

Nuclear Imminence in Contemporary Indo-Pakistani Conflict

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ABSTRACT

November of 2008 saw frightening attacks on India's foreigners. Over the course of three days, hostages had been taken, hotels and restaurants in India's busiest city of Mumbai were burned and English, American and Canadian citizens lay among the nearly 200 dead. Pakistani terrorists were arrested and held accountable for this act of brutality. However, it seemed that tensions had just begun. The upset of peace in Indo-Pakistani relations fuelled the international communities' fear of a nuclear war between the two nations. This paper will address this concern and discover that such acts of terrorism do not reflect nuclear imminence due to tensions between the Indian and Pakistani states. However, they do reflect unrest within Indian and Pakistani civil society; a civil society that is both tied and fragmented by ethnic and religious identity. The fear of nuclear war in this historically conflicted region of South East Asia may aid in the plight for peace by forcing these states to accept international norms and treaties on nuclear proliferation.

Is nuclear war between India and Pakistan imminent? This paper argues that despite the brutal history between the two states and growing terrorist's activity, nuclear war is an unlikely event in this region of South East Asia. The first section of this paper aims to give a brief overview of Partition as a grim prelude of the future conflict, followed by a discussion of the numerous wars between the two nations. Secondly I will analyse the claim that nuclear deterrence is responsible for the lack of indo-Pakistani nuclear confrontation. Terrorism will be addressed as a valid threat to peace between the two nuclear states, but this concern is discounted by the fact that both governments are determined to pursue peace despite the violence. Lastly this paper will explore the best option for creating peace: both India and Pakistan need to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Despite the resistance between both nations, it is important that India and Pakistan become involved with the international community in hopes that they will embrace its norms on nuclear proliferation. In turn the international community may offer help both through finances and council to heal the wounds of partition that still bleed today.

Partition

To appreciate the contemporary relationship between India and Pakistan we must first understand the long and conflicted history between the two. The Partition of colonial India is a grim back drop to the conflicts between modern India and Pakistan. India was a colonial state that had been part of the British Empire for roughly 50 years¹. In the mid-twentieth century the British power began to wind down in the area and Pakistan and India were left to draw out their own territorial lines². It was August of 1947 when India claimed independence and a day later became the sovereign Dominion of Pakistan (later Islamic Republic of Pakistan and People's

¹ Rajan, M.S.(1969) The Impact of British Rule in India, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1969, 4, 1, Colonialism and Decolonization, 89

² Basrur, Rajesh. (2008) *South Asia's Cold War: Nuclear Weapons and Conflict in Comparative Perspective*, London: Routledge Press, 36

Republic of Bangladesh) and the Union of India (later Republic of India)³. The colonial territory was occupied by both Hindu and Muslim majorities. Without an overarching imperial power in control of the region the tensions between the two communities began to rise and violence spread.

The Wars

Partition may have been the root cause of the last 50 years of conflict in the region. Although India is seen as predominantly Hindu and Pakistan Muslim, there is a significant Muslim population that has remained in India which is often cited as repressed and rejected by the Indian state and its people⁴⁵. The area of Kashmir has been the subject of much fighting since partition. This small mountainous area of north eastern India is claimed by the Pakistani government to be a rightful part of their land. The area of Kashmir is predominantly occupied with a Muslim community that desires to be part of Pakistan⁶. The first war was in 1947 called the First Kashmir War. The second, The Second Kashmir War, was fought in 1965 and ended with much bloodshed, many casualties and a UN mandated ceasefire. The third war took place in 1971 on the eastern border of Pakistan. This war resulted in the defeat of the Pakistani military and the dissolution of East Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh. The most recent war occurred in 1999 in the Kargil area of Kashmir⁷. Again, many were left wounded and dead. These wars demonstrate the tensions that occasionally explode between militants with severe consequences⁸. Rajesh Basrur, author of *South Asia's Cold War: Nuclear Weapons and Conflict in Comparative Perspective* (2008), points out that "attempts to transcend the divide have been insufficient to heal the 'permanent scars of geography', which were once scars 'on the land' and 'scars on the psyche', cut deeper by every episode of violence between the two countries"⁹.

