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**South Asia: The Prospect of Nuclear Disarmament  
After the 1998 Nuclear Tests in India and Pakistan**

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by

**Lieutenant Colonel Zhou Bo**

**November 1999**

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABM	antiballistic missile
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
C&C	command and control
CD	Conference on Disarmament
CSBM	confidence and security-building measures
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EU	European Union
FMCT	Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty
G-8	The group of eight highly industrialised countries (United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia)
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NMD	national missile defence
NPT	Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
P-5	the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (United States of America, China, United Kingdom, France and Russia)
PrepCom	Preparatory Committee
R&D	research and development
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
THAAD	theatre high-altitude area defence
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

In spite of the international condemnation and remedial efforts after the May 1998 Indo-Pakistan nuclear tests, the situation in South Asia has subsequently been an action–reaction of missile race, local war, full-fledged nuclear weapon program and coup d'état. International arms control regimes such as the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) have been hampered. South Asia as a whole has become a more dangerous place and a range of international efforts have not worked as expected. Even more pessimistically, it may be that nobody can do anything significant to change the South Asian situation.

This could be true. There is no panacea for nuclear disarmament in South Asia. Such disarmament will be a protracted process, intertwined with expediency and relentless bargaining within and beyond the region. Although, at this stage, India and Pakistan appear unlikely to conduct nuclear tests again, they will spare no efforts towards modernisation and deployment of nuclear weapons. India refuses to join the NPT. In the absence of Indian commitment to the NPT, it is unlikely that Pakistan will sign the treaty. India and Pakistan may sign the CTBT, as they have pledged, but the recent coup in Pakistan and the refusal of the United States Senate to ratify the CTBT make such a possibility even further remote. The Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) and controls on the export of fissile materials are negotiable, in that they are long-term objectives and are not necessarily associated with India and Pakistan alone.

The question of nuclear disarmament is never why, but how and when. The author argues that the solution lies in India and Pakistan discovering how nuclear disarmament in South Asia best serves their national interests and also how wider international nuclear disarmament progresses. A simultaneous three-level approach is suggested. This comprises some concrete proposals as to what could be done between India and Pakistan, between the international community and India and Pakistan, and last but not least, among all nuclear-weapon states. The author concludes that South Asian nuclear disarmament is now part of global nuclear disarmament, making this issue more complicated.



# **SOUTH ASIA: THE PROSPECT OF NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AFTER THE 1998 NUCLEAR TESTS IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN**

## **Background**

The prospect for global nuclear non-proliferation before the May 1998 Indo-Pakistan nuclear tests was, by and large, encouraging. The end of the Cold War, globalisation of the world economy and political changes within potential proliferant states all added to the general belief that the value of nuclear weapons was declining. In 1996, the post-Soviet states of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine transferred their nuclear weapons to Russia and became non-nuclear-weapon states. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), opened for signature in September 1996, has been signed by 152 states and ratified by thirty-seven of the forty-four states whose ratification is required for the Treaty to enter into force.<sup>1</sup> As of late 1997, all five declared nuclear-weapon states and most non-nuclear-weapon states had become parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was extended indefinitely in May 1995. Earlier on, in the 1980s, Argentina, Brazil and Romania renounced their nuclear acquisition programs. In 1991, South Africa eliminated its stock of six nuclear weapons, which it had secretly acquired in the late 1970s.

Until May 1998, we had a world with only seven countries remaining on the proliferation 'watch list': Israel, India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Libya and North Korea.<sup>2</sup> Regional

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<sup>1</sup> 'Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation', *News Brief*, No. 46, 2nd Quarter, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Rodney W. Jones, Mark G. McDonough, Gregory P. Webb and Gregory D. Koblenz, *Tracking Nuclear Proliferation: A guide*

nuclear-weapon-free zones have also become more extensive geographically. They include nuclear-weapon-free-zone pacts in Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific and, more recently, nuclear weapon-free-zone accords in South-East Asia and Africa.<sup>3</sup> Although the Second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) had yet to be ratified by the Russian Duma, START III had been anticipated. It seemed logical that the general trend of non-proliferation had been accepted universally, if not unanimously, as the code of conduct of the world-to-be.

The Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in May 1998 dealt a heavy blow to such wishful thinking. India announced that it had conducted three underground nuclear tests on 11 May and two more on 13 May at the Pokharan site in Rajasthan. On 28 May Pakistan announced that it had conducted five nuclear tests, followed by a further test on 30 May, in the Chagai region of South-West Baluchistan.

### **The Impact of the Tests**

Nuclear experts have expressed suspicions over the alleged number and yield of the tests by India and Pakistan, but few strategists doubt the consequences of the tests. In the first place, India has triggered an arms race that Pakistan would be most unwilling to follow if it had other choices. This arms race has also dashed the dream of a nuclear-free South Asia. In particular, the shock waves of the tests have hampered international arms control regimes such as the NPT and CTBT, and made the prospect of negotiating a strong and binding Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) more complicated.

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*in Maps and Charts, 1998*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D. C., 1998, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The bedrock of non-proliferation has been strongly eroded. Article 9 of the NPT stipulates that ‘a nuclear-weapon State is one which has manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January 1967’. If the international community accedes to the nuclear-weapon state status of India and Pakistan, it ushers in the danger of encouraging any nuclear threshold states to follow suit and even nuclear have-nots to rethink the consequences. The NPT could therefore be fragmented. On the other hand, even if the international community does not accept India and Pakistan formally as nuclear-weapon states, they are de facto nuclear-haves. The danger arising from this situation is no less significant; both countries could disconnect themselves from any obligations of non-proliferation and continue to beef up their nuclear-weapon programs. Events suggest that this is exactly what they have been doing since their nuclear tests in May 1998. In this regard, the NPT is intrinsically flawed for not being able to accommodate the new political reality within the existing legal framework.

The effectiveness of the CTBT, another important non-proliferation treaty, was equally damaged by the tests. The rationale for the CTBT was that it would ‘constrain the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons; end the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons; contribute to the prevention of nuclear proliferation and the process of nuclear disarmament; and strengthen international peace and security’.<sup>4</sup> But India has announced repeatedly that it would not sign the treaty. The official reason India gives is that the five nuclear-weapon states refuse to agree to the new Indian demand that the treaty must contain a provision for a ‘time-bound framework for

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<sup>4</sup> US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Fact Sheet*, 11 September 1996.

nuclear disarmament',<sup>5</sup> obligating the nuclear-weapon states to negotiate the elimination of their nuclear weapons within a fixed period of ten or so years. However, India's true motive was probably fear that compliance with the treaty would cap its nuclear option for good.

## World Response

The international community was initially shocked and then outraged. This was compounded by a sense of betrayal, because India has over many years championed the development of a global nuclear-test ban treaty and contributed positively to early drafts of the CTBT. The outrage was all the stronger because of a general belief that there were no credible threats to India at the time.<sup>6</sup> Although the international community knew that it was India that triggered the nuclear race, Pakistan could not be treated differently for legal and political reasons.

Condemnation of the tests was heard around the world. More than eighty statements were made to the Conference on Disarmament (CD). In a joint statement read out by Clive Pearson, Ambassador of New Zealand to the Special Session of the Conference on Disarmament, forty-seven CD member states and observers condemned the tests as undermining both the non-proliferation regime and the process of disarmament. They concluded that these tests were totally irreconcilable with claims by both countries that they were committed to nuclear disarmament.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rodney W. Jones *et al.*, *Tracking Nuclear Proliferation: A guide in Maps and Charts*, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> 'No Security Threat When I Stepped Down: Gujral', Rediff on the Internet, 30 May 1998 (<http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/may/30bomb20.htm>).

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Johnson, 'CD Update', *Disarmament Diplomacy*, May 1998, p. 21.

Most notable were the successive responses from the UN, P-5, and G-8. In Geneva, on 4 June 1998, foreign ministers from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council issued a joint communiqué that condemned the tests. It demanded that India and Pakistan stop all further such tests, refrain from the weaponisation or deployment of missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, and refrain from any further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. India and Pakistan were also urged to accede to the CTBT immediately and unconditionally, and to participate in negotiations with other States in the CD regarding the Fissile Material Cut-off Convention. Both countries were also advised that they should not export equipment, materials or technology that could contribute to weapons of mass destruction or missiles capable of delivering them. The communiqué further stressed that, nuclear tests notwithstanding, India and Pakistan would not be awarded the status of Nuclear-weapons State in accordance with the NPT.

UN Resolution 1172, unanimously agreed on 06 June 1998, and the G-8 meeting six days later in London, also condemned the nuclear tests and made the same demands in very similar language. During his visit to China in June 1998, US President Bill Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin issued three arms control-related joint statements. In the first one, noticeably on South Asia, the two presidents endorsed the P-5 Joint Communiqué, reaffirmed their determination to fulfil their commitments relating to nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the NPT, and pledged to take all possible steps to assist India and Pakistan to resolve peacefully the difficult and long-standing differences between them, including the issue of Kashmir.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 'Sino-US Presidential Joint Statements on South Asia', *People's Daily*, 28 June 1998, p. 1.

Follow-up actions were taken as well. Economic sanctions were imposed on India by Japan, Sweden, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and many other countries. High-level and military exchanges between China and India were suspended by China, as China suddenly found itself being accused by India as 'potential long-term threat No. 1'.<sup>9</sup> The US imposed sanctions, mandated by its 1994 Nuclear Proliferation Act (Glenn Amendment) on both India and Pakistan. These prohibited the export of sensitive technologies, military and foreign assistance, official credits or credit guarantees, and lending by US commercial banks. The US also withdrew its support for World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans. Sanctions would be lifted only on conditions of concrete progress by India and Pakistan in meeting the benchmarks. However, by the Northern Hemisphere mid-Summer in 1998, agricultural exports had been exempted in response to complaints by American farmers. By early November the sanctions were further eased to cover only high-technology and military-equipment exports, as a reward to India and Pakistan for announcing testing moratoria and for their pledges to sign the CTBT by September 1999. France, Britain and Russia did not take much action. France believed that sanctions would not encourage India to sign the NPT.<sup>10</sup> On 21 December 1998, during Russian Prime Minister Primakov's visit to India, Russia and India even signed a treaty of military and technical cooperation for ten years and declared their intention to establish a strategic partnership.

US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott shuttled between Washington, New Delhi and Islamabad carrying both carrots and sticks. The eight rounds of meetings could be described as encouraging, but were far from satisfactory. Both India and

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<sup>9</sup> 'Speak Softly . . . India's Fernandes Lowers His Anti-China Tone', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 July 1998, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> R. Krishnan, 'US Sanctions Make No Sense: France', *The Hindustan Times*, 14 May 1998, p. 1.

Pakistan expressed a likelihood to sign the CTBT before September 1999 conditional upon the lifting of US sanctions. They also expressed readiness to join the FMCT discussions. On the issue of export controls, both claimed to have effective control over sensitive technologies, while India conveyed the wish to be provided better access to dual-use and high technologies. With respect to its missile programs, India declared that it would not 'accept any restraints on the development of India's R&D capabilities'.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately India 'remains unequivocally opposed to any suggestions that seek to place India at a technological disadvantage through intrusive or sovereignty violative measures'.<sup>12</sup>

Insofar as India's accession to the NPT was concerned, no progress was made to change India's position that the NPT was discriminatory by nature and there was no question of India signing it. Pakistan stressed that it did not initiate the tests, that it had 'waited for 17 days for the world to respond' before it was forced to test to establish nuclear deterrence in self-defence.<sup>13</sup> Pakistan has also made it clear that it will not sign the NPT under 'coercion or pressure'.<sup>14</sup> This led some people to believe that, in exchange for lifting economic sanctions, Pakistan may still sign the NPT, while others argue that Pakistan would never do that without India signing the NPT first.

### **What do India and Pakistan Want?**

Since the late 1980s, all Indian prime ministers have had the option to conduct nuclear tests. However, each prime minister

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<sup>11</sup> Indian Prime Minister's Statement in Parliament on 'Bilateral Talks with United States', 15 December 1998.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Pakistani Prime Minister's Speech at the United Nations on 23 September 1998.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

had decided against going through with field tests. India's nuclear capability is known to all after it had detonated a nuclear device in what it called a 'peaceful nuclear experiment' in May 1974. Why then, all of a sudden, did India decide to conduct nuclear tests? The reasons suggested by India are a little of everything. In the beginning, Indian Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee wrote to President Bill Clinton about the 'deteriorating security environment, especially the nuclear environment, faced by India'.<sup>15</sup> This was seen as an indirect support of Defence Minister George Fernandes's remarks about China being 'potential threat No. 1'. The Clinton Administration dismissed these remarks, and the relevant Indian letter was later published in the *New York Times*.<sup>16</sup> Later Prime Minister Vajpayee changed his tune when he remarked that 'millions of Indians have viewed this occasion [the tests] as the beginning of the rise of a strong and self-confident India . . . the greatest meaning of the tests is that they have given India *shakti*, they have given India strength, they have given India self-confidence'.<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister Vajpayee also asserted, 'India is now a nuclear-weapon state. This is a reality that cannot be denied . . . it is India's due, the right of one-sixth of human-kind'.<sup>18</sup>

To a great extent, Vajpayee had voiced India's sense of honour and wish to be acknowledged as a great power in the world when he talked about the rationale behind the Indian nuclear tests. However, what Vajpayee could hardly say in

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<sup>15</sup> Steve Lee Myers, 'Clinton to Impose Sanctions on India in Aftermath of Nuclear Tests', *New York Times*, 13 May 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State, On-the-record Briefing on India and Pakistan, Washington, 28 May 1998.

