UCRL-JC-114402
CSTS-43-93

CSTS *Center for Security and Technology Studies*

Nuclear Weapons Issues in South Asia

Neil Joeck

This paper was adapted from a presentation at the
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory conference:
Managing Nuclear Weapons in a Changing World
November 17–18, 1992

July 2, 1993

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
University of California, Livermore, California 94551

DISCLAIMER

CSTS *Center for Security and Technology Studies*

UCRL-JC-114402
CSTS-43-93

Nuclear Weapons Issues in South Asia

Neil Joeck

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

July 2, 1993

This paper was adapted from a presentation at the
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory conference:
Managing Nuclear Weapons in a Changing World
November 17–18, 1992

Each manuscript from this conference is a separate publication. These individual documents can be collected in a binder under the report number CONF-9211112 and title of the conference.

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
University of California, Livermore, California 94551

Nuclear Weapons Issues in South Asia

Neil Joeck
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

Managing Nuclear Weapons

In looking at the framework for this volume, one should first evaluate the objective of "managing" nuclear weapons. The question is one of emphasis. For example, should one focus on achieving an international objective? One might argue that since nuclear weapons are dangerous, they should be taken out of the hands of all national leaders. The logical result of this approach would be nuclear disarmament, with international supervision. In contrast, the focus could be defined more narrowly in terms of power politics. One might argue that since only certain national leaders threaten U.S. interests, they (and only they) should be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons.

In the late 1940s, Edward Teller argued in favor of establishing an international authority. He expanded on the Acheson Report, which called for international control of the atom. Teller linked such control to open borders, open access, and full freedom of information. He also argued that the effect of the Acheson measures,

> "would be to place a considerable group of men directly under an international body and to protect freedom of information by supreme international law. Thereby, we would have taken a first step toward placing authority in the hands of an organization whose essential function is to keep the peace. Only such a central authority can bar the road to power politics and help us find the way to world unity."[1]

More recently, in an article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "The Unipolar Moment," Charles Krauthammer argued that with the Cold War now over, the most crucial global security threat is the emergence of a new strategic environment marked by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Krauthammer's concerns today differ little from Teller's in the 1940s, but his solution differs substantially from the regime Teller proposed. With the emergence of what Krauthammer calls "the weapons state," he argued that,

> "there is no alternative to confronting, deterring, and, if necessary, disarming states that brandish and use weapons of mass destruction, and there is no one to do that but the United States backed by as many allies as will join the endeavor."[2]

It is important to understand this contrast between international authority and power politics before setting a course in managing nuclear weapons. Whether one takes an internationalist or unilateralist approach, the U.S. will bear the burden of leadership. Others cannot be expected to follow unless the United States is clear both on the direction it wants to go, and the implications of each of the two paths.

It is also important to remember that nuclear proliferation did not start with the Iraq war; the United States' concern about research by German scientists before and during World War II drove the Manhattan Project, and the basic insecurity that was represented by our development of nuclear weapons continues to drive the nuclear proliferation behavior of states around the world today. The origins of our concern about nuclear proliferation, and the efforts made before the Iraq crisis, will affect which path makes better sense.

The development of nuclear weapons almost simultaneously created a concern for their control. The first step toward controlling the atom was the Baruch Plan, which grew out of the Acheson report. This effort was stillborn, though, because even in the 1940s, it was impossible to reconcile the international and unilateral approaches. The U.S. argued that an international mechanism should be set up to control atomic energy. The Soviet Union, however, feared that this would

ensure a U.S. monopoly on atomic energy, would be a front for U.S. espionage against the Soviets, and would be dominated by the Untied States. Moscow countered by proposing that the use and production of fissile material be outlawed; only then could an international control body be formed. The U.S. was not prepared to give up its own capability unilaterally, while the Soviets rejected international control until such unilateral action took place. The result was a diplomatic impasse.

After this initial failure to reach an international accord on the control of nuclear energy, the U.S. focused on two other approaches to managing nuclear proliferation. The first was to try to control and monitor the transfer of technology through the Atoms for Peace program and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This was a supply oriented approach, in which it was accepted that the transfer of nuclear technology could not be prevented. At a minimum, however, nuclear technology transfer could be monitored and safeguarded. Any state that wanted nuclear technology could have it (under Atoms for Peace), but the price for access was agreeing to allow monitoring (by the IAEA) to ensure that no nuclear weapons were developed.

The second approach taken by the U.S. was demand oriented: if states felt insecure and threatened (as the U.S. and Soviet Union had), they might want to acquire nuclear weapons for legitimate defensive needs. The American response was to rely on the post-World War II alliance system to alleviate that insecurity, providing a nuclear umbrella for certain states that otherwise might develop weapons on their own.

Origins of Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia

For different reasons, India and Pakistan fell between the cracks of this nuclear nonproliferation approach, and they were left to address their security concerns on their own. The nature of security in India and Pakistan was somewhat different, however. Many scholars by now agree that security and insecurity in South Asia are in substantial measure a consequence of internal problems, rather than foreign threats. Both states are linguistically, ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse. They face some of the same problems the Soviet Union did, in that central authority, as much as a common sense of national loyalty, keeps each of these states together. Although leaders in India and Pakistan accept the argument that internal diversity and internal problems create insecurities for both states, they maintain that their regional security environment is more critical. To understand proliferation in general, and to understand the Indian and the Pakistani points of view in particular, we need first to understand why they feel insecure about their neighbors.

India and Pakistan were formed in 1947 out of what had been British colonial India. Under the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, India attempted to develop a foreign policy that navigated between the two major power blocs of the post-World War II era. Nehru was a key participant in founding the Nonaligned Movement (NAM), and he stressed the importance of Third World solidarity. This concept was challenged, however, with the outbreak of war between India and China in 1962. China soundly defeated India, and two years later conducted its first nuclear test. Debate immediately raged within India as to whether it should follow suit. As is often the case in India, though, domestic politics moved to the foreground, and the issues of foreign policy and nuclear weapons were pushed to the background. The result was indecision on the nuclear issue within India until the early 1970s.

Pakistan had been formed as an Islamic state under the principle that the Muslim majority states of British India should be united as a single country. However, two problems confronted Pakistan. The first was that Kashmir, a Muslim majority state, ended up being a part of India. The second was that Pakistan itself was divided in two, separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory. The difficulties for Pakistan in combining these two sectors solely on the basis of Islam proved to be too great.

In 1971, the eastern sector declared independence from the west. A bloody civil war ensued that resulted in the formation of the new state of Bangladesh. A further consequence of the civil war was the outbreak of war between India and Pakistan. Many in Pakistan are convinced that the creation of Bangladesh was not the consequence of Pakistan's internal failures, but rather of Indian intervention in the civil war. In this view, the formation of Bangladesh was only the first step in the recreation of *Akhand Bharat*, or undivided India,

running from Pakistan's Western edge at the Khyber Pass to the jungles of Burma (Myanmar).

Pakistan had counted on its security relationship with the United States, and its enduring friendship with China, to keep India at bay. Pakistan had joined the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) as well as the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) to achieve that objective. Pakistan's leaders assumed that these formal ties would ensure American support in time of crisis with India. Quite in contrast, the U.S. position was that these ties were intended to confront the Communists in the Soviet Union, and to prevent the spread of Moscow's influence into what the U.S. considered vulnerable regions. With the catastrophic conclusion of the 1971 war, Pakistan felt that the U.S. had abandoned it. Feeling isolated and vulnerable to Indian designs, Pakistan set off on a slow but steady course of developing nuclear weapons, which were seen as the only guarantee that, in the future, India would be deterred from finishing the job begun in 1971 with the division of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh.

India appeared to reach a very different conclusion as a result of the 1971 war. Fearful that the budding U.S.–China relationship (marked by Henry Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971) might enable China to enter the impending war on Pakistan's side, India had signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in August 1971, before the war broke out. In India's view, China was checked by this move, and as a consequence was unwilling to help Pakistan once war broke out at the end of 1971. The lesson India apparently drew from this was that its own conventional strength was sufficient for it to remain the dominant power in South Asia *vis-à-vis* Pakistan, while the treaty with the Soviet Union deterred Chinese meddling in the subcontinent. The 1974 Indian nuclear test put China on notice that India could develop nuclear weapons if need be, but was not followed up with weaponization or deployment.

