STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Brigadier Tughral Yamin

The Concept of Stability

One of the central preoccupations of the discipline of strategic studies is ***stability*** and some of the influential work in the field has focused on the question of what constitutes 'strategic stability.'[1]

The word ***stability*** describes a state or quality of being stable and is considered to be synonymous with 'balance', 'equilibrium' and 'symmetry.' The Oxford English dictionary defines stability as 'permanence of arrangement, power of resisting change of structure' and 'immunity from destruction or essential change.'

Microsoft Encarta Reference Library offers at least ten definitions of ***stability***, each time in a different milieu, such as aerodynamics, ecology, economy, physics, climate and weather, and mental health. Quite understandably, diplomats and soldiers tend to examine this notion through the prism of their own knowledge and experiences.

During the Cold War, strategic stability came to be understood as the means of deterring the enemy by making known the destruction calculus i.e. the number of deaths, which could be caused and the destruction that could be wreaked on the enemy with the available nuclear weapons. [2] This concept changed to a balance in strategic nuclear weapons during the period of détente.[3]

In the realm of international relations, 'peace' is often assumed to be the essential prerequisite for 'stability' and 'wars' and 'conflict' are considered to be anti thesis of such a condition. This judgment is based on the fact that conflict produces human misery and peace creates conditions for human happiness. In reality, however, 'stability' is a perception and not necessarily motivated by noble sentiments. If history is any guide, it can be argued that 'established' or 'status quo' powers favour things 'as they are,'

irrespective of whether it is a state of peace or war.[4] On the other hand 'anti status quo' forces seek change in the existing order most often through 'revolution' and 'wars'. Change is rarely through a process of 'evolution.' It is axiomatic therefore, that change disturbs the existing balance.[5]

There are different theories of conflict. Famous fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldun in his landmark historical work Muqaddimah or Prologue conceived the theory of social conflict, based on the clash between the "townspeople" and the "desert folks."[6] Western scholars like Arnold J Toynbee and Samuel P Huntington have interpreted conflict in their theories of clash of religions and civilisations.[7] Yet others have blamed political disagreements, differences of opinion, conflicting ideals, racial and ethnic prejudices, irredentist claims and counter claims, as causes of conflict or imbalance within societies, communities, countries and civilisations.

Right through the ages, nations and their leaders: kings, emperors, generals, statesmen and politicians have sought to enforce internal and external stability within their own domains, countries, neighbourhoods and spheres of influence to perpetuate their national or personal rules and domination over others, through alternating strategies of diplomacy and war, in the true spirit of Carl von Clausewitz's famous dictum that "war is the extension of policy by other means" and vice versa.[8]

Internal and external stability represent the flip side of the same coin but the processes that shape the two notions are ideationally different. While, policy makers and administrators construct regimes of internal stability on the strong but benign foundations of domestic peace and harmony, good governance and other long term beneficial measures for the good of the society; diplomats, statesmen and soldiers seek regional and international stability by building security architectures premised on a shrewd mixture of statecraft and diplomacy backed by powerful system of forces and alliances. In security structures, where nuclear weapons play the role of a 'balancer', 'nuclear deterrence' or the ability to

deter an adversary from taking an offensive for fear of unacceptable punishment is the underpinning concept of stability.

Competing nations with differing world-views seek stability or balance by creating security architectures or global/regional 'orders' on the strength of their national 'power potentials.' Power potential is a relative measure of power, derived from a sum total of tangible and intangible resources that a nation-state possesses; economic and military might being among the foremost.

In his seminal work, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Paul Kennedy argued that the strength of a 'Great Power' is directly proportional to available resources and economic durability; military "over-stretch" and an attendant relative decline is the consistent threat facing powers, whose ambitions and security requirements are greater than their resource base can provide for. Kennedy used a number of measures to indicate real, relative and potential strength of nations. For instance, prior to the twentieth century some of his measures to rank the power of a nation included the ratio of urban to total population, steel production, energy consumption from modern fuels and manufacturing output. For the twentieth century he used arms production and tonnage of steel or coal to produce a given GNP output.[9]

The elusive search for peace and stability to justify national aspirations and personal ambitions has ensured that conflict has remained the integral part of human history. Twice during the first half of the twentieth century, major world powers fought each other to acquire a position of global pre-eminence. Whereas, the First World War was more of a stalemate, leaving the losers crippled but not dead, the Second World War was brought to a conclusive and violent end in August of 1945, after two American atomic bombs destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and snuffed out the Japanese will to fight.