Nuclear Deterrence?

In the case of Indo-Pakistani conflicts, although military fighting exists, nuclear conflict is far from the future. There have been four consecutive wars and many crises between the two nations and no nuclear confrontations to date. Many scholars attribute evidence of deterrence theory working by to the lack of nuclear confrontation¹⁰. It is arguable that mutual deterrence has been effective for sometime between the two states, despite the fighting over Kashmir. Both have become nuclear states since the early 1970's and have tested their weapons since¹¹.

³ Ibid, 37.

⁴ Baker, Aryn (Nov. 27, 2008) India's Muslims in Crisis. *Time Magazine :World Edition*. Article On-line: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1862650,00.html>

⁵ Nomani, Asra Q. (December 1st, 2008), Muslims: India's new 'untouchables' *Los Angeles Times*, Article On-line: <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-nomani1>

⁶ Basrur, Rajesh. (2008) *South Asia's Cold War*, 39

⁷ Ibid, 49-51.

⁸ Krepon, Michael, (2004), *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia*, New York: Palgrave Press, 19.

⁹ Basrur, Rajesh. (2008) *South Asia's Cold War*, 37.

¹⁰ Khan, Saira. (2002). *Nuclear Proliferation Dynamics in Protracted Conflict Regions: A Comparative Study of South Asia and the Middle East*. England, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 151

¹¹ Krepon, Michael, (2004), *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia*, New York: Palgrave Press, 19.

Despite the volatile situation in the region, the two states have maintained a state of nuclear deterrence. There are numerous theories about why exactly 'deterrence' has been working between the two nations. The mere fact that both declared themselves nuclear states is an example of deterrence¹². It maybe possible non-traditional deterrence has been working up until the first tests by India in 1998. Deterrence would have been "non-traditional" because there were no tests done to demonstrate capability up until nearly 25 years after weapons acquisition¹³. Therefore each state was uncertain, up until that point, that the other state would have second strike capability.

This may be related to the credibility deterrence theory. Deterrence theorists put great emphases on the concept of credibility¹⁴. In this case, deterrence can be defined as persuading the opponent not to initiate a first nuclear strike because the perceived benefits are outweighed by the anticipated costs and risks¹⁵. This means that both states believe the other is a credible nuclear threat; they will retaliate in the event of a nuclear strike. This means that first strike will be retaliated against. India's Department of National Defence has published their desire to communicate to the international community (mainly Pakistan) that their weapons will survive a first strike and has intense second strike capability¹⁶. In this case, deterrence is held to be credible if the adversary is 'convinced' of ones capacity to retaliate¹⁷.

Terrorism

The history of India and Pakistan both from a military and nuclear perspective indicates a volatile yet somewhat stable relationship. However, terrorism plagues these states and often raises the concern by the international of nuclear imminence. Basrur believes that the "Hindu" and "Muslim" identities of the two regions play an important role in the conflict and nuclear politics between India and Pakistan¹⁸. The two identities are socially constructed norms of religious dominance¹⁹. The presence of this religious divide feeds into the festering violence between civil societies. Terrorism continues to rock the two countries with an 'eye-for-an-eye' mentality. Identities are powerful and the stronger they get the more of a slippery slope these kinds of rivalries can become. Because identity is a socially constructed concept, events within the population can strengthen and weaken it. Terrorism does strengthen these "Muslim" and "Hindu" identities and in turn increases rivalries²⁰.

These acts of terrorism, however grand and horrendous, do not change the level of stability between the two nations and the degree of nuclear war imminence. Terrorism is an element of

¹² Ibid, 153

¹³ Ibid, 151.

¹⁴ Jervis, Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution, pp.193-214; Schelling, Arms and Influence, pp. 36-43.

¹⁵ Dunne, Tim et al. (2007) *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. London: Oxford University Press, 333.

¹⁶ Basrur, Rajesh. (2008) *South Asia's Cold War*, 64.

¹⁷ Kanwal, Nuclear Defence, p.133.

¹⁸ Basrur, Rajesh. (2008) *South Asia's Cold War*, 37.