By the end of the 1980s, Pakistan had made enough progress in its nuclear program that then President Zia ul-Haq could claim to have developed a nuclear weapons capability. India continued to maintain that it had nothing more than a peaceful nuclear program. New Delhi had tested a single nuclear device in 1974 and had stockpiled plutonium, but argued that it had no nuclear weapons capability or interest. With the dawning of the 1990s, though, India's concern with China had been supplanted by a concern that Pakistan had achieved a nuclear capability. Whereas at the end of the 1971 war, India had rendered Pakistan virtually defenseless, two decades later India found itself confronted with a conventionally still-inferior Pakistan now possibly armed with nuclear weapons. It is a sad commentary on Indian planning that its position of strategic superiority had been so thoroughly compromised in such a short time span.

From Nonproliferation to Arms Control

Assuming that India and Pakistan have crossed the nuclear threshold, it is appropriate to think in terms of nuclear arms control, not just of nuclear nonproliferation, in South Asia. To this end, it might be useful to consider a number of issues that were part of the United States–Soviet Union arms control relationship, and ask whether they pertain to the India–Pakistan relationship. Some mitigating factors that allowed the U.S. and the Soviet Union to reach certain agreements may not be present for India and Pakistan. On the other hand, some obstacles that prevented agreements may also not be present, perhaps allowing arms control a better chance for success in South Asia. International regime issues that were in part linked to U.S.–Soviet arms control agreements may also affect Indo–Pakistani negotiations.

Regional Differences

One important difference between the two cases is the issue of alliances. Unlike the U.S. and the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan are not negotiating arms control agreements with any allies in mind. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had to be concerned about the effect of any agreement on their allied partners. The most likely theater for conflict was on the territory of those very allies; this provided a kind of buffer at times, in the sense that, if war could be limited, it would be fought away from the heartland of either superpower. No one ever felt confident that war could be so contained, but for India and Pakistan, there is no such buffer. For both sides, the consequences of failure to resolve differences through arms control may be direct and catastrophic if war breaks out.

An issue that has been less analyzed in South Asia, but that may strongly affect arms control possibilities, is domestic public opinion. Polling data support a conclusion that nuclear weapons enjoy popular support in both India and Pakistan. That conclusion may be premature, however, as the process of arms control can itself prompt changes in attitudes within the attentive public. Many argue that neither side can give in on the nuclear issue for fear of being overthrown politically. Such arguments assume that Indians and Pakistanis alike believe that nuclear deterrence is the optimal means to achieve security. Yet the interplay between deterrence and arms control, the assumptions about both, and the relative advantage of one or the other have not been fully vetted within either India or Pakistan. In a rapidly changing world, both may conclude that nuclear weapons cause more problems than they do solutions.

Bureaucratic politics within both countries may also influence arms control negotiations and agreements. Just as special interests and competing bureaucracies within the U.S. wanted to bring about or prevent arms control, so too will constituencies form in India and Pakistan favoring one approach or another. Interservice rivalries may already be affecting how the two sides proceed. The cost of the nuclear program in terms of military aid and technology transfer is fairly high: are there now constituencies forming that would benefit from the elimination of those costs?

Arms Control Issues

The most significant international regime issue is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Pakistan long ago offered to sign the NPT if India would agree to do so simultaneously. Many in India consider this to be little more than a bluff by Pakistan. The offer provides India an opportunity to consolidate its position of strategic superiority over Pakistan, however, which may be overlooked in New Delhi. India's somewhat ambivalent approach to nuclear weapons development may derive in part from its position of conventional superiority, which it could consolidate by freezing South Asian nuclear developments. By ignoring Pakistan's peace overtures on this and other issues, India has allowed Pakistan, in effect, to gain a nuclear veto over India.