The emerging nuclear equilibrium between the two post-World War II power blocs was described by Albert Wohlstetter as the 'delicate balance of terror.'[10] This balance created by nuclear weapons is also referred to as ***strategic*** or ***nuclear stability***. The

strategic community has intensely debated this new dimension of warfare and have failed to reach a consensus, whether nuclear weapons promote stability or are potentially destabilising?

Nuclear Weapons: A Source of Deterrent Stability?

Ever since the end of Second World War, strategists have contributed tomes of strategic thought on the theory of nuclear deterrence. The concept evolved and matured during the period of the Cold War. Although no one has accurately measured deterrent balance, it is clear that a small deterrent may be effective against a larger one, provided the smaller deterrent can threaten the infliction of an unacceptable level of damage. This depends not only on an assessment by each opponent of the other's subjective evaluation of unacceptable damage but also on the offensive capabilities of the small deterrent relative to possible defensive capabilities of the opponent.

Deterrence in the nuclear age seeks the prevention of the opponent's use of nuclear weapons through the threat of retaliation.[11] It can be more fully defined as the maintenance of such a posture that the opponent is not tempted to take any action which significantly threatens his adversary's vital interests. The concept of deterrence is aimed, not only against the use of nuclear weapons but also against the use of the threat of nuclear weapons in vital circumstances.[12]

Throughout history, deterrence has been achieved by building a system of military forces credible enough to threaten punishment if vital interests were impinged upon. If deterrence is adequate, vital interests will not be challenged, and stability will be established and maintained. The problem arises in determining the kind and amount of forces that will achieve the desired deterrence. Two opposite views on the level of forces required to achieve deterrence and thus promote stability are the 'disarmament view' and the 'massive retaliation doctrine.'[13]

The assumption that arms make war, that weapons induce rather than reduce tension results in the conviction that stability is

possible only in a disarmed world. This extreme view is reflected in the advocacy of complete disarmament. Less extreme is the advocacy of arms limitation by agreement, either as a progressive lowering of force levels or force growth rates. The proposition that stability may be inversely proportional to the destructive potentials of weapons results in the opposition to technological advances. If weapons are destabilising in themselves, it is argued, then not only more but also better weapons are more destabilising.[14] Complete disarmament or genuine arms limitation as a means of producing a stable condition is an untested theory. It has never happened in the true sense because nations are neither willing to part with their weapons nor honest in limiting their arms. Disarmament can only be thrust upon vanquished nations.

The other view about deterrence is reflected in doctrine of *massive retaliation*, which was United States official policy during the fifties.[15] Massive retaliation was based on the central strategic concept of a short, extremely destructive war and depended on the potential use of strategic nuclear weapons against population as the sole threatened retaliatory punishment to deter all aggressions, large or small, against the United States or its allies. Hence, it was thought that the United States needed only to maintain its clear superiority in offensive nuclear forces and threaten to use them in times of crises. Stability was sought from the one-sided imposition of terror.

As the Soviet Union acquired a significant deterrent threat, the use of terror became balanced in a "mutually assured destruction," (MAD) regime in the sense that any transgression would result in catastrophic destruction.[16] The major defect of this "suicide pact" or death wish was that it was simply not credible, certainly not with respect to minor transgressions.[17] The massive retaliation strategy fixed the form of military reaction, leaving no options open to the deterring power. It was a policy geared to meet the one improbable type of warfare, but it did not adequately address more probable types of threats. It forced a choice of either yielding to local small aggression or applying the threatened massive nuclear destruction. The ultimate threat was neither credible nor usable as punishment for less than ultimate cause. It also left the terrifying prospect of accidental or unintended war, including not only war as

a result of a "short circuit" or the act of a berserk general[18] but also war as the outcome of miscalculation of intent or the misreading of enemy actions.

