Nuclear South Asia – circa 2060
Jean Meyer Award Lecture

Pervez Hoodbhoy
Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

I am deeply honoured to receive the Jean Meyer Global Citizenship Award. I think that it is highly significant that this award emphasizes the concept of global citizenship. Indeed, the world has become far too small for us to invest our primary loyalties to tribe, race, religion, or country. These parochial identities have become far too dangerous in a world that now offers an infinite variety of means by which we can destroy ourselves. For the world to become safer and happier, every one of us has to act locally but think globally.

EPIIC has organized this marvelous conference with four words in the title: Conflict, Culture, Complexity, and Change.

Yesterday I spoke about just one of these – culture. I made the case that it is undergoing enormous changes in my country through deliberate use of education for indoctrination.

I wish I could speak further on the subject of culture and speculate on whether:

1. Recent reassertion of cultural identity might trump religious and national identity in the volatile areas of Sind and Baluchistan. One can indeed make the case that this is happening and will grow.

2. Whether culture might ultimately bridge the differences between India and Pakistan. So as Pakistan reels under the blows of Islamists, a part of the country looks wistfully at the cultural and personal freedom in India. Just how far can this go?

However, although these are interesting issues to explore, I shall focus upon the three remaining words: Conflict, Complexity, and Change. And I shall do so in the context of nuclear weapons, which are the ultimate weapons of conflict. This being the session on South Asia 2060, I shall put in my two bits to guess what the nuclear future of South Asia may look like.

1. **Can we predict?** Well, it would be stupid of me to try and actually predict nuclear futures 50 years from today. This is properly a job for fortune tellers rather than scientists. Scientists can do a great job predicting deterministic systems like the solar system. But they shudder and refuse chaotic systems.

2. **The Bad News about nuclear weapons:** It is estimated by SIPRI (the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) that today there are more than 23,300 nuclear warheads in the world and that the US, Russia, UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, and Israel have 8,392 deployed warheads ready to be launched within minutes. Even a Hiroshima sized weapon can kill hundreds of thousands of people.

3. **The Good News: there's a strong move in the US, Russia, and Europe towards global zero and away from vertical proliferation.** Hitherto the emphasis had been totally on horizontal proliferation. At the beginning of 2010, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists decided to move its famous Doomsday Clock from 5 minutes to midnight backwards by one minute. Created in 1947, the Doomsday Clock has been adjusted only 18 times prior to today, most recently in January 2007 and February 2002 after the events of 9/11. One might continue this note of optimism: populations in the West now openly question the need for nuclear weapons instead of buying into the rhetoric of indispensability. The absurdity of maintaining nukes in post-Cold War Europe is apparent. Where is the enemy? Why put your own people at needless risk to accident and sabotage? Antagonize neighbors with whom you no longer have much of a quarrel?

4. **US is clearly losing enthusiasm.** Although it was the first country to invent and use nuclear weapons, its enthusiasm started waning after the end of the Cold War. A realization slowly dawned that every warhead added to its arsenal of 30,000 certainly increased maintenance and security costs but brought little benefit. In the now famous articles published in the Wall Street Journal of 2007 and 2008, the four horsemen—George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn – called for nuclear global elimination. Less nuclear salience. CTBT will be an important test.

5. **Why the change in direction?** This change of heart comes primarily for three pragmatic reasons, not some high moral principles.

I) Nuclear terrorism. Nukes are worse than useless in dealing with holy warriors, for who reward lies in the hereafter. By engineering a nuclear catastrophe in some Western city, Osama bin Laden and his disciples dream of provoking a nuclear response from the US against Muslim holy sites and populations – Mecca, Cairo, Teheran, and Islamabad. I'm not sure if I want to give OBL the Nobel Prize for peace, but he certainly has done much to dampen the enthusiasm for nukes!

II) Nukes are equalizers. Nukes of new powers annul conventional advantage. Iraq was attacked but North Korea was not. Almost any country can make nukes if it really wants to.

III) Nukes are irrelevant for war-fighting. They have lost most of their scare power. US nuclear weapons have not been used for 65 years – and the enormity of consequences if they are actually used – means that they are viewed as distant and abstract threats. On the other hand, war-fighting requires smart non-nuclear conventional weapons. For the US to maintain its dominance as the pre-eminent world power, it needs smart conventionalo weapons not nukes.

NOW TRANSPORT THIS LOGIC TO SOUTH ASIA.

1. **Nuclear terrorism in South Asia.** India and Pakistan should have real reason to worry about loose nukes. One does not know if radical Pakistani Islamists can eventually hijack a weapon, or acquire the technical expertise and the highly enriched uranium needed for a crude in-situ nuclear device. The more nukes that are around, the easier to lose one of them – or the material. It is quite certain that, having gone to the trouble of getting a nuke, they will use it if they can. One should not assume that London or New York will be the preferred targets because Islamabad and Delhi may be just as good – and certainly much easier.

2. **Nukes are equalizers.** To its dismay, India discovered that it was severely limited to respond to Pakistan after Kargil, the attack on the Indian parliament, and Mumbai. Of course, India may freely construct any number of "Cold Start" type strategies in the next few decades, and of a two-front front war under a "nuclear over-hang" (by itself an interesting newly invented phrase), articulated by Gen. Deepak Kapoor in January, 2010. But these are highly risky games.

3. **Nukes are irrelevant for war-fighting in South Asia.** Conventional weapons gave India an edge in Kargil, its blue water navy and space program gives it force projection. Not nukes.

LOOKING TOWARDS 2060 – SOME FIRM FACTS:

1. Making nukes is going to become easier with time. Horizontal proliferation will increase, