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The Strategic Effects of South Asian Nuclear Proliferation

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This essay analyzes the factors underlying nuclear tensions in South Asia and how governments and organizations working toward nonproliferation and arms control are prepared—or not prepared—to deal with this problem in the post-Cold War era. The essay then examines the different methods to disarmament, nuclear ownership, and bargaining in India and Pakistan, two states that are only beginning to learn the utility of arms control in maintaining nuclear stability in South Asia. The essay concludes by making several recommendations that can be met only by concurrent efforts among a variety of parties. Although the highest responsibility remains those of the governments in the region, attention and action from parties outside of the region are also needed to benefit nonproliferation efforts in South Asia, as well as maintaining nuclear stability in the area.

INTRODUCTION

The May 1998 nuclear tests by both India and Pakistan, accompanied by the expressed intentions of both nations to become full-fledged nuclear weapon states, present the prospect of a new nuclear arms race in South Asia. Perhaps even more ominous is the potential for these events to promote degradation of security relations and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction beyond the region. This viewpoint addresses the future of nuclear nonproliferation from the broader prospects of the new circumstances in the region.

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If the international community is unwilling to take a clear, affirmative decision to abandon reliance on nuclear weapons, the number of states possessing nuclear weapons will probably increase in the next decade or so. Stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons, even to non-state actors such as terrorists groups, will be harder. The window of opportunity for reducing the likelihood of these scenarios is closing.

This essay examines India’s decision to test a nuclear explosive as well as Pakistan’s response and the global consequences of such actions. It then examines the important links between the South Asian nuclear tests and proliferation problems more generally. The reasons for India’s and Pakistan’s decisions to test nuclear weapons are numerous. This viewpoint focuses on the links between the tests and the circumstances elsewhere in the region to draw attention to the expanding number of reinforcing relationships among proliferation aspirants. In particular, an explanation of these links reveals that the South Asian nuclear tests were more a symptom than a cause of the now visibly weakening Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). These links also show that the task of curbing the spread of weapons of mass destruction has become more complicated, demanding new strategies on the parts of those governments and organizations working to achieve nonproliferation goals.

The essay then examines existing Indian and Pakistani efforts to manage the nuclear competition in South Asia. It argues that a durable nuclear peace in South Asia rests on the ability of these adversaries to overcome a formidable array of political, psychological, and bureaucratic obstacles to establishing an effective nonproliferation regime in this region.

The essay concludes by arguing that these efforts at nonproliferation in South Asia can only be achieved by the concurrent efforts among a variety of players. Although the highest responsibilities remain among those of the governments in the re-

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region, attention and action from parties outside the region are also needed—most particularly from the United States, but also from other governments and non-governmental organizations. The current dilemmas in South Asia can be resolved only through strategies of comprehensive engagement on the parts of both governments and non-governmental organizations. Although the nuclear tests of the past year seems to have derailed efforts of nonproliferation in the region, concerted action offers reasonable hope of placing nonproliferation efforts on a course consistent with global peace and security in the twenty-first century.

**INDIA’S DECISION TO TEST**

It is clear that the Bharatiya Party authorized a series of tests for which there was no compelling strategic necessity. The party came into office determined to carry out the tests. It did not consult the Parliament nor conduct a promised strategic defense review before reversing the national consensus. The Hindu-right in India has advocated nuclearization since 1951, thirteen years before China acquired nuclear weapons. Now, the “sacred cow” of national security has been invoked to mask the ideological and electoral interests of the ruling coalition and the vested interests of India’s nuclear and defense civilian-scientific sector.

Authorization of the tests and the proclamation of India’s status, although inter-related, must be distinguished for purposes of analysis. On the one hand, the timing of the Indian tests were determined by the electoral compulsions of a politically shaky coalition in India. The timing was also influenced by arguments from India’s “bomb lobby,” which feared that a growing international norm against horizontal proliferation might forever foreclose India’s option to test. On the other hand, India’s decision to declare itself a nuclear weapon state has more to do with the Hindu-right’s ideological motivations and the changing self-
perceptions of India’s strategic elite, in their search for a separate Indian national identity.

In their quest for modernization, India’s state and political managers have faithfully reproduced Western norms and culture in the area of national security. In doing so, they have come to regard a nuclear deterrent as the ultimate measure of national power and a symbol of modernity, scientific excellence, and a higher strategic culture. Nuclear weapons, they hope, will bolster India’s prestige and consolidate its profile as an emerging great power in the international system.

At the core of India’s decision, therefore, is the socialization of its ruling elite into a cultural belief that nuclear weapons and status constitute legitimate means to enhance the domestic prestige of the state and expand its power in the international system. Ironically, such beliefs are themselves the expression of a colonized mindset that lacks self-esteem and a nation-state that suffers from a historical inferiority complex.

In many respects, however, India has been right that the non-weapon states that are parties to the NPT have used the treaty to perpetuate a double standard. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had a point when he observed, at the fiftieth anniversary of his country’s Atomic Energy Commission in November 1998, that “a few nations are sitting on huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons,” and concluded that their policy of “insisting on collective restraint on the part of the rest of the world is an inherently unstable proposition” (Reuters 1998, A2). The belief that the nuclear weapon states are committed to an indefinite monopoly of these weapons in order to enhance their prestige and power at the expense of other states contributed to the Indian decision to resume testing. Now both India and Pakistan have added themselves to the number of states claiming to seek a nuclear-weapon-free world of retaining nuclear arsenals. The addition of the world’s sixth and seventh declared nuclear
arsenals has exacerbated pressure for proliferation. This is not only because more states now openly contend that nuclear weapons are vital to them, but also because the addition of two more states with nuclear weapons threatens the integrity of the NPT regime, however imperfectly, to accommodate only five nuclear weapons states.

Although both the 1974 and 1998 Indian nuclear explosive tests were conducted primarily for domestic political reasons, the Indian Government explained both with language taken from the NPT. In 1974, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi carefully emphasized that India’s first nuclear test was a “peaceful nuclear explosion” permitted under Article V of the NPT (Thaker 1999, 14). Similarly, when Prime Minister Vajpayee declared, following the May 1998 tests, “that India is a nuclear weapon state,” his use of treaty terminology affirmed the centrality of the NPT to the existing international security environment as surely as his country’s action undermined the regime.

Contrary to Prime Minister Vajpayee’s assertion, India can never be a nuclear weapon state. “Nuclear weapon state” is defined in Article IX of the NPT as a state having detonated a nuclear explosive before 1967 (Albright 1998, 21). Prime Minister Vajpayee’s claim to this legal term is an anachronism, as is the notion that India has attained some sort of “nuclear status” by exploding nuclear weapons. The age of the “nuclear club” is at the end. Any distinction India thinks it has achieved in crashing the gate will be washed away if its actions help usher in an age of “nuclear rabble,” where many states and some sub-state actors have nuclear weapons.

The NPT regime is the international community’s best tool for limiting nuclear proliferation and moving toward nuclear disarmament. The regime, however, is far from perfect, and frankly, is capable of doing more. For example, the nuclear weapon states should do much more to live up to their Article VI
disarmament obligations, such as negotiating deeper cuts in nuclear arsenals and agreeing not to use nuclear weapons first. Such actions would help discredit the assertion that the NPT is discriminatory. India itself has railed against this perceived inequality for twenty-eight years, but its recent decision to surrender the moral high ground by declaring itself a nuclear weapon state threatens the NPT regime and its goal of eventual nuclear disarmament.

**PAKISTAN’S RESPONSE**

After India’s nuclear tests in May 1998, the world held its collective breath. When Pakistan conducted its own nuclear tests, Prime Minister Vajpayee claimed “we are now vindicated,” as if a Pakistani wrong could right an Indian wrong (Ali 1999, 14). India was not vindicated but rather confirmed in a destructive path. On 28 May 1998, the idea of a nuclear proliferation chain in South Asia stopped being a speculation and became a sad reality. The other shoe dropped, but it is now frighteningly clear that the “other shoe” may not be the last. We have seen a clear demonstration that nuclear proliferation is self-perpetuating; and the fact that these new potential nuclear combatants stand, as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has observed, “cheek by jowl...creates a uniquely dangerous situation” (Diamond 1998, 2).

Although India has denied parity between itself and Pakistan, strategic nuclear parity is the result that proliferation in both states has produced. India is much larger and, in economic and conventional military terms, much stronger than Pakistan. However, with nuclear weapons on both sides, India’s enormous military advantage is somewhat neutralized, as then US Ambassador to India Patrick Moynihan expressed to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi following India’s “peaceful nuclear explosion” in 1974:

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India has made a huge mistake. Here you were the number one hegemonic power in South Asia. Nobody was number two and call Pakistan number three. Now in a decade’s time, some Pakistani general will call you up and say I have four nuclear weapons and I want Kashmir. If not, we will drop them on you and we will all meet in heaven. And then what do you do? (Kux 1993, 305).

The fundamental effect of the other shoe dropping is that South Asia has just moved closer to the edge of a regional nuclear war that could claim the lives of millions. As Iranian Foreign Minister Kharazzi told the Conference on Disarmament in June 1998, “The nuclear sword of Damocles is now hanging over the region by a thread” (Whittle 1998, A1).

The open acquisition of nuclear weapons has made the use of nuclear weapons more likely than at any time since the beginning of the Cold War, with the possible exception of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The peaceful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis had as much to do with luck as with stable deterrence. The world can ill afford another Cuban Missile Crisis, this time in Kashmir. The fortuitous outcome of the crisis and the absence of nuclear war since then represents a chance at peace that humankind should be bound by its survival instinct to grasp. If every nation risks rolling the nuclear dice, eventually, those dice will turn up snake eyes and we will all lose.

GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES

The immediate implications of nuclear proliferation in South Asia extend beyond the subcontinent. For instance, it is possible that some predominantly Muslim states could view a Pakistani nuclear arsenal as a deterrent to the possibility of Israel even using a weapon of mass destruction against them. In this context, Israel could come to believe that a Pakistani nuclear ar-
senal threatens Israeli defense programs or installations. Consequently, it is conceivable that Pakistani acquisition of nuclear weapons could further destabilize already strained relationships among groups of different faiths. On his arrival in Islamabad on June 1, Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi announced that “from all over the world, Muslims are happy that Pakistan has this capability” (Diamond 1998). Days later in Saudi Arabia, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif assured the world that “nuclear weapons have no religion” (Anderson 1998). However, intentions do not always equate with outcome: history is replete with examples of religious zeal igniting conflict when reason would have dictated caution.

Beyond the short-term strategic instability South Asian nuclear arsenals may generate, nuclear proliferation on the subcontinent threatens to destroy the NPT regime on which the rest of the world bases its security. When its parties again review the NPT in 2000—the first Review Conference incorporating the enhanced review process agreed upon in 1995—its performance in preventing proliferation and encouraging disarmament will be assessed critically. If the South Asia nuclear tests result in forcing open the door to the “nuclear club” and India, a longtime declaratory proponent of nuclear disarmament, joins the ranks of those states that rely on the threat of using nuclear weapons for their security, the continued viability of the NPT will be in serious question. If state parties to the NPT see the world moving in the direction of declaratory reliance on nuclear weapons for security, they will be pressured to adopt a policy of such reliance themselves and be more reluctant to rely on the NPT regime.

An even greater threat lurks behind the possible dissolution of the NPT regime. Its collapse could trigger the emergence of a “nuclear rabble,” increasing the threat of nuclear terrorism. There is no reason to believe that India and Pakistan will be immune from the protection, control, and accountability problems
that have faced other states with nuclear arsenals. Even if other states do not follow India and Pakistan’s example, more weapons and weapon-usable material, stored in more locations, and accessible to more individuals, increase the likelihood that nuclear weapons will be used accidentally or without authorization, or that weapons or materials will be diverted or stolen. While a number of states currently possess weapon-usable nuclear material, further acquisition of nuclear weapons by India, Pakistan, and possibly other states can only exacerbate this problem.

In the early 1960s, some predicted that there would be 20 or 30 nuclear weapon states by the end of the 1970s. Fortunately, the international community saw the dangers of nuclear proliferation and chose to work toward only the viable alternative, a world ultimately free of nuclear weapons, by negotiating the NPT. The NPT has served as the principal bulwark against widespread nuclear proliferation, and no state declared a new nuclear weapon capability during the first twenty-eight years of its operation. However, India’s recent actions, coupled with inaction by nuclear weapon states (NWS), have placed this essential tool in acute danger. If the NPT begins to unravel or even collapses, the most terrifying predictions of the past may not be bad enough to describe the future. If nonproliferation is to be possible, it must be chosen and pursued concurrently.

**PROLIFERATION LINKAGES IN SOUTH ASIA AND BEYOND**

Although India’s five nuclear tests on May 3 and 5 were widely criticized, they met with rather tepid reactions from the world community (*Disarmament Diplomacy* 1998, 51) that were certainly insufficient to stave off Pakistan’s “retaliatory” nuclear tests. With both countries accelerating development of sophisticated medium-range ballistic missiles and with nuclear “weaponization” perhaps already underway, the tests and policy
declarations of both countries have raised the specter of a spiraling nuclear arms race in the region.

Two sets of issues raise questions as to whether a nuclear standoff between India and Pakistan would be as stable or enduring as that between the US and the Soviet Union proved to be: first, these countries' history of war and crisis, coupled with their contemporary grievances, despite a period of recent "warmed" relations, suggest a relatively greater prospect for future conflicts in which deliberate nuclear attack might be contemplated. Neither country is a "status quo" state for which deterring attack is a sufficient end. The ardent cultural and religious dimensions of this relationship are a particular source of uncertainty. Though both countries share important bonds and in past wars have shown some propensity to restrain the use of force, there remains clear prospects that crises could release deep animosities that overwhelm the kind of sober rationality assumed by theories of mutual deterrence.

Second, the countries' territorial proximity is a crucial new variable. The US and the Soviet Union, at a similarly early stage in their nuclear rivalry, could deliver nuclear weapons only by aircraft and therefore had hours of warning time of an attack. By the time of deployment of ballistic missiles reduced this margin to ranges of 0 to 30 minutes, the Cold War rivals had acquired many years of experience with their nuclear relationship that thereby helped maintain stability. In contrast, India and Pakistan could traverse from latent nuclear ability to overt nuclear rivalry by deploying nuclear-armed ballistic missiles with flight times as short as three minutes. This possibility dramatically limits reaction times in crisis decision making and hence prospectively increases the danger of an inadvertent nuclear war.\(^1\)

\(^1\)For an argument that this circumstance would create strong temptations for pre-emptive and "launch-on-warning" strategies, placing tremendous time-critical pressures on decision makers and command and control systems with past histories of incoherence and no
However, a more worrisome—and far less studied—implication of the prospects of a nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan is its potential cause to spiraling repercussions outside of South Asia. Many states in Asia and elsewhere in the world will be watching the progress of events with keen interest, and this progression is likely to have effects in other regions that will be difficult to anticipate.

The potential importance of such links between circumstances in South Asia and elsewhere is evinced in part by the role such links played in leading up to the South Asian nuclear tests themselves. Thus far, most attention has focused on those factors indigenous to the region, including the Indian-Pakistani relationship, Indian and Pakistani domestic policies, and Indian and Pakistani perceptions of external actors (such as China, the US, and the nonproliferation regime). Less attention, however, has been focused on the links between proliferation developments in South Asia and the roles played by actors and concurrent developments elsewhere in Asia and the world, particularly in contributing to India’s and Pakistan’s nuclear missile development programs.

For example, assertions that China provided Pakistan with assistance in its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development are well known. Pakistan reportedly has obtained from China crucial technology to support its nuclear program as well as complete M-11 nuclear-capable missiles. More recently, China is believed to have supplied plans and equipment to enable Pakistan to construct a factory for indigenous production of the missile. With a range of only about 300 kilometers, however, these missiles do not enable Pakistan to strike major Indian cities (Sheppard 1998; Bermudez 1998).

India, for its part, has used Canadian-made nuclear reactors to produce plutonium for its weapons program and acquired technological information for its missile development program from both Russia and the US. India developed its recently tested Agni missile, with an estimated range of 2,000 kilometers, in part using technology originally purchased from the US (Smith 1998, 8).

In addition, few have noted the ways in which North Korea's role in facilitating the missile proliferation in South Asia helped set the scene for the current crisis. India's nuclear tests came just five weeks after Pakistan successfully test-fired its new Ghauri missile. This nuclear-capable missile, with an estimated range of up to 1,500 kilometers and an estimated payload capacity of up to 700 kilograms, provides Pakistan with a potential nuclear threat against most major Indian cities. It is now known that the Ghauri was developed from North Korean No-dong missiles, sold in complete form to Pakistan in 1997 (even though they have yet to be provided to North Korea's own military) (Bermudez 1998, 27).

Through its direct contribution to accelerating the missile technology race in South Asia, North Korea's actions helped create the context within which India made its decision to conduct nuclear tests. Admittedly, the Ghauri test was at most a precipitating factor in the decision by India's ruling Bharatiya Party to conduct the nuclear tests—a move that had been contemplated by other Indian governments for many years. However, India's deep-seated anxiety about its strategic position vis-à-vis China has long been a central rationale for India's nuclear program. Moreover, India has interpreted Chinese assistance to Pakistan as a crucial indication of China's strategic concern. In this envi-

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2This missile sale advanced a North Korean-Pakistan relationship dating back to the 1970s and firmly established in the 1980s, when the two countries cooperated in providing military assistance to Iran in its eight year war with Iraq.
ronment, the role played by North Korea's history of assistance to Pakistan's missile development should not be discounted.

North Korean missile assistance to Pakistan, combined with its own missile development activities, also represent an important failure of the broader diplomatic effort by the US to integrate North Korea into the world community and restrain its "rogue" behavior. Despite the significant effort that the US has invested in seeking to curb its missile technology proliferation, meetings between the two countries on this issue have been characterized mostly by a lack of progress and frequent breakdowns. Meanwhile, North Korea managed to conduct its sale of missiles to Pakistan without obstruction. In the wake of the nuclear tests, North Korea, ignoring heightened attention to this relationship, reportedly delivered to Pakistan several shipments of weapons materials that included warhead canisters for the Ghauri missile. These shipments reportedly took place amid indications that Pakistan is proceeding with production of the missile and development of nuclear warheads that can be carried by it (Weiner 1998, A3).

US, Chinese, and North Korean missile assistance to India and Pakistan epitomizes the emergence of a set of mutually reinforcing linkages among proliferation prospects—a proliferation network. This network introduces a new and troubling dimension to the problem of achieving arms control and preventing proliferation in the region and worldwide. This network is still in a nascent stage, consisting of only a confluence of relationships rather than a mechanism of direct coordination. Nevertheless, even at this level, the emerging network of links posi-

3Foreshadowing the now renowned US failure to anticipate India's first nuclear tests, US officials have acknowledged that the US was unaware of the Ghauri transaction until it was completed. See David Smith, "A Feared Scenario Around the Corner"; and Tim Weiner, "US Says North Korea Helped Develop Pakistani Missile," The New York Times, 11 April 1998, A3.
tively reinforces incentives for proliferation across disparate situations. Thus, more than ever, decisions and events in a given situation and region are likely to have unexpected and unintended implications in other places at other times.

The link between circumstances of South Asia and the Korean Peninsula exemplifies this point. Concurrent to, but overshadowed by, the South Asian nuclear tests, North Korea threatened to effectively “suspend” its 1994 “Agreed Framework” accord with the US under which it forsook its own incipient nuclear weapons program (Bermudez 1998). The US government immediately questioned North Korea’s intention and/or capacity to follow through on the specific threats to “reopen” the reactors addressed under the Agreed Framework (Bermudez 1998). However, more recent events have suggested that concern over the North Korean nuclear program is still warranted (Bermudez 1998). The threats have (or at least should have) served to highlight a growing North Korean dissatisfaction with the rate of progress in achieving the ends of the Agreed Framework and improving its relations with the US (Bermudez 1998). This discontent has likely contributed to the failure of US diplomacy to achieve North Korean missile proliferation restraint. This proliferation, in turn, then became a contributing factor in South Asian instability and ultimately the nuclear tests.

Now, the South Asian tests may not only spark a nuclear arms race in that region, but may also increase insecurity throughout Asia. In a potential “feedback,” events in South Asia indirectly encouraged, if not provided direct incentives for, North Korea’s most recent actions—especially the August 31 missile test. More broadly, the changes circumstances in South Asia

Many analysts have noted the apparently poor timing of the missile test, which aborted Japan’s pending approval of funding for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and disrupted a promising round of talks with the US. Two of the most prominent explanations for the North Korean action are that it was intended to
have raised questions concerning the sustainability of the NPT and may serve to obstruct ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the US Congress and START II in the Russian Duma (Isaccs 1998, 40). These cascading consequences threaten to erode the institutions, norms, and political cooperation supporting nuclear arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation worldwide.

NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL IN SOUTH ASIA

Having already fought three wars and more than once having flirted with a fourth, India and Pakistan are often viewed as two states most likely to wage a nuclear war. This may be an exaggeration. The risk of nuclear conflict in South Asia is significant, but it can be controlled with the effective application of arms control to stabilize nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan.

The US and Russia regulated the dangers of their global nuclear rivalry through a series of unilateral actions, reciprocal measures, and formally negotiated agreements to establish stable political and military relations. This nuclear arms process took place over several decades. It is not surprising that India and Pakistan have been slow to develop a stable nuclear order in South Asia. In response to recent military crises and the explosion of nuclear devices by each state, Indian and Pakistani leaders have learned to conduct military operations more cautiously (they have concluded several confidence-building measures [CBMs] on issues of marginal domestic and military importance), but they do not yet accept arms control as a way to enhance military security and stabilize strained political relations. With both states engaged in costly defense preparations, fears of demonstrate its missile capabilities to potential purchasers or, conversely, to raise the "price" it would cost the US to curb the North Korean missile program.
surprise attack, military escalation, and even nuclear conflict loom over the subcontinent.

Although fashioned first to stabilize competition between the superpowers, nuclear arms control is now suitable for South Asia. Arms control and CBMs can help India and Pakistan avoid a war that neither side wants, minimize the costs and risks of their arms competition, and curtail the scope and violence of conflict should it recur in South Asia. Regional arms control is important because each side engages in coercive strategic behavior—provocative troop movements and military exercise near tense borders, alleged support for militant groups in unstable regions of the other state, and recent cross-border firing along the line of control in Kashmir (the de-facto India-Pakistan border)—and yet both governments know they cannot afford escalation to full-scale combat, much less nuclear conflict. Here I analyze the opportunities, incentives, and obstacles for a specific set of concepts and practices created by the superpowers during the Cold War to operate in the strategic and cultural context of contemporary South Asia.

Neither India nor Pakistan has openly manufactured nuclear forces, but both states have a nuclear weapons program and could, on short notice, assemble and use such weapons. India has a large quantity of bomb-grade plutonium, and few doubt the ability of the Indian scientific community to make nuclear weapons following the country’s 1974 “peaceful nuclear experiment” and the 1998 underground tests. On the other side of the border, Pakistan’s enrichment plant at Kahuta is believed to have produced enough weapons-grade uranium for several nuclear devices as evidenced by its 1998 underground tests approximately two weeks after India’s. Because of concerns about ongoing

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5These are the three arms control goals that Thomas C. Schelling and Morton H. Halperin identified in *Strategy and Arms Control* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1961), 1.
Pakistani efforts to develop these weapons, the US government ended all economic and military assistance to Pakistan in October 1990; the cancellation remains in effect today. Pakistan and India each have aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons to targets inside each other’s territory; and both states are developing, or seeking to obtain, ballistic missiles that may also be able to deliver nuclear warheads.

Several CBMs have been proposed for both India and Pakistan: a regional cutoff of fissile material production, a regional nuclear test ban, safeguards on new and existing nuclear facilities, extension of the no-attack pledge to cover population centers, enhanced international security assurances, regional risk reduction centers, upgraded hotlines between military and political officials, and regular exchanges of military personnel. However, even the best ideas cannot succeed in the absence of a stable arms control culture.

Effective and durable arms control requires India, Pakistan, and the US—the only outside power capable of facilitating regional arms control presently—to develop the guidelines and attitudes required for nuclear stability. Five obstacles impede efforts to establish this culture in South Asia: (1) the diplomatic preoccupation with nuclear disarmament to the detriment of modest but yet feasible nuclear restraint measures; (2) reluctance to acknowledge the military purposes of Indian and Pakistani nuclear programs, preventing a realistic debate about reasonable limits on nuclear forces and strategies; (3) an unwillingness of either side to pursue arms control as a vital source of national security; (4) an inability to transform the India-Pakistan strategic dialogue from tacit to explicit bargaining; and (5) the persistence of resentment and defiance among India, Pakistan, and the US. These obstacles are examined below.
THE PROBLEMS OF NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY IN SOUTH ASIA

A major barrier to new thinking about nuclear deterrence and arms control in the region is the persistence of the long-espoused ideas of disarmament and denuclearization among the three key actors involved: India, Pakistan, and the US. Traditional diplomatic measures on regional nuclear issues are firmly entrenched in the foreign policy bureaucracies of each state. Continued calls for the elimination of nuclear arms at the global level by India and regionally by Pakistan and the US inhibit new thinking about arms control. There are postures for change in the region (experts in all three states argue for regional arms control over disarmament) but this new thinking does not yet enjoy wide support among policy elites.

India has long been an outspoken opponent of nuclear deterrence and arms control. Even before independence, Jawaharlal Nehru campaigned to ban nuclear weapons. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru argued that nuclear violence could not be countered by threats of nuclear retaliation; this would spell the utter destruction of humanity. Every Indian prime minister since has viewed deterrence as immoral and as an irrational basis for national security in the nuclear age. This opinion was expressed clearly in the Delhi Declaration of Rajiv Gandhi and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986 and in India's 1988 Action Plan on nuclear disarmament. In welcoming the 1993 START II agreement, India urged the "nuclear weapon states to re-examine doctrines on nuclear deterrence which have been used by them in (the) past to justify expansion of their nuclear arsenals." (Indian Press Statement).