The fact that massive retaliation might be disproportionate to the most likely threats led the United States to broaden its options and adopt the concept of *flexible response*.[19] One of its major contributions to stability was that it required, precise definition of what was desirable to deter, in terms of both the full spectrum of conflict and the definition of the vital interests.

It is clear, of course, that it is desirable to deter a nuclear war. This aim was achieved; not only were nuclear weapons not used during the Cold War but there was no strategic use of forces, although an increased alert such as that during the Cuban crisis could possibly be considered a type of strategic use. On the other hand, the effectiveness of deterrence of general nuclear war is not static; the fact that it has worked so far does not ensure against its failure in the future. The deterrent balance needs constant reappraisal.

During the Cold War, the mode of deterring general nuclear war was by maintaining a strategic nuclear force sufficient to make credible a threat of "assured destruction"; that is, certain destruction of something of such value to the enemy that its loss would be unacceptable. In this assured-destruction mode, the force must be of sufficient magnitude to retain credibility even in a second-strike position; that is, even if deterrence fails and the enemy strikes first, using some or all of his first-strike weapons in a counterforce role. This posture was based on the view that strategic stability exists when each side deems the second-strike retaliatory capability of the other to be survivable, reliable, and effective.

Stability, as understood during the Cold War was a dynamic situation of mutual deterrence. Deterrence was constantly upgraded by both sides as the situation changed and technology improved.

Nuclear Weapons: Sources of Stability or Instability in South Asia?

The voluminous corpus of literature available on the evolution of nuclear strategy during the Cold War, points out that the most of the western strategists, who shaped policy decisions argued vehemently in favour of these weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), declaring them to be the underpinning of 'strategic stability.'[20] Ironically the same nuclear weapons are now being touted as a source of potential instability between India and Pakistan.

Two kinds of scenarios are visualised in the South Asian context. One, in which India and Pakistan fight a conventional war, which escalates into a nuclear war and two, a situation, wherein Pakistani nuclear weapons fall into 'irresponsible' hands.[21] Curiously no such threat is visualised in case of the Indian nuclear weapons. The first argument has been played on a number of occasions to defuse explosive standoffs between India and Pakistan, which threatened to spiral out of control. The second scenario has lately assumed sinister proportions, particularly after Pakistan was rocked by internal stability during 2007.[22]

This is in stark contrast to the initial euphoria expressed by the 'nuclear optimists.'[23] It was hoped that nuclear evolution between India and Pakistan would create stable nuclear deterrence, which would make the outbreak of nuclear war unlikely. Parallels were drawn with a similar evolution of nuclear deterrence between Soviet Union and the United States of America during the course of the Cold War and empirical evidence was used to prove that India and Pakistan were able to avoid nuclear exchange despite experiencing multiple crises between 1986 and 2001.[24]

The 'nuclear pessimists' rejected the evolution of such a stable nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan and direly warned of the dangers of a possible nuclear war between these two arch rivals.[25] According to these 'pessimists', India and Pakistan are different from the Cold War superpowers and that nuclear deterrence as practiced by them superpowers is not appropriate for

the South Asian subcontinent for a variety of reasons, like short reaction times and low nuclear thresholds.

A second difference, in their opinion was that India and Pakistan's nuclear arsenals were much smaller than those of the United States and Russia. The US and Russian arsenals truly had the capability to destroy each other's society beyond recovery. The levels of destruction in the South Asian context did not reach the level of "mutual assured destruction" (MAD) that stood as the ultimate deterrent during the Cold War.[26]

Four distinct phases can be discerned in the evolution of nuclear politics in the India – Pakistan milieu. In the first or the preliminary stage both countries covertly developed nuclear weapons, in the teeth of opposition by the nuclear weapon states (NWS), who wanted to stop them from doing just that in the larger context of the non-proliferation regime. In the next two stages (covering the time period during which the two nations had acquired the nuclear capability but had not declared it and next when they declared their nuclear weapons programme), nuclear deterrence was successfully used to prevent conventional wars and in the fourth stage the US is propping up India as a reliable nuclear ally and as a countervail against China,[27] while Pakistan is being maligned as an unpredictable ally, whose nuclear weapons are in the eminent danger of falling into the 'unsafe' hands.[28]

