Preprint
UCRL-JC-140532

Nuclear Security in Asia: A Global Affair

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This article was submitted to
Seventh ISODARCO-Beijing Seminar on Arms Control
Xi'an China
October 8-12, 2000

September 2000

U.S. Department of Energy

Lawrence
Livermore
National
Laboratory

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Introduction

My goal with this paper[2] is to stimulate some thinking as to how scientists, concerned with nonproliferation and arms control, can address their efforts to improve the security environment in Asia, an environment that impacts the security of the entire world. The processes that led to the nuclearization of Asia are complex, with each country's nuclear weapons program tightly coupled to internal and regional politics and to national rivalries. Therefore, the first step toward nuclear stability, and ideally proliferation reversal, in Asia is to understand the motivations for and evolution of these programs.

I begin by addressing the evolution of the nuclear weapons programs of India, China, and Pakistan. Next I discuss why India (and then Pakistan) may have felt compelled to clear the ambiguity of their programs with their 1998 nuclear tests. I also explore why the P5 states (U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China) were unable to persuade India and Pakistan to stop or reverse their nuclear weapons programs. I then look at other countries' actions and reactions that may amplify or dampen the response of India, Pakistan, and China to what they perceive as a deterioration of their security environment. Finally I look at regional activities that may reverse the deteriorating global security that has resulted from a nuclearized South Asia. This situation is something of a paradox because, at the same time the South Asia security environment is deteriorating, Russia and the U.S., the former Cold War adversaries, are finally taking steps to reduce the massive nuclear arsenals that threatened global security for so many years.

India's Nuclear Weapons Program

As a democracy, India's political deliberations regarding its nuclear weapons program have been quite public, even though India has kept the program itself under tight wraps. In a very thorough history and analysis, Perkovich [1999] identifies a number of illusions associated with India's nuclear weapons program. Specifically: India's professed

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[2]This work was performed by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy under contract W-7405-Eng-48.

moral aversion to nuclear weapons, its purported self-reliance in moving its nuclear program forward, and its view that nuclear weapons are a short cut to great-power status. These illusions collide with realities that have become evident in the half-century of India's history. In particular, the founders of the Indian republic clearly desired to launch India as a modern and powerful state in an environment where nuclear weapons were already a symbol of power. India has continued to pursue nuclear weapons as a way to gain great-power status, even though the late-20th century reality is that economic strength and political stability are the foundation of a country's international power. India has also relied heavily on foreign technology to obtain fissile materials.

From a nonproliferation standpoint, India's and Pakistan's nuclear weapons programs have forced the global community to confront a more general set of illusions associated with nuclear weapons proliferation. From the standpoint of international relations, these illusions are that external security concerns drive the nuclear weapons policies of states, that proliferation is an isentropic process such that removing the conditions (external or domestic) that led to the acquisition of nuclear weapons will cause unproliferation,[3] and that recognition bestowed upon democratic governments, especially by the U.S., promotes nonproliferation [Perkovich, 1999].

These illusions do not jibe with reality either. As India's nuclear weapons program demonstrates, domestic factors are just as important as the external security environment in determining nuclear weapons policy. In addition, implementation of the large technical infrastructure associated with the acquisition of nuclear weapons brings about changes in the politics of the state such that removing the motives for acquiring nuclear weapons does not automatically result in unproliferation. Indeed, although democratic debate may inhibit the implementation of nuclear weapons programs, nuclear populism can obstruct domestic efforts to control and eliminate nuclear weapons once they have been acquired, unless there exists a global security environment in which the public perception of the benefits of nuclear weapons reductions outweighs the demands of those who wish to use nuclear weapons programs to gain political advantage.

It would be naive, however, to think that India's nuclear weapons outlook is driven only by internal politics. Military insecurity is an across-the-board motivation for nuclear weapons programs. According to Chellaney [1999], the push for India to take the nuclear road arises from the strategic triangle posed by China, Pakistan, and India. In this triangle, the reference point for the strategic calculations of each player is not congruent with the reference points of the other two.