India makes a sharp distinction between disarmament and arms control, rejecting the latter as an incomplete and diversionary response to the nuclear danger. Largely ritualistic from the 1940s through the 1970s, India's support of nuclear disarmament grew stronger in the 1980s. Despite mounting evidence
of Pakistan’s efforts to acquire a nuclear device in that decade, the procession of political benefits Pakistan gained through its espousal of regional denuclearization, mounting global pressures on India to embrace regional arms restraint, and increased domestic pressure for India to declare itself as a nuclear weapon state, India still advocated global nuclear disarmament. This policy remains intact even as world attention has shifted from East-West arms control to regional nonproliferation. Having long viewed horizontal proliferation (rise in the number if nuclear-armed states) and vertical proliferation (expansion of modernization of existing nuclear arsenals) as two sides of the same coin, India is more outspoken about the latter and insists that both problems must be solved simultaneously. Stressing the importance of equity in global nonproliferation efforts, Indian officials still see the global elimination of nuclear forces as the only fair and effective way to curb the spread of nuclear capabilities. Popular support for this policy, the bureaucracy’s resistance to rethink it, and the reluctance of political leaders to revise it are three factors that sustain India’s disarmament diplomacy.

As India stresses global denuclearization, the idea of regional disarmament preoccupies Pakistan. Pakistan did not participate actively in the global debates on nuclear arms during the 1950s. When Pakistan became alarmed concerning India’s nuclear potential in the 1960s, however, Pakistan initiated a campaign to draw international attention to the military implications of India’s civil nuclear program and to raise diplomatic costs to India of developing nuclear arms. Although policy means have changed over time, these aims still guide Pakistan’s nuclear diplomacy.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Pakistan sought to prevent India from going nuclear by encouraging international measures to stop the spread of military nuclear capabilities to all nonnuclear weapon states. Pakistan was an early supporter of a nuclear
Nawaz Sharif added another proposal in 1991 when he called for five powers (the US, Russia, China, India, and Pakistan) to discuss the nuclear issue in South Asia. India has rejected all of these regional nuclear disarmament proposals.

**THE US POSITION**

As part of its global nonproliferation policy, the US presently advocates nuclear disarmament for India and Pakistan. US efforts to curb the bomb’s spread rest on the premise that new nuclear forces are inherently dangerous. While nonproliferation has been a steady goal, the US has changed its strategy for controlling the bomb’s spread globally and in South Asia (Lavoy 1991, p735-783). Breaking with early US efforts to pressure India and Pakistan to join the NPT, the Clinton administration has urged these nuclear holdouts first to cap, then over time to reduce, and finally to eliminate their nuclear arms capabilities. In pursuit of this policy, the US stresses nonproliferation in bilateral discussions with India and Pakistan; it urges them to stop producing fissile material for weapons purposes; it withholds economic and military aid from Pakistan until nonproliferation is verified; it supports high-level Indo-Pakistani talks on regional security and nonproliferation; it presses China not to aid Pakistan’s nuclear missile efforts; and it engages other states, particularly Russia, France, Germany, and Japan, to hold bilateral nonproliferation discussions with India and Pakistan.

Through mid-1999, the US has little to show for its efforts. Despite improved relations with both states, particularly after the 1995 visit of Prime Minister P.V. Rao to the US and the January 1996 visit to the region by then Secretary of Defense William Perry, tensions over the nuclear issue remain high between the US and the South Asian states especially in the wake of the underground nuclear tests conducted by both states in May/June, 1998. However, as US officials come to accept that
nonproliferation treaty; in 1962 President Mohammed Ayub Khan urged the world community to devise a "treaty to outlaw the further spread of nuclear weapons" (Rai 1979, 241). While acknowledging the need to control vertical proliferation, Pakistani diplomat Agha Shahi said that the top priority was to curb horizontal proliferation, a problem he saw as a greater security threat to nonnuclear weapon states, and insisted that "to tie the question of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons to other measures restricting the nuclear arms race only result in an impasse" (Documents on Disarmament 1967). In the end, Pakistan refused to sign the NPT because it was not binding on India, which refused to sign, and because it contained no mechanism for assuring the security of Pakistan and other nonnuclear weapon states.

Shortly after the NPT failure, and less than a year after Pakistan's loss in the 1971 war, Pakistan launched a two-track policy to match and contain India's growing nuclear might. In early 1972, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto secretly directed his top scientists to start work on a nuclear weapons program. Several months later Bhutto initiated the second track—a bid to obtain Indian denuclearization through a diplomatic campaign to rid south Asia of nuclear weapons. Originally announced at the unveiling of a Pakistani nuclear reactor in late 1972, a South Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone plan was submitted by Pakistan to the UN in November 1974, six months after India's first nuclear test.

Pakistan continued to pursue each policy track in the 1980. As part of his diplomatic offensive against India, General Zia ul-Haq opposed six measures for regional disarmament: mutual renunciation of nuclear arms; inspection of each side's nuclear facilities; simultaneous acceptance of IAEA full-scope safeguards; joint accession to the NPT; a bilateral nuclear test ban; and a multilateral conference under UN auspices on nuclear nonproliferation in South Asia (Naqvi 1994, 11). Prime Minister
nuclear disarmament may no longer be a feasible goal for this region, the US appears gradually to be pushing for India and Pakistan to practice arms control. Secretary William Cohen suggested as much in a June 1997 speech: "I recognized that the nuclear ambitions of India and Pakistan flow from a dynamic that we are unlikely to be able to influence in the near term. We might be able to gain influence over the long haul, but only if in the meantime we can prevent the tension from flaring into another conflict" (Defense News 1997).

The US pragmatic line is now finding support in surprising places. Conceding that nuclear disarmament is beyond reach globally and in South Asia, and convinced that current diplomatic approached are counter productive, a new group of Indian and Pakistani defense specialists back arms control as a means to enhance security and to avoid nuclear war. Indian military experts K. Subrahmanyam and General K. Sundarji accept the permanence of nuclear forces in the region and stress the need for India and Pakistan to learn to live peacefully in such an environment (Subrahmanyam 1992). Although the Indian government still pushes global nuclear disarmament and is not prepared to act on the nuclear realist perspective, it is showing greater flexibility and pragmatism. After the military crisis over Kashmir, India embraced the concept of confidence-building with Pakistan; several CBMs were negotiated and implemented by the two sides over the next three years (i.e., a ban on flights within five kilometers of the line of control in Kashmir, pre-notification of military exercises). In Pakistan, too, there are isolated signs of willingness to move beyond the traditional policy of regional denuclearization to stabilize regional security. For

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example, retired general K.M. Arif has urged India and Pakistan to consider turning the region into a “nuclear safe zone (that is, a region where nuclear deterrence is stable)” (Arif 1996, 18). Neither India or Pakistan accepts this plan yet, but the tide is turning: officials in the US, India, and Pakistan now seriously consider various nuclear arms control proposals if they do not yet embrace them.

