Regional Proliferation And Universality: South Asia  
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Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament

New countries do not take so serious a decision to go nuclear because of 'growing frustration' due to intransigent behaviour by the nuclear weapon states (NWSs) but do so within the classic explanatory grid of changing threat perceptions or changing self-perceptions or both, even though the general character of the 'worldwide disarmament momentum' can be a 'background condition' of some value in influencing potential proliferators. What is more, the existing non-proliferation regime may not be able to cope with too many new entrants (but this is not on the cards) but it can cope with a few more entrants even if this increase isn't particularly to the liking of say, the US which is concerned about its 'complicating' factor into its own strategic-political-nuclear perspectives. But this, too, depends on who the new proliferators are. The US will have one attitude towards North Korea or Libya but another to India and yet another to Israel.

The real problem is posed for us in that newer entrants bring their own specific dangers, raise the likelihood of use of nuclear weapons somewhere sometime, and have a profoundly negative effect on the process of struggling for further disarmament. The frustration that comes from failure to build a strong enough disarmament momentum or from the emergence of new NWSs is most strongly felt by the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWSs) and disarmament proponents and most hampers their efforts at promoting complete disarmament. That is why we need to both curb and reduce regional proliferation and to promote further and more rapid disarmament by the existing NWSs. The two are connected in the sense that progress in the field of disarmament universally creates stronger pressures and more chances for success in the field of regional non-proliferation and disarmament as well which in turn strengthens the overall disarmament momentum. In the specifically South Asian case, there can be no doubt that much greater progress in universal disarmament while it will not make it impossible for India and Pakistan to go ahead with their nuclear plans for further weaponization, development and deployment, will certainly make it more difficult, awkward and embarrassing. If the world is moving in one direction then moving in the opposite direction by India and Pakistan becomes more difficult and even if it does take place, it is more likely to be slower and more cautious.

Understanding the South Asian Developments *

The basic reason for India going nuclear (Pakistan went nuclear because India did) is not out of frustration with the hypocrisies of existing five NWSs nor because of changed or deteriorating threat perceptions but because of changing elite self-perceptions. India's decision to go nuclear was status-driven not threat-driven. The sources of this change towards endorsement, support and desire for overt nuclearization are essentially domestic.

The key factor here is the transformation of Indian elite nationalism, itself related to the growing political and ideological weight of a particular form of religious-influenced belligerent and aggressive nationalism as embodied in the rise of the BJP and Hindutva generally. The BJP and its previous political incarnations was the only political party that has been saying since the fifties that if they came to power they would go openly nuclear. This was in contrast to all other parties which since the first test in 1974 were committed to keeping the option open but right up to the 1998 tests had no intent to go openly nuclear. That the BJP has been pressing nuclearisation since the fifties is testimony to the fact that for it Indian nuclearisation

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had everything to do with its vision of nationalism and of how to build a 'great India' and nothing to do with external security threats or with progress (or lack of it) in the international disarmament process. The growth of the BJP's rightwing and aggressive cultural exclusivist, authoritarian and belligerent nationalist ideology has both reflected and fed into the rise of an aggressive elite Indian nationalism.

The Indian decision to go nuclear has greatly damaged the nuclear and general security of the region. While the worsening of India-China strategic relations is a serious and enduring consequence (China must now factor India in as an ambitious nuclear rival out to develop a 'credible deterrent' against it) far and away the most serious effect of South Asian nuclearisation is what it has done to the relations between India and Pakistan.

Simply and accurately put, the India-Pakistan nuclear face-off is the most dangerous in the world. This is now the only part of the world where an unrelenting hot-cold war between the same two rivals has continued for over 50 years and with no signs whatsoever of tensions subsiding let alone dissolving. The Cold War between East and West is over. The long hot-cold war between Israel and the Arab countries of the region is over. Moreover, the Cold War was just that -- above all an ideological conflict between two countries which were not geographically contiguous. Even then it was a close run thing (the October Cuban crisis of 1962).

How much more serious the India-Pakistan nuclear face-off is can be gleaned from the following distinctive elements.

1) Unlike the Cold War rivalry, Indian-Pakistani hostility has endured from the very birth of these two countries as independent entities. At its heart has been an enduring conflict over Kashmir, still unresolved. The geographic proximity of the two countries and the seeming irresolubility of the Kashmir problem has given an edge to the conflict unlike the essentially ideological rivalry of the USA and the former USSR.

2) It is in wartime or near-wartime conditions that mutual suspicions, hatreds and fears are greatest. It is in such circumstances that the possible use of nuclear weapons by one or both sides by design, accident or miscalculation become greatest. The only part of the world that has had more 'hot wars' between enduring rivals than India-Pakistan in South Asia was the Middle East with 5 such wars. South Asia follows with four but the last war (undeclared -- the Kargil conflict of May 1999) was the first such war between two nuclear equipped countries. In contrast the China-USSR border conflict never came close to approximating the scale of conventional conflict in Kargil with hundreds of air sorties and a force of 40,000 troops amassed for a concentrated assault across the Line of Control. In short, not only was the actual scale of fighting far greater than anything during the Sino-Soviet Ussuri river conflict but the danger of further military escalation was also much greater.

3) During the Kargil conflict, some thirteen threats and counter-threats were exchanged between senior personnel both within the two governments of India and Pakistan and by those outside it but enjoy very prominent positions in the political system. Compounding the problem on both sides was the distinctive nuclear belligerence of religious fundamentalist organisations in both countries which over the last decade and a half have become much stronger in both the states and civil societies of the two countries respectively. During the conflict there were unconfirmed but plausible reports that both sides had geared up their respective nuclear weapons regimes to a serious level of alert and preparation for activity.

4) Current relations between the two countries are almost certainly at their worst during peacetime than perhaps at any time in three decades. But what is also new and most worrying is that never before (not even during the first three wars between the two countries in 1948, 1965 and 1971) has there been so strong, widespread and growing a sentiment among the elites of the two countries that co-existence
between the two countries is in the long term an impossibility and that ultimately the security of either country requires the break-up and destruction of the other. This is still a minority sentiment among the dominant elites in the two countries but it exists and the sentiment is deepening. This in itself is extremely disturbing because it implies that worst-case scenarios, including the use of nuclear weapons in the name of 'assuring survival from an implacable foe' become that much more possible and feasible.

5) Given the asymmetry in geographical size between the two countries, i.e. Pakistan's relative lack of strategic depth, the asymmetry in warheads (Pakistan is estimated to have 10 to 20 warheads and India 40 to 60) and the asymmetry in nuclear capabilities and development possibilities in the future, the weaker side Pakistan, faces in even more acute form the general dilemma of trading off centralised control against dispersion of deployment and control (to prevent possible nuclear 'decapitation' of its political decision-making apparatus) of its nuclear weapons and delivery systems. The need for Pakistan to disperse its weapons and decentralise control to prevent an effective Indian first strike becomes all the more greater. This compulsion is not lessened by India's No First Use pledge whose practical effect in a context where missile flight time is less than six minutes and in certain cases as little as three minutes, is negligible.

6) Neither country has had the time or ability to develop the kind of sophisticated and time-tested mechanisms of early warning and caution vis-a-vis possible false alerts that the USA and USSR were able to develop over decades. Moreover, the general technological-safety levels of India and Pakistan in comparison to what existed in the US and USSR is much lower. Only this week, a major ammunitions dump in central India (Bharatpur in Rajasthan) blew up, the fourth such blow up in the last five years in ordnance related facilities. Unsubstantiated rumour has it that nuclear-related materials were stored underground where the latest blow up took place. In any case, technological-military mishaps of a serious nature are routine in both countries.

To sum up: the India-Pakistan nuclear face-off is for both logical and historical reasons the most serious such face-off anywhere in the world. The region is the most serious potential nuclear flashpoint in the world for reasons that include but also go beyond the Kashmir conflict. This is where a nuclear conflagration whether by accident, miscalculation or design is most likely to take place.

The Response of the P-5 Countries

The P-5 response to India's (and Pakistan's) nuclearization needs to be clearly understood. Only China remains adamantly opposed to what has happened and demands full roll-back consistently and unequivocally. The US (and the other NWSs) may have this as their formal, occasionally declared position which will no doubt be repeated at the NPT review conference. But their practical relations and negotiations with India belie this. For Russia and France it is business as usual. Russia is selling VVER reactors to India that it cannot set up in its own country. France is trying to sell Mirages and other military equipment to India (and also to Pakistan) even promising to hardwire them to carry bombs if necessary or so it has been publicly reported. In any case, neither of these two countries is out to put serious pressure on India and Pakistan to reverse its nuclear trajectory. Britain will simply follow the US lead. The US in the name of a practical realism has accepted de facto India's (and Pakistan's) nuclear status but wants India, particularly (since it sets the pace vis-a-vis Pakistan), to be a 'responsible' nuclear power. In principle, India is very amenable to this but in one area there is a serious tension in this regard between US desires and possible Indian ambitions. This has to do with the question of how minimum is India's demand for a minimum deterrent? Namely how complicating a factor for the US's global agenda and geostrategic and nuclear perspectives are Indian ambitions, particularly its potential nuclear competition and desire to have a 'credible deterrent' against China? In this context, the semi-official 'Draft Nuclear Doctrine' (its formulation was mandated by the National Security Council of India and was made public in Sept. 1999 but has not yet been officially accepted or endorsed) has definitely disturbed the US. The
DND portrays India's nuclear ambitions has both very great and completely unconstrained. As a statement of intentions it shows a programme that is open-ended and potentially at least out to match that of any of the NWSs.

Elsewhere, US desire for ‘responsibility’ translates into Indian acceptance of export controls on dual-use technologies via existing mechanisms, Indian acceptance of the CTBT and its involvement in Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) negotiations. To all three, this Indian government has no principled objections but regarding the last two it has specific problems and orientations. On the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), there is no 'national consensus' or all-party consensus and the ruling government does not yet want to risk the domestic opprobrium of going it alone to sign and ratify the CTBT. Besides the failure of the US Senate to ratify the CTBT lets off the hook somewhat and gives New Delhi more time to try and negotiate more 'pay-offs' from the US in return for an eventual Indian signature. Those payoffs include de facto acceptance of India’s nuclear status, access to dual-use technologies, and other possible material, technological, and diplomatic benefits. On the FMCT, the Indian calculation is simple. These negotiations are likely to be prolonged so there is still time for India to go on producing and stockpiling weapons grade fissile materials for a 'minimum credible deterrent whose limits are still the subject of an intense and undecided internal debate. Furthermore, India joins hands with the other NWSs in wanting the issue of stockpiles out of the FMCT negotiations. Pakistan concerned with the asymmetry between itself and India in the matter of fissile materials does want the stockpiles issue to be considered in a way which might redress the perceived imbalance between itself and India. In any case the Indian calculation is that the FMCT negotiations, slowed down as they are, afford it an opportunity to present itself as 'responsible' without as yet committing itself to any decision regarding early ending of production or even having to stipulate any quantitative limit to its 'minimum deterrent'.

But on the two key unwritten rules for membership, formal or informal of the nuclear club, India has no problems with whatsoever. These two rules symbolise the basic unity of the members of this club regardless of what other intra-club tensions there may be between different NWSs.

The two rules are a) once in the club make it difficult for others to enter, i.e. agree to oppose non-proliferation. This means the central focus of all nuclear weapons-related discussions and negotiations internationally should be non-proliferation not disarmament. b) The other rule is, under no circumstances let the NNWSs, especially the most seriously active and committed among them, set the pace or pattern of whatever discussions/negotiations there are on disarmament and reduction matters.

What Must Now Be Done
There is need for both regional and more universal perspectives of restraint and disarmament. The South Asian perspective at this juncture should be for a Nuclear freeze, i.e. no induction, no further weaponization, no mating, no deployment, no further production of weapons grade fissile materials or tritium, and proper public accountability and transparency in regard to meeting these demands. Apart from this being a unifying anti-nuclearist position within India and its anti-nuclear groups/activists, etc. there still exists some space and time for such a perspective. This is created by the following factors as well as whatever pressure internal and external can be created to halt India and Pakistan where they are or to slow down their forward movement on the nuclear issue.

i) Pakistan’s official position is that they will not be the first to openly deploy but will do so only if India does so first.

ii) India has significant problems in developing an adequate command and control system and is unlikely to rush into open deployment before the resolution of such difficulties.

iii) India is aware of its relative isolation and is obviously closing watching the international trends in regard to the disarmament issue, including what happens at the NPT review conference as an indicator (even though neither India nor Pakistan is attending even as
It follows then, that there is an important role for other countries, especially the NNWSs to intervene to prevent further deterioration in the South Asian nuclear situation. The NWSs or the countries which are their military allies have no credibility in calling for South Asian roll-back or disarmament when their own nuclear-related behaviour has been so bad. However, the other NNWSs, especially the NAC (New Agenda Coalition) should have no qualms about making their political opposition to South Asian nuclearization, as unequivocally, as aggressively and as repeatedly as possible. Indeed, their doing so will have important effects on elite and general public opinion in India and Pakistan. It can only do good for the cause of regional disarmament.

The other area for movement must be the strengthening or (perhaps more accurately) resurrection of the post-Cold War disarmament momentum. This means holding the line on the ABM not letting it get weakened or scuppered, getting the CTBT fully ratified, pressing for the emergence of some kind of multilateral body empowered to discuss, if not negotiate global disarmament, going forwards in the FMCT negotiations duly addressing the issue of stockpiles, pushing NATO to revise its doctrine, question and reject NATO nuclear sharing arrangements, negative security assurances issue, etc. In short, all the things that need to be done to tighten up and strengthen the NWSs commitments to Article I, II and VI of the NPT as well as the other restraint and reduction efforts going on or pressed for. In one sentence, to push (with the help and strengthening of forces like the NAC and their connections with NGOs) for a shifting of the focus from non-proliferation to disarmament!

This will be the best way for all those forces, institutions and governments outside of South Asia to also provide an input into bringing about greater nuclear sanity in South Asia itself.

* For a more detailed coverage of all the following six points in regard to the distinctiveness of the India-Pakistan nuclear face-off, please refer to the recent book by Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, *New Nukes: India, Pakistan and Global Nuclear Disarmament*, published by Olive Branch Press, Northampton, MA, USA, 2000, published in 1999 by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, as *South Asia On A Short Fuse*.