The Indian and Pakistani nuclear programmes had dissimilar beginnings. India had a head start in nuclear R & D. The *Tata Institute of Fundamental Research* (TIFR) was established in Trombay, near Bombay in March 1944 by the father of the Indian atomic programme Dr Homi Bhabha, after whom the institute was, renamed *Bhabha Atomic Research Centre* (BARC) on 12 January 1967.[29] Nehru, the first prime minister of India was intensely involved in his country's nuclear plans and is credited with laying the foundations of the Indian ambitions to become a nuclear power, ever since it became an independent nation.[30] Pakistan only embarked on the nuclear path after the country was dismembered in 1971. New Pakistani President ZA Bhutto summoned his scientists in Multan in January 1972 and tasked them with developing an

indigenous nuclear programme. The Pakistani plans acquired real momentum after the Indian nuclear explosion in1974. Working ferociously and against all odds the Pakistani scientific community was able to produce enriched uranium and conduct a 'cold test' in 1984.[31]

Chary of allowing nuclear competition in South Asia, India planned nipping the Pakistani atomic ambitions in the bud. Drawing inspiration from the Israeli attack on the Iraqi nuclear facility in Osirak in 1981,[32] India planned eliminating Pakistani nuclear programme in Kahuta, in collusion with Israel. In 1982, *Washington Post* reported Indian contingency plans to carry out pre-emptive strikes against Pakistani nuclear installations, especially the Kahuta Uranium Enrichment plant.[33] Again during a briefing in 1984 to US Senators, CIA alluded to the possibility of Indian pre-emptive strikes against Kahuta.[34] Giving details of the stillborn Indo-Israeli raid in their book, 'Deception: Pakistan, the United States and the Global Weapons Conspiracy,' journalists Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark stated: "In February 1983, with the strike plan at an advanced stage, Indian military officials had travelled secretly to Israel, which had a common interest in eliminating A.Q. Khan, to buy electronic warfare equipment to neutralise Kahuta's air defences." India put its plans on hold after Raja Ramanna, then director of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), was warned by the then Chairman of Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) Munir Ahmed Khan in Vienna in the autumn of 1983 that Islamabad would attack Trombay, if its facilities in Kahuta were attacked. At this juncture, Israel suggested that they should carry out the raid on Kahuta from the Indian Jamnagar base in Gujarat to launch its jets and another IAF base in northern India to refuel. "In March 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi signed off (on) the Israeli-led operation, bringing India, Pakistan and Israel to within a hair's breadth of a nuclear conflagration." However, according to Levy and Scott-Clark India and Israel backed off from the plan after the CIA tipped off President Zia ul Haq and the US state department warned India that "the US will be responsive if India persists." The book further said Prime Minister Indira Gandhi then aborted the operation despite protests from military planners in New Delhi and Jerusalem. General KM Arif, the then Vice Chief of

Staff of Pakistan Army is quoted as saying: "Our friends had let us known what the Israelis and Indians intended to do, and so we let them know how we would respond. Both sides were harrying the other and were absolutely aware of the consequences of every move. In the end, it was India that blinked."[35] This was the first instance of nuclear brinkmanship in the chequered history of Indo Pakistan conflict. In order to avoid another nuclear escalation, Zia and Gandhi met in New Delhi, in December 1985 and agreed to not attack each others' nuclear facilities.[36]

Another crisis was precipitated by a large-scale Indian military exercise codenamed Brasstacks. The manoeuvres began in July 1986 and reached crisis stage in December. By that time India had amassed a total of nine divisions in Rajasthan opposite the Pakistani province of Sindh, under the garb of the exercise. In absence of any formal notification of deployment of troops, Pakistan became suspicious about this massive concentration of battle ready troops, so close to its border. As a safeguard Pakistan moved its Army Reserve North and Army Reserve South to locations from where they could strike at Punjab or Kashmir. In January 1987, the situation threatened to escalate out of control. Better sense prevailed and both governments decided to lessen tensions by activating a hotline and agreeing to a systematic plan for standing down.[37] Conventional posturing was supplemented by unambiguous nuclear signalling to deter an all out war. On January 28, near the height of the crisis, Pakistani nuclear scientist Dr AQ Khan in a rare interview to Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar, plainly informed him that Pakistan had succeeded in enriching uranium to weapons-grade, and could build nuclear weapons. He added, "...nobody can undo Pakistan or take us for granted. We are here to stay and let it be clear that we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened."[38] In 1987 President Zia told Time magazine, "Pakistan can build a bomb whenever it wishes".[39]

