Taken together, the chapters summarized here present a number of paradoxes and dilemmas that stem from the condition of Pakistan today. The military, including its intelligence service, is the strongest institution in the country. Yet, it also is bedevilled by violent actors that threaten Pakistanis, the state, and others (particularly India). The military nurtured and used some of these actors to wage proxy conflict with India, Afghanistan, and the US. But now Pakistan finds itself daunted by the prospect of controlling these actors, if not disbanding them. Partly as a result of these developments, Pakistan finds itself falling further behind India in all measures of well-being, security, and international reputation. The country is struggling to reverse self-destructive trends even as it still threatens Indian interests. India could push Pakistan closer to self-destruction, but does not have a clear interest in doing so. India itself is vulnerable to retaliatory forms of violent subversion that Pakistan could still mobilize. India could seek to impose lesser damage on Pakistan in order to motivate its leaders to curtail potential threats of terrorism, but Pakistan is too poor and economically disconnected from India and others to make economic sanctions a reliable tool. This leaves politics in its various forms, including international mobilization of political pressure paired with negotiation, as the least risky potentially effective alternative. Clausewitz famously wrote that war is merely the continuation of politics by other means. In Indo-Pak relations, which have involved plenty of warfare, politics may be the continuation of warfare by other means.

The analysis conducted in these pages leads us to risk the occupational hazard of predicting the following developments. India will sluggishly reform the institutions required to develop and implement national security strategy and policies toward Pakistan. India will continue to pursue capabilities to implement strategy in ways that reflect bureaucratic and political predilections more than clear, efficient strategic purpose. Military and intelligence capabilities will be acquired slowly and less coherently than a clear strategy would indicate, and the results will be suboptimal. (This of course is not unique to India.) However, elements in the technical establishment will remain tempted to tout capabilities prematurely, feeding Pakistan’s worst-case assessments of Indian intentions and capabilities. Government leaders with the most power and creativity to develop new approaches and capabilities for mobilizing ‘soft power’ to affect hard problems will not have the time and interest to do so. Traditionally understaffed departments will be left to design and implement policies.
If these predictions prove somewhat accurate, limited capabilities combined with the precedence of other national priorities and the historically beneficial results of relative restraint in the use of force make it most probable that in the event of another high-profile attack Indian leaders would opt for the following actions: largely symbolic airborne attacks on terrorist-related targets in Pakistan-administered Kashmir; more aggressive covert operations to kill at least one major terrorist target; increased covert financial support for groups that challenge the Pakistani establishment in Balochistan, Karachi, and perhaps elsewhere; and exertion by Indian diplomats to move other states to protest against Pakistan in the event of additional terrorist attacks on India.

These predictions are not recommendations. India’s strategic community is too talented and independent to need or heed any recommendations we might offer. If the analysis contained in these pages is persuasive—in varying degree—Indian colleagues will draw their own appropriate conclusions from them.

We close, instead, with an observation. We did not devote a chapter, let alone the bulk of this book, to options of conflict resolution. Even if India’s ultimate intent is to make peace with Pakistan, India would need to enhance its coercive strategy, capabilities, and doctrines. ‘To make peace, prepare for war’ is an incomplete guide to statecraft, but it is an important element of it. India needs to prepare for the most probable contingencies. Given the circumstances in Pakistan, it is prudent to consider that these contingencies include the risk of more terror, with the nuclear shadow creating imperatives to limit escalation. ‘Not war, not peace’ is the most likely condition in which Indians and Pakistanis will operate for the foreseeable future.

In this condition, when Indians reform institutions, develop strategy, and acquire capabilities, they will have the opportunity to consider more than coercive options. The chapter on non-violent compellence lays the foundation for a less traditional direction of security analysis (although it echoes the strategy of Gandhi and the Indian independence movement. Even with a focus on military and covert operations, the need for greater attention to diplomacy and conflict resolution arises unavoidably in the analysis of how to motivate Pakistan to change its behaviour.

India and Pakistan are approaching rough symmetry at three levels of competition: sub-conventional, conventional, and nuclear. One of the countries may be more capable in one or more of these domain, but each has now demonstrated enough capability in all three domains to deny the other confidence that it can prevail at any level of this violent competition without suffering more costs than gains. This condition of rough balance and deterrence across the spectrum of conflict amounts to an unstable equilibrium. Any number of actions by leaders and/or non-officials, taken by mistake or on purpose, could destabilize it. But, at the same time, the existence of a basic balance creates an opportunity for leaders to take steps to stabilize and pacify the Indo-Pak competition. Diplomacy and deal-making cannot shift balances of power and deterrence, but they can solidify them through explicit agreements that clarify expectations and standards of behaviour. Such agreements—essentially, negotiated accommodations—raise the stakes for any authorities that would subsequently violate them. This is all the more relevant when major outside powers have a stake in the stabilization that has been achieved. In this case, a coalition of stakeholders has an interest in motivating the parties to meet their obligations, including by punishing them for failing to do so.

Some Indian leaders and some national security experts have perceived the need to complement coercive capabilities and policies with magnanimous diplomacy. Atal Bihari Vajpayee manifested this approach by beginning the so-called Lahore Process in February 1999, shortly after the nuclear tests. He demonstrated even more resolve by supporting back-channel diplomacy with Pakistan after the Kargil conflict and the 2001 parliament attacks. Indeed, any Pakistan and Indian leader who would offer positive inducements to the other in order to pacify the two states’ relationship must expect opponents to undertake violent actions to destroy their initiative. For nearly 70 years—before they acquired nuclear weapons and
Indian and Pakistani leaders have tried various means to achieve their objectives toward each other. Sometimes this involved direct and proxy conflict; other times diplomacy. But 70 years on, the situation remains one of neither peace nor war. Pakistan has fallen further behind India and its own aspirations in the process. There are signs that much of its population and some of its leaders recognize, as Pervez Musharraf did between 2003 and 2007, a need to focus on more constructive ambitions. A long-time Indian defence official and analyst assessed this possibility with insight that deserves quoting at length:

“The problem is not that the entirety of the ISI. But, given how long they have worked with various mujahidin groups, and how much they have done together, there must be some elements still in the ISI, or network of alumni, who will want to continue the jihad, especially against India over Kashmir. Even if and as the army leadership shifts its focus, and really does believe the greatest threat is internal, and that they have got to get control over the violence within Pakistan, and they have an interest in normalizing with India, there must be elements who will resist this and keep trying to fight India.

The smarter ones realize that India as a state cannot be made to fall apart. Whatever these guys can do, whatever kinds of attacks, or support for disaffected young guys here, India will withstand it. It just won’t fall apart and proxy war won’t make it fall apart. At the same time, India and Pakistan can’t fight a big war. There will be a level of conflict of some kind that will continue, but it won’t lead to a major conflagration.

So, between those two realities, at some point the Pak leadership and even the army will realize it makes more sense to stop, especially when the proxies are now threatening Pakistan itself.”

This experienced official and observer was describing a sense of stalemate and rough deterrent balance that, in part, had made it possible for Nawaz Sharif to win election in Pakistan while campaigning for improved relations with India. The subsequent months after that interview in April of 2014 featured the cancellation of foreign secretary-level talks on security issues and a sharp escalation in violence along the LoC. This also demonstrated the way in which recalcitrant forces in both countries could impede this agenda. But our interviewee nonetheless continued by turning to the Indian political scene, where the election that would bring Narendra Modi to power was weeks away.

“I can’t understand our guys’ attitude toward Pakistan. The larger state in every relationship ultimately has to recognize that the smaller states can’t negotiate one for one and tit for tat. The bigger state has to be willing to give more. It’s counter-intuitive: if we’re bigger, we can force them to give in and do what we want. But, the psychology of it is the opposite.

The only way forward with Pakistan is that we have to be seen conceding more than we are getting. The reality is that we would be getting enormously more by normalizing relations and ending their story of conflict, etc. We would gain greatly overall.

It’s going to take a very big man to do that. He would have to accept not getting another term, and the people who depend on him would have to accept that too, which is very hard. The dividend for normalizing relations won’t be felt in three to four years, before the next election would happen.”

It is much more politically risky, hence rarer, for leaders to compromise with adversaries in negotiations than it is to authorize potentially costly uses of force. No leader benefits at home by seeming to give something to an adversary, which essentially is what negotiation and compromise require. A former Indian foreign secretary reflected this reality in an October 2013 interview: ‘Nawaz says “you must give me something so I can get the Army to sign up to making peace and restraining jihadi groups.”’ We can’t do that. Either you want to change policy and rein these groups in, or you don’t. And if you want to do it and you can do it, then do it.’
The perspectives of these former senior Indian officials obviously diverge. The more recalcitrant view seems to be more prevalent, including within the Modi government. The veteran journalist R. Jagannathan summed up this mindset and approach:

“Any concession on J&K (Jammu and Kashmir) will only convince the Pakistani generals that they were right all along in pursuing a path of mindless antagonism to India. The ISI will keep sending terrorists over to do damage. Let’s not fool ourselves that talks will solve this problem. For India, this means four or five things: we have to keep strengthening our resolve to fight terror and roll with the punches when we can’t prevent it; we have to give it back to Pakistan without raising the stakes where it becomes an open war with the nuclear threat hanging over us; we have to develop covert capabilities inside Pakistan so that they know two can play the dangerous game; we have to diplomatically explain to the world what we are doing and why Kashmir isn’t the issue, but Pakistan’s ideology-driven terrorism is; and, lastly, we have to keep talking to Pakistan to convince them they cannot win and to tell the world dialogue isn’t a problem for us. Underlying it all we have to give a consistent message: enmity with India has costs. If you try to harm us we will harm you. We have to prepare ourselves for a 100-year war of attrition with Pakistan till the latter accepts reality or falls victim to its own follies and disintegrates.”

Jagannathan’s October 2014 description of the way the Indian government would approach Pakistan was clearly well-informed. Events during the subsequent year largely bore it out, with one glaring exception: as of October 2015 India did not keep talking to Pakistan. If the Indian government persists in the belief that it can manage Kashmir as an internal matter without Pakistan’s negotiated cooperation, New Delhi will be unable to build an international coalition that would significantly raise the cost to Pakistan of future major attacks on India. Indeed, by acting as if there is nothing to negotiate with Pakistan, Indian leaders will encourage proponents of violence in Pakistan and discourage international players who would like to fully embrace India, but are reluctant to do so if India insists that they reject Pakistan at the same time. India has the power and habits of mind and institutions to win on its own a 100-year war of attrition with Pakistan. But India cannot achieve its ambitions to be a global power if it remains bogged down in such a war.

History teaches that not all problems have solutions, or that people often will not pursue solutions because it seems easier to live with familiar problems. The analysis presented in this book shows that there are no clear solutions that India can unilaterally pursue to end the threat of violence from Pakistan. Some are more or less likely to be effective at greater or lesser risk and cost to India. But only a combination of Indian coercive and non-violent policies and capabilities, paired with a willingness to bargain, can motivate Pakistan to remove the threat of violence. It is up to Indian and Pakistani leaders and societies, with encouragement from the international community, to find a combination that will work for them. If the analysis of this book helps inform the search for this combination, it will have achieved its purpose.