


7-9-2015

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Recommended Citation

Shankar, Vijay (2015) "Subcontinental Nuclear Instability: The Spiralling Nightmare," *International Journal of Nuclear Security*. Vol. 1: No. 1, Article 8.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/v77h1gg1>

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/ijns/vol1/iss1/8>

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Subcontinental Nuclear Instability: The Spiralling Nightmare

Vijay Shankar

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Abstract

The scheme that carved out world order during the Cold War was a pitched battle for “containment” against burgeoning communism. In turn, rationality gave way to the threat of catastrophic nuclear force as the basis of stability. If there is an historical lesson to be learned from that experience, it is that stability begins with serious and sustained dialogue among leadership—the alternative being what John F. Kennedy termed “the peace of the grave.” An appraisal of the contemporary global state of nuclear affairs suggests that the three pillars of nuclear stability—non-proliferation, control of fissile material production, and transparency of nuclear arsenals—are wobbly. In the absence of global support for these pillars, the answer may lie in reconstituting a framework for détente.

I. Introduction

In the Subcontinental context there looms a nuclear nightmare. It takes the form of a hair-trigger, opaque nuclear arsenal that has embraced tactical use under decentralized military control, is steered by an ambiguous doctrine, and guided by a military strategy that carouses with non-state actors. A weakened civilian leadership in Pakistan that is incapable of action to remove the military finger from the nuclear trigger can do little to dispel the nightmare. A singular feature of the deterrent relationship in the region is its tri-polar character. As is well known today, it is the collusive nature of the Sino-Pak nuclear relationship that created and sustains the Pakistan nuclear weapons program. This is in stark contrast to the Indian nuclear doctrine, which went public in 2003.

The unleashing of Islamic radicals in the wake of US withdrawal from the Af-Pak region, and their mounting internalization in the Pakistan military and political establishments, brings into question the state and motivation of the nuclear command-and-control structures there. Stability in this context would suggest the importance of not only reinforcing assured retaliation to nuclear violence, but, at the same time, for Indian leadership to bring about a consensus between both China and the US to persuade Pakistan to harmonize with foundational rules of nuclear conduct and re-orient the Sino-Pak nuclear collusion.

II. “Peace of the Grave”

In September 1950, as the Soviet Union’s nuclear weapons capability emerged, the US Secretaries of Defense and State put forward a report titled National Security Council - 68 [1]. This report, in general terms, informed US perception of the world order till the end of the Cold War and, in particular, defined and drove doctrines for the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The 35 years preceding NSC-68 had witnessed some of the most cataclysmic historical events: two devastating World Wars, two revolutions that mocked the global status quo, collapse of five empires, and the decline and degeneration of two imperial powers. The dynamics that brought about these changes also wrought drastic transformation in power distribution, which had now decisively gravitated to the US and the USSR. The belief that the USSR was motivated by a ideology antithetical to that of the West, and driven by ambitions of global domination, provided logic for the verdict that conflict and violence would become endemic. Thus was presented to the world a choice either to watch the incarceration of civilization or to take sides in a just cause to confront the possibility.

As a corollary to the doctrine of massive nuclear retaliation to Soviet aggression, in 1954, defence planners fine-tuned a policy, the emphasis of which was nuclear war fighting. The concept was that nuclear weapons would be used along a controlled escalatory ladder. This strategic notion would in time be enshrined in the nuclear doctrine of “flexible response.” The new approach, as outlined in NSC policy Document 5440, stated:

“The ability to apply force selectively and flexibly will become increasingly important in maintaining the morale and will of the free world to resist aggression. As the fear of nuclear war grows, the United States and its allies must never allow themselves to get into the position where they must choose between (a) not responding to local aggression and (b) applying force in a way which our own people or our allies would consider entails undue risk of nuclear devastation. However, the United States cannot afford to preclude itself from using nuclear weapons even in a local situation, if such use will best advance U.S. security interests. In the last analysis, if confronted by the choice of (a) acquiescing in Communist aggression or (b) taking measures risking either general war or loss of allied support, the United States must be prepared to take these risks if necessary for its security”[2].

