that Pakistan cannot countenance any Indian role or even presence in Afghanistan. Given Pakistan's paranoia about India, any possibility of India's sending troops to Afghanistan, even for training the Afghan army, is completely ruled out. Pakistan has protested vehemently even against the presence of Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar, alleging that India has deployed hundreds of persons in the consulates for anti-Pakistan activities. No less a person than Richard Holbrooke recently stated in a

---

television interview to a Pakistani television network that he personally looked into the matter and found that no more than seven or eight persons were employed in each of the Indian consulates. Holbrooke went on to say that the more than one billion dollars aid extended by India has been of immense benefit to the ordinary people in Afghanistan, as has the road constructed by India linking southern Afghanistan with Iran. India's aid program in Afghanistan has been the envy of other donors.

Pakistan is fortunate in its geography and has exploited it to the full, especially since the disastrous Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979. Its present effort is to use the American dependence on Pakistan, for logistics reasons among others, in dealing with the al-Qaeda menace, to extract maximum aid from America and others as well as to bring pressure on India. The international community rightly feels that Pakistan cannot be allowed to go under and become a failed state. It has, therefore, been generous and pledged billions of

dollars for Pakistan. The US in particular has poured in several billion dollars over the past decade. As I said earlier, we too would hate to see Pakistan become a failed state and indeed wish the people of Pakistan to prosper. However, experience suggests that Pakistan has used foreign assistance mainly to strengthen its war-fighting capacity against India. Pakistan has been arguing that it needs to feel more secure on its eastern border in order to be able to concentrate more on the western frontier with Afghanistan.

This argument no longer carries conviction with the United States or anybody else for that matter. Despite the grave provocation of the Mumbai attack, India did not deploy a single additional soldier on the border with Pakistan. Indeed, the Pakistan establishment was frustrated that India did not fall into the trap laid for it by the Mumbai events. They expected that India would react in a knee-jerk fashion and take some military action which would then have afforded a legitimate excuse

## AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE 2009

---

to Pakistan to at least reduce its military deployment on its western frontier. The restraint exercised by India after 26/11 has won appreciation from the entire international community, although it was not easy for the government, given the strong feelings in the country.

The Afghan rulers and tribal chiefs played the British off against the Russians and vice versa and they inflicted military and political humiliation on both powers during the Great Game in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Afghan tactics were even then full of courage and cunning. They included assassinations, ambushes, denial of supplies, use of captured arms, double dealings, and deception. In the end it was the defiant hostility of the Afghan tribesmen which compelled the 'forward' imperialists of both Russia and Britain to yield to pragmatic counsels to leave the Afghans to their own tribal polity. Afghanistan was the only Asian country which, having faced full-scale repeated invasions from different powers, did not end up as part of a European

empire. This is the Afghanistan which the United States and its coalition partners have to contend with in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

President Obama unveiled a so-called Af-Pak policy in March after an extensive review of the situation and inputs from many scholars, analysts and military commanders. The intervention in Afghanistan in the winter of 2001 was always regarded as a good war, because it had the endorsement of the United Nations Security Council, as well as a winnable war. Now, however, no one expects that even the combined military might of NATO can actually win the war in Afghanistan.

Next to the Americans and the British, Canada has suffered more casualties in Afghanistan than any other NATO or coalition country. It was, therefore, significant that the prime minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, said quite frankly in an interview with CNN in March this year: 'We are not going to ever defeat the insurgency'. He advised the United States to have a viable exit plan before

---

asking other countries to do more. It was, therefore, reasonable that the main focus of Mr Obama's Af-Pak policy would be to devise a plan which would enable the US and others to eventually pull out of Afghanistan, leaving behind a semblance of governance in the country.

President Obama's new approach envisages increased American military presence, training of Afghan army and police and equipping them appropriately, accelerating reconstruction of the country, sending experts in various fields, and so on.

Personally, I am not convinced that the Obama plan will achieve the desired results. Adding 20,000 or 37,000 troops might produce pockets of stability but only for a while. Training and equipping a well-disciplined Afghan army and police force is certainly essential, but it is doubtful whether this can be done within a span of two or three years. There is always the danger of Taliban elements infiltrating into the armed forces. Helping in reconstruction of the country is similarly desirable, but this

presupposes a secure environment.

The main plank of the new approach seems to be to co-opt the so-called 'moderate' or 'good' Taliban into the Afghan governing establishment. The primary, perhaps the only concern of the United States is to eliminate al-Qaeda which has a global, anti-US jihadist agenda. The US is not worried in equal measure about the Taliban who, at least until recently, were focused only on Afghanistan. It would be well for us to remind ourselves that the United States did not have much of a problem when the Taliban occupied Kabul in 1996, though they condemned some of their practices, particularly with respect to women. If the Taliban were to guarantee to render al-Qaeda completely ineffective, the United States would not object if the Taliban were to once again establish their rule in Kabul either on their own or in partnership with the Karzai or successor government.

