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AUGUST 20, 2009

Great Powers & Failed States

The Wall Street Journal **reports** that India is burrowing into Afghanistan:

After shunning Afghanistan during the Taliban regime, India has become a major donor and new friend to the country's democratic government -- even if its growing presence here riles archrival Pakistan.

From wells and toilets to power plants and satellite transmitters, India is seeding Afghanistan with a vast array of projects. The \$1.2 billion pledged assistance includes projects both vital to Afghanistan's economy, such as a completed road link to Iran's border, and symbolic of its democratic aspirations, such as the construction of a new parliament building in Kabul. The Indian government is also paying to bring scores of bureaucrats to India, as it cultivates a new generation of Afghan officialdom.

This leads Justin Logan **to wonder** just how the Obama administration - and the boosters of counter-insurgency theory - propose to deal with this situation:

Eventually--although in fairness, God only knows when--we're going to leave Afghanistan. When that happens, India and Pakistan are still going to live in the neighborhood. They'd each prefer to have lots of influence in Afghanistan, and to preclude the other from having too much. Accordingly, they're both trying to set up structures and relationships that would, in the ideal scenario, let them control Afghanistan. In a less-than-ideal scenario, they'd like enough influence to undermine the other's control of the country. Until you grasp that nettle, you're really just fumbling around in the dark.

Find a solution for that in your COIN manual.

This problem - they live there, we don't - is not one that's possible to solve.

More broadly, I think the WSJ article underscores a point that Jakub Grygiel **made in the American Interest**: the real danger of failed states is not their ability to breed international problems like terrorism or drug trafficking, but that they tempt other powers to step into the vacuum, thus heightening the chances of great power conflict.

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