



STRATEGIC SITUATION : INDIA PAKISTAN

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Over the past year concern has grown in think tanks and seminar/track II circuits about need to explore bilateral nuclear arms control/restraint between India and Pakistan so that their standoff can be less prone to instability. Paul Bracken articulates such concerns in his profound new book, "The Second Nuclear Age" where he advances the view that the Second Nuclear Age, i.e., of the age when nuclear weapons spread outside the cold war theatre, may be far more intractable. Bracken argues that the emerging global nuclear system will make it impossible to eliminate nuclear weapons and that the only solution is to "manage" the problem. His argument essentially rests on the impossibility of persuading the new nuclear nations like Pakistan, North Korea or India and Israel; and possibly Iran to give up their weapons and consequently no giving up by the older nuclear weapon states – even if some of them, like USA, might find those weapons useless. Of course, there are others within US who, as the recent New York Times editorial asserts, would "ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change". But as regards South Asia, they all voice fears that in South Asia no effort was underway towards even "management" of growing nuclear stockpiles of India and Pakistan.

Closer home an implicit despondence about likeness of the post Soviet-Afghanistan and the situation anticipated after 2014 might inspire search of much responsibility to fix the problems within South Asia, among other things, through some tangible progress in engagement of these two countries. However, the reality check in South Asia is hardly reassuring on any count about any such engagement. An analysis is attempted here on how India and Pakistan are placed to see the nuclear predicament in the ensuing denouement. The analysis

comprises a many sided view of how each of them separately and in their bilaterals approach the issues and how external parties view and influence them.

On the Situation in India and Pakistan.

It will be useful to begin with short narratives of India and Pakistan about their own situation and perspective.

For India it is India's due place in world which figures high for a country of its size, democracy, pluralism and secular ethos as also its economy and mammoth reach and contribution to the UN system. At the same time India is acutely aware of its substantial limitations too as a developing country and the categorical imperative for internal comprehensive transformation of its socioeconomic situation. India expects, nonetheless, due recognition of its prowess in nuclear, space, and other High Technology, the reach and span of its human resource potential and its fast emerging economy. India's nuclear deterrent as integral to this whole grand strategy provides assurance against bullying or blackmailing in a difficult and uncertain post-proliferation neighbourhood.

As for Pakistan, its narrative is that of the sole nuclear armed Islamic nation and articulates a no-holds-barred quest to be the peer and rival of India. Its profile as a state has been characterized

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by the Army's hold on political economy. Pakistan has acute sensitivity about its identity and in recent decades has pushed identity politics to extremes. Pakistan is going through a phase of critical internal instability and economic mess and grappling with extremists and terrorists. At the same time it is ambivalent on jihad & epicenters of terrorism within its territory and serious allegations about it

using terrorism as instrument of state policy. It views its nuclear weapons as instrument for safeguarding its ambition and national security; threats to which in its assessment come from India.

India is six times that of Pakistan, and its economy even larger. Pakistan professes nonetheless to match India in virtually every sphere. The region straddles nuclear brinkmanship ever since Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear capability and empirical tendency to pull India down.

Manifestations of Instability

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As regards possible approaches to dealing with this situation and the problem of stability it is important to recognize the variance in perception of their situation by India and Pakistan, how they take it on board the bilateral dialogue process and, finally, how external powers influence and exercise leverage.

As regards risks that an armed conflict might escalate to nuclear following past instances have particular relevance:

Operation Brass Tracks 1987-

During massive Indian military exercise close to India-Pakistan border Pakistan panic-mobilized troops raising risk of border clashes. Abdul Qadir Khan revealed to an Indian journalist in London that Pakistan had the bomb, conveying an implicit threat of nuclear flare up. Both sides bilaterally negotiated de-escalation.

Gates Mission 1990 - After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan Pakistan diverted jihadi fighters to Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir causing unprecedented extremist violence which led India, in turn, to enhance troops deployment. US Deputy Secretary of Defence Robert Gates visited in May 1990 to defuse the situation, aggravated by revelation about Pakistani nuclear bomb.

Kargil War 1999 - Pakistani regular troops dressed as jihadis occupied Indian side of the line of control (LOC) in Kashmir controlling tactically critical heights in Kargil. India mobilized its Army and Air Force to vacate occupation through fierce battles; risking nuclear escalation.

Operation Parakram 2001-2002 - Following terrorist attack on India's parliament in-session in December 2001

which was traced to Pakistan, India mobilized troops on wartime alert on entire border; which led to a Pakistani tit for tat response with nuclear threat. Troops faced each other for ten months during which tension peaked twice. Situation was deescalated in October 2002.

Crisis after events of November 26, 2008 - Armed Pakistani seaborne terrorists launched planned attack on Mumbai city. They fired indiscriminately at peak time in busy central train station and held hundreds hostage in five star hotels, a restaurant and a Jewish Guest House. Indian commando operations killed terrorists and released hostages but more than two hundred including foreign tourists lost lives. Indian government had ample proof of Pakistani army and ISI conducting operations and a Pakistani terrorist was captured alive by Mumbai Police. Enraged nation came close to serious escalation. Pakistani stock denials were accompanied by nuclear threats.

Pakistan's stated policy posture of readiness for nuclear weapons' use has been a key factor in these crises.

As regards Instability in Pakistan, stories are galore about Talibanisation in Pakistani army, the growing cost in terms

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of human lives, material and troops of Pakistan fighting Taliban, politics in Pakistan being jihadi-driven, with leading political formations virtually having their backs to the wall, and two serious instances when extremists attacked heavily guarded military installations near Islamabad

and Karachi leading to apprehension that jihadis might gain access to nuclear weapons .

An aggravation in all these cases involves risks of nuclear weapons use. Pakistan has no nuclear doctrine as such but has operational India-specific posture to use nuclear weapons if, as averred by one senior Pakistani defense official, certain redlines were crossed, namely if:

- Pakistan is attacked and large territory conquered;
- large part of Air/Land forces destroyed;
- economic strangling done by India;
- domestic Political destabilization or subversion pushed by India.

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As regards accidental or unauthorized use Pakistan's affirmation of total control on its weapons has been repeated at the highest levels of its strategic command,

the army and political leadership. Its recent assertiveness through tests of short range missiles for battlefield use, with implied pre-delegation has increased risks of accidental use..

India's Nuclear Doctrine is that of no-first-use but includes assured massive retaliation in the event of a first strike with nuclear weapons against India. India also remains committed to negotiated nuclear disarmament and elimination of nuclear weapons as integral to its doctrine. It attaches importance to an updated Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan for a nuclear weapon free world.

Both India and Pakistan espouse credible minimum deterrent. Pakistan's deterrent is unabashedly India-centric. India defines its deterrent as essential to meet any threat (without naming a country) of nuclear or other WMDs.

India and Pakistan: Different Approaches

Indian approach consists of using diplomatic means to ensure stopping of anti India terrorist acts originating in Pakistan, trial and conviction of accused of 26/11, including LeT Chief. India considers this critical to reducing trust-deficit between the two. India nonetheless favours engagement and dialogue to build trust, promotes expansion of bilateral trade, welcomes promised MFN status by Pakistan and stands for qualified non-reciprocity in trade concessions, stresses people to people connectivity and has engaged Pakistan in a bilateral dialogue on CBMs, albeit an interrupted one. India considers its security matrix vastly different from Pakistan's and finds the role of external military, nuclear and missiles related assistance to Pakistan an exacerbating factor.

Pakistan maintains stout denial of involvement in anti India terrorism and acts as victim of terrorism. It demands conflict resolution and dispute settlement with India and attributes all problems to their absence. Pakistan is reluctant to expanding trade and people to people contact. It asserts that its support to terrorists in J&K is political and will remain undiminished and it seeks external powers' role in every which way to attain parity with India. Pakistan amasses nuclear warheads & missiles aimed at India.

Both countries have been in talks with each other off and on. Bilateral dialogue has been interrupted however due to terrorist acts in India, allegedly from Pakistan. Meetings take place at all levels from the heads of state and governments to the ministerial and of foreign and other

secretaries but progress remains slow and limited. Both lack mutual trust necessary to bilateral moves in security matters but continue dialogue and engagement, and back channel contacts.

External powers have historically impacted their bilateral discourse and the overall situation. Pakistan received unflinching support and military assistance through its cold war ties and nonaligned India found special relationship with the Soviet Union vital. Chinese all weather friendship with Pakistan has meant generous military, nuclear and missile proliferation links that

endure. Pakistan-Afghanistan region has legacy of the great game since 19th century. Both countries seek a major role in UN, Regional and Inter-regional Organizations. AQ Khan's proliferation network- though censured- was expedient in spreading Pakistan's influence in the Islamic countries. Pakistan demands role of UN and external powers in dispute settlement but India insists on bilateral process, as per 1972 Simla Agreement. But on

arms control India insists on multilaterally negotiated, verifiable measures under UN auspices.

External powers have also expressed concerns about failing economies and off and on commentaries include Pakistan (unjustifiably, perhaps) also due to mounting terrorist menace. Business impact of their travel advisories on both sides have been effectively leveraged for crisis management.

On the Way to Dialogue

The deterrent relationship between the two resists parallel with those of the superpowers and is far less autonomous. India and Pakistan have been engaged in dialogue for CBMs both officially as well as in track II. The official dialogues can be broadly characterized by preliminary exploration on need for clarity on doctrines, transparent information exchanges on tests/maneuvers, on avoidance of destabilizing steps, miscalculation, accidental nuclear use, early warnings and securing of hotlines and channels of communications between military commanders like DGMOs.

In the foregoing description of multiple facets of their strategic interrelationship, arms control does not figure since India envisions nuclear arms control or disarmament only in multilateral negotiations under UN with participation and equal stakes of all nuclear armed states.

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India thus supports launching FMCT negotiations in CD. Pakistan is not ready for it. India maintains a unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests as de facto observance of a test ban. Pakistan does the same. The Lahore Joint Declaration of 1999 includes separate mentions of their test moratoria. Signing the CTBT for both does not appear to be on cards at present. India has been on record to say that it would not be in the way of the entry into force of CTBT. India rules out any bilateral measures with Pakistan on CTBT.

It is important to note that to strategic community in India any dialogue with Pakistan without including China in the process does not seem to be tenable since China's nuclear weapons/missiles related assistance and linkages are by now too well documented in strategic literature globally. India's approach to China has been to forge good bilateral relations spanning trade investment and all other dimensions of good neighbourly ties. Discussions between India and China on the nuclear question are narrowly limited by the latter to UN centric multilateral agenda.

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Conclusion

The foregoing description of the broad setting of bilateral relationship of India and Pakistan may have some difference of nuance depending on the observers own frame of reference. Common factors in approaches of both sides and those of external actors have been few and far between except in times of acute crisis when all have managed so far to agree on de-escalation and withdrawing from the brink.

A premature rush for measures mimicking situations elsewhere may have no workable precedent in South Asia largely due to persisting and acute lack of trust, apart from dissimilarities with the models proffered. Caution is in order since inherent risks cannot be dismissed out of hand of any fevered push for *bilateral measures* in present context; even reasonable sounding measures, as in Lahore declaration, having landed up actually abating rather than restraining deterrence instability. Close proximity and short reaction times of both lends an uncertain edge to imperatives for confidence building as the first step towards managing a nuclear South Asia, which is, nonetheless, highly desirable given the nuclear weapons and missiles build up.



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