¹⁹ Collins, Alan. (2003) *Security and South East Asia: Domestic, Regional and Global Issues*. London: Rienner Publishers, 23.

²⁰ Basrur, Rajesh. (2008) *South Asia's Cold War*, 37

confrontation that is outside government. Within Pakistan there are moderate and fundamentalist fractions in the Muslim community and government. The moderates want a better Pakistan²¹. For these moderates a better Pakistan means a better government, free from corruption and extreme militancy. Moderates within Pakistan also desire better relations with Pakistan, in hopes to avoid nuclear confrontation and modernize their own country. Evidence of moderate strength in Pakistan is demonstrated in the dissolution of the Musharaff administration and the election of President Asif Ali Zardari, husband of Benizir Bhutto. Zardari won this election democratically, a president whom rejects the Taliban and other terrorist fractions²². The American government is a significant source of financial support for the Pakistani government. The Americans have for years been pressuring Pakaistan diplomatic and peaceful relations with India.²³

India, too, is perusing a better relationship with Pakistan. Due to Pakistan's location, bordering Afghanistan, it is best for India to support good relations and stabilization with Pakistan. However, both the Indian and Pakistani governments peruse positive relations despite numerous acts of terrorism. In October of 2008, India has publicly claimed their hopes for a peaceful solution to the Kashmir conflict for the two nations. The Indian prime minister said: "Good relations with Pakistan are an essential part of our policy. My vision of India-Pakistan is that both countries situate their bilateral relations in a cooperative framework of mutual understanding."²⁴ Since then Mumbai has seen deadly bombings of hotels, hostages taken and over 100 people announced dead. Pakistani terrorists are the confirmed culprits of the shocking attacks in Mumbai not even a month after the Indian Prime Ministers remarks²⁵. In retaliation, Indian terrorists bombed a mosque Pakistan with death tolls still rising at this time²⁶. These acts of terrorism are that of fundamentalist Muslim groups and terrorist fractions in both Indian and Pakistani society. In reality this violence is an attempt to upset the peace talks and diplomatic progress between the two nations that the international community and moderates in both nations support.

Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission on Deterrence

Although terrorism does not pose an immediate threat to nuclear stability, it does raise questions about how safe deterrence really is. Terrorists are essentially non-state actors that

²¹ Krepon, Michael, (2004), *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia*, 25-27.

²² Perlez, Jane., Masood, Salman (September 7th, 2008) Bhutto's Widow Wins Pakistani Presidency . *New York Times*. Article On-line http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/world/asia/07zardari.html?_r=1&hp

²³ Chopra, Sonia, (Jun. 17, 2007) Signs of India Pakistan understanding after Musharraf and American influence – suspended chief justice praises Indian judicial system. *India Daily News*. Article On-Line:

<http://www.indiadaily.com/editorial/17188.asp>

²⁴ India wants to settle Kashmir issue with Pakistan, says Manmohan, *The International News*, Article on-line: http://thenews.jang.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=140303

²⁵ Nomani, Asra Q. (December 1st, 2008), Muslims: India's new 'untouchables' *Los Angeles Times*, Article On-line: <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-nomani1>

²⁶ Death Toll Rises In Pakistan Mosque Explosion , *CNN News*, Article On-Line:

<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/12/05/pakistan.violence.ap/index.html?eref=edition>

have proven very influential over civil society by instilling fear and provoking further retaliation. Pakistan is still somewhat unstable and stirring up factions within the country can lead to further dangerous chaos. Non-state actors pose a new and complicated threat to nuclear stability. The role of non-state actors in international stability has become a focus for scholars in recent years. This new study has been coined the “new wars”²⁷. Scholars often debate whether ‘normal’ power and politics theories in international relations which involve the study of states can apply to the behaviour of non-state actors. Douglas Lemke, author of *Power Politics and Wars* (2008) concludes that in fact the traditional theories of power and politics are useful to predict the behavior of non-state actors²⁸. This, he argues, is due the historical resemblance of coming-of-ages states whose government was once a group similar to that of today’s organized non-state actors. “If wars among these [groups which now form national governments] resemble wars among non-state actors today,” Lemke writes, “then victory by warlords trying to create competent national governments could similarly succeed.”²⁹ John Mueller, author of *The Remnants of War* (2004) agrees, he writes “the creation of essentially disciplined forces from bands of people who are, or act like, criminals and thugs has been at the center of much state building.”³⁰

