

Have Pakistan and India forgotten Hiroshima?

by

Pervez Hoodbhoy

The horrible lesson of Hiroshima is now so distant in the past that it seems irrelevant. Today, war-mongers in India and Pakistan know well that nuclear war will mean annihilation of both countries, but it has ceased to worry them. They only talk about the calculus of deaths – they chatter about how many of them will we kill, and how many of us will they kill. They never mention Black Rain or the infinitely slow, painful death of the survivors.

A relatively benign 5-year period of Pakistan-India relations crashed to a close when a Pakistan-based group attacked Mumbai in November 2008. War-talk thickened the air but this time the fault was not that of the two governments, both of which worked overtime to maintain calm. Perhaps paradoxically, it was the free media on both sides that whipped the public into a nationalist frenzy. Seeing political opportunity some popular Indian leaders, such as K.S. Sudarshan of the Hindu supremacist RSS party, announced that nuclear war between India and Pakistan may be necessary to destroy terrorist camps across the border.

In Pakistan, the willingness to go to war was even more apparent. Television programs frequently featured Pakistan's chief bomb-makers, Dr. A.Q.Khan and Dr. Samar Mubarakmand. They emphasized Pakistan's readiness, the scale of casualties to be expected on both sides, and casually remarked that even after a nuclear exchange there would still be millions left over in Pakistan to continue future wars against India. On a personal note: in the most widely-watched Geo-Television program called "Capital Talk", there was a verbal battle between myself and Gen. (R) Hamid Nawaz, a former secretary of defence, who said that Pakistan should not bother with conventional weapons and should immediately launch a nuclear attack if India tries to attack jihadist groups based in Pakistan.

The psychosis which drives this abominable way of thinking is not new. It comes from the false belief in India and Pakistan that nuclear weapons bring security, prestige, and power. We need to step back into history and review how this came about.

On 11 May 1998, cheering crowds thronged the streets of Delhi and Mumbai after the Indian government declared it had carried out five atomic tests, one of which was a hydrogen bomb. Sweets were distributed, thousands performed *puja* in Hindu temples, and India sternly warned Pakistan that the balance of power had forever shifted. But, only 17 days later, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif congratulated wildly cheering citizens in the streets of Lahore and Islamabad as the Chagai mountain trembled and went white from multiple nuclear explosions. He declared that Pakistan is now safe and sound forever, on the road to prosperity, and has to be now acknowledged by the world as a technological power. Bomb makers become national heroes. School children were handed free badges with mushroom clouds. Bomb and missile replicas were planted in cities up and down the land.

But none of Mr. Sharif's promises could be kept. Ten years later, Pakistan turned into a different country, deeply insecure and afraid for its future. Grim-faced citizens today see machine gun bunkers, soldiers crouched behind sandbags, barbed wire, and barricaded streets. In Baluchistan and FATA, helicopter gunships and fighter jets swarm the skies.

Today Pakistan is at war on multiple fronts. But the Bomb provides no defense. Rather, it has helped bring it to this grievously troubled situation and offers no way out. There is little doubt that India forced Pakistan to test. But once Pakistan reluctantly followed suit, it forgot that it had done so under provocation. To India's chagrin, it discovered that the Pakistani Bomb had generated a life of its own.

The Bomb became a fantastic talisman, able to ward off all evil. For military men, Pakistani nukes became not just a counter to Indian nukes but also the means for neutralizing India's larger conventional land, air, and sea forces. For diplomats and politicians, the bomb was a sure way to guarantee that the world would make India negotiate on Kashmir. Flushed with success, the Pakistani leadership hit on what, in their view, was a brilliant strategy for confronting India – jihad by Islamic fighters protected by Pakistan's nuclear weapons.

Kargil followed. This secret invasion in early January 1999, was conceived and implemented by General Pervez Musharraf. But to blame only Musharraf – a fashionable thing to do in these times – is to sacrifice truth for convenience. Blinded by nuclear euphoria, there was scarcely a voice in Pakistan against an adventure that, six months later, left over a thousand dead and dealt the country a humiliating defeat.

But Kargil was just one consequence. More significantly, the Bomb fed a culture of violence that eventually grew into the hydra-headed militancy now haunting Pakistan. Some mujahideen, who felt betrayed by Pakistan's army and politicians, would ultimately take revenge by turning their guns against their sponsors and trainers. As the Mumbai attack showed, they have also the capacity to wreak havoc across the border.

Terrorism and fanaticism are now an existential threat to Pakistan. Perhaps the greatest danger is that some fanatical jihadist group based in Pakistan will launch another cross-border attack. A paralyzed Pakistani state appears incapable of stopping this, as much else, from happening. The writ of the state has already ceased to hold in some parts of the country. In Swat, education of girls has been stopped by jihadists and the state is powerless to reverse this. Terrorists have repeatedly targeted Pakistani army officers and soldiers, and their wives and children. Even their fortified residential compounds are not safe from rocket attacks. Officers are now understandably afraid to drive in official vehicles, to wear uniforms in public, or even to stop at traffic lights. It was a lie that the Bomb could protect Pakistan, its people, or its armed forces. It is also unclear whether the government is capable of keeping nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists.

How can Pakistan be made into a more normal, more secure country? What can eventually persuade it to give up its nuclear weapons? I am certain that force cannot work. Pakistan's nuclear weapons are probably too well dispersed and protected for even the combined forces of America and India to locate and destroy with confidence. Any attempt to do so will trigger a nuclear response.

In such a situation, is there anything that the government and people of Japan do? As time devours the remaining *hibakusha*, the living memory of nuclear horrors will inevitably disappear. Nonetheless, Hiroshima and Nagasaki will continue to stand as monuments to human cruelty and stupidity. Therefore, Japan is uniquely placed to demand global nuclear disarmament, which is the only way of ensuring that Pakistan's nuclear weapons are also eliminated.

The first step towards this goal must be a categorical declaration by the US that it will downsize its nuclear arsenal leading to an eventual zero. This is no longer as impossible as it once seemed because even mainstream political figures in the US are now calling for zero nukes for purely pragmatic reasons. Such a declaration could then be followed by an effort to stop the production of fissile materials globally. Currently, the moral hypocrisy of the nuclear weapon countries is obvious as they preach abstinence to Pakistan but, at the same time, India is being rewarded by them with nuclear deals in spite of it having surreptitiously made nuclear weapons and launching a deadly arms race.

Until progress is made towards the global elimination of nuclear weapons, one must be grateful for every week and month that passes safely. By the time this article gets published, Pakistan-India tensions will hopefully have cooled down. But how long can Pakistan and India live at the razor's edge? The time for getting rid of nuclear weapons is now.

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