<sup>17</sup> 'India's Nuclear Tests: National Security or International Status', *Southern Asia Policy Briefs Page*, The Henry L. Stimson Centre, 5 June 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee in a statement to Parliament, 28 May 1998.

public was that, in the first place, his nationalistic Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was a weak coalition government. Without a dramatic, patriotic event like a nuclear test, the BJP had little hope of sustaining the ever-weakening coalition government. Second, knowing that the ongoing CTBT negotiation had made tremendous headway by attracting more than 150 countries as signatories, India was afraid that if it did not conduct tests to obtain all the necessary data, Indian nuclear capabilities would be frozen forever. This in part explains why, after conducting five nuclear tests within three days, India announced that it would observe a voluntary moratorium and refrain from conducting underground nuclear tests.

The allegation of a ‘China threat’ was dismissed by many international observers and even Indians themselves. Inder Kumar Gujral and Deve Gowda, two previous prime ministers, noted that there were no threats to the country’s national security when the United Front government left office in March 1998.<sup>19</sup> In fact, bilateral relations between India and China had witnessed steady improvement since the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China in December 1988. An agreement on maintaining peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in the Sino-Indian border area, and another agreement concerning the establishment of confidence-building measures in military fields, were signed respectively in 1993 and 1996. Four forward posts at close proximity in Wandong, an area in the eastern section of the Sino-Indian border, were withdrawn in 1995, two from each side.

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<sup>19</sup> ‘No Security Threat When I Stepped Down: Gujral’, Rediff on the Internet, 30 May 1998 (<http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/may/30bomb20.htm>.); ‘Deve Gowda Blasts Vajpayee for Dumping ‘Consensus’, Rediff on the Internet, 30 May 1998 (<http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/may/30bomb19>).

The timing of India's nuclear tests could not have been worse. A few days before the tests the Chinese Chief of General Staff, General Fu Quanyou, was undertaking a goodwill visit to India. Warm remarks about the current and future relationship were made by Prime Minister Vajpayee and Defence Minister Fernandes. India's nuclear tests and its attack on China in the wake of Gen Fu's departure 'shocked' China and provoked strong condemnation.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, India, apparently caught between its own words and deeds, tried to mend the fence for almost a year. At the 11th Sino-Indian Joint Working Group meeting convened in April 1999, both countries declared that they did not pose a threat to each other.

India's nuclear tests left Pakistan no choice. Pakistan considered that it had to restore the strategic balance and demonstrate the credibility of its own deterrent capability. Failing to do so would leave Pakistan politically, technically and even psychologically inferior to its arch-rival, something Pakistan could never afford. Pakistan's decision also stemmed from a frustration that it had warned the world several weeks before the Indian testing, but the international community had ignored its warning of the tests. Furthermore, the international response seemed to be more focused on persuading Pakistan not to test, rather than punishing India, which had already conducted tests.<sup>21</sup> Pakistan 'waited for 17 days for the world to respond',<sup>22</sup> while increasingly feeling mounting domestic pressure to test and global pressure not to test, punctuated with Indian claims that the geo-strategic balance had changed and that Pakistan should abandon support for Kashmiri self-determination. Pakistan eventually pressed the button, probably reluctantly, knowing that its

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<sup>20</sup> 'The Chinese Government Strongly Condemns Indian Nuclear Tests', *People's Daily*, 15 May 1998, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Pakistani Prime Minister's speech at the United Nations on 23 September 1999.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

nuclear response would mean sanctions similar to those applied to India.

### **Lahore Summit – Kargil Crisis Nuclear Doctrine**

A major breakthrough was made in February 1999. On 20–21 February, the Indian and Pakistani prime ministers held a much-hyped meeting in Lahore. The meeting resulted from an invitation by Prime Minister Sharif to Prime Minister Vajpayee to visit Pakistan to mark the initiation of a cross-border bus service between New Delhi and Lahore. In the Lahore Declaration and its accompanying documents, they agreed to a series of confidence and security-building measures (CSBM), including bilateral consultations on security concepts and nuclear doctrine; the establishment of consultative mechanisms to monitor and ensure effective implementation of confidence-building measures; reviewing communication links with a view to upgrading and improving them; taking national measures to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, including the establishment of appropriate communication mechanisms; undertaking to provide advance notification of ballistic missile test flights and concluding a formal bilateral agreement on this matter; and observing moratoria on further nuclear tests. The two prime ministers had also pledged to make efforts to resolve all problems including the Jammu–Kashmir issue, a core issue that has bedevilled Indo-Pakistan relations for five decades. All these agreements and pledges created a positive atmosphere and a hope that tensions had eased, and that the two countries had taken a first step forward with regard to confidence building.

The optimism soon proved unfounded. On 11 April, India test-launched a nuclear-capable missile, the *Agni II*. With a reported payload of 1000 kilograms and a range of 2000 to 2500 kilometres, this missile could hit targets anywhere in

Pakistan and in western China. Specialists in Indian politics have noted that the latest test-launches happened to come just when Prime Minister Vajpayee's political position was weakened by friction among members of his governing coalition. On 14 April, in response to India's test launch of the *Agni II* ballistic missile, Pakistan tested its *Ghauri II*, a liquid-fuelled, medium-range, nuclear-capable ballistic missile, with a reported range of 1500 kilometres. The test of the *Ghauri II* was followed within 24 hours by the launch of the *Shaheen I* missile. *Shaheen I* is reportedly solid-fuelled, with a range of 600 kilometres, and capable of carrying a payload of 1000 kilograms. On 16 April, India responded with two tests of its *Trishul* surface-to-air missile, one of five new missiles said to be under development.