Nuclear weapons had been drawn into the ambit of preferred weapons for waging any military conflict. At the same time, leaders recklessly believed that the intensity of nuclear engagement could be calibrated along a predetermined escalatory ladder. Only after the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 did it dawn upon President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev how close they had come to nuclear war, on account of a misshapen military-led nuclear policy and a doctrine based on the dangerous idea that nuclear war could be controlled, and won. Writing to President Kennedy on the catastrophic dangers of implementing such a nuclear strategy, Khrushchev suggested:

“(…) we and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war (…) a moment may come when that knot will be tied so tight that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it, and then it will be necessary to cut that knot, and what that would mean is not for me to explain to you, because you yourself understand perfectly of what terrible forces our countries dispose. Consequently, if there is no intention to tighten that knot and thereby to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot. We are ready for this”[3].

Kennedy shared this distress, and in a series of private letters, he and Khrushchev opened a dialogue on banning nuclear testing. Thus began a progression of political moves and agreements that sought to dampen the risk of a nuclear war, contain the proliferation of nuclear weapons, do away with tactical nuclear weapons, limit strategic arms, cut arsenal size, and indeed bring stability to nuclear relations. The historical lesson to be learned is that nuclear risk reduction and

stability begins with serious and sustained dialogue among leadership. The alternative is, as Kennedy put it, “the peace of the grave”[4].

III. State of Play: Non Proliferation, Fissile Material Cut-offs, and Transparency

Stable nuclear relationships between nations are characterised by a congruence of views on proliferation of weapon and vector technologies, fissile material control, and transparency around the strategic underpinnings that motivate weapons programs. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), negotiated in 1968 and entering into force in 1970, is the cornerstone of all international efforts to provide stability within the bounds of a global nuclear regulatory system by limiting access to nuclear weapons and ultimately reversing the possession of nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, the NPT is viewed by some nations as flawed in its inequity and inability to cater for global security concerns.

Though its conceptual origin pre-dates the Cuban missile crisis, it was the fragility of the then-extant détente between the two superpowers that pushed leadership towards a pact that would restrict possession of nuclear weapons. Based on a “bargain” that traded denial of nuclear weapons for peaceful-use technologies, the NPT distinguishes between three categories of states: nuclear-weapon states—US, Russia, UK, France, and China; non-nuclear weapons states; and thirdly, states that possess nuclear weapons but are not signatories to the treaty: India, Pakistan, and Israel. The system has not evolved to find a status for this last category of players, whose security needs were neither addressed nor given remission. As far as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is concerned, they have demonstrated possession and withdrew from the treaty in 2003.

Western thinking (by which is implied the nuclear ‘Haves’) on the matter appears, regrettably, to be dominated by two main issues: how best to retain power exclusivity of the Nuclear Club, and the situation in the Middle East—arguably for reasons of a predisposition towards Israel and petro-politics. On the other hand, questions related to nuclear non-proliferation, hazards of non-state actors gaining access to nuclear weapons, and stability of nuclear relations have taken a back seat. The US and Russia, as the states with by far the biggest nuclear arsenals, have shown neither the will nor imagination to formulate a new dispensation that holds nuclear stability as a function of enforceable transparency, and an acceptance of No-First-Use as an inviolable first step towards disarmament.

On the ground, the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is a distant illusion. The US has failed to ratify this treaty, and Russia stands accused of violating the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty[5] that commits both the US and Russia to abolishing their intermediate-range nuclear arms. Thus there is no progress in matters of multilateral nuclear disarmament, and the proliferation of tactical nuclear weapons has taken an upswing[6].¹ Lastly, there are no negotiations or an agreed agenda over stopping the production of fissile material for military purposes. The Geneva Conference on Disarmament that is intended for this last purpose continues to debate the principles that will govern the Treaty [7]. Meanwhile, transparency in arsenals and doctrines has been progressively rendered opaque as nuclear weapon states have found new reasons to enlarge and modernise. In this milieu, “Global Zero”[8] remains a utopian ideal.

¹ In Pakistan, the development of tactical nuclear weapons has become “increasingly central to Pakistani nuclear thinking” in the past few years.

The paralysis in the nuclear disarmament agenda is also symptomatic of the growing perception that, in an uncertain world, nuclear weapons provide a persuasive argument for strategic stability. During the Cold War, strategic doctrines relied heavily on nuclear weapons for their deterrent effect. This resulted in a veritable freeze in the probability of war in Europe. Today, while the picture may have changed due to tensions of a multipolar world and the competitive tyranny of economics, the need to underscore the boundaries of interstate behavior remains imperative. In the absence of globally accepted regulatory regimes, conflictual situations are likely to arise—and indeed have arisen. These conflicts must be constrained, ensuring that they do not escalate beyond limited warfare. This is where the deterrent value of nuclear weapons play a role until such time that an alternate disincentive can be devised. It is also for this reason that nations demand reliable extended nuclear deterrence [9].

An apocalyptic scenario is shaping up. Consider the escalating friction in the South and East China Sea, the war in Ukraine—where a nuclear-armed Moscow has arrogated Crimea (and parts of eastern Ukraine) in defiance of the December 1994 Budapest Memorandum [10]—the irrational nature of North Korea's nuclear threats, the continued existence of nuclear black market networks of A.Q. Khan notoriety [11], the appearance of non-state nuclear actors, and China's program of nuclear proliferation—which has nurtured and continues to sustain and enlarge Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. For many nations, this has reinforced the impression that possession of nuclear weapons adds up to strength, protection, and inviolability—while renouncing nuclear weapons can threaten the very existence of a country (the case of US action in Libya and Iraq as opposed to North Korea is edifying). As the importance of nuclear weapons increases in a geopolitical environment of uncertainty, the prospects of stability become bleaker.

In the truancy of global support for the three pillars of nuclear security, namely, non-proliferation, control of fissile material production, and transparency of nuclear arsenals, the answer may lie in reconstituting a framework for détente.

IV. The Subcontinental Nuclear Situation: Makings of a Nightmare

The crumbling of the Soviet Union in the last decade of the twentieth century and the end of the Cold War brought down the curtains on the distinctive basis of global stability as a zero-sum game which, in the extreme, rested on mutually inflicted, assured nuclear holocaust. In its wake, scholarly works suggested the emergence of one world and an end to the turbulent history of humanity's ideological evolution (Fukuyama 1992). With China's global arrival, some saw a multi-polar world. Others saw a clash of civilizations in the First Iraq War, the continuing war in the Levant, the admission of former Soviet satellite nations into NATO, and the splintering of Yugoslavia (Huntington 1996). However, these illusions were mostly dispelled within a decade; none of them were sufficient for understanding and coming to grips with the realities of the post-Cold War world. The paradigm of the day (if there is one) is the tensions of the multi polar; the tyranny of economics; the anarchy of expectations; and polarization of peoples along religio-cultural lines; all compacted in the cauldron of globalization in a state of continuous technology agitation. An uncertain geo-political brew has emerged under the shadow of the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The problem with nuclear weapons in an uncertain world is the complexity of convincing decision makers that no conceivable advantage can be achieved from a nuclear exchange. For, as long as one side believes that there is some value to be had through the deployment and use of nuclear weapons, indeterminate fears creep in that set into motion a chain reaction, raising the degree of calamitous risk. Military planners are familiar with the fact that risk assessment is an

imperative in the development of a strategic plan. The process is marked by persistent motivation to not only eliminate uncertainties and bring about balance between political objectives, consequences and resources, but also to ensure that the probability of a strategy's success, and the benefits that accrue, outweigh the hazards of failure. In the nuclear arena, we note that strategic imbalance is intrinsic to the undertaking. From the start, the equation is irrevocably unstable, caused by the fact that between nuclear weapon states when nuclear resources are used, escalatory control is first lost and its impact will invariably be to obliterate the political objectives that were being sought. This is the reality of nuclear weapons. Their value lies in non-usage. Their aim is avoidance of nuclear war, and it is futile to try and use them to attain political goals.

Strategic collaboration with a potential enemy is not a concept that comes naturally to leadership, and the idea of sovereignty rejects the thought of it. Nonetheless it can be no nation's case to destroy the very purpose that polity sets out to attain, and therefore strategic empathy lies at the heart of nuclear stability. A nuclear deterrent relationship is founded entirely on rationality. On the part of the 'deterree' there is rationality in the conviction of disproportionate risks of hostile action, and on the part of the deterrer, there is rationality of purpose and transparency in confirming the reality of the risks involved, in a manner that strategic miscalculations are avoided. The exceptional feature of this transaction is that the roles are reversible provided it is in the common interest to maintain stability of the relationship. The test of a durable deterrent relationship is its ability to withstand three dynamics that are common to contemporary politics, significantly so on the Subcontinent. First, the deterrent itself must be stable; by which is implied its command, control and doctrinaire underpinnings must be unwavering and transparent. There can be no duality of control or influence. Inconsistencies increase the temptation to take pre-emptive action. Second, in a crisis, either conventional or sub-conventional, the propensity to "reach for the nuclear trigger" must be restrained. Third, the intrusion of technology into the nuclear calculus causes a predicament, for it invites covertness but its impact demands transparency.

The most alarming form of a nuclear nightmare could be described this way: a hair-trigger, opaque nuclear arsenal controlled by a dispensation that has embraced tactical use under decentralised military control, is steered by an ambiguous doctrine, and is guided by a military strategy that carouses with non-state actors. This is the situation upon the Subcontinent.

The effect of a weakened civilian leadership in Pakistan that appears incapable of action to remove the military finger from the nuclear trigger; the active attendance and involvement of jihadists in swaying strategy; technology intrusions brought in by covert means; absence or at best ambiguity in doctrinal underpinnings that make Pakistan's nuclear posture indecipherable, and the alarming reality of "intention to use"—in aggregate, all this make the status quo untenable [12]. The need for change in the manner in which we transact nuclear business is urgent. Strategic restraint predicated on failsafe controls, verification in a transparent environment, providing logic to size and nature of the arsenal, and putting the brakes on the slide to nuclear capriciousness are the imperatives to stabilizing a deterrent relationship on the Subcontinent.

But the catch is, how does one begin a meaningful nuclear dialogue with a weak Pakistan civilian establishment that does not control its military—which, in turn, finds no reason to come to terms with a subordinate role? As Stephen Cohen succinctly put it, "Pakistan will continue to be a state in possession of a uniformed bureaucracy even when civilian governments are perched on the seat of power. Regardless of what may be *desirable*, the army will continue to set the limits on what is

possible in Pakistan” [13].² More recent scholarship on Pakistan’s Army notes that the Army’s revisionist agenda is not restricted to altering the territorial and political status quo in Afghanistan and Kashmir; it is also committed to undermining India’s global position [14].

No scrutiny of the regional nuclear situation can avoid looking at the domestic politics of Pakistan. The establishment’s apparent nurturing of fundamentalist and terrorist organizations as instruments of their military strategy has created a dangerous condition [12]. The vulnerability of their security establishment is suggested by the attacks on Pakistan Naval Ship Mehran, Kamra Air Base, Karachi naval harbour [15] and the assassination of the Punjab Governor; while the recent murderous assault on the Army School in Peshawar and the everyday terror killings are more symptomatic of the free run these elements enjoy across the length and breadth of the country. The withdrawal of US forces from the region and the consequent freeing of Jihadist elements only increases the probability of subversion in the Pakistan establishment—as well as the probability that dangerous elements will gain access to nuclear resources.

V. The Tri-Polar Tangle

A singular feature of the deterrent relationship in the region is its tri-polar character. As is well known today, it is the collusive nature of the Sino-Pak nuclear relationship which created and sustains its nuclear weapons programme [12]. Therefore it is logical to conclude that there exist doctrinal links between the two which permit a duality in China’s nuclear policy; a declared No First Use can readily fall back on Pakistan’s developing First Use capability as far as India is concerned. Such links have apparently made China blind to the dangers of nuclear proliferation, as exemplified by the A.Q. Khan affair. Continued nuclear and missile technology proliferation in-region remains an abiding symptom. What is striking is that despite several incidents over the past decade and a half that could have escalated to the nuclear level, security establishments in China, India, and Pakistan have not set themselves to the task of preparing concrete perspectives on the issue of nuclear stability, barring endorsing the idea. China’s proliferation policy may have been driven by balance of power logic, but in today’s geopolitical circumstance it serves only to diminish its global standing and in time may rebound on its ambitions. On the perilous side is induction of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs), by way of Chinese collaboration [16]. The consequences of this are devolution of control and ever-increasing ambiguities.

Pakistan has no declared nuclear doctrine and has adopted ambiguity as central to their nuclear policy. TNWs in their arsenal would suggest that conventional principles of war apply (which places a premium on elements such as surprise, offensive action and deception). This sets into motion, on the one hand, a military dynamic that provides the incentive for use of nuclear weapons and a reactionary development of a first-strike capability—while, on the other hand, the adversary strives to generate a counterforce potential. Ambiguity has been used as an offset for conventional inferiority with the belief that control over escalation is possible. This is a fallacy due to the nature of the weapon. Covert technology intrusions, coupled with ambiguity of intent and the mounting influence of radical Islamists on policy, has geometrically increased the hazards of unintended use.

Contrastingly, India’s nuclear doctrine was made public in January 2003. The doctrine presents two perspectives. The first part deals with “form;” with nuclear war avoidance as the leitmotif, No First Use (NFU) develops into a natural choice. The logic of self-preservation and of power equations demanded that relations not be held to ransom on account of an inability to respond in a

² Cohen has also noted the widely-held belief within the army that terror, as sanctioned by the Quran, is a legitimate instrument of state power. This intensifies the predicament. See Cohen pp. 118-119.

manner to deter convincingly, and therefore the arsenal had to be palpably credible at a minimum level. It also includes certain philosophical goals which underscore belief in the ultimate humanity of things. The second part of the doctrine deals with “substance.” Operationalizing the deterrent and Command and Control are main themes. Command and Control was arranged in a manner that there existed clear division between Control and Custodian, with multiple redundancy and dual-rule release authorization at every level.

VI. Failure of the US Af-Pak Policy and the Unleashing of Radical Islamists

When states involve themselves for years on end in irregular, decentralised warfare such as the Afghan-Pakistan situation, which has been in a condition of violent chaos since 1979, the idea of central control is anaemic. The breakdown of the region into several warring worlds has opened the geography of the expanse to historical fractures that the politics of the last century failed to reconcile. Today, a simmering Baluchistan finds little mutuality in a Punjab-dominated Pakistan; Pakthunwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) cling to religio-ethnic links with eastern Afghanistan that, in turn, refute the modern idea of statehood within Pakistan. Inside Pakistan there is evidence of considerable Jihadist sentiment against India and the West and finally, Afghan resistance to US presence and the establishment of a dispensation alien to the recent past has left an insurgency engorged with modern weapons and enabling technologies [17].

As early as 2003 the USA set out two major policy goals towards Pakistan; first, holding it as an indispensable ally in its war in Afghanistan, and second, ending the proliferation of nuclear weapons in and from the region. However, over a decade later, both goals have failed. There are confirmed reports that the Pakistan military has persistently deceived US forces while elements within the former either lack the will to combat the insurgency or are actively involved with the jihadists [17]. On the nuclear front, the rapid setting up of the unsafeguarded Khushab series (II, III and IV) nuclear reactors with Chinese collaboration, having no other purpose than production of weapon-grade plutonium, development of tactical nuclear weapons, and the uninhibited growth of their arsenal, do not inspire belief in US ability to exercise any stewardship over Pakistan’s nuclear stockpile. The inexplicable disappearance of key nuclear scientists who had recorded liaisons with the Al Qaeda remains alarming and must cause anxiety [18]. With US involvement in the Af-Pak region greatly diminished, and their focus on nuclear proliferation much sharper, the time is ripe for the US to address Pakistan’s nuclear posture. No other nation has the power to apply substantial pressure on their economy as well as military establishment. But the question really is, will the US be willing to alter their strategic policy in the region and orient it towards controlling and regulating Pakistan’s nuclear posture? This is a particularly urgent point, since their experience would suggest that no amount of resources either in terms of money, material, or coercion has brought about a change in the intriguing hand that Pakistan is playing. China can also influence nuclear policies in Pakistan; unfortunately, they are internal to the situation, having actively promoted and nurtured the Pakistan program. Unless Islamic fundamentalism directly threatens the restive western provinces of China, or there is loss of confidence in the integrity of Pakistan’s nuclear command and control system, China is unlikely to abandon Pakistan or its nuclear establishment. This complex situation leaves the prospects for nuclear stability bleak.

The “Global War on Terror” may be over, but the war *by* terror continues with unabated fury [19]. The civil war in Syria and the unbeaten insurgency in the Af-Pak region have become the hatchery for the next generation of terrorists, and jihadist terror organizations are gaining ever-more money, equipment, recruits, and, most importantly, global radical influence through social media and other penetrating tools of indoctrination. The current American Af-Pak strategy is predicated on a forlorn hope of increasing the size and effectiveness of the Afghan National

Security Force to a level where it could in fact discharge security responsibilities (despite the Iraq experience suggesting otherwise). Achieving the six operational objectives that had been set for the US military mission in Afghanistan, centred on neutralizing the power and influence of the Taliban, have long since been abandoned [20].³

Given such circumstances, instability will remain an abiding feature of the politics of the region, reflected in the domination of politics by fundamentalist elements. The rise of the Islamic State Caliphate (IS) and the current implosions in a number of Islamic States— from Libya, covering a large geographic swath right up to the borders of Pakistan—serve further to destabilize and vitiate matters. Radical Islamic terrorists see the possession of a nuclear weapon not just as a symbol of power and an instrument of deterrence, but as a means to destroy and dislocate an order that has so wilfully kept the faithful under political, economic, and spiritual subjugation. In this frame of reference, nations that have been singled out for retribution are the US, India, and Israel [21]. It is in these countries that the probability of a nuclear device being detonated by radical Islamic terror groups looms large.

An Islamist takeover of Afghanistan and the country's subsequent turn into a hotbed of international terrorism and proliferation may not be a certainty—but it is a probability. It has also reignited Pakistan's quest for "strategic depth" in Afghanistan [12]. While there is considerable confusion as to what exactly the implications are, despite its all-pervasive manifestation in Pakistan's security narrative, the concept is perhaps best generalized as a geographic imprint that confers proprietary rights over dominant influence in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan neither has the economic muscle nor does the army-led establishment enjoy leadership eminence or the political clout to realise such a vision. Under these circumstances, Pakistan's carousing with jihadists and non-state actors must come as no surprise. The relationship has no other predisposition than to put the status quo into disarray. Global double standards on proliferation and persistent tendentious views on the subject have given selective legitimacy to this liaison, never mind that it has taken the world another step closer to a maverick conflagration in the immediacy of a nuclear arsenal.

Not only do current policies and attitudes to proliferation generate exceptionably high risks of a nuclear attack, but there is an inevitability emerging if fissionable materials are globally not secured, retrieved, and accounted for.

My narrative in this section has suggested that the dynamics of armed conflict are moving beyond State-to-State armed struggle into a realm where the real threat of apocalypse comes from nuclear weapons in the hands of anarchic groups. These amorphous factions are driven by an ideology that seeks the destruction of what it considers antagonistic to its beliefs. The Nation State, on the other hand, is rationally driven by the will to survive. Perpetuation of the State is a national interest that is held supreme even if it means compromises that may cause profound changes. Radical terror groups do not operate under such existential constraints. In these conditions, the

³ The Af-Pak strategy review of Nov. 2009 identifies six operational objectives for the military mission, (quoted in Woodward 2010):

- Reversing Taliban momentum.
- Denying Taliban access to and control of key population centers and lines of communication.
- Disrupting the Taliban in areas outside the secure area and preventing Al Qaeda from gaining sanctuary in Afghanistan.
- Degrading the Taliban to levels manageable by the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF).
- Increasing the size of the ANSF and transfer security responsibilities to the Afghan Govt. on a timeline that will permit decrease of US troop presence by July 2011.
- Build selectively capacity of Afghan Govt. in the defence and interior sector.

unleashing of Islamic radicals in the wake of US withdrawal from the Af-Pak region—and their mounting internalization in the Pakistan military and political establishments—brings into question the state and motivation of the nuclear command-and-control structures in Pakistan. In the meanwhile, Pakistan sits on a rapidly increasing nuclear arsenal, burgeoning stockpile of fissile material, an ambiguous nuclear doctrine, and an emerging tactical nuclear capability.

VII. Orientation of Sino-Pak Nuclear Collusion

The key to GHQ Rawalpindi's compliance with accepted norms of nuclear behaviour lies in Beijing. And the direction in which Sino-Pak collusion is headed will, to a large extent, influence nuclear stability in the region. If the alliance was intended (as it now appears) to nurture a first use capability in order to keep sub-continental nuclear stability on the boil then the scope for achieving lasting stability is that much weakened. However, the current political situation in Pakistan, as has been highlighted, represents a dangerous condition since its establishment nurtures fundamentalist and terrorist organizations as instruments of their policies in Afghanistan and Kashmir [12]. The essence of Pakistan's rogue links will, unmistakably, seduce the IS into the subcontinent, underscoring the distressing probability of the IS extending its reach into a nuclear arsenal. Islamic jihadist elements have already sworn to obtain nuclear weapons [22]. At a time when the politico-ethnic situation in western China remains fragile and the fanatical outburst of xenophobia advanced by the IS has stretched south and eastward to influence jihadi factions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a nuclear armed Islamic State is an alarming prospect which China cannot be blind to, nor can it be in China's interest to persist with the promotion of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.

VIII. Conclusion: A Prescription for Nuclear Stability

The challenge before the international community is clear. To put the nuclear genie back into the bottle is not realistic. At the same time, to roll back the links that jihadist elements have established with the Pakistan Army, and to convince them that it is the radical Islamists who pose the existential threat to that nation rather than India, is not a pragmatic proposition since it runs counter to the Army's foundational narrative. A movement in Pakistan towards democracy and weakening of the Army's hold on the establishment, as history has shown, remains an unlikely event. Rapprochement with India would, on the other hand, diminish its own internal pre-eminence and therefore is anathema to the Army. All of this suggests that nuclear stability will remain hostage to the Army's revisionist and self-serving agenda.

Against the reality of conventional war with its limited goals and moderated ends—and the unlikelihood of it being outlawed in the foreseeable future—the separation of the conventional from the nuclear is a logical severance. Nuclear weapons are to deter and not to use; intent is the key; coherence and transparency are basic. These remain the foundational principles to which a nuclear weapons state must adhere. However, given the politics of the region, historical animosities, rising influence of Islamic radicals, and the persisting dominance of the military in Pakistan, the dangers of adding nuclear malfeasance to military perfidy is more than just a possibility. Stability in this context would then suggest the importance of not only reinforcing assured retaliation to nuclear violence, but at the same time for Indian leadership to bring about a consensus among both China and the US to persuade Pakistan to harmonize with foundational rules of nuclear conduct and at the same time bring about a re-orientation in the Sino-Pak nuclear collusion. The alternative to this proposition is Kennedy's "peace of the grave."

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