In early 1990, there were reports of missiles being readied in the subcontinent. The crisis was precipitated due to an unprecedented and largely indigenous independence Kashmiri struggle in late 1989. India blamed Pakistan for aiding and abetting the 'freedom movement' and deployed its troops along Pakistan's

border.[40] Pakistan countered by rapidly deploying its conventional armed forces and pre-positioning its nuclear capable F16s.[41] As risk of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan heightened, US sent the then Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates in the middle of May 1990 to South Asia. In his meetings with senior Pakistani and Indian officials, Gates made it amply clear that US did not want any escalation to nuclear levels.[42]

In the spring of 1999 a border incursion on the icy heights of Kargil, in the lofty Himalayas, once again snowballed into a major crisis, which threatened to escalate into a full blown war. To find a way out of the emerging maelstrom, Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif sought an urgent meeting with the American President, so that he could be asked to act as an honest broker to settle this conflict. Much to his chagrin, in the July the 4th meeting at Blair House, the Pakistani premier was hectored and cajoled by his American interlocutor, who insinuated that his generals had readied nuclear tipped missiles. A nuclear war he argued would be recipe for disaster. Having 'softened' up the Pakistani premier, Clinton emphasised the importance of an immediate troops withdrawal from Kargil heights and a promise to abide by the sanctity of the Line of Control (LoC) in the disputed territory of Kashmir.[43]

The disastrous consequences of a nuclear war in case of an India – Pakistan conflict were again the underlying theme of US dissuasive diplomacy during the 2002 crisis.[44] The Indians apparently in a bid to copy the American response to 9/11 attacks mobilised troops and concentrated them along the international border (IB) in offensive configurations, in retaliation to an attack on the Indian parliament by Kashmiri militants in December 2001.[45] To dissuade India from launching an attack across the IB, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in his June visit to the subcontinent shared a classified Pentagon study that concluded that a nuclear war between these countries could result in 12 million deaths.[46] This was also leaked to the international media. Travel advisories were issued to prospective travellers and non-essential embassy staffs were withdrawn. The panic caused had inherent economic consequences and threatened to dry up the massive financial investments being

made in India. The effects caused by the American disclosures on the market put a brake on Indian plans to invade Pakistan.

The argument that the potential use of nuclear weapons could lead to instability had been persuasively used by the US.

Nuclear Options

Clearly the nuclear option has deterred war in the past but would it continue to deter war in the future? Ever since India and Pakistan agreed to resume the peace process after the extremely optimistic SAARC summit held in Islamabad in 2004, tensions have by and large eased and the guns have fallen silent across the LoC. The composite dialogue, which resumed four years ago, addresses a basket of seven issues including the complex case of Kashmir.[47]

Understandably the dialogue process has followed a sputtering and frustrating trajectory but nonetheless, it has given hope that war as an instrument of settling issues has been put on ice, hopefully forever. If for argument's sake one accepts such an optimistic prognosis of the India-Pakistan relationship, which has traditionally been wracked by mutual suspicions and misgivings in the past, the question is whether this the opportune moment to opt for complete or partial nuclear disarmament? Before rejecting this approach out rightly, let's hypothetically examine the consequences. The immediate questions that come to one's mind is: Does Pakistan really stands to gain from such a decision? Would adopting such an option enhance Pakistan's security or would it make it more vulnerable? How can Pakistan redress the insecurity created by giving up its nuclear weapons? Would Pakistan be provided external security guarantees like a nuclear umbrella from allies or friendly countries? (India had similar assurances from western powers, when they perceived that India might be threatened by China).[48] Nuclear-sceptics might say that overtime the safekeeping of Pakistan's nuclear assets has become more important than the security of the country itself and that the existence of these weapons can become a likely *causus belli* for a foreign invasion.[49] Those in favour of nuclear weapons as a dependable means of deterrence may advance three arguments: One, nuclear weapons have deterred wars with