The situation continues to worsen. In May, heavy fighting including exchanges of artillery fire erupted along the Line of Control (LOC) in the disputed territory of Kashmir near the Indian-controlled town of Kargil. Each side accused the other of having started the fighting, and tension escalated amid fears that this would result in the fourth war between India and Pakistan, now two nuclear-weapon states. In the seven weeks of fighting, Pakistan shot down two Indian MiG aircraft and an armed helicopter. After initial setbacks, India counterattacked and made significant progress. Talks at foreign-minister level did not result in agreement on ways to lessen the tension. India's Prime Minister ruled out further talks until what India termed 'infiltrated militants' were withdrawn into Pakistan. He also reiterated the long-term Indian policy of rejecting any role for third-party mediation of the Kashmir issue.

After seven weeks of fighting, and following direct intervention by the US, Prime Minister Sharif declared in a joint statement with American President Bill Clinton that 'concrete steps will be taken for the restoration of the Line of

Control in accordance with the [India–Pakistan] Simla Agreement [of 1972]’.<sup>23</sup> The official spokesman of the civilian government stated that Pakistan would ‘appeal to’ and ‘use its influence with’ the ‘mujahideen’ involved.<sup>24</sup> A phased withdrawal started, among sporadic shelling and air strikes. Serious incidents of violence have continued to occur in various areas inside Indian-controlled Kashmir. Much further south, an unarmed Pakistan Navy plane was shot down on 10 August 1998 by an Indian MiG near the international border between India and Pakistan and crashed inside Pakistani territory.<sup>25</sup> International opinion generally considered that the shooting down by India was in revenge for the two aircraft shot down by Pakistan.

The Kargil crisis raises several questions. First, given that the conflict happened after the Lahore summit meeting in which a series of CSBM had been proposed, what is the use of such CSBM if they are proven to be nothing but window-dressing? Second, if the Kargil incident was a ‘proxy war’ masterminded by the Pakistani Army and supported by the Pakistani Government (as claimed by India), could India concede on ‘sovereignty’ to let Pakistan feel that there is at least ‘hope’ to resolve the Kashmir issue on a mutually consultative basis, rather than resorting to force? Third, can it be concluded that nuclear weapons in the subcontinent have not become a ‘peace stabiliser’, as some people have wished, or have they just made any potential conflict between the two nuclear-haves more dangerous? Conversely, did the nuclear weapons on both sides prevent the conflict in Kashmir from developing into a wider war? Answers to these questions

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Full Text of US–Pakistan Statement’, *Dawn*, 05 July 1999, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Vacation of Kargil by Fighters: Pakistan to Use Its Influence’, *Dawn*, 6 July 1999, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Sarfaraz Ahmed, ‘India Downs Pakistan Navy Plane: 16 Killed’, *Dawn*, 11 August 1999, p. 1.

would be interesting because many people argue that it was fear of ‘mutually assured destruction’ between the US and Soviet Union that actually prevented war from happening. In the South Asia context, Pakistan has not pledged a no-first-use of nuclear weapons. During the conflict, there were worries from the Indian side that Pakistan may consider using nuclear weapons.<sup>26</sup>

The Draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine, published on 17 August 1999, is a logical follow-up to India’s nuclear tests, but far more ambitious than expected. In the doctrine, India declares that its strategic interests require effective, credible nuclear deterrence and an adequate retaliatory capability; and that India shall pursue a doctrine of credible minimum nuclear deterrence. India pledges not to be the first to initiate a nuclear strike and not to resort to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against states that do not possess nuclear weapons, or are not aligned with nuclear-weapon powers. These words are nothing new and have been repeated many times on different occasions since the May 1998 tests. However, India officially revealed for the first time that its nuclear forces are to be based on a triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles and sea-based assets. To alleviate international concern about its effective command and control over nuclear weapons, India pledged that nuclear weapons will be tightly controlled and released for use only at the highest political level. The authority to release nuclear weapons for use resides in the person of the Prime Minister of India, or his or her designated successor.

This raises significant questions as to the exact meaning of ‘credible minimum nuclear deterrence’, and Strobe Talbott tried desperately to get answers to such questions during his negotiations with the Indians. The Indian doctrine only

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<sup>26</sup> Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation, *News Brief*, No. 46, 2nd Quarter, 1999, p. 1.

reveals in flexible and ambiguous terms that ‘credible minimum nuclear deterrence’ is a dynamic concept that is related to the strategic environment, technological imperatives and the needs of national security. It was also made explicit at this time that India will not accept any restraints on continuing its nuclear research and development.

Pakistan’s answer to this Indian doctrine was as anticipated. Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, responding to a query about India’s draft nuclear doctrine, was quoted as saying that ‘Pakistan’s own nuclear doctrine was in the final stages of being evolved’.<sup>27</sup>

### **What Can be Done?**

On 12 October 1999, the world was once again shocked by the almost unpredictable changes in the South Asian political scene. Responding to Prime Minister Sharif’s abortive effort to sack him, the Chairman of the Pakistani Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of the Army Staff, General Pervaiz Musharraf, mounted a coup d’état on 12 October, dismissed the Government and put Sharif under house arrest. Subsequently, General Musharraf proclaimed a state of emergency throughout Pakistan and assumed the office of Chief Executive of the nation. The country was informed that the constitution had been put in abeyance, the federal parliament and the provincial assemblies were suspended, and the Prime Minister and his ministers sacked.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyse the political situation of Pakistan. However, the sudden change in that country has certainly made Pakistan, and the already-nuclearised region of South Asia as a whole, more turbulent and volatile. The current situation also raises new questions

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<sup>27</sup> M. Ziauddin, ‘Pakistan’s N-doctrine Being finalised: FM’, *Dawn*, 18 August 1999, p. 1.

regarding arms control. In spite of establishing conditions for the lifting of sanctions in exchange for signing the CTBT, the Sharif Government had at least expressed a willingness to sign that treaty. Will this also be true with the new military government? This does not seem to be a high priority for a government whose legitimacy has yet to be recognised. The coup d'état also poses a question for India. The successful re-election of Vajpayee as Indian Prime Minister could have made him more committed to signing the CTBT. However, confronted with the new political situation in Pakistan and especially with a government comprised of the Pakistani military whom India believed had masterminded the Kargil crisis, would India change its mind? Or is it even possible that the two countries may conduct another round of nuclear tests, perhaps with Pakistan conducting tests first?

These questions have no answers as yet. A cool-headed examination of the prospect of South Asian nuclear disarmament indicates that much has yet to be done. This, however, needs a simultaneous, multifaceted approach; a careful study of what can be done between India and Pakistan, between the international community and India and Pakistan; and last but not least, among all the nuclear-weapon states.

### **First Approach—Steps that India and Pakistan can take to Improve Relations**

#### ***Strengthening Confidence and Security-building Measures***

The essential problem between India and Pakistan is a lack of trust and accommodation. The daily front-page coverage of killings in Kashmir in Indian and Pakistani newspapers demonstrates the historical and religious animosities and hostilities that have been deep-rooted for more than fifty years. CSBM between India and Pakistan over the years have not been scarce. They have included communication,

notification, border security, transparency and consultation measures.<sup>28</sup> In the nuclear-related area, apart from the recent Lahore Declaration, there is the 1988 Memorandum of Understanding entitled an Agreement on the Non-Attack of Nuclear Facilities. Over the years Pakistan has made numerous other proposals, including the establishment of a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone, renunciation of nuclear weapons, bilateral inspection of nuclear facilities, concurrent accession to the NPT, and the agreement of a zero-missile regime in South Asia. Nevertheless, all these CSBM have been turned down by India, which argues that they do not address the nuclear threat India faces from China, and that nuclear disarmament questions should be addressed as global rather than regional issues.<sup>29</sup>

To make any CSBM credible and feasible, mutual accommodations in certain areas are needed to break the suffocating intransigence and allow some fresh air in. As a minimum, such accommodation needs to include:

- *No preconditions set for consultations or negotiations.* Over the years, Pakistan (and most disinterested international observers) have stressed that the main precondition for a comprehensive restoration of relations between India and Pakistan is the solution of the Kashmir issue in the first place. India has claimed that the Kashmir issue could only be resolved along with other issues, that Jammu and Kashmir are an inalienable part of India anyway, and that negotiations on Kashmir cannot include any discussions about 'sovereignty'. Such a relentless attitude from both sides makes any substantive agreement

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrence Scheinman, 'Engaging Non-NPT Parties in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime', *Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation*, No. 16, May 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Rodney W. Jones *et al.*, *Tracking Nuclear Proliferation: A Guide in Maps and Charts, 1998, op. cit.*, p. 133.

impossible. An approach based on no preconditions is required to explore the chances of cooperation whenever and wherever possible. The bus service between India and Pakistan via Lahore is a small step in the right direction. More efforts should be made in economic exchanges between the two countries and in the region. Unfortunately, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is remarkably impotent and ineffective, compared to other regional organisations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU). The SAARC should play a more dynamic role. This would only be possible if India, in particular, were to adopt a more flexible approach, leading to the amelioration of tension between India and Pakistan. The expectation is that strong economic links may spill over to the political level, as has been seen in the economic integration among EU and ASEAN countries.

- *Pakistan renouncing the use of force and support of 'freedom fighters' and India accepting that Jammu and Kashmir and the Line of Control are 'disputed'*. This is more difficult for India in that it has long wanted the Line of Control separating Indian and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir to be made into a permanent international border, and has rarely given appropriate consideration to the possibility of relinquishing (some) 'sovereignty'. India's attitude so far remains typically that of a major power in a stand-off with a lesser power—it anticipates possible minor injuries, but remains sure of a final victory. Such a feeling could especially intensify in the post-Kargil crisis era when international media support seemed to tilt towards India and ignore India's continued non-compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions on Kashmir dating back decades. This, in turn, only strengthens Pakistan's perceptions of international hypocrisy, especially given the attention paid to other long-standing international disputes—for example,

in the Middle East—and the subsequent progress achieved in such cases.

In the long run, however, the Kargil crisis could prove to be only another chapter in the long, bloody history of Kashmir. So far, Pakistan has spared no efforts to highlight the Kashmir issue on every occasion. Any mention of the word ‘Kashmir’ in the international arena is welcomed by Pakistan, to the frustration of India, as it underlines the fact that Kashmir is a ‘disputed’ territory under international law. Some observers assert that the Kargil crisis was triggered by Pakistan in an effort to draw more international attention, or preferably international intervention, along the lines of the NATO intervention in Kosovo. For genuine peace to arrive in Kashmir, and in South Asia as a whole, India has to take a benign, giving-rather-than-taking attitude towards its neighbours, and not to get into a ‘reaction-centred’ relationship with Islamabad, as suggested and practised by the National Congress Party–led Government of ex-Prime Minister Gujral.<sup>30</sup>

- *India reconsidering the likelihood of third-party mediation, which it has adamantly rejected so far.* It goes without saying that any solution of problems between India and Pakistan can only be negotiated between them. India’s insistence on negotiation with Pakistan without any broker probably stems from three main causes. First, India’s sense of being an ancient civilisation that needs nobody to tell it what to do. Second, a determination to avoid interference in India’s ‘domestic affairs’. Finally, and above all, a strategy that direct negotiation with a weak interlocutor gives India more leverage at the negotiating table. However, such negotiation has not worked. In fact, history has suggested that mediation from friendly countries might

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<sup>30</sup> Jyoti Malhotra, ‘Govt to Dump Soft-on-Pak Gujral doctrine’, *The Indian Express*, 24 April 1998, p. 1.

be useful. If the Middle East peace process can be mediated, and a referendum under UN auspices can be held in Cambodia and East Timor, why can the same not happen in Kashmir? With the consent of India and Pakistan, a broader South Asian security dialogue involving interested participants may be worthwhile.

- *Maintaining peace and tranquillity along the Line of Control.* On the basis of admitting that the Line of Control in Kashmir is still ‘disputed,’ the two sides can be separated from each other along the line, and withdraw from forward positions in close proximity. India knows only too well how successful this can be as a CSBM, because that was exactly what India and China did in Wangdong in 1995. If such a separation is considered difficult for any reason, both countries could allow more observers from the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to monitor such disengagement areas.

The Kargil crisis brought two unexpected and contradictory results to India and Pakistan: the internationalisation of the Kashmir issue and international calls for respect of the Line of Control. The first result is what Pakistan would like to see, although not at the cost it, perhaps unexpectedly, paid as a result of the crisis. The second result is what India would like to see, making the Line of Control more ‘permanent’ through international recognition. Strengthening UNMOGIP could reconcile the contradictions. Right now UNMOGIP is only mandated to observe the ceasefire (in Kashmir) and provide good offices to both sides when necessary.<sup>31</sup> UNMOGIP could be further mandated to separate the two armies to outside each other’s artillery range, monitor such disengagement and

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<sup>31</sup> Since the Simla Agreement of 1971, India has rarely requested that UNMOGIP provide ‘good offices’ support to negotiations between India and Pakistan.

demilitarisation areas that might subsequently result, and perhaps prevent illegal movement across the Line of Control. If this could be implemented, both sides would be seen to be benefiting: Pakistan would succeed in internationalising the issue and India in achieving a better sense of security.