The notion that non-state actors can pose a threat to nuclear stability within this region of Southeast Asia is shared by the United Nations Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission Report (WMDC)³¹. The commission argues that deterrence is so dangerous, especially when it comes to the weapons falling into the hands of non state actors. The report is dedicated to the argument that disarmament is the only way to prevent nuclear weapons from becoming deployed in any region of the world. The commission asserts that deterrence, although held by proponents as the most reliable method of assuring stability, can create a dangerous arms race.³² The report points to the “stabilization” between the two super powers in the Cold War as an event in which many credit deterrence for the lack of nuclear war. The commission reminds that is called Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), which assured second strike capability, meaning an ability to retaliate³³. However, the commission argues, the dynamics of the international stage during the cold war are much different today. Even if deterrence stabilized the relationship between the United States in the Cold War, other important factors may have contributed. For example, the distribution of power and possibly ‘sheer luck’³⁴ may have avoided nuclear war. But the once championed deterrence theory has become questioned in the post cold-war era³⁵. What worked for tensions between states in the cold war era may not work in the post cold war era because tensions are no longer between states because they

²⁷ Lemke, Douglas. (2008) *Power Politics and Wars*. *American Journal of Political Science*. 52, 4, 775

²⁸ Lemke, Douglas, *Power Politics and War*, 785

²⁹ *Ibid*, 784

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Blix, Hans. 2006. *Weapons of Terror Report*. Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (UN WMDC: United Nations Publications) http://www.wmdcommission.org/files/Weapons_of_Terror.pdf, 171 (Accessed September 25, 2008)

³² *Ibid*.88.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ Blix, Hans. (2006) WMDC Report, 88.

³⁵ *Ibid*

include non-state actors. This concept somewhat contradicts Lemke and Mueller's notion that power and politics theory to examine the possibilities of wars between states can be used in light of non-state actors playing a significant role in the equation. Yet the WMDC makes numerous valid points about the increased threat of non-state actors to stability.

The commission emphasizes the different ways non-state actors can create heightened danger in a nuclear world. Most importantly the gravest threat lines in the Pakistan's government ties with Al-Qaeda and the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA)'s account of the sharing of nuclear intelligence with such terrorist organizations³⁶. A. Q. Khan, a Pakistani nuclear scientist "has been at the centre of illicit international supplier networks involving both imports and exports of nuclear technology and equipment."³⁷ Furthermore, terrorists can steal weapons of mass destruction while in transport or obtain material from radioactive waste from hospitals etc³⁸.

With the fire fueling on both sides of the border, this kind of terrorist actively becomes more and more likely. Nuclear war in India and Pakistan could have very serious implications for the region and for the rest of the world. First of all, millions could die as a result of Nuclear, biological and chemical weapons capable of wiping out the entire region. Secondly, China is a rising power and borders both India and Pakistan. Pakistan and China have a very close relationship politically, diplomatically, socially, economically and in regards to defense fields³⁹. The United States has significant interest in Pakistan's relationship with India in effort to further maintain influence and good relations with the Chinese 'Sleeping Giant'. Therefore, throwing off the balance of power in south East Asia may affect the western world as well.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

In light of the dangers non-state actors create in such volatile conditions, the question becomes whether the government has the determination and ability to suppress these terrorists' fractions within their state boundaries. It is the Muslim fundamentalist population in Pakistan and the Muslim extremist minority in India that have rapidly been making alliances in effort to disrupt peace in India. The Pakistani government's ability to do so is questionable because it has been weak with corruption for decades⁴⁰. One reporter announced in the New York Times that "Pakistan's new civilian government is too weak to control either the extremist groups within the country or the various rogue elements within its military and intelligence."⁴¹ With no government to suppress the terrorists another authority is needed to intervene.

³⁶ Ibid.40.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid, 41.