India in the past. Two, these have the potential of deterring wars in the future also because conventional weapons alone do not stand a chance of preventing a nuclear armed adversary from either blatant coercion or outright attack. Three, in case Pakistan gives up its nuclear weapons, the significant amount of time, money and energy spent on developing these would simply go waste. There are other additional questions, which would agitate the minds of disarmament experts. How to dispose off these redundant weapons and the weapon grade fissile material? Destroy them, sell them or place these under international stewardship? If these are to be given into safekeeping, who will be vested with custodial controls – IAEA or OIC or some other international organisation? Difficult questions, with no simple answers.

Nuclear disarmament would inevitably be welcomed by those segments of international community, who perceive nuclear proliferation as a threat to their unique nuclear status. Most western nations including NWS like US, Britain and France, and non – NWS like Germany and other western European states and Japan would applaud it. China might not consider this a welcome development because it will allow India to concentrate exclusively against it. It would be a heaven sent gift to the Indians, as this would remove a major hurdle in their quest in becoming the hegemonic power in the region. Muslim countries and others striving to acquire a nuclear status would be extremely disappointed because this would almost foreclose their nuclear options. Domestically, this will create an acute sense of insecurity and vulnerability.

Before closing the discussion on this option altogether, it would not be out of place to mention that India Pakistan landscape is littered with proposals for 'no war pacts' and 'nuclear free zone' (NFZ). At this point in time, India is not willing to discuss the NFZ option.[50] This puts paid to pious intentions of complete or partial disarmament.[51]

The sheer weight of economics militates embarking on an expensive and non-productive arms build up to keep up with India, both in the field of conventional as well as nuclear weapons. Logically speaking the more sensible option for Pakistan is to

maintain minimum credible nuclear deterrence without getting involved in a debilitating arms race with India. Right now Pakistan is doing just that. The current Pakistan nuclear policy according to the Director General of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division (SPD) Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai is based on restraint and responsibility with four salient features: (1) deterrence of all forms of external aggression; (2) ability to deter a counter strike against strategic assets; (3) stabilization of strategic deterrence in South Asia; and (4) conventional and strategic deterrence methods.[52] It is clear from this approach that Pakistani nuclear policy is based on the concept of deterrence.

Place of Nuclear Weapons in the Stability Matrix

There is no doubt that nuclear weapons play a fundamentally important role in maintaining balance in an adversarial relationship. The question, however, is whether these WMDs are the ultimate guarantors of stability and security? There are two dimensions of stability – external and internal. Both are extremely complex, multifaceted and intricately interlinked phenomena. One can continue arguing without actually determining the importance of one as compared to another. Strong nations have collapsed because they had become internally weak and unstable.

The collapse and disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the last decade of the previous century is only recent history. During the Cold War nuclear weapons had a vital balancing position in the overall superpower equation. In the final analysis, these could not prevent the collapse of the USSR. The Soviet Union imploded not because of a nuclear strike on Moscow but because its economy could not longer bear the consequences of a long and expensive foreign campaign. The archaic and creaking financial system collapsed and the former global power disintegrated into a number of states. The former USSR makes an extremely interesting case study of internal and external stability. Analysts often credit or blame (depending on which ideology they subscribe to) Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the last head of state of the USSR (from 1985 until its collapse in

1991), for presiding over the dissolution of the original bastion of communism by introducing reforms like *perestroika* (economic restructuring) and *glasnost* (policy of maximal publicity, openness, and transparency in the activities of all government institutions in the Soviet Union, together with freedom of information). Fact of the matter is that the decade long military operations in Afghanistan had drained the physical and economic resources of the Soviet Union. The national morale had fallen rock bottom. The common man had lost faith in communism, the Warsaw Pact countries of Eastern Europe were faced with an acute leadership crisis. The socialist system built to safeguard the welfare of the proletariat had been waylaid by the vested interests of the politburo members and the party *apparatchiks*, who had become more equal than the party cadres. [53] Gorbachev was only the catalyst, which hastened the end of the mighty empire, not the main cause for losing the dialectic of opposing wills in the Cold War.[54]