### *Effective Command and Control System*

Since India and Pakistan cannot be realistically expected to roll back from their nuclearisation and weaponisation at this time, effective command and control of their nuclear weapons is all the more important. This will by no means be easy for these two new nuclear players. Given the fact that the geographic proximity of major civilian and military targets across the border leaves India and Pakistan no warning time, the idea of striking first in a crisis may look appealing.

India has expressed a willingness to discuss no-first-use of nuclear weapons with all countries including Pakistan. These offers are probably based on a strategy that any talks with one of the P-5 countries about no-first-use contributes to the impression that India is a 'legitimate' nuclear-weapon state, a status rejected by the NPT and guarded against by P-5. India's offer of a bilateral no-first-use treaty with Pakistan was turned down by the latter, which is fully aware of its conventional inferiority to India's superiority in most war scenarios. By the same token, and for understandable reasons, a general no-war treaty offered by Pakistan was rejected by India.<sup>32</sup>

The Lahore Declaration and Indian Nuclear Doctrine have described bilateral and unilateral duties in ensuring an effective command and control system. In spite of the

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<sup>32</sup> 'Vajpayee to Initiate Dialogue with Sharif on Nuke Strategy', *Indian Express*, 16 February 1999, p. 1.

soothing effects, how they can be implemented remains unknown. The fact that the Kargil crisis happened after the Lahore Declaration raises serious doubt about the credibility of any CSBM between India and Pakistan until the question of Kashmir is resolved to their mutual satisfaction.

In its Draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine, India has pledged that nuclear weapons shall be tightly controlled and released for use only at the highest political level, that is, the Prime Minister of India, or his or her designated successor. A similar declaration from Pakistan would help to alleviate doubts in the international community about the commensurate credibility of Pakistan's command and control measures.

An announcement by India and Pakistan regarding the de-targeting of nuclear weapons aimed at each other deserves serious consideration. Similar agreements have been reached among the US, Russia and China. Despite being technically easy to reverse, politically such a measure enhances mutual trust and confidence. Militarily, it helps to de-escalate tension and avoid accidental or unauthorised launches. It would be particularly applicable in the case of India and Pakistan, two countries characterised by the close proximity of major population centres and military targets.

### **Second Approach—Continuous Urging by the International Community to Encourage India and Pakistan to Honour Commitments**

Although some observers consider that either India or Pakistan may conduct another round of tests and simultaneously announce joining the CTBT, the likelihood is remote. The fact that, as of 29 June 1999, the CTBT has been signed by 152 states and ratified by thirty-seven indicates the enormous constraint of multiple adverse political and economic

consequences that are sure to follow should India and Pakistan venture to conduct nuclear tests again.

In spite of the change of government in Pakistan, that country is unlikely to risk further major confrontation with India in the short term. Commentators decline to associate the implications of the change in government with Pakistan's nuclear policies.<sup>33</sup> The Pentagon believes that the Pakistani Army has controlled the nuclear program and the security of the nuclear weapons as a matter of course.<sup>34</sup>

The top priority for arms control in South Asia remains that both India and Pakistan sign the CTBT. This would be the most important step forward. India and Pakistan have not been able to sign the CTBT by September 1999, as suggested by the two governments on various occasions. Strong domestic opposition made a national consensus in either country difficult in spite of the two Prime Ministers' efforts to push it forward. Before being re-elected as Indian Prime Minister on 13 October 1999, Vajpayee expressed the view that, as head of a caretaker government, it would be 'highly improper' for him to commit India to the CTBT by the September deadline without a parliamentary consensus.<sup>35</sup> Pakistan initially declared that it would join by the same time, but expressed that it 'will not consider the signing of the CTBT till the time the sanctions imposed against Pakistan by the US are removed'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Shaheen Sehbai, 'Democracy Will Be Restored In Pakistan Soon, Hopes US', *Dawn*, 14 October 1999, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation, No. 46, *News Brief*, 2nd Quarter, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Ansar Abbasi, 'Positive Response From US Congress Awaited: No CTBT Signing Till Removal of Sanctions', *Dawn*, 12 September 1999, p. 1.

The successful re-election of Prime Minister Vajpayee rouses an expectation that he will honour his commitment to sign the CTBT. Most observers hoped that Pakistan would follow suit, although the change in the government of Pakistan has brought some uncertainty in that regard. By joining the CTBT, India and Pakistan would place themselves in a stronger position for arguing for progress in the global nuclear disarmament process. But this may prove to be wishful thinking. On 14 October, ratification of the CTBT was rejected by a vote of 51-48 in the US Senate. As well as handing an embarrassing defeat to the Clinton Administration, which had fought for endorsement of the accord, the Senate's rejection also seriously undermined US capacity to put pressure on India and Pakistan to sign CTBT themselves. It was the first time that the Senate had voted down a major arms control accord since the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. As a Pakistani observer has noted, 'the US has lost its legal and moral authority to persuade Pakistan and India to sign the CTBT'.<sup>37</sup>

The FMCT is the next in line. It would 'place a quantitative cap on production of fissile materials for weapon or explosive purposes, just as the CTBT places a qualitative cap on development'.<sup>38</sup> Both India and Pakistan have declared that they are prepared to join in any negotiations in a CD ad hoc committee on the issue (in Geneva), on the condition of having dialogue with the US on easing sanctions. However, India is opposed to a FMCT that deals with pre-existing activity and nuclear material stockpiles. Pakistan's position is that existing stocks should be part of the negotiation. Neither India nor Pakistan support invoking a moratorium on the

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<sup>37</sup> 'US Senate Rejects Test Ban Treaty', *Dawn*, 15 October 1999, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Scheinman, 'Engaging Non-NPT Parties in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime', *Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation*, No. 16, May 1999.

production of fissile material before a treaty has been negotiated and agreed.<sup>39</sup>

This raises the question of how much fissile material India and Pakistan need to produce nuclear weapons. Obviously, Pakistan's quantity of nuclear weapons is mainly dependent on that of India's. India, on the other hand, obviously seeks to counter both Pakistan and China. However, whether India's perceived nuclear-weapon requirements are dependent solely on China and Pakistan's nuclear weapons remains a further question. India is now debating whether it should develop ICBM with the ability, should the need arise, to hit the US. Indian hardliners want a global-strike capability with an arsenal matching those of Britain, China and France.<sup>40</sup> If such a policy is adopted, should India eventually stock some Surya—an ICBM yet to be developed—for targets in the US?