THE PROBLEM OF NUCLEAR OPACITY

The common reluctance of India and Pakistan to discuss openly their force capabilities and intentions poses two problems for regional nuclear security. The first concerns the strategic instability arising out of covert nuclear forces. The second problem is that nuclear opacity impedes Indian and Pakistani efforts to openly propose, negotiate, and accept nuclear arms control agreements. This opacity leads policymakers to work out in private measures that would be politically unpopular if publicized in either country.

Strategic Stability

Many experts believe that secrecy concerning nuclear capabilities, force employment doctrines, targeting plans, and escalation thresholds weakens deterrence and creates other political and military problems. Shai Feldman argues that covert nuclear weapons programs entail closed decision making without wider scrutiny, dominance of the military in the formulation of doctrine, biases toward offense and preemption, and strained crisis management and nuclear signaling (Feldman 1992, 11). Gen-

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7 Nuclear opacity is a term used to describe the nuclear policies of India, Pakistan, Israel, and possibly other emerging nuclear states. Opaque nuclear states deny possession of nuclear warheads, do not make direct nuclear threats, do not deploy nuclear weapons, and do not openly debate nuclear plans. For further discussion see Avner Cohen and Benjamin Frankel, Opaque Nuclear Proliferation, (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 14-44.
eral Sundarji sees two strategic problems of nuclear opacity for South Asia: the possibility of a war between India and Pakistan triggered through miscalculation of each other’s nuclear status and ignorance of each other’s nuclear doctrines; the difficulties ensuring the safety of nuclear warheads and the prevention of their unauthorized use in a clandestine state (Sundarji 1997, 19).

On the other hand, nuclear opacity probably is required to preserve non-weaponized deterrence between India and Pakistan. George Perkovich and others contend that a condition of mutual deterrence deriving from the power of India and Pakistan to assemble nuclear arms quickly can be a steady source of regional security (Pekovich 1993, 23). These analysts recognize, however, that the stability of non-weaponized deterrence requires India and Pakistan to undertake a demanding set of CBMs to assure each other and the international community that they have not built weapons and that they seek a situation of mutual security.

Arms Control

In South Asia, nuclear arms have a meaning that extends well beyond their value as military and strategic bargaining instruments. Large portions of the region’s informed population see civilian and military nuclear programs as components of, and indeed symbols for, national sovereignty and security. Thus, it is difficult for Indian and Pakistani officials to make public concessions on nuclear issues. If India and Pakistan move to embrace nuclear arms control, it will be difficult for them to cultivate popular support for measures that very few citizens understand because of years of government secrecy. Obscure nuclear proliferation in South Asia may have constrained a regional arms race and provided military policymakers flexibility in negotiations, but it has done so at the cost of preventing Indian and Pakistani leaders from cultivating domestic constituencies for nuclear arms
control and from identifying the precise nuclear security problems that are in the most need of control.

PRESENT TREATIES, AGREEMENTS, AND LIMITATIONS

Neither India nor Pakistan has accepted limits on military activities that either state realistically might wish to pursue at some point in the future. Past and present Indo-Pakistani treaties and CBMs have helped to reduce tensions and resolve troublesome disputes but have not significantly altered the sources of military rivalry, stabilized nuclear security, nor seriously constrained the strategic behavior of either state.\(^8\) Arms control does not yet play a central role in South Asian military and nuclear affairs.

Even in light of their recent underground detonations, India and Pakistan concluded their most consequential military pacts after their three wars. The costs of conflict forced them to negotiate measures for troop disengagement's and to make minor territorial adjustments along disputed borders; but neither side treated these settlements as conclusive since they did not solve basic problems—especially those underlying the Kashmir dispute (Makeig 1997, 272).

India and Pakistan jointly observe several military CBMs. Driven to avoid another violent conflict in the aftermath

\(^8\)The simmering Kashmir dispute, the cause of two previous wars between India and Pakistan, shot to international prominence in 1998 after both states detonated underground nuclear devices and declared themselves nuclear powers. While there have been many CBMs between these two states over the past decade, as of this writing, both Pakistan and India were warning of war six weeks into a bloody offensive to secure a vital highway in Kashmir from guerrillas (these guerrillas are believed to be a combination of Afghan mercenaries and Pakistan Army regulars who have occupied an 88-mile stretch of the snow-capped peaks and ridges shooting anything that moved on the highway) in the towering Himalayan heights. However, it would appear that the heavily armed guerrillas have been pushed back closer to the military Line of Control dividing India and Pakistan, allowing both sides to breath a sigh of relief.
of the Second India-Pakistan war, the two states agreed in 1966 to provide prior notification of border exercises. In 1982, they established the Indo-Pakistan Joint Commission. Designed to facilitate normal relations between the two states by creating a forum for bilateral cooperation in communications, consular affairs, cultural exchanges, trade, smuggling, and, more recently, drug trafficking, the commission convened several formal sessions at the foreign minister level and more sessions at lower levels.

As separatist violence in Indian-held Kashmir accelerated in 1990, Indian and Pakistani troops fought armed skirmishes along the line of control. The heightened risk of a fourth Indian-Pakistan war quickly focused government attention in India and Pakistan, and even more so in the US, on the need for military CBMs. After a year of little progress, the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan met in New Delhi in April 1991 and signed two major agreements, one pledging nonviolation by military aircraft of each other’s airspace and the other requiring each state to provide advance information about any military exercises and troop movements along common borders. India and Pakistan subsequently established a formal line of communication (hotline) between their military commanders and there is a new bus line linking the two states making travel between them much easier.

Despite this impressive paperwork, few regional CBMs operate according to plan. Both states violate no-fly zones for combat aircraft and helicopters to map terrain across the border. Each state’s underground nuclear tests has violated the agreement on prior notification of military exercises. Abuses of the military hotline are also reported: after opening fire and inflicting casualties on enemy troops in Kashmir and on the Siachin glacier the attacking party can call the enemy on the hotline to prevent hostilities from widening. Military and civilian officials
in the region remain skeptical of arms control as a means to enhance national security.

The track record of CBMs in South Asia is spotty, at best. Both India and Pakistan assert that trust is lacking and is the key ingredient to improved relations, but neither state has chosen to generate trust through CBMs voluntarily negotiated. Now that nuclear dangers and regional instabilities have grown, India and Pakistan might do well to implement existing CBMs properly. New nuclear risk reduction measures might also be considered in bilateral negotiations. Will India and Pakistan now take CBM implementation more seriously than in the past? One clear indication will be whether both states again dwell on rhetorical initiatives designed for public relation purposes or move instead to negotiate concrete measures to reduce nuclear dangers.