China's nuclear weapons reference point is the U.S. India's point of reference is China. For Pakistan, the reference point is India. A complicating factor is India's view

[3]Perkovich defines unproliferation as the reversal of a nuclear weapons program and cites South Africa as a prime example.

that China has repeatedly used Pakistan as a proxy to threaten India and has assisted Pakistan's nuclear weapons and missile programs to keep India off balance. India is also suspicious (and perhaps even envious) of China's determination to become a world economic and strategic power. Further complicating the situation is the fact that Pakistan views itself as the protector of the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. It also has an interest in the balkanization of India as retribution for India's acquiescence in the secession of East Pakistan (Bangladesh).

Thus, in Chellaney's view [1999], an important existential question arises regarding India: Can India create a strategic space for itself where it aspires to a seat in the UN Security Council, whose five members are nuclear weapons states, and where two of its bordering countries have a long history of covert collaboration on nuclear weapons and their delivery systems? The existence of unresolved territorial disputes between China and India and between Pakistan and India is particularly vexing to India. In India's view, it must maintain a security alert along two borders, and often Pakistan and China appear to coordinate threatening border actions against India. These views have been clearly articulated by the Indian government at the highest levels [Chari, 1999].

If the above relationships were not complicated enough, Chellaney [Ghosh, 2000] raises an additional issue: What will happen if India's current policies of reform and openness, coupled with its economic growth and the explosion of its informatics industry, turn India and China into economic competitors in the global economy? How will economic competition affect the uneasy India–China relationship in the future?

China's Nuclear Weapons Outlook

China's strategic outlook reaches across the Pacific, across the Sea of Japan, and across the Taiwan Straits. According to Roberts et al. [2000], China's principal security concerns are the erosion of its nuclear deterrent vis à vis the U.S. because of the success of precision-guided munitions in the Kosovo, the perceived mission creep of U.S. national missile defense from a thin to a thick defense, the U.S. commitment to the centrality of nuclear weapons in its global defense strategy, and Taiwan's opposition to reunification.

In addition, China still does not trust a technologically advanced and plutonium-rich Japan, which could come under a U.S. mutual defense umbrella meant to protect Japan from a DPRK missile threat. Japan's lack of repentance for events that took place during its occupation of China, from the 1930s through World War II, gives China concerns as to Japan's long-term motives regarding China. Also, U.S. allegations of a missile threat to the U.S. from North Korea, despite evidence pointing to a DPRK–ROK reconciliation, causes China to wonder about U.S. motivations for a national missile defense.

Some say that a possible Russian response to U.S. deployment of a national missile defense may become a concern for China. China may fear that deployment of U.S. missile defense system would bring a halt to further reductions and perhaps even trigger an expansion of Russia's nuclear arsenals [O'Hanlon, 1999]. Others instead [Dobriansky, 2000] state that the necessity of a largely unnoticed emerging strategic alliance between Russia and China overrides China's concerns. This alliance, Dobriansly claims, relies upon a common resentment of U.S. global dominance, a common dislike for the U.S.-led international consensus for humanitarian intervention, and a common dislike for U.S. national missile defense. Either scenario impacts China's views of its own security and the security environment in Asia.

Although its nuclear weapons modernization efforts are currently focused on achieving greater range, payload, accuracy, survivability, and tactical advantage through the deployment of the DF-31 missile, the possible deployment of multiple warheads, and the deployment of short range-missiles, China's strategic weapons program is at a crossroads [Roberts et al., 2000]. China faces the prospect of restoring a minimum deterrence that takes into account possible deployment of a U.S. missile defense system. It may also have to look into a limited deterrence with regard to India or perhaps even an expansion of its arsenals to develop a limited deterrence across the board. None of these options, of course, is welcome news for India (or anyone else, for that matter).

As the above discussion suggests, there is definite risk that uncoordinated decisions made in Washington, Moscow, Beijing, or to a lesser extent New Delhi will result in the deterioration of the global security environment. Such deterioration perceived by Russia, India, Pakistan, or China would likely result in a diversion of scarce capital resources away from economic development and into weapons programs, despite the fact that economic strength, not nuclear weapons, is the source of power in the 21st century.

Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Perspective

India shapes Pakistan's security outlook [Thakar, 1999]. Territorial disputes between Pakistan and India go back to 1947 when Colonial India was partitioned into Hindi and Muslim states. At the time of partition, Pakistan expected Kashmir to become Pakistani territory. Armed conflict broke out between Pakistan and India soon after partition, which left Kashmir in India's hands. In 1965, frustrated by the lack of progress in a political and diplomatic resolution of the conflict, Pakistan attacked Kashmir. India repulsed the Pakistani attacks and the ensuing cease-fire moved the India–Pakistan border to a line of control running through Kashmir territory. In 1971, India intervened in an internal Pakistani dispute between East Pakistan and Pakistan proper. The outcome of India's intervention was the creation of Bangladesh as an independent state. India's testing of a nuclear device in 1974 reinforced Pakistan's determination to acquire nuclear weapons to prevent Indian actions that could lead to further dismemberment of the Pakistani state.

Pakistan has experienced nearly constant political instability since its birth at partition and is afflicted with endemic social, political and economic problems that a succession of military and civilian governments have been unable to resolve [Ganguly, 2000]. Pakistan's internal problems are a cause of serious concern for South Asia and the rest of the world, especially now that Pakistan is a nuclear state. Its economic growth is not keeping up with its exploding population. Due to the tension between ethnic groups in Kashmir and because of Pakistan's fear that a stronger India may take advantage of Pakistan's weakness (as it did when Bangladesh seceded in 1971), defense spending accounts for forty percent of Pakistan's budget. Pakistan can ill afford this level of expenditure. When one adds the economic burden of supporting a nuclear arsenal, the prognosis is for continued deterioration of the Pakistani economy and further political instability.

Complicating the situation is the fact that Pakistan borders the Persian Gulf as well as Central Asia, regions that suffer from a highly flammable mixture of terrorism, oil, and drugs. In addition, Pakistan is physically very close to the center of the Islamic World. Islamic extremists in a country with few civilian institutions may pull Pakistan in a direction that would not only destabilize northern India but would make Pakistan's nuclear weapons vulnerable and accessible to other states or extremist splinter groups. Indeed there are indications that, with the encouragement of Pakistan, Islamic fundamentalism may be taking root in Kashmir [Ganguly, 2000]. Fundamentalism could harden the positions of ethnic groups, turning a chronic 50-year-old problem into an intractable one. Since part of the India–Pakistan border runs as a line of control through Kashmir, strife within the disputed province (which has resulted in 34,000 deaths in the last decade [Bearak, 2000]) could conceivably escalate into nuclear conflict. Thus the Kashmiris may well decide the future of the Indian subcontinent [Blank, 1999].

How Nuclear Ambiguity Came to an End

Nuclear ambiguity in South Asia came to an end because the BJP party chose Indian national security as the 1998 election and post-election issue with which it could assert its uniqueness [Perkovich, 1999]. Because Pakistan felt that the victorious BJP party (March 1998) would change forever the course of South Asian security, it tested its Ghauri missile in early April 1998 to demonstrate its readiness to respond to the expected hardening of India's national security positions. The Pakistani missile test gave the BJP party the opening it needed to publicly deliver on its promise to safeguard India's national security. India's nuclear tests of May 11 took place, and Pakistan followed suit with its own nuclear tests in late May.

In my view, an equally important push to the end of nuclear ambiguity may have come from the Indian nuclear weapons establishment itself. India lost the battle to hold up the CTBT by blocking consensus in Geneva (August 14, 1996) and, after the decisive

158-to-3 approval of the CTBT by the UN General Assembly (September 10, 1996; only India, Bhutan, and Libya voted against it), the process of CTBT ratification rapidly gathered momentum. The BJP government and the Indian nuclear weapons establishment probably recognized that the worldwide push for CTBT ratification would soon escalate the political cost of nuclear testing to unacceptable levels, denying them the opportunity to demonstrate their prowess and have something to show of military value for half a century of India's nuclear activities. The victory of the BJP party and Pakistan's Ghauri missile test provided the very opportunity India's weaponeers were waiting for.

Is There a Path to Nuclear Stability in Asia?

Raja Mohan [1999] observes that "the overt nuclearization of the subcontinent has also allowed intensive exploration of arms control within the region. Until now, Pakistan has emphasized regional disarmament and India has insisted in global denuclearization." After their nuclear tests , India and Pakistan began to talk the language of stability, arms control, and deterrence. The two prime ministers met at the border in January 1999, and the Lahore Summit followed in February.

Unfortunately, soon thereafter, in the summer of 1999, Pakistani-backed militants crossed the into the Indian-controlled area of Kargyl, which resulted in heavy fighting and cries of betrayal by India. In October 1999, the Pakistani general who engineered the Kargyl incursion led a successful military coup and is now the leader of Pakistan. As Raja Mohan [1999] notes, these events inflicted a severe blow to the hope that "having come out of the nuclear closet, India and Pakistan [would figure] out a set of explicit and well understood rules that must govern their bilateral relations and diplomacy. Such rules are essential if the two sides are to achieve their principal common security objective—the avoidance of a nuclear war in the subcontinent."

Nonetheless, there is a solid case for India and Pakistan to implement confidence-building measures to minimize prospects for conventional conflicts and their escalation into a nuclear exchange. Besides confidence-building measures, Raja Mohan [1999] suggests that India may want to attempt to catalyze a regional integration of the Indian subcontinent, exploiting the engine of India's growing economy to start Pakistan along the road of economic expansion. Such engagement, while not specific to Pakistan, is embodied in the Gujral Doctrine (1997), which aims reduce tensions between India and its weaker neighbors, even at the cost of unilateral economic concessions [Perkovich, 1999]. Indeed, this approach may be the best hope for stabilizing Pakistan and reducing India–Pakistan mutual suspicions [Ganguly, 2000].

Along the same lines, some South Asian specialists and members of the Independent Task Force on U.S. Policy toward South Asia [Haass et al., 2000] have suggested that the economic and social development of Bangladesh that has accompanied its economic engagement with its neighbors and western economies can provide a model

of how accommodation of Pakistan with its neighbors may help Pakistan lift itself out of crisis and diffuse tensions between India and Pakistan.

Others [Ramesh, 1999] suggest that what India needs to do is to develop ICBMs (Indian confidence-building measures) for explicit, transparent, and verifiable nuclear risk reduction. Because of Pakistan's, India's, and China's geographic contiguity and unsettled border disputes, confidence-building measures are far more important for South Asia than they were for the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War. Cohen [1999] underscores the importance of confidence-building measures, observing that "India's security is not predicated on the rational control of its command and control system but on the weakest link in the Pakistani military system."

There are indications that confidence-building measures were discussed during the Lahore Summit meeting and are part of the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries on February 21, 1999 [Ramesh, 1999; Kunadi, 1999]. However in the course of my research, I have not been able to determine in detail what confidence-building measures were discussed except for an agreement of prior notification of missile tests. The confidence-building measures that have been applied to the China–India border [Sidhu and Yuan, 1999] could serve as an example for similar measures that India and Pakistan could develop along their borders.

Conclusion

At this writing, it appears that Pakistan and India have returned to their mutual recriminations about each country's actions in Kashmir [Wren, 2000]. Therefore, now is perhaps the time for all of us to use our technical skills, diplomatic acumen, and professional connections with our colleagues in India and Pakistan to forge a peace process analogous to the one in the Middle East.

This process could become a forum to identify regional problems whose solution would equally benefit Pakistan and India. If implemented, this process would be analogous to cooperation that developed in Europe after World War II through the creation of the Community of Steel and Coal. That organization embraced France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg—countries that had been involved in two major wars in four decades—and eventually evolved into the European Community. N. Naik [1999], former foreign secretary of Pakistan, recently suggested regional cooperation on water and energy. Such cooperation would build trust and, if sustained, could become a significant step in the economic integration of South Asia.

Another dream of cooperation would be the creation of Asiatom, through which India, Pakistan, and China could share technical resources in nuclear power generation and nuclear waste management. It is conceivable that if successful, Asiatom, could fill the role of a regional IAEA uniquely suited to deal with nuclear issues in the Asian context.

Finally, the information and communication technology skills that abound in India and China could be exploited, together with commercial overhead imagery and Internet technologies, to implement a World Wide Web site to display up-to-date images of border regions. Such images would help eliminate surprises and reduce the risk of escalation of conflicts resulting from incomplete or imperfect data.

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