

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION IN SOUTH ASIA PAKISTAN'S POLICY AND  
OPTION

D D KHANNA  
UNIVERSITY OF ALLAHABAD  
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## Introduction

The development of nuclear technology in South Asia, especially in relation to Pakistan and India have attracted world wide concern and the interest of the Super Powers, and of China and the Arab world. In recent years several studies have apprehended that South and West Asian regions are the most likely areas for a future nuclear conflict<sup>1</sup>. In both Pakistan and India a serious debate is on over the nuclear weapon option and unless public opinion asserts in favor of non-proliferation of the nuclear weapon programme, neither Pakistan nor India is likely to declare its nuclear weapon option.

While this debate generates active interest, the governments of Pakistan and India consistently stated that they are committed to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, express apprehension and suspicion of each other, and make identical statements about the nuclear weapon development programme. While the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi declared in the Parliament that India did not want to make nuclear weapons although Pakistan had not abandoned its nuclear weapon programme, President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan felt concerned about India having "already acquired the nuclear weapons capability"<sup>2</sup>. The Pakistan Foreign Minister categorically stated in the UN General Assembly that Pakistan is and shall be committed to not developing nuclear weapons and to not allowing their deployment on its soil. Identical observation is also reported to have been made by the Pakistan Foreign Secretary to his counterpart in India that Pakistan had neither the resources nor the capability of producing the nuclear bomb and that its programme was for peaceful purposes<sup>3</sup>.

Responsible officials and influential political parties in both the countries have however, made statements contrary to the official stand and have favoured the desirability and stated the capability of developing the nuclear weapon programme. In India, the Congress (I) Parliamentary Party Secretary has asserted that the Indian Government should go in for the nuclear bomb and also prepare the masses to face the on-slaught<sup>4</sup>. The new Indian Chief of Army Staff stated that if the adversary used nuclear weapon against India "our armed forces will not be made to fight in a disadvantageous position"<sup>5</sup>. In Pakistan also the ruling Muslim League and the Right Wing Jamat-Islami have repeatedly stressed the need to develop nuclear weapon capability<sup>6</sup>. Dr. A. Q. Khan, the brain behind the Pakistan Uranium enrichment plant, made a pointed reference of Pakistan's capability of making a bomb. He felt that Pakistan has left India far behind in enrichment technology and now the making of the bomb is only a political decision and we will never disappoint the nation<sup>7</sup>.

### **Pakistan's Case**

From its inception Pakistan evinced a strong psychological impulse to seek an identity outside that of India, from which it was carved out. The Pakistani elite felt an urge to demonstrate that their smaller muslim nation was qualitatively equal or superior to India in many respects. Initially this was sought to be achieved by establishing strong ties with the US<sup>8</sup>. As early as 1949 an US assessment also indicated that Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Karachi-Lahore areas are vital for the US to meet her basic strategic objective in the region<sup>9</sup>. This similarity of national interest between Pakistan and the United States continues and has provided Pakistan

the desired security with the result that Pakistan could modernize her armed forces without any significant strain on her economy. In early 1960s the Pakistan thought it was in her national interest to develop close relations with China, and she successfully helped the U S A to reestablish friendly understanding with the one time hostile China. The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 and first Chinese nuclear explosion in 1964 generated a strong desire in India to achieve nuclear weapon capability. The late Indian Prime Minister Shastri announced in the Parliament "I cannot say that the present policy - nuclear programme for energy alone - is deep rooted, that it cannot be set aside and that it would not be changed"<sup>10</sup>. It is during this period that, in Pakistan also, Mr Z A Bhutto talked about the need to have a nuclear bomb and wrote about the desirability of obtaining it before the crisis began<sup>11</sup>. In 1972 when Bhutto came to power he thought that fate had placed him in a position "when Pakistan was going to have a bomb"<sup>12</sup>. Bhutto gave birth to the theory of Islamic bomb. This theory, even if it may never materialize, serves Pakistan's national interest in many ways: likely leadership of the muslim world, undercutting Indian influence in the Middle East, greater economic and military support from the Arabs, gains from the anti-zionist fronts, and stronger bargaining power with the U S and the West<sup>13</sup>. Since then Pakistan has never looked back on her keen desire to produce a nuclear weapon.

The dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 and the Indian nuclear explosion in 1974 symbolized the emergence of India as a dominant force in South Asia capable of dealing with any situation on her own. India's status could no longer be ignored. Pakistan strongly felt that it was imperative

for her to further strengthen her security and speedily develop nuclear technology to match that of India so that she had not to compromise on her national interest<sup>14</sup> Pakistan's apprehensions of India's nuclear technological advancement made her feel that she would have to live under the shadow of a hostile and powerful nuclear neighbour unless she possessed a nuclear deterrent<sup>15</sup> However, Pakistan realises the grave consequences of a nuclear arms race, and in the last few years has initiated proposals to seek cooperation from India towards nuclear non-proliferation in South Asia The proposals include the establishment of a nuclear weapon free zone (NWFZ), mutual inspection, safeguards of nuclear installations, and a no-war pact Most of these have not received a positive response as India feels that Pakistan's current enrichment programme has no conceivable peaceful use, that the South Asian NWFZ would be a legal myth, and that mutual inspection and verification between India and Pakistan would create additional irritations without solving any problem<sup>16</sup>

India has suggested an alternative to the Pakistani proposal of a no war pact A powerful pro-bomb lobby in India feels that "Pakistan is a collaborationist state of the nuclear imperialists" and proposals for the signing of a NPT/NWFZ, treaty with mutual inspection, or for jointly giving up the nuclear option have been made with an objective to disarm the subcontinent and render it vulnerable vis-a-vis the nuclear powers surrounding it<sup>17</sup> This group is also convinced that if India has to make serious efforts towards nuclear disarmament she must acquire nuclear weapon capability Otherwise she will have to live permanently and helplessly with the nuclear weapons of "industrialised nations, their chosen client states, and China", with all the risk of the "coersive use of nuclear diplo-

macy inherent in the situation"<sup>18</sup> In spite of these constraints India and Pakistan have agreed not to attack each others nuclear installations Both India and Pakistan feel that it is a great step forward<sup>19</sup> India feels that an agreement on an Indian offer of a treaty of friendship and co-operation with Pakistan and the latters offer of a no war pact with India could also be evolved in the near future<sup>20</sup>

### **Interest of Superpowers**

The apprehensions that India and Pakistan are pursuing a nuclear weapon programme has its own global implications The Soviet Union has repeatedly voiced her deep concern over Pakistan's clandestine efforts to achieve nuclear weapon capability and has accused both, the Imperial Powers and China, in conniving at Pakistan, trying to achieve nuclear status The Soviets also feel that the likely nuclear weapon capability of Pakistan, now a frontline state vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, is a cause of great concern to their interest Pakistan on the other hand thinks, if they could tolerate the Pokhran explosion as peaceful why should they not treat Pakistan on the same ground However, the Soviet Union is likely to cooperate on nonproliferation, but if Pakistan should choose to go nuclear there may be some "selective weakening of Soviet restraint vis-a-vis the Indian nuclear programme"<sup>21</sup> But, the Soviets are very apprehensive about a joint US - Pakistan - China approach against Soviet interests in the region and will therefore oppose any nuclear weapon development programme on Pakistani soil

The US also is strongly opposed to any nuclear weapon proliferation programme in South Asia and has repeatedly expressed her concern over

Pakistan's efforts to acquire nuclear weapon technology. However, the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan has changed the U S security perspective in South Asia. To meet this development it appears that the U S needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs the U S. The Reagan administration has realised that somehow, the U S foreign policy will have to find a way of rewarding friends and penalising opponents<sup>22</sup>. Although Pakistan's engagement in nuclear activities are "found troubling to U S but it takes its peaceful intent seriously"<sup>23</sup>. The U S has suggested to Pakistan that it should not link the signing of the NPT with India, and Pakistan should pursue its nuclear programme for peaceful purposes alone to get more and more U S aid and cooperation<sup>24</sup>. Among domestic political factors, the powerful Jewish lobby in the United States has always opposed Pakistan's nuclear programme as it is apprehensive of Pakistan's considerable dependence on the Arab world and their interest in nuclear technology<sup>25</sup>. India, however feels that the present regime in Pakistan is confident that it can go on expanding the frontiers of its nuclear weapon programme without putting at risk the U S military assistance and political support as long as it refrains from actually detonating a nuclear device.

China's position in the Pakistan's nuclear programme has been veiled in secrecy and uncertainty. China is against the superpower monopoly of nuclear weapon technology. The Chinese interest in a Pakistani bomb is very natural to keep balance in South Asia vis-a-vis India. Reports circulated both in the U S and the USSR indicate that China has been providing nuclear cooperation to Pakistan to embarrass the USSR and India<sup>26</sup>. India also feels convinced of such a co-operation<sup>27</sup>, but this has been denied by China as 'absurd' and 'totally groundless'<sup>28</sup>.

It can now be argued that security in South Asia is not likely to be a regional problem and threat to this region can also emanate from non-regional powers. The U S and the Soviets have always tried to acquire military facilities in the Indian Ocean region and will continue to do so. The U S has recently acquired communication facilities in Trincomalee, the finest natural harbour of the Indian Ocean, in Sri Lanka and there are waves of speculation that the U S may also like to have facilities on the coast of Makran, in Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> The presence of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, their interest in the Indian Ocean region, and the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1971 create a compulsion for the U S to help Pakistan and to continue their involvement in the region. In this context the Super Powers are not likely to withdraw from the region but will certainly come closer to one or the other likely nuclear regional power to maintain a balance. Pakistan feels that the Indo-Soviet 1971 treaty has made India a pillar of the Soviet Unions Asian collective security system.<sup>30</sup>

### **Neighbouring Countries**

The alleged efforts of India and Pakistan to achieve nuclear weapon capability have caused anxiety and concern to the smaller neighbouring states and if one could apply the domino-theory to the region it could be presumed that each time a country goes nuclear it increases the pressure on similarly situated neighbouring countries to do the same. Some of these smaller countries may not like nuclear asymmetry to reach beyond a point and may feel compelled to develop a nuclear status for themselves by any method, preferably through the nuclear umbrella of super powers. In such a case the South Asian region will become a hot bed of nuclear rivalry.

However, a strong lobby both in India and Pakistan feels that horizontal nuclear proliferation is not necessarily dangerous or destabilising<sup>31</sup>

### **Pakistan's Interest**

It is agreed by policy makers both in India and Pakistan that nuclear co-operation between the two countries would not only be in their own interest but also in the interest of the region and of the whole world<sup>32</sup> However, the element of suspicion and apprehensions between the two countries has activated debate in favour of a nuclear weapon option. In spite of this the policy makers in Pakistan must accept that "even a declared peaceful nuclear explosion is most likely to lead to an all out Indian nuclear effort"<sup>33</sup> and in such a nuclear arms race Pakistan would find itself at a distinct disadvantage (because Pakistan presently lacks the technical base needed for a quick build-up of survivable launch and delivery system)<sup>34</sup>, while India is likely to successfully develop IRBM capability by the end of this decade and its satellite will develop its command and control capability<sup>35</sup> It is also estimated that during the same given period India can build nearly three times more warheads than Pakistan<sup>36</sup> The theory of deterrence in such a situation can not be applicable to a country which has no capability to deter the first strike and to develop her strike capability beyond a certain range which will make the first strike less effective. The physical closeness of India and Pakistan and the presence of densely populated cities on both sides of the border may bring catastrophe if a nuclear war by accident or a nuclear strike in sheer desperation takes place. Pakistan being a small country with no depth is likely to suffer unimaginable damage in all respects. There is every reason to believe that in such a

situation the entire logistical machinery of the fighting troops with conventional weaponry will also collapse. Further, Pakistan's experiment with nuclear explosion even for peaceful purposes will certainly change the present U.S.-Pakistan relations and may have serious implications for Pakistan's security. It will therefore be in the interest of Pakistan to proceed with a conviction that India may not escalate its nuclear weapon programme as it has given no such indications since its last nuclear explosion in 1974.

Pakistan can not ignore that India is a very active member of the non-aligned movement and is committed to universal disarmament. It will certainly not be in her interest to go all out for nuclear weapon development programme, which will give her more insecurity and will adversely affect her global ambitions.

It will be in the interest of Pakistan to concentrate on her peaceful nuclear development programme and not to compete with the Indian nuclear programme as her economy is largely dependent on foreign sources<sup>37</sup>. Pakistan hopelessly lacks conventional sources of energy and her atomic generation efforts have given her ~~only~~ **only 125 Mw as compared to India's 1240 Mw** **by December 1985**. It is therefore essential for Pakistan to concentrate on the development of her economy with all speed as an economically viable Pakistan is a much more dependable alternative for her stability and security.

It will be against Pakistan's interest to accelerate the pace of a nuclear explosion even for peaceful purposes as it will be taken as a declaration of nuclear option. It will not be in the interest of Pakistan to

declare her nuclear weapon option until India does the same or takes recourse to further explosion. Several countries in the world, and especially India, believe that Pakistan has developed a nuclear device, and if Pakistan by any chance decides in favour of the explosion, it is likely to get so much punishment that it will have no political stamina left to stand. In the absence of any explosion by Pakistan, India cannot prove that Pakistan has gone nuclear. It should be remembered that whether Pakistan decides in favour of an explosion or not India is already ten years ahead and any competition to achieve symmetry with India will have serious economic and political consequences. Both international and national interest therefore demand that Pakistan should not choose the path of nuclear weapon programme which will ultimately encourage nuclear proliferation in the South Asian Region and also involve super and major powers more deeply in this region. The dangers of nuclear proliferation in South Asia can also be minimized considerably with the help of institutions like SARC and NAM, where a large group of countries can put their weight together against nuclear weapon proliferation in the South Asian region.

Against this background one could quote an observation of Sri P N Haksar at a Seminar held in India on the "Role of Nuclear Weapon in International Relations vis-a-vis the Developing World". He observed "the compulsion of real politik and the conflicting interest of the major nations had resulted in the evolution of frightening doctrines such as that of deterrence escalating into mutually assured destruction. This means that the present nuclear regime had a vested interest, economic, political and technological in building up nuclear arsenals and in non-proliferation, nuclear

powers have been placed in a dilemma in which inspite of a leverage that nuclear weapons give them, they cannot in practice use them" "Nuclear weapons today, thus, serve to articulate, vivify and formulate explicitly the perplexity of our time"<sup>38</sup>

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