**BARGAINING**

In the 1980s India and Pakistan enjoyed strong political leaders who had sufficient maneuvering room at home and the confidence needed to engage the other side and to de-escalate crises. It is not obvious that the tacit bargaining that worked well in the 1980s can be managed as effectively in the present era. Religious revivalist outbursts, spy scandals, feverish nationalism, communal rioting and bombings, and recent low-intensity conflict in Kashmir have disrupted the political dialogue. The transformation of domestic politics in each state, marked by the rise of the religious right and the erosion of national leadership, makes it necessary to formalize arms control negotiations.

The effectiveness of tacit bargaining depends on the current state of relations between India and Pakistan and on the strength of each side’s political leaders. Unfortunately, India and Pakistan have had weak and unstable governments for several years and there are no signs that political conditions are improving in either state. In response to a July 1998 call for bilateral
tension-reducing talks by Pakistan’s foreign minister, for example, Indian foreign minister Salman Khursheed stated: “India wants to ease these tensions, but there is a period of uncertainty in Pakistan. For the present let us wait and watch” (Nation 1997, 29). This attitude remains. Unilateral restraint and tacit CBMs are important in any adversarial relationship, especially when the threat of nuclear war is involved; but arms control must be formally negotiated and ratified if it is to garner widespread domestic support and survive sudden changes in political leadership, popular sentiment, and international events.

INDIA, PAKISTAN, AND THE US: UNDERSTANDING AND RECIPROCITY

The final barrier to creating a viable arms control regime in South Asia is the prevalence of resentment and defiance among India, Pakistan, and the US. Specific conflicts have confounded amicable relations among these states, but, more important, each state often acts with moralism and sometimes hypocrisy. The lack of trust and understanding between India and Pakistan is well known; neither side is willing to initiate a relationship of reciprocated good gestures. The animosity created by differences over the nuclear issue between the US and India and Pakistan is also destructive. US nonproliferation pressure inhibits open discussions between India and Pakistan on regional nuclear security. Pakistanis resent the imposition of the 1985 Pressler amendment (US legislation banning economic and military aid to Pakistan because of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons activities), which they see as discriminatory and Indians object as strongly to US pressure on New Delhi to join the NPT and curb space and missile activities. Consequently, much Indian and Pakistani diplomatic energy goes to diverting US pressure rather than thinking about and proposing creative ideas to promote regional nuclear security.
At a deeper psychological level, the sense of US and collective Western pressure on nonproliferation perpetuates anti-Western feelings. Such sentiments could produce a situation far more serious than that created by the “nuclear nationalism” that presently exists in India and Pakistan. Despite fragmentation of the domestic fabric in both states, the defense of national sovereignty, which the nuclear program symbolize, is a strong rallying cry. In a colonial region that has a long history of anti-Western populism, the US strategy of technology denial and punitive actions has the potential to trigger a new round of anti-Western activism.

**CONCLUSION:**

**TOWARD A NEW NONPROLIFERATION STRATEGY**

The current erosion of the nonproliferation regime and a lack of any real arms control measures should not be too surprising. The challenge now facing organizations and states working toward nonproliferation and arms control objectives is to recast those objectives to fit the post-Cold War era. The new characteristics of this era include a disaggregation of the Cold War’s bipolar organization of world politics, the resulting greater complexity and ambiguity of international relationships, and hence the increasing relevance of less obvious links among disparate regions and circumstances. The bottom line is that proliferation problems can no longer (if they ever could) be treated in isolation from one another. The problem of proliferation is better understood and treated in an integrated and holistic manner.

Accordingly, states and non-governmental organizations seeking to promote arms control and nonproliferation need to begin with a strategy that recognizes the importance of links among discrete proliferation problems. This strategy would entail seeking to identify those links when fashioning solutions, and therefore would require active and multifaceted interaction,
incorporating positive as well as negative inducements. Adopting such a strategy, which might best be called comprehensive engagement, would be a first step toward generating a nonproliferation regime strong enough—and inclusive enough—to overcome current incentives for proliferation.

For states in general, and for the US in particular, a strategy of comprehensive engagement would go beyond the tactics of selective engagement manifested in recent years, by fully embracing each of five elements. First, comprehensive engagement must continue to involve bilateral engagement on a state-by-state basis. This is the current US policy premise towards North Korea, and no other policy premise holds more promise despite the ruling regime’s inscrutability and recalcitrance. Shutting off current contacts would only encourage this “isolated” regime to bolster its existing contacts with other proliferation aspirants, such as Iran and Pakistan. Indeed, simply the prospect that existing punitive policies will be ended offers incentives for regimes, such as that in North Korea, to respond positively to direct engagement (one source of the recent decline in US-DPRK relations is in fact a growing conviction among North Korean leaders that there exists no real prospect of ending current US economic sanctions). However, even in such bilateral contexts, there is room for more integrated approaches treating bilateral relationships in their entireties and focusing on the linkages between different issues within those relationships.

Second, comprehensive engagement means sustaining requisite levels of attention and commitment to engagement over time. Too often, the US focuses on a proliferation problem only at moments of crisis. The specific efforts to engage North Korea in 1993-94 and India today—while laudable under the circumstances—demonstrate this tendency. Moreover, in allowing itself to garner a reputation for addressing problems only when they become crises, the US risks encouraging states, or even non-
governmental actors, to create crises by taking provocative action in order to be regarded "seriously" by US policy makers. Such thinking may have been an underlying factor in India’s decision to go forward with its nuclear testing, and is likely a key source of the current crisis between the US and North Korea. The US cannot hope to sustain a consistent and successful non-proliferation policy if each abated crisis is followed by waning attentions and flagging efforts, which only sow the seeds of a new crisis.

Third, comprehensive engagement requires a conception of involvement with a region as a dynamic system, not simply with each of the states within it. In particular, the US has too often neglected the long-term systemic implications of seemingly prudent short-term tactics, thereby directly contributing to the type of regional proliferation it ostensibly opposes. For example, the Chinese M-11 sale to Pakistan followed shortly the US sale of F-16 fighters to Taiwan, which China saw as a direct violation of the US pledge to limit transfers of military weaponry to Taiwan. To the extent that the F-16 sale to Taiwan undermined US credibility in persuading China to limit its own arms transfers in the region, the sale may have indirectly contributed to South Asian missile proliferation. At a broader level, this US tendency to ignore longer-term regional consequences of shorter-term, bilaterally-focused decisions has contributed to creating the peculiar situation in which both India and China perceive the US to be tacitly and/or surreptitiously tilting in support toward the other. The US will be unable to achieve nonproliferation genera-

9 In the 1982 joint communiqué with China, the US agreed not to increase weapons sales to Taiwan "either in qualitative or in quantitative terms" beyond the levels of preceding years, and to reduce over time.
10 Although the circumstance is likely most symptomatic of the level of distrust and suspiciousness characterizing India-China relations, working to overcome these perceptions will be an important determinant of US effectiveness in acting as an agent of nondiscriminatory norms in Asia.
ally until it can more effectively anticipate such long-term systemic consequences into its short-term decision making.