According to Indian nuclear doctrine, the requirement of credible minimum nuclear deterrence is a 'dynamic concept related to the strategic environment, technological imperatives and the needs of national security'.<sup>41</sup> It thus appears that neither India nor Pakistan want to be capped in the upper ceiling of the quantity of fissile material production, and both countries would like to remain open-ended in this regard to allow strategic flexibility. In the foreseeable future, India and Pakistan will probably speed up production of fissile materials to gain a better position in the negotiations. The quantity of production will be determined by the security environment, technical capabilities and economic performances of the two countries.

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<sup>39</sup> Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation, No. 46, *News Brief*, 2nd Quarter, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Sadanand Dhume, 'Choosing the Target', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 September 1999, p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> 'India Vows to Augment its Nuclear Capability', *Dawn*, 18 August 1999, p. 1.

In the future, India and Pakistan can still be expected to be seen at the negotiation table for the CTBT, FMCT and export control of fissile materials because these measures have no serious negative impacts on the immediate security concerns of either country. Furthermore, there is no pressing timetable for them to sign the CTBT now. Their commitment, although half-hearted, would gain them some political advantage through being seen to be 'doing something together' with the P-5 countries. It would be politically innocuous, to say the least.

### **Third Approach—Nuclear Disarmament Among Nuclear-weapon States**

India has been claiming that its pursuit of nuclear weapons results largely from its disappointment over the global nuclear disarmament process. India calls for 'global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament'.<sup>42</sup> This could be a sham in that it gives India a moral high-ground.<sup>43</sup> By its own words and deeds, India seems to tell the world that nuclear disarmament has to go through the vicious cycle of arming before disarming. But India does draw international attention to the responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon states in nuclear disarmament, as defined in the Article VI of the NPT. In the future, the nuclear-weapon states will undoubtedly feel more pressure from non-nuclear-weapon states to reduce their nuclear arms, most likely at the year 2000 review conference. At the conference, the state-parties to the NPT will undertake a full review of the treaty in April–May 2000, the first since 1995, when the accord was effectively made permanent. The third Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting for the 2000 review conference took place on 10–13 May in New

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<sup>42</sup> Rebecca Johnson, 'International Implications of the India–Pakistan Tests', *Disarmament Diplomacy*, July 1998.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

York. The PrepCom's central message is that a credible non-proliferation regime cannot be maintained unless the nuclear-weapon states relinquish their reliance on nuclear weapons. Recent developments in relations between the major powers could explain the stalemate in decision making among the nuclear-weapon states.

The Russian Duma has not, so far, ratified START II, a step most expected in the reduction of nuclear-weapon stockpiles. In a worsening situation of economic performance and military readiness, Russia has renounced its once-declared 'no-first use of nuclear weapon' policy and has become more reliant on its nuclear arsenal for deterrence purposes. NATO's attack on Yugoslavia caused strong resentment in Russia and prompted a reassessment of the country's need for nuclear weapons and prospects for their development. President Boris Yeltsin was quoted as saying that Russia's nuclear forces have been a decisive factor for stability, and maintaining their combat readiness at a high level is a top priority for Russia.<sup>44</sup>

In the US, there is no sign whatsoever of renouncing nuclear weapons or even the first use of such weapons, as was seen most recently in the Senate's rejection of CTBT ratification. All indications point to the US still regarding nuclear arms as a linchpin of its national security for the indefinite future. Furthermore, partly fuelled by the DPRK's missile program and that of other perceived 'rogue states', the development of a national missile defence (NMD) system and a theatre high-altitude area defence (THAAD) antimissile missile system has increasingly attracted the emergence of a national consensus. Russia has objected to an NMD system and has claimed that it would clash with the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and has further claimed that NMD is a challenge to strategic stability and international security. In addition the

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<sup>44</sup> Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation, No. 46, *News Brief*, 2nd Quarter, 1999.

action stimulates the deployment of more sophisticated missiles, stimulates a new arms race, and poses a threat to the whole disarmament process. Russia has also made it clear that Moscow would strongly oppose any 'negative change' in the ABM Treaty.<sup>45</sup>

China too has voiced its objections to the establishment of an American NMD system and to the introduction of a THAAD system in its region. In his speech to the CD in March 1999, President Jiang Zemin raised concerns about programs for antimissile systems and the weaponisation of space. He also condemned the research, development, deployment and proliferation of sophisticated antimissile systems and any attempts to revise or withdraw from the ABM Treaty. President Jiang emphasised that the indefinite extension of the NPT has by no means given nuclear-weapon states the prerogative to retain their nuclear weapons permanently. He also reiterated China's long-held position on security assurance and no-first-use, and advocated negotiations on a convention on the comprehensive ban of nuclear weapons.<sup>46</sup>

The US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on 8 May 1999 produced a free fall in Sino-American relations. China rejected American claims that the bombing was accidental (allegedly caused by an 'outdated map'), called this explanation 'hardly convincing' and demanded punishment of the perpetrator.<sup>47</sup> China announced a delay in Sino-American

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Jiang Zemin, 'Promote Disarmament Process and Safeguard World Peace', *People's Daily*, 27 March 1999.

<sup>47</sup> In his meeting with visiting German Chancellor Gerald Schroeder on 11 May 1999, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji remarked that calling NATO's attack on the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade a 'terrible mistake' had not convinced the Chinese people, and that 'we demand a thorough investigation of the missile attack, the publication of the results and severe

high-level military exchanges, bilateral consultations in non-proliferation, arms control and international security, and dialogue on human rights.<sup>48</sup> On 2 August 1999, China succeeded in launching ‘a new long-range surface-to-surface missile’.<sup>49</sup>

## The Way Ahead

The question of nuclear disarmament is never why, but how and when. There are two schools of thought that take different approaches: those that seek incremental steps towards disarmament; and those that look for a single ‘leap’ towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons by establishing a time-bound framework for its achievement, or through the immediate negotiation of a nuclear disarmament convention.<sup>50</sup> India used to be in the second school, but now, being a de facto nuclear-weapon state, is more likely to acquiesce to the first approach.

Nuclear weapons are deeply integrated into the military structures, doctrines, defence policies and symbolic powerful statecraft among nation-states. Although in the post-cold war era it is widely believed that the value of nuclear weapons is in

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punishment for those who designed and launched the attack’. See Xinhua News Agency, ‘Tang: Government Demands NATO’s Open, Official Apology’, *China Daily*, 12 May 1999 (<http://www.Chinadaily.com.cn/cndydb/1999/05/d1-2tang.ell.html>).

<sup>48</sup>

*Ibid.*

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Xinhua News Agency, ‘China Has Successfully Launched a New Long-Range Surface-to-Surface Missile’, *People’s Daily*, 3 August 1999, p. 1, and Seth Faison, ‘China Tests Missile with a Range That Could Cross Pacific’, *International Herald and Tribune*, 3 August 1999, p. 1.