Fixated as it is on China, India has continued to insist that only an agreement that includes China would have any strategic meaning. At the same time, India has argued that the discriminatory nature of the NPT is repugnant. On both those counts, India's position is beginning to look questionable. India's refusal to engage in arms control with Pakistan may have allowed Islamabad time to acquire a nuclear capability that can now neutralize India's conventional superiority. This refusal has made New Delhi strategically vulnerable in a way that it was not at the end of the 1971 war. India may hold the moral high ground on this issue, but the cost to India if war breaks out could make that moral argument meaningless.

The argument that the NPT is discriminatory is also under challenge. The French and Chinese decisions to sign the NPT take support away from India on this score. Furthermore, recent suggestions that India might sign the NPT as an Article 1 state (i.e., as a nuclear weapons state), suggest that they have sensed the wind is shifting. Ironically, however, this proposal smacks of hypocrisy in suggesting that India rejects unequal treatment only so long as it is on the wrong end of the mistreatment. One problem with this proposal, however, is that Article 9 of the treaty stipulates that only those states that detonated a nuclear weapon or a nuclear explosive device before January 1, 1967 can be considered nuclear weapons states. The time therefore seems opportune for India to reconsider the value of rejecting what has proven to be a remarkably durable treaty. The security benefits that many states received when their neighbors signed the NPT is not entirely lost for India *vis-à-vis* Pakistan. India's insistence that it be treated on an equal footing with China, and with the other large powers, has been partially met because China itself signed the NPT and continues to maintain its no-first-use pledge. India can call Pakistan's bluff (if indeed it is a bluff), and at the same time compromise relatively little in terms of security against either of its neighbors and erstwhile enemies.

In bilateral terms, India and Pakistan are already involved in an arms control relationship, with a number of achievements and proposals of note. The most important is the agreement not to attack one another's nuclear facilities; India has stated that its nuclear facilities are those listed in the annual Atomic Energy Commission report, while Pakistan has not disclosed the list that it has identified in the agreement with India. Ongoing dialogue is possible through bilateral foreign secretaries' talks, which cover a range of issues

beyond the nuclear question, and through the multilateral South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

In addition to these formal ties, Pakistan has made a number of proposals to India, including freezing production of fissile material, mutual inspection of nuclear facilities, simultaneous acceptance of IAEA safeguards, a South Asia nuclear weapons-free zone, a joint declaration renouncing nuclear weapons, a bilateral nuclear test ban, and five-party negotiations. Much as Pakistan's NPT proposals are considered a bluff, India has dismissed these proposals as empty gestures. As thinking changes within India in response to the transformation of global politics, however, these measures may become more attractive. India may continue to reject them as formal arms control agreements, but more attention is being paid to the idea of informal confidence-building measures. Packaged the right way, and matched with some parallel global initiatives, they may yet become part of the South Asian nuclear dialogue.

The U.S. Role in South Asian Arms Control

Given the nature of the arms control discussions between the two sides, the U.S. can play a positive role in Indo–Pakistani negotiations and agreements. At the outset, however, the U.S. must see the issue in South Asia in regional diplomatic terms, rather than as an aspect of U.S. defense and security policy. The contrast between a unilateral and an internationalist approach is again at issue. The U.S. can help in South Asia not by trying, as Krauthammer argued, to disarm states that may have nuclear weapons, but rather by encouraging diplomatic relations between them.

An emerging problem that could undercut American efforts to support arms control in South Asia is Pakistan's impression that the U.S. concern for nonproliferation has become a kind of anti-Islamic crusade. A number of examples support this fear. The issue of defending Kuwait against Iraq, and ejecting Iraq's forces, gained particular favor in the U.S. when the prospect that Iraq might acquire nuclear weapons was added to the equation. Polls in the United States at the end of 1990 indicated that support for U.S. intervention was higher if the goal was to eliminate Iraqi nuclear capability as well as to eject Saddam's troops. In Pakistan's view, the U.S. was more interested in ensuring that no Muslim state acquired nuclear weapons than it was in restoring peace.

Pakistanis also ask why the U.S. failed to respond in a meaningful way to the Algerian elections in 1991. After the first round of voting, it was apparent that the Islamic front was going to win the election; at that point, the Algerian military stepped in and prevented the completion of the electoral process, with nary a dissent from the U.S.. The message received in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Islamic world was that the U.S. was happy to encourage democracy, but only as long as it produced a politically acceptable outcome.

A further concern was the U.S. decision to stop assistance to Islamabad in 1990. Many in Pakistan argued that nothing had changed in its nuclear program, yet once the war in Afghanistan was over, the U.S. refused to certify that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device and cut Islamabad off economically. Having served its purpose in confronting the Russians, it was argued, Pakistan was then cast aside.

There are legitimate responses to these points, but the impression is nonetheless left that, for Pakistan and for some other Islamic countries, the United States is in danger of compromising its position as a potential honest broker. There are complexities within the Islamic World that might allow the U.S. to play a productive role as intermediary, just as it is doing in the Middle East peace process. A subtle and even hand regarding Islamic fears and aspirations will allow the U.S. to foster dialogue and arms control in South Asia, rather than push Pakistan into a radical corner.

The U.S. may also be able to exploit and encourage opposition to nuclear weapons within Pakistan and India. Other states have thought about developing nuclear weapons, only to decide that they would be a bad investment. From those examples, the U.S. may be able to develop useful arguments that will help its efforts to mediate relations between India and Pakistan. The agreement between Argentina and Brazil, for example, may have some similarities that would work in India and Pakistan. In South Africa, the fear of a successor regime taking over a weapons capability appears to have induced nuclear rollback; similar fears in Pakistan or India might be exploited to produce a similar outcome.

Strategy and Deterrence in South Asia

How will deterrence work, if arms control does not prove sufficient, or is found impractical, for solving South Asian nuclear security problems? India and Pakistan may find themselves in a similar position to the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the early days of their rivalry. A number of issues can be raised that illustrate the problem, and that suggest important areas for further research and analysis.

India and Pakistan have experienced a variety of crises and conflicts; it is important therefore to consider how nuclear deterrence would work in this environment. How might past crises have been handled, and what might the results have been, if both sides had deployed nuclear weapons? Information gathering and information analysis are central parts of crisis management; in a nuclear environment, this calls into question the information gathering capabilities on both sides. How is information disseminated internally, and to what extent do internal dynamics and rivalries come into play? For example, does the military in Pakistan trust nonmilitary sources for information, analysis, or decisions? This was a problem in Pakistan when Benazir Bhutto was in office. Bhutto repeatedly claimed that she was left out of nuclear decision-making in Pakistan. During a crisis in which both sides had nuclear weapons, both sides need to know who is in charge on the other side in order to communicate their threat adequately.

Is there a systematic bias not only in the way information and intelligence are gathered, but in how that intelligence is evaluated? Certain biases are already evident in South Asia, and are especially troublesome in the context of nuclear deterrence. For example, Hindu nationalism and chauvinism toward Muslims within India, and by extension toward Pakistan, may inspire potentially dangerous risk-taking in a nuclear confrontation. On the other side of the border, one still finds in Pakistan vestiges of the martial races theory (not unlike the French view of the role of *élan* during World War I, a view that cost France almost an entire generation of young men). An example of this bias can be found in the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. Pakistan's leaders were surprised when India responded to the conflict in Kashmir by crossing the international border between India and Pakistan, and launching an offensive against Lahore in the Punjab. Pakistan had expected to be able to contain the war within Kashmir, mistakenly assuming that India's Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, because he stood just over five feet tall, lacked the conviction to widen the war. The taller Pakistanis thought that a physically smaller Hindu would lack resolve. In a nuclear confrontation, this sort of misunderstanding could again produce disastrous results.

The belief that one's own motives are clear to the enemy is another important element in crisis behavior, and it is again a potentially problematic issue in a nuclear South Asia. What message, for example, is India sending to Pakistan by not testing any weapons since 1974? It is unlikely that India would stockpile bombs based on that design, just as the U.S. could not have stockpiled weapons based on the Trinity design. Is New Delhi sending the message that the peaceful nuclear explosive (PNE) was symbolic only, and that there is no intent to develop more sophisticated weapons? An Indian defense official said that Pakistan should not assume that they have not weaponized, but leaving strategy and communication to guesswork and assumptions creates dangerous uncertainties when crises occur. India's motives may not be at all clear to Pakistan; without them being clarified, a critical aspect of deterrence is lost.

An important variable in the U.S.–Soviet context, and one that has been carefully studied in the context of the Cuban missile crisis, is the relationship between the executive and the various bureaucracies that must carry out executive orders. Benazir Bhutto claimed that she was kept out of the decision-making on the nuclear issue, and another aspect to this is whether her orders would have been followed, even if she were included. This is an issue that pertains regardless of which political party is in power, or which individual is in power. Command authority in a fragmented state cannot be assumed; how would such possible command fissures affect the thinking on the other side of the nuclear dialogue, especially during a crisis?

The issue of command authority also affects physical control of the weapon. How are weapons to be stored, who would have access to the weapons, and how would they be fired? In the U.S. in the early days of the nuclear era, a member of the Atomic Energy Commission was included on the nuclear-designated airplanes and was responsible for final assembly of the weapon prior to delivery. From a technical point of view, would

the same sort of control be a good idea in India or Pakistan, and if it were instituted, how would it affect crisis stability between the two sides?

Leadership transition and survival during a crisis is still another important aspect of nuclear deterrence. When Pakistan's President Zia died in 1988, for example, the transfer of power to President Ghulum Ishaq Khan and General Beg was fairly smooth. When Indira Gandhi was assassinated, the transfer of power to her son Rajiv was fairly smooth as well. When Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, however, it was painful to see how his Congress Party associates virtually begged his grieving wife to take his place as leader of the party. Sonia Gandhi turned the offer down, but had the assassination taken place in a nuclear South Asia at a time of crisis, how would it have been resolved? Furthermore, what lesson are the Pakistani authorities drawing from this abject failure to transfer power in a sovereign state?

How leaders handle stress during a crisis has been an issue throughout history, but is all the more critical in a nuclear confrontation where it is assumed that each side is behaving according to consistent values. At the end of the 1971 war, for example, the leader of Pakistan, General Yahya Kahn, was apparently taking more solace from a bottle of liquor than he was advice from his military aides. Reaching decisions about nuclear weapons—and conveying one's own commitments and desires to the enemy—during a crisis calls for a more careful approach than Yahya demonstrated.

The point in this section is not to question Indian and Pakistani decision-making capabilities: there are similar examples one could cite from U.S.–Soviet interactions. The issue is more that nuclear weapons put different burdens on leaders, and communication, threat assessment, demonstration of resolve, etc. all take on a far greater importance. Failure on any of these counts in a conventional war is costly, but may not be catastrophic. Nuclear weapons and modern means of delivery are less forgiving, however. Much of what has been learned in the West about nuclear deterrence may be appropriate in South Asia; but until South Asians think these issues through in the regional context that they understand better than anyone, neither side should draw comfort from the expectation that nuclear *deterrence* will automatically result from nuclear *deployment*.

Conclusion

The U.S. can play a productive mediating role in South Asia by engaging India and Pakistan in an international forum to manage nuclear weapons, as Edward Teller advocated. India and Pakistan have developed their nuclear capabilities because they fear their neighbors, not because they want to threaten the U.S. The appropriate response for the U.S., therefore, is diplomatic engagement and negotiations. In addition to the international approach, encouragement and facilitation of regional and bilateral interactions will also be important. Formal arms control agreements have been reached, but less formal confidence-building measures, and unilateral security pledges may well be combined to form a more secure strategic environment in South Asia than a nuclear armed confrontation across the porous South Asian border.

Acknowledgment

This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under Contract No. W-7405-Eng-48.

References

1. E. Teller, "A Suggested Amendment to the Acheson Report," (June 1, 1946)*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* , p. 5.
2. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," (Spring 1991)*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, p. 32.

END

DATE FILMED

12/6/93