Stability has different connotations when linked with the internal situation. In the case of Pakistan within the framework of South Asia, nuclear weapons are viewed as a major balancing factor in its instable relationship with India. There have been occasions, particularly in times of internal crises, when this strength has been portrayed as a source of weakness. It is interesting to examine the background of such speculations. The first time such a theme was played up was after the 1999 military coup, almost a year after Pakistan had conducted its nuclear tests. Western commentators, particularly arms controls and disarmament experts feared that without civilian controls, Pakistani nuclear weapons in the hands of the military would become a cause for instability. It was surmised that an unbridled military setup would be at liberty to initiate sub-conventional conflicts like the Kargil skirmish, which many hint may have been the root cause for the overthrow of the civil government.

In his analysis about the security of nuclear weapons after the military coup of 1999, Gaurav Kampani, a non-proliferation expert expressed concerns on the removal of 'civilian filters' in the nuclear decision-making process in Pakistan. He thought that the replacement of a civilian government with military hardliners would

result in the intensification of the sub-conventional war between India and Pakistan in Kashmir with risks of escalation to the conventional and nuclear levels and nuclear crisis stability. He also conjectured that the imposition of additional economic sanctions on Pakistan by the United States and international financial institutions would weaken the Pakistani government's commitment to export controls on nuclear, missile, and other dual-use technologies.[55]

In hindsight such doubts both genuine and motivated, proved false as nuclear weapons did not in any way become 'insecure' in the hands of the military sans civilian oversights. Pakistan military did not go into an overdrive to repeat a low intensity conflict like the one that had taken place in Kargil and nuclear weapons were instrumental in deterring India from escalating the mobilisation of forces in 2002 into an all out war. The military government also undertook immediate measures to institute a National Command Authority (NCA) to institutionalise nuclear decision making by way of policy formulation, and development of nuclear weapons and employment control over all strategic nuclear forces and strategic organizations.[56] It was also during this time that sources of nuclear proliferation were effectively blocked.

Concerns were also raised about the possibility of nuclear weapons and radioactive materials passing into the hands of the terrorists after the 9/11 attacks on mainland America. [57] The alarm lasted a while and subsided partially after Pakistani authorities made all out efforts to convince the world at large that their nation's nuclear arsenals were secure and were not likely to fall into the hands of unscrupulous elements.

Similar concerns are now being raised as Pakistan experiences internal turmoil and upheaval. A raft of articles appearing in the western press puts the safety and security of the Pakistani nuclear weapons into question, should religious extremists take over the reins of the government. The American presidential candidates on the campaign trails have offered solutions like taking the war from Afghanistan to Pakistan and setting up joint oversights to control Pakistani nuclear weapons.[58] Much to the chagrin of the Pakistani government, the head of the IAEA Muhammad Al Baradei

also added his voice to the din of condescending concerns about Pakistani nuclear weapons.[59] There were also alarming reports that Pentagon was considering contingencies to secure these weapons to prevent them from falling into the hands of radical extremists.[60] Foreign media reports suggested that hundred million dollars in US aid to secure make Pakistani nuclear weapons safe may have gone waste (*sic*).[61] This prompted Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai, Pakistan's DG SPD to set the record straight by informing an audience of foreign journalists that aid offered by the US was accepted in order to share "best practices" in nuclear security and training, and that it amounted to no more than *$8-10 million dollars* and not a hundred million dollars as claimed.[62]

There were also rumblings within the US policy making circles, expressing the need to properly audit the monies paid to Pakistan from 2002 to 2008 in various kinds of developmental and military aid and grants.[63] The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Joseph R Biden Jr went on record to suggest a new US approach to Pakistan based on four steps: 1) Tripling the aid to Pakistan for a decade but that it should be given to its people rather than the rulers. 2) Tying security aid with government's performance. 3) Ensuring "democracy dividends" in Pakistan and 4) Engaging the Pakistani people and not just the rulers.[64] Biden's suggestion was interpreted as being positive but patronising.

Suspicion and scepticism notwithstanding, there is a need for stocktaking and retrospection at the official level, of how Pakistan's nuclear weapons can be a source of stability and not become a cause for instability for the country?

Firstly, one needs to determine whether the present instability is because of the nuclear weapons or are there other causes for it? A logical examination of the prevailing instability leads one to the conclusion that nuclear weapons are not the reason for the turmoil rocking the country. The issues tearing the fabric of the society are basic like poverty, hunger and illiteracy. Nonetheless, a bogey has been created by the western media that Pakistani nuclear weapons were in imminent danger of falling into the hands of radical elements, who would use nuclear weapons irrationally.[65]

Ergo, it is the dreaded religious extremists, who arouse all these fears and apprehensions and not the nuclear weapons *per se*.

Secondly, one needs to contemplate, how to remove such international concerns and worries? The results of the recently held elections have already done a lot to disabuse the doomsday sayers, who have been depicting Pakistan as the hotbed of extremism. That the forces of extremism have been rejected goes to show the high level of maturity that the common Pakistani possesses.[66] This, however, does not absolve the new government from undertaking a holistic campaign to purge the feeling of perceived 'relative deprivation' afflicting the increasing numbers of the less privileged members of the society.[67] This can only be done if a real term investment is made in the human resource capital. The common man, who now makes up the swelling ranks of the marginalised and disenfranchised, has been neglected far too long. He must now be made stakeholders in the destiny of the nation. This is far easier said than done. Long term measures need to be undertaken to provide modern education to all, as compared to the archaic madrassah based education, which promotes obscurantism and perpetuates a primitive worldview. Equal opportunities in life, justice, healthcare, potable drinking water and freedom from fear and want are essential ingredients for a healthy developing society.

Thirdly, there is a requirement to prepare an imaginative security policy, which provides solutions to internal as well as external threat. For security from external aggression, first and foremost Pakistan needs internal stability. Stability within can only be insured, if the national leadership is mature and far sighted. An honest and committed top hierarchy can introduce good governance, maintain law and order, create harmony among the ethnically diverse population of Pakistan, alleviate poverty, and restore the confidence of the common man in his future. The country is currently experiencing violent upheaval and turmoil. Religious extremism threatens to tear apart the fabric of the society. The present state of affairs is the result of years of apathy and neglect. Certain segments of society have become so marginalised that the only solace and salvation they can find for themselves is in an old fashioned brand of religious extremism. There is no short term

solution for the polarisation of the society. The disenfranchised must be brought back to the main stream.

Conclusion

Nearly thirty six years ago, after Pakistan was brutally torn asunder by force of arms, a strategic decision was taken to opt for nuclear weapons. Such a nostrum was expected to balance the strategic equation in South Asia. The decision has stood the test of time. As the nature of threat evolves, there is growing awareness that in the times to come nuclear weapons alone would not be enough to ensure internal or external security.

The nature of threat needs to be reassessed and defence policy revised in the light of new ground realities, including the menace of terrorism. Questions like the need for maintaining large armed forces trained and configured to fight a battle of manoeuvre should be reconsidered. The ratio of conventional forces as compared to nuclear forces needs to be rationalised.

In order to gauge the public opinion about the Pakistani nuclear weapons, I carried out a random survey among my peers in the PhD class. The results gathered were very instructive, i.e. all the respondents were in favour of retaining nuclear weapons, though many were unsure whether these should ever be used.[68]

One may conclude therefore that, whereas, nuclear weapons are acceptable as a safeguard against foreign aggression, many consider their actual use as counter productive. Axiomatically, one may also extend the argument that nuclear weapons are no guarantee against internal instability and turmoil.

End Notes

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Author

The author is a Brigadier in the Pakistan Army, with three decades of service behind him. Commissioned in the Frontier Force Regiment in 1976, he has been trained in prestigious military institutions at home and abroad. He also has a vast experience of command, staff and instructional appointments. Presently he is associated with an R&D project and is concurrently pursuing doctoral studies in Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. His chosen area of study is nuclear stability in South Asia.