The suggestion to co-opt the so-called reconcilable elements of the Taliban

## AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE 2009

---

into the government needs to be thought through. What would they do with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda? Will they hand them over to the Americans? Will they eliminate them? How would their erstwhile partners in crime react to their betraying the cause? How would the Taliban in government deal with their erstwhile fellow criminals? If at all the new government in Kabul were to deal ruthlessly with the bad Taliban, where would the latter move? They would shift their activities either to the badlands in Pakistan or to Kashmir or to the neighbouring countries in Central Asia. It is entirely conceivable that Pakistan would cooperate fully with the United States in bringing the so-called moderate Taliban into the governing mechanism of Afghanistan. Indeed, this is what Pakistan has been working for all along. Let us not forget that the Taliban were created, equipped and officered by Pakistan's army and ISI. Such an arrangement, however, would be a matter of utmost concern to India. It is an article of faith with the Taliban that they

consider the Americans, Jews and Indians to be working together to destroy Islam and to harm Pakistan. India is very much on their hit list.

It may already be too late to look for a solution to the situation in Afghanistan. The international community has made a series of mistakes in dealing with Afghanistan, starting with the Soviet occupation of that country in 1979. I believe that there are two essential conditions for stability to return to Afghanistan. Firstly, the Afghans themselves must declare their firm commitment to remain neutral, or non-aligned, and must not seek assistance from outside powers in settling their internal turf wars. Secondly, the international community, for its part – and this applies particularly to Afghanistan's neighbours – must undertake not to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs and not to seek to influence its government in any manner. Some sort of internationally-guaranteed neutrality would have to be devised.

---

It is, however, the state of affairs in Pakistan which is causing concern and alarm to the decision-makers in Washington, and neighbours of Pakistan, especially India.

Recent events have cast serious doubts on the Pakistan military's ability and/or willingness to root out the insurgency and jihadi groups operating with impunity on, and from, Pakistan's territory. The agreement concluded by the government with the Taliban in the Swat Valley, described by an Australian journalist as a virtual capitulation by the state to an extremist non-state actor, has already unravelled. When they occupied Buner, the Taliban came to within 100 kilometres of the capital in Islamabad. The Taliban have clearly enlarged their horizon and have announced their intention and expectation to take over Pakistan, and impose Sharia rule in the whole country, in addition to ruling in Afghanistan. One constantly hears references to the Pakistani Taliban. We should be under no illusion that the Taliban

operates as one single movement driven by the same ideology of establishing the Sharia rule wherever they can. Regrettably, the authorities in Pakistan have been in a state of denial about the threat posed by the Taliban. The phenomenon of Taliban was created, nurtured, financed and equipped by Pakistan, but the Frankenstein-like character of the monster has not yet been recognised by its creators. Most analysts agree that the Pakistan army up to fairly senior levels has acquired strong Islamist orientation. It should not be difficult to understand the concern felt in India at the prospect of having a Talibanised Pakistan as our neighbour to the west. I hope that the most recent efforts of the United States administration to convince Pakistan of the danger of the Taliban threat would propel Islamabad to deal firmly with this grave menace. Was the Pakistan army operation two weeks ago in Buner an indication of Pakistan's seriousness of approach to the problem? Or, was it meant to impress the US on the eve of President Zardari's visit to

## AUSTRALIA-INDIA STRATEGIC LECTURE 2009

---

Washington? Time will tell.

The president of the strongest power on earth has declared: 'Our strategy reflects a fundamental truth: the security of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States are linked.' This must have been sweet music to at least one of his listeners, President Zardari. If the United States feels its own security threatened, Pakistan has nothing to worry about: the generosity of the international community will endure, no questions asked.

The Americans and others have expressed particular concern at the prospect of a Taliban-run Pakistan acquiring control over its nuclear assets. I have heard many experts reassure everyone that Pakistan has an excellent system in place to safeguard its nuclear installations and warheads. We can only hope that such is in fact the case, but one cannot be too sanguine about it.

The international community must impress two things upon Pakistan's army: Pakistan must change its mindset about India; and it must deal resolutely with

the extremist menace within its territory.

As I said earlier, no one wants Pakistan to become a failed state, least of all India. Pakistan, for its own sake, will have to root out this threat before it is too late. I hope that Pakistan's civil society, and public opinion, which is reported to have become alarmed at the growth of Talibanisation, will mobilise and organise itself to force the establishment's hand. The next few months in what is known as the Af-Pak area will be crucial in shaping the course of events in the region for years to come.

A strategic thinker in Canberra made a wise observation to me last week. South Asia, he said, is the least economically integrated region in the world. He is right. The sooner the leaderships and peoples realise this and act to integrate the region, the better the prospects for peace lobbies to emerge in all the countries, thereby enhancing the chances for more stability and prosperity for the peoples of the region. We, in India, are more than willing to do our part.

---

**Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan** is one of India's leading authorities on Southwest Asia, and has had a long and distinguished career as a diplomat and a senior UN official. He is India's Special Envoy for West Asia and the Middle East Peace Process, and has served as India's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York (including as India's representative to the Security Council), India's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva and Additional Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office. After retiring from the Indian Foreign Service in 1992, Mr Gharekhan served as Under Secretary General in the UN, first as the UN Secretary General's Personal Representative to the Security Council and then as UN Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories.

CONTACT US

31 BLIGH STREET SYDNEY NSW 2000  
TEL: +61 2 8238 9000 FAX: +61 2 8238 9005  
PO BOX H-159 AUSTRALIA SQUARE NSW 1215  
ABN 40 102 792 174  
[WWW.LOWYINSTITUTE.ORG](http://WWW.LOWYINSTITUTE.ORG)

**LOWY INSTITUTE**  

---

**FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY**