

## **Nuclear Explosions, Security, Stability and Influence in Global Politics: The Indo-Pak Nuclear Explosions in Perspectives**

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**Abstract:** India's atomic blasts in May this year, which violently shook the nuclear status quo, were driven by its specific security perceptions and a desire to improve its standing in global politics. The response of Pakistan with tests of its own was conditioned by the dynamics of Islamabad's hostile relations with New Delhi. The atomic tests by both countries create a sort of power balance that would contribute to ensuring security stability in the region. The great power status the two countries seek out of the explosions is however, a remote possibility since New Delhi and Islamabad lack the prerequisites of a powerful industrial economy, a modernized stable society and a strong technological state.

### **Introduction**

With India's nuclear explosions on 11 and 13 May, 1998, followed by Pakistan's on 28 May, a new nuclear age has set in global politics. The explosions have not only completely shattered the nuclear status-quo effected by the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), major changes have also occurred in regional and extra regional security and strategic environment. The explosions, moreover, have been conducted at a time when nuclear weapon programs are losing rationality both at regional and global levels. Completely stunned by the atomic tests, the world community has been forthcoming to condemn the nuclear-hungry India and Pakistan.

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Military experts, strategists and academicians generally concerned with the nuclear hangover in South Asia are deeply searching questions like: Why did India decide to explode the devices when no practical rationale justifies it? What are the major advantages the BJP government in Delhi sought to achieve out of it? Will open nuclearization of India and Pakistan promote stability in the South Asian security order or enhance the possible dangers of an all-out nuclear war and mutual annihilation? Are India and Pakistan, with a declared nuclear status, new global powers and poised to exert influence in global politics? This paper is an attempt to seek out answers to these questions.

### **Pakistan's Response to Nuclear Explosions**

India detonated its first nuclear device in 1974, which the late Indian Premier Indira Gandhi pronounced to be "peaceful". After that India has voluntarily practiced a policy of nuclear restraint for about 24 years. But the widely known Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in New Delhi has off-set the record of restraint by openly inducting nuclear weapons into its national defence. Many people believe that the nuclear blasts are nothing less than the outburst of Hindu nationalism the BJP spearheads, and an attempt to hold together the tottering coalition government made up of fractious parties, 17 in all, that disagree on almost every issue except one - the declaration of India as a nuclear power.

The BJP's love for nuclear weapons is no secret. The party manifesto promises to equip India with nuclear teeth and the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee on taking office openly declared that India would adopt the BJP election manifesto's promise to exercise the nuclear option.<sup>1</sup> But will the tests shore

up the coalition government and produce a stronger political platform for Bajpayee?

For one thing, to be sure, there is an exceptionally strong public support for the explosions. A poll of 1000 people in six major cities conducted by *The Times of India* immediately after the first set of tests revealed a staggering 91% of those interviewed approved of the blasts.<sup>2</sup> Hindu extremist leader Bal Thackeray convulsed the stage with what most Indian politicians think : "we need real bombs and not crackers to take on neighbours like Pakistan and China ..... we have to prove that we are not eunuchs".<sup>3</sup> The spontaneous jubilation on the streets of major Indian cities seems to be an indication of common Indian mind spoken out by Bal Thackeray.

Some BJP leaders, sensing the spectacular popularity for the bombs, wanted a quick general election to cash in on the explosions. Mr. Bajpayee, however, remained unconvinced. Two factors perhaps contributed most to disfavour a decision for election. First, the BJP has been in the government only since last March, 1998 and most party rank and file are against an election right at this moment. The Indian voters are also fed up with elections at national level at short gaps that incur huge costs from the national exchequer. Even if an election does look likely, some MP's in Mr. Bajpayee's coalition government may defect to the opposition to form a new government headed by National Front or Congress Party. And quite ironically BJP's attempt to consolidate political power may lead to its easy down fall.<sup>4</sup> Second, the BJP is not an all-India type party, what Congress was once, having popular support and party branches in all states of the Indian Union. Its operations are mainly confined to upper caste-dominated north Indian states like, Uttar

Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh. It still lacks any notable access to South Indians. There is little possibility that BJP can capitalize on the bomb's popularity to win a sweeping electoral victory. Likewise, the blasts are unlikely to come to any effect to hold the coalition unity for long since it absorbs sharply dividing lines on national issues except the bombs. The political benefits of explosions are temporary.

There is another view that the deterioration in India's security environment led to a quick decision for nuclear blasts. The finger is pointed both at Pakistan and China. The BJP leaders insist that it was a matter of vital national security, a precaution against Pakistan's nuclear preparation, a deterrent to ward off Chinese hegemony. In April this year, Pakistan test-fired the Ghauri missile which can carry nuclear war-heads as far as Bangalore in south India. Further it has announced to test-fire the longer-range Ghaznavi and Babri missiles that would make most of India a target. As for China, with which India had been until recently enjoying a bit of rapprochement, Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes has recently proclaimed as the number one potential threat to his nation's security. The BJP officials perceived all this as qualitative changes in strategic terms detrimental to India's security interests and took the decision to shred the missile superiority of Pakistan and to match the nuclear capability of China.

But do the nukes stave off the perceived deterioration in India's security environment ? Definitely it does not make any difference between declared and undeclared nuclear deterrents. Although not openly declared, it was an open secret that India had nuclear weapons in its military arsenal. So had

Pakistan. And it is this deterrent that prevented them from fighting another round of war since 1971, the last time they fought over Bangladesh. Pakistan's Ghauri was not still a match for India's Agni which, with nuclear pay loads, can reach any place in Pakistan, and hit Beijing or Shanghai in China if it is fired from Eastern state of Assam. And China of course, a nuclear power with its first successful atomic test in 1964, just two years after the Sino-Indian war of 1962, is a nuclear superior to India. The nuclear explosions, so to speak, were driven less by security needs, and they induce no qualitative change in pre-blasts and post-blasts India's security environment.

India's decision to explode nuclear devices was definitely propelled by reasons that lie elsewhere. The reasons could be better discovered if we look at the two dominant theories-one developed by independent India's first Premier Jawharlal Nehru and the other by Keshav Hedgewar, the founder of Bombay-based extreme Hindu organization RSS, to explain foreign rule in India for centuries together.

Nehru, after a thorough and careful study of Indian history, arrived at the conclusion that India's repeated defeat to and domination by foreign rulers and powers were due to the lack of modern military technology. He was of the opinion that India's march into the modern age must be accompanied by tremendous advances in modern science and technology with nuclear energy being the dominant symbol. He criticized the 1968 NPT as "atomic colonialism" and refused to sign it on the plea that it was discriminatory. Although in terms of economic progress and military achievements India was not equal to any great powers of the day, Nehru was still determined that it would be so

treated. That actually set the basic premise of his foreign and nuclear policies. The post-Nehru Indian decision-makers - nationalists, socialists or moderates - have nurtured the basic premise and never deflected from the Nehruvian nuclear position.<sup>5</sup>

Keshav Hedgewar, on the other hand, believed that the Hindus were repeatedly conquered by foreign powers because they were weakened by internal dissension. He sought a modern united Hindu society free of caste and religious divides.<sup>6</sup> Hedgewar observed that all Hindu gods bore arms, and he stood for a powerful India equipped with modern military hardware. The present ruling BJP, which was earlier known as Jan Sangh, is an off-shoot of his pet organization RSS. And it is no wonder that BJP election manifesto promised open nuclear deterrent for India.

The two theories, one propagated by a reputed nationalist and the other by an extremist Hindu leader, actually help us understand India's quest for nuclear power. The current nuclear explosions, one may argue, are the outcome of two particular factors. First, India's self-style perceptions of security in international politics. India has so long clung to the opposite camp of NPT by consistently maintaining that the treaty is discriminatory and that it divides the world between nuclear "haves" and "have-nots". The Indian opposition to the treaty centred round the point that the treaty imposes limits on the non-nuclear-weapon states not to go nuclear but leaves the nuclear-weapon states free to develop and deploy nuclear weapons systems. On this basic count India despite mounting pressures chose to remain a non-signatory to the NPT during the cold war period. After the collapse of the cold war a global non-

proliferation momentum marked the prevailing trends in international politics which gave India the least rationale to hold on to the cold war nuclear philosophy. The INF Treaty, concluded between Washington and Moscow in 1987, set the first historic agreement for nuclear disarmament. It was soon followed by START-1 which for the first time made possible the destruction of some US and ex-Soviet strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup> There were similar positive moves for non-proliferation at the regional level. The South Pacific states, by concluding the Raratonga Treaty in 1985, set up a Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (NWFZ) in their own region. In Latin America, Brazil and Argentina concurred to avoid nuclear confrontation by engaging themselves in civil nuclear cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

The global and regional non-proliferation momentum could, however induce no change in India's security mind-set. It seemed to remain convinced that the demise of the cold war did bring about no basic change in post-1945 world security order, and by no means heralded an end of hegemonic domination in international politics. The sea-changes in international politics notwithstanding, the world military order still remains under tight grip of a club of few western powerful states who control more than 80% of world military might. The majority Third World states are as vulnerable to western military domination and economic prowess as ever. The Indian political elites observed that it was nuclear deterrent that gave the super military giants - the US and the former USSR - the power to establish absolute domination throughout the world, and in the absence of the USSR the power balance has only shifted to the US putting more pressures and limitations to the foreign policy manoeuvrability of a vast number of states in the Third World.

And it does not discourage India to make nuclear weapons to induce qualitative changes in its national security perceptions.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, India's declining status in international politics. Despite being the world's largest democracy India, for 50 years, has been frustrated by its failure to gain global standing. During the time of *Pandit* Nehru India commanded a sort of respectability in international politics which for post-Nehru leaders turned out to be an illusion. During Nehru's time India was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the G-77, and a vocal leader of the Third World with flagrant anti-imperialistic and anti-colonial foreign policy stance. But to the awful despair or disgust of the Indians, India was constantly bracketed with neighbouring Pakistan. The Indian political elites have seen China join the nuclear club by exploding its first bomb a decade before India's. For its long restraint since its initial atomic test in 1974, India has earned no credit. The BJP leadership might have been influenced to off-set the declining trend in India's global standing by taking the decision to go nuclear openly. This was exactly echoed by Surjit Mansingh, a disarmament Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi : "Indian politicians feel they are not being listened to in the world because we do not have the bomb".<sup>10</sup> To the BJP decision-makers atomic tests appeared to be the only option to make the Indian voice heard throughout the world.

The atomic tests by India unfailingly triggered a serious backlash in Pakistan. There are historical as well as geopolitical reasons for the backlash that define the parameters of hostile relationships between the two countries. The partition of the sub-continent in 1947 based on the 'two-nation theory' invariably led them to perceive each other as 'enemy' and the



three wars they fought in 1947, 1965 and 1971 drifted them away further. Pakistan perceived India's first atomic test of 1974 as India's intentions to permanently subject the Pakistanis to Indian domination and vowed to match India's nuclear superiority at any cost. The late Pakistani Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto famously thundered that his country would go nuclear even if the Pakistanis had to 'eat grass'. This time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was naturally under intense political pressures to retaliate with tests of its own which came on 28 May, just after 17 days of India's tests. The decision to follow India's suit was, in fact, conditioned by a series of domestic and international factors. In domestic context, a serious challenge to Sharif's leadership was posed by the Islamic fundamentalist parties who threatened to pour into the streets if Sharif failed to match India's tests. Pakistani public sentiment in general also favoured a nuclear test. Even Benazir Bhutto, the opposition leader and former Prime Minister, demanded Mr. Sharif's resignation accusing his government of a big security lapse by failing to predict the Indian tests.<sup>11</sup> For Pakistani public the decision to test or not to test became a question of credibility. Shireen Mazari, a respected military analyst in Islamabad, said : "If we do not test, we lose the credibility of our so-called nuclear capability."<sup>12</sup> Apart this, the pro-bomb lobby that consists of retired army generals, bureaucrats and hawkish politicians put extra pressure on Sharif to test the nuclear devices.

Externally, India's tests apparently posed serious threats to Pakistan. The BJP had already alarmed Muslims in Pakistan with its firebrand Hindu nationalism. Although Bajpayee insisted that India had no aggressive intentions, Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani on May 18 implicitly threatened the use of a nuclear weapon to resolve India's long-standing

dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir. Mr. Advani stated : "Islamabad should realise the change in the geo-strategic situation .....roll back its anti-India policy, specially with regard to Kashmir".<sup>13</sup> In Pakistani version the failure to demonstrate nuclear capability was tantamount to offering an invitation for an Indian adventure. Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan told *Time* : "It is not a question of if we test, but when".<sup>14</sup>

The failure of the international community to make India a pariah by imposing tough sanctions also accelerated Pakistan's decision to test a bit further. The G-8 economic summit, held in Britain in the wake of the Indian blasts, failed to develop a unified response to deal with India. Only Japan and the US could impose sweeping sanctions upon Delhi ; France, Britain and Russia differed. Pakistan was evidently frustrated by the weak response of the G-8 and despite threat of similar sanctions as imposed on India it finally exploded the bomb on May 28.

### **Nuclear Weapons and Stability in South Asia**

The serious question is whether Indo-Pak explosions promote stability or invite perennial instability in South Asia's security order. Viewed good or bad politically, nuclear deterrents promote stability in an unstable setting by effectively containing the forces of instability. Its values lie in making war an obsolete phenomenon by discouraging the conflicting parties to think of war as a viable policy option. It gives an assurance that each side can inflict unacceptable damages on the other, making a cost-effective military victory impossible. The post-war European security order stands as an ideal here. The US and the former USSR refrained from waging any war because each side had the capability for mutually assured destruction, and therefore, an unwritten guarantee of no-attack from either side.

Nuclear deterrents thus provided them a remarkable degree of stability and peace, although uneasy, notwithstanding occasional tensions originating from continued sophistication of nuclear forces and their deployment.

Most analysts on South Asian proliferation are, however, hesitant to predict that open nuclearization of the region would help promote stability in its security order. They point to the inherent dangers of war over Kashmir and the possibility of escalation of conflicts over Rann of Kutch and Siachen Glacier between India and Pakistan. The South Asian security order is characterised with persistent tensions that get heightened largely because of the unequal nature of the region itself. The region is Indo-centric due to the forces of geography and history. It symbolises a unique pyramidal politico-economic and military power structure with India holding the ace. In terms of all tangible and intangible elements of power like geographical vastness, population strength, economic progress, technological advance, diplomatic maneuverability and so on India supersedes many times all other regional states put together. Pakistan is next to India in terms of resources and military might but fall far behind to match India.

The tension-ridden unstable security order in South Asia started getting stabilized whenever India and Pakistan came to acquire nuclear weapons. It is nuclear deterrent that has prevented war between the two countries in the last 27 years since 1971 compared to the three wars they fought in a short span of two decades between 1947 to 1971. War was thought of to be a viable policy option because there was no nuclear deterrent that could deter them from launching attack against each other. The situation now stands completely different with

strategic changes in the security environment. Unless anything accidental happens, it is almost certain that India and Pakistan are unlikely to fight any more wars in future.

There are some people who predict that India and Pakistan might rev up a nuclear race right at this moment. They prefer to quote the central strategic competition between the US and the former USSR which rather sounds unrealistic in case of India and Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> The Western alliance and the Soviet block had worldwide political and ideological interests and, therefore, an urge to create a psychological impact beyond their national boundaries. Secondly, the Moscow-Washington arms race did not revolve around regional dynamics of conflicts but for the cause of particular ideologies. The ideological competition between the two superpowers appeared to be a never ending game even after the acquisition of nuclear deterrents and their continued sophistication by both parties.

In contrast to the Washington-Moscow nuclear race, the Indo-Pak nuclear competition represents a quite different case. Neither Pakistan nor India has an urge to create a psychological effect to protect its worldwide interest and none has any universal ideology whose baking requires continued sophistication of new generation of nuclear forces. What is obvious here is that the Indo-Pak nuclear race would get stabilized since they have embarked upon open nuclearization. The opening up of an arms control dialogue backed up by the necessity to maintain nuclear transparency would help much to stabilize the regional security order.

### **Nuclear Weapons and Global Influence**

The aspirant states are usually motivated by the perceptions that nuclear weapons enhance prestige and influence in regional and global politics, and help wriggle out of any challenges to their foreign policies. The belief was established during the cold war period due to American and Russian capacity - military or political - to respond to any challenge and contain it successfully at any corner round the globe. It actually lent credibility to the aspirant states that nuclear weapon was the real key to global reckoning. But that was a false idea and with the cold war over nuclear deterrent is not seen as the best guarantee for security, let alone global prestige and influence. The Soviet nuclear might has completely failed to preserve its empire ; and it is not nuclear weapons but economic and technological powers that determine a nation's future.

The Indian Prime Minister Mr. Bajpayee boasted just moments after the five under-ground nuclear tests, that : "We are a nuclear power". In an interview with *Newsweek* he justified the blasts as the "sovereign right" to address the national security needs in an appropriate manner and added that "the concern of a vibrant nation that is home to one sixth of humanity cannot be disregarded".<sup>16</sup> The way to set India well recognized in the world community is not definitely series of nuclear blasts, although it may be the cheap route to great power status. In today's world the secure path to great power status and corresponding influence in global politics is a powerful industrial economy, a stable modernized society and a strong technological base which India and Pakistan definitely lack. Even if military prowess is considered to be the best outward expression of national power, that must rest on a technologically sophisticated base. Iraq before the 1991 Gulf war had the

world's fifth largest army but suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the US. Japan, on the other hand, having no nuclear weaponry, is exerting tremendous influence in global politics.

Apart from this, India's national economy is getting hurt due to tough sanctions imposed by the US and the rapture of aid and grants by Japan. The US sanctions include all non-humanitarian aid and loans, credit guarantees and military Assistance. Japan, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden and Australia have halted development aid. The Indian officials estimate potential losses in aid and soft loans at just 8 billion dollar a year which the US put at a much higher figure - \$20.7 billion. India's economic growth is expected to slow down to 5% or 5.5% in the current 1998 -99 fiscal year from 6.9% in 1997-98. Whatever way the Indians get prepared to brace the sanctions, they will take a toll. But since India has a resilient economy less vulnerable to external pulls and pressures it may manage to hedge the loss likely to be unleashed by sanctions.

The situation is more gruesome for Pakistan which possesses an economy less than one-fifth the size of India's and burdened with a huge foreign debt of US \$36 billion, or 72% of its GDP. Interest payments cost Pakistan between \$200 million to \$500 million every month. The atomic blasts have definitely made that money very hard to come by.<sup>17</sup> Its foreign exchange reserves stands at US \$1.3 billion (against India's \$29.5 billion) which is sufficient for a few weeks' imports from foreign countries. The proclamation of a state of emergency and imposition of curbs on foreign currencies just after the tests point out how hard Islamabad is struggling to defend its currency. Economists predict painful measures like imposing exchange- rate controls, imports controls and freezing foreign

currency deposits to withstand the pressures of sanctions. Of the measures import curbs could hurt domestic industry severely, since a third of Pakistan's 12000 factories are now standing idle.

The political fall out of sanctions and resultant decline in economic performance in the coming years may be more dangerous for Pakistan. The Pakistani society is characterised by multiple tensions with ethnic violence being the most dominant. The *Pathans*, the *Baluchis* and the *Sindhis* have political grievances against the Punjabis - the dominant ethnic group that manages political and economic affairs in Pakistan. The grievances may rankle if the sanctions and IMF-WB loan-cuts put the economy in a doldrum. The introduction of painful economic measures that are needed to tide over the horrible consequences of sanctions may threaten to split open fault lines in the dangerously divided Pakistani society. The imposition of high taxes on industrial and business sectors may further stall the economy and contribute to political instability and violence. In that case, the unity and integrity of Pakistan would be under serious risk.

### Conclusion

India's atomic tests, which throw a serious blow to the nuclear status quo, are a strong bid to attain its 'rightful' place in international politics. The Indian political elites weighed the tests to be the last option to that end. Pakistan's blasts are more linked up with regional political dynamics, particularly its relations with India.

The strategic changes the tests have introduced in regional security order are inevitably to contribute security stability in the region. The logic simply goes that war with

nuclear weapons are highly improbable exactly because nuclear weapons are for deterrence, not for use. There are flash-points between India and Pakistan, particularly Kashmir, but since nuclear weapons require more restraint each side would be careful enough not to initiate war. Even the tensions that originate out of the nuclear blasts could be effectively managed by initiating a security dialogue and pursuing a policy of nuclear transparency between the two countries.

The atomic blasts by India and Pakistan may not fetch them the great power status they look forward to achieve. Instead they may have to undergo economic shocks the sanctions are set to produce. The economic capability of India and Pakistan are not out of question to survive the sanctions. This is the area wherein the severest threats loom large to cripple the Indian and Pakistani poverty-stricken, under-industrialized and traditional societies. Unless the two countries are able to better manage their economies to tide over the grips of sanctions their quest for nuclear status may amount to dropping bombs just on their own feet.

### Notes

1. *Time*, May 25, 1998, p. 28.
2. *Asia Week*, May 22, 1998, p. 36.
3. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 21, 1998, p.19.
4. *The Economist*, May 23, 1998, p. 27.
5. Jozef Goldblat (ed.), "Non-Proliferation: The Why and the Wherefore" (Taylor & Francis, London & Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 89-99.
6. *The Economist*, April 4, 1998, p. 32.
7. Ziba Moshawer, "Prospects For The NPT In South Asia", in *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1992, pp. 357-58



8. *Ibid*, pp. 358-59.
9. For details see, Md. Nuruzzaman, "South Asia Without Nuclear Bombs?" *Journal of International Relations*, vol. 7, no. 2, January - June, 1994, pp. 155 - 179.
10. *Time*, May 25, 1998, p. 32.
11. *The Economist*, May 23, 1998, P. 27.
12. *Newsweek*, May 25, 1998, P. 31.
13. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 28, 1998, p. 28.
14. *Times*, June 1, 1998, p. 30.
15. See Md. Nuruzzaman, "The Arms Race In South Asia : Some Approaches To Stability", *Strategic Studies*, nol. XVI, nos. 1 & 2, 1993, pp. 34 - 35.
16. *Newsweek*, May 25, 1998, p. 32.
17. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 28, 1998, p.70.