³⁹ Pak, China strategic relations play vital role in regional peace: PM, (December 13th, 2007), *Pakistan Times*, Article On-line: <http://www.pak-times.com/2007/12/13/pak-china-strategic-relations-play-vital-role-in-regional-peace-pm/>

⁴⁰ Baker, Aryn (Nov. 27, 2008) India's Muslims in Crisis. *Time Magazine :World Edition*. Article On-line: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1862650,00.html>

⁴¹ Mishra, Pankaj., Fresh Blood From an Old Wound (December 2, 2008), *New York Times*, Article On-Line: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/02/opinion/02mishra.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=fresh%20blood%20from%20an%20old%20wound&st=cse

Although we have discussed the question of whether theories of power politics can apply to the issue of non-state actors, the exploration of theories of international relations is still a worthy endeavor. According to realist theory, we live in an anarchic international system. Sovereign states govern their domestic entities yet there is no governing body to rule over states themselves. But what does this mean for states that are not sovereign and non-state actors transcend the boundaries of sovereignty? Liberal institutionalist theory may be the best to offer a possible solution to the half a century old Indo-Pakistani conflict.

Liberal Internationalist scholars assert that cooperation can be created through the use of multilateral international institutions. This view is consistent with that of the WMDC report, which asserts that the United Nations Security Council is the ultimate global authority when it comes to cooperation between nuclear states⁴². Andrew Moravcsik writes in his article *Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics* that states that state preferences matter most in international politics. The interest, or preference, of both of the states is to maintain peace and avoid nuclear confrontation. Therefore, if in the interest of no nuclear war, the states may need to join multilateral agreements, it will⁴³.

Thus, the Non Proliferation Treaty is the best step towards a safer nuclear state of affairs. However, India and Pakistan have both previously rejected membership into the Non-Proliferation Treaty⁴⁴. This rejection was due to the belief that the NPT Treaty creates an element of inequality between those who can possess nuclear power and those who cannot due to the political and military advantages of being a nuclear state.⁴⁵ Yet it is possible that in the time of crises, when a government is unable to control terrorist fractions, that the government of both states will decide that it is with in their best interest to join the NPT. Put differently, India and Pakistan will realize it is better to have no nuclear weapons at all than have them used by terrorists. This treaty will allow for confidence building and for conflict avoidance because of the treaties first two pillars: non proliferation and disarmament⁴⁶.

Furthermore, joining the NPT represents engagement with the international community. If these two countries become part of the NPT treaty, the international community may be more inclined to aid Pakistan into a transition for the whole of society into a modern society, which may pacify fundamentalist fractions and consequently make controlling nuclear weapons easier for Pakistan by lowering risk. Put differently, if you put a carrot in front of a horse, he will follow its direction. Even though Pakistan's fragile government could dissolve the country into a failed state, and therefore an entity unable to participate in formal agreements, the aid itself and direction from the international communities can provide the necessary support and stability needed to end the conflict over Kashmir and other conflicts on the rise.

⁴² Blix, Hans (2006), WMDC Report, 18.

⁴³ Moravcsik, Andrew. (1997), *Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics* *International Organization*, Vol 51, 04, 513.

⁴⁴ Kapur, Paul S. (2007) *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons proliferation and conflict in South Asia*. California: Stanford University Press, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (2002) UN Department for Disarmament Affairs.

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/WMD/treaty/>

Conclusion

Fractions within government and civil society are energized by terrorists' attacks, whether it is mosque bombing in Pakistan or hostage taking in India, both sides feed off violence. Nuclear imminence is clearly not a result of national government intention. Although the recent attacks demonstrate fresh blood from an old wound, there is hope that India and Pakistan can reconcile. This glimmer of light lies in the mutual fear that weapons of mass destruction will fall into the hands of terrorists and create epic destruction in both states due to their second strike capability. As anger and violence fester between the two states, factions will most likely topple the weak Pakistani government and relations with India and the western world will diminish. However, if both Pakistan and India come to this realization before it is too late, the states may cooperate and join the NPT treaty. The shared interest of survival may be the motivation to cooperate, facilitated through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations. Partition and its legacy remain alive today, but as tensions become more extreme it may open the door for both Indian and Pakistani government to disarm out of desperation.

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