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Harald Muller and Makarim Wibisono, ‘Approaches to Nuclear Disarmament: Two Views’, *Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-proliferation*, No. 12, Review Issue, April 1998.

decline, such weapons simply cannot be discarded overnight. Nuclear disarmament can only be achieved in a step-by-step fashion.

Many suggestions have been proposed to eliminate nuclear weapons. Suggestions include, among the P-5, no further development and deployment of nuclear weapons and delivery systems; a cut-off in the production of fissile materials for weapon purposes; commitment by Britain, France and China not to enlarge their nuclear arsenals; de-alerting and no-first-use commitments; and transparency measures including a nuclear-arms register and regular exchanges on nuclear doctrine. It should be pointed out that many of these suggestions would not be possible in the absence of goodwill and trust among the major powers. While admitting that the dream could be the father of future reality, current reality is more focused on the possible. A single 'leap' towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons would be an impossible challenge.

Nothing would be more important than the further reduction of the US and Russian nuclear arsenals. It may still take some time for the Russian Duma to define how reduction best serves Russian national interests. But in terms of the 3000–3500 strategic warheads remaining on each side after START II, reduction is feasible and possible, even if Russia still relies on nuclear deterrence. As states having the largest and most advanced nuclear arsenals, both countries should continue to reduce their nuclear weapons stockpile drastically. The fact that Russia would like to negotiate START III is a positive signal. The process should guarantee continuation.

Another major step would be the commitment of all nuclear-weapon states not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, and not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or in nuclear-weapon-free zones. So

far, China is the only country that has made such a pledge. China and Russia have made a promise of no-first-use to each other. The significance of this is tremendous: if all nuclear-weapon states undertook not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, then at least in theory nuclear weapons would sooner or later become obsolete. No-first-use agreements thus provide a great incentive among the nuclear-haves to reduce and eventually abandon nuclear weapons.

This wish may appear too simplistic, but it can be fulfilled. The US and the Soviet Union have been engaging in arms reduction since the 1970s. This is because both sides have realised that their huge nuclear-weapon stockpiles, even if drastically reduced, still allow the capability to retaliate devastatingly should the other side venture to use nuclear weapons first. Therefore, a no-first-use commitment does no harm to the nuclear capability of either the US (along with its British and French allies) or Russia. Besides, if all nuclear-weapon states pledge no-first-use, the advantage still remains with the US and Russia, the two countries with the largest arsenals of modern conventional weapons.

There is a belief in the Pentagon that a no-first-use commitment is not useful because basically a no-first-use declaration is only a gesture and can change with changes in the strategic environment. The Pentagon also believes that nuclear weapons are a capability that cannot be discounted by rivals. Such an argument is not convincing. Indeed it is quite commonplace in the international arena to see promises made and then breached. However, a promise that is conducive to peace is better than none, and a breach of the promise will at least invite international contempt and distrust. A commitment of no-first-use will therefore subject the nuclear-weapon states to the moral supervision of the non-nuclear-weapon states. If the US, Russia and China can announce de-targeting nuclear weapons at each other, why can they not, by the same token,

sign a multilateral no-first-use agreement? This would further assure the non-nuclear-weapon states of the P-5 determination on nuclear disarmament. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the claim by the US that it still needs nuclear weapons to retaliate against possible attacks using chemical and biological weapons from 'rogue states' is questionable. Even without resort to nuclear options, the massive state-of-art conventional superiority of the US today is still sufficient to destroy such 'rogue states'.

A no-first-use agreement would also contribute tremendously to CBSM in South Asia, since India has claimed that no-first-use of nuclear weapons is India's basic commitment. Although Pakistan disagrees to a no-first-use commitment for fear of India's stronger conventional forces, Pakistan can still be expected to accept a multilateral no-first-use treaty. It would be very difficult for Pakistan to stand alone against an internationally supported measure of such consequence.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of international condemnation and remedial efforts, the situation after the May 1998 South Asian nuclear tests has been an action–reaction of missile race, local war, fully fledged nuclear-weapon program and coup d'état. This suggests that the efforts of the world have so far yielded little result or, even more pessimistically, nobody can do anything significant to change the South Asian scene. Indeed India, by conducting nuclear tests, has severely damaged its desire of becoming one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, something that it has pursued for years. But what else have India and Pakistan lost? The effect of economic sanctions on India has been marginal, and India knew that from the beginning. The sanctions on Pakistan have had devastating effects, which ironically made the US lift some

sanctions for fear of a collapse of the Pakistani economy.<sup>51</sup> Also because of the illegitimate change of government in Pakistan, the Commonwealth has suspended Pakistan's membership, and this will have some effect on that country's international relationships and internal economy.

The future of South Asian nuclear disarmament appears self-evident. Initial international responses to the tests, based on instinct and good wishes, have not worked as expected. Both India and Pakistan have systematically moved towards nuclear weaponisation and deployment of missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. India will not join the NPT. In the absence of Indian commitment to the NPT, Pakistan will not sign it either. The CTBT, FMCT and export controls of fissile materials are negotiable, in that they are long-term objectives and are not necessarily associated with India and Pakistan alone.

There is no panacea for nuclear disarmament in South Asia. This will be a protracted process, intertwined with expediency, careful calculation of pros and cons, and relentless bargaining within and beyond the region. In both India and Pakistan, there currently exists widespread public opinion supporting nuclear-weapon options, and neither government appears to want to change that. The fact remains that India and Pakistan appear bent on modernisation and deployment of nuclear weapons.

In South Asia, an incipient nuclear balance of terror between India and Pakistan has been established and the region nuclearised. This is a disturbing picture, particularly at the turn of the century when the post-Cold War world has sighed with relief and is ready to embrace the new millennium. South

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<sup>51</sup> 'Program for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation', *News Brief*, No. 46, 2nd Quarter, 1999.

Asian nuclear disarmament is now part of global nuclear disarmament and has certainly made the issue more complicated.

The solution lies in how India and Pakistan find that nuclear disarmament in South Asia best serves their national interests and how international nuclear disarmament progresses. If there is a domino effect of global nuclear disarmament, India and Pakistan will certainly be the last to feel it. For this to happen and to make the new millennium less dangerous, the whole world (including India and Pakistan) needs to rethink the role of nuclear weapons and make a sustained commitment using a multifaceted approach. The fact that the Indo-Pakistan nuclear tests have not so far generated a chain reaction among the nuclear threshold countries suggests that non-proliferation is still the main trend in the world today. This is encouraging, and let us hope that it will continue.