Fourth, comprehensive engagement must mean that the US and other nuclear weapon states seeking nonproliferation recognize more clearly how their own lack of progress toward nuclear arms control increases pressures for nuclear acquisition. Despite their commitment to the goal of vertical disarmament in the NPT, nuclear arms control negotiations between the US and the Soviet Union only achieved a brief period of respite in the two superpowers’ nuclear arms race. Occasionally, as in the SALT I Treaty’s incentives to develop MIRV missile technologies, they even redirected that race in new and more dangerous directions. After important early progress, the slowing pace of the START process falls short of the arms control promises offered by the US in negotiations for an indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. The growing disregard of this promise by nuclear weapon states now threatens to undermine preparations for the next review of the NPT in 2000. At the same time, US programs for sub-critical nuclear testing and continuing weapons “stewardship” effectively obviate much of the spirit, if not the letter, of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Thus, India does have a point, if not justification, in emphasizing years of unfulfilled promises for progress toward disarmament by nuclear-armed states as motivations for its own nuclear program. Indeed, this relation between “vertical” and “horizontal” proliferation is one of the essential linkages of the proliferation network. The US and other nuclear-armed states cannot expect their condem-

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11The breakdown and failure of the second Preparatory Committee meeting for the 2000 Review Conference, held April 27 to May 8, 1998, was in good measure due to the widespread perception that the nuclear weapons states (particularly the US and Russia) were attempting to rollback the commitments to disarmament included the decisions underlying the 1995 indefinite extension of the NPT.

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nation of India’s actions to be credible in the absence of recognition of this linkage.

Finally, comprehensive engagement means developing an appreciation for the political context of proliferation. During the Cold War, a popular tendency developed to regard nuclear weapons issues as independent of politics. Ironically, nuclear strategists and nuclear abolitionists shared this perception: the former holding that nuclear weapons impose a logic of their own, bestowing a certain universality to theories of deterrence and war-fighting; the latter in holding that the sheer horror of nuclear war renders use of nuclear weapons “unthinkable.” The end of the Cold War itself repudiates this notion. Despite force levels and launching capabilities that are as lethal as ever, the perceived nuclear war between the US and Russia has been dramatically reduced. The source of this reduced threat of war is the improvement in political relations between these states, which has decreased the animosities and uncertainties that have always lurked behind the abstract veneer of strategic theory. Improved political relations, not strategy, moved the superpowers toward greater actual peace. The lesson for South Asia is clear: only sufficiently thorough and enduring improvements in the political climate (such as the hotline, the new busline, etc.) can reduce intrinsic temptations to proliferate, thus offering hope of achieving nonproliferation goals in the long term. Neither the spread of nuclear weapons, nor the prevention of that spread through punitive sanctions or coercive counter-proliferation, is likely to help produce that peace.

The proliferation problem in Asia today has many sources, of which the shortcomings of US nonproliferation policy constitute only one. However, the US, now the world’s sole superpower and likely to remain so for quite some time to come, has an assurance of its own basic security needs and hence a latitude of behavior far exceeding that of any other nation. The
long shadow that its own nuclear weapons attitudes and policies cast over those of all other governments provides the US with a unique capacity to lead by example on nuclear weapons issues. This offers the US an unprecedented opportunity to articulate and pursue a long-term vision for national and global security in which the threats to use nuclear weapons is dramatically reduced or even eliminated.

Whether or not the US is able to take the lead in building regional and global security regimes that rely less on threats to use nuclear weapons, this nevertheless must remain the essential goal of nonproliferation advocates. During the Cold War’s long nuclear stalemate, the argument arose that mutual nuclear deterrence was in fact a force for peace, strongly discouraging actual war between the superpowers. Such perceptions endure; indeed, one of the most intractable features of the proliferation problem is that not all agree even that proliferation is a problem. Clearly this was not the view of the great majority of Indian and Pakistani citizens who favored their countries’ acquisition of deployed nuclear capabilities—even as many of them also anticipated the eventual use of these weapons.

This notion is an illusion: the psychological vulnerability and political tension engendered by mutual assured destruction provided genuine security to no state. While the threat of nuclear destruction may have helped to stave off overt military conflict among nuclear-armed states, nuclear deterrence did nothing to promote the resolution of the political conflicts fueling the rivalries of these states. The improved conditions of major power relations in the wake of the Cold War, however limited they remain, reveal starkly the paucity of the “security” provided to the superpowers by their nuclear weapons during the Cold War itself. Progress toward a genuine nuclear disarmament, in all its facets, depends upon debunking the illusion of “nuclear peace” wherever it emerges, and building security regimes that would
aim ultimately at replacing persistent dependence on nuclear deterrence.

The predominant justification for India’s and Pakistan’s nuclear tests, drawing as they do on Cold War conceptions of the political utility of nuclear weapons and other technologies of weapons of mass destruction, represent a dramatic turn away from this realization. India and Pakistan certainly perceive themselves as pursuing legitimate security interests and in fact behaving no differently than did the US and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. Indeed, many of the US’ own nuclear policies and practices also still derive from such calculations. However, emulation is not validation. In a nuclear-armed South Asia, India will depend for its security—as it never has before—on the prudence, competence, and authority of decision makers in Pakistan (just as the US, as much today as during the Cold War, relied upon command and control coherence in Russia). For its part, in addition to a similar security dependence upon India, Pakistan will labor under crushing economic and political burdens to maintain not only its “nuclear deterrent” but also its very integrity as a state. Meanwhile, for citizens of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and other neighboring states, the world today is an irrevocably more dangerous place.

The US has already accomplished much to lay the foundations for stricter controls on and dramatic reductions in nuclear weapons worldwide. However, the US and other nuclear powers need to do more to maintain regional stability in South Asia. The world looks to the US, as the sole remaining superpower, for leadership. However, paradoxically, it is mainly the US’ attitude, not India’s or Pakistan’s, that ensures the continuing legitimacy of nuclear weapons. The US, and the other declared nuclear weapon states, should stop preaching nuclear chastity until they, too, are willing to forswear nuclear weapons. The dictum, “do as we say, not as we do” is hypocritical; great powers lead by ex-
ample, not by empty words (Hagerty 1998, 195-196). The agenda prescribed in this essay is ambitious and will not be accomplished quickly, but the time has come to intensify the effort to achieve it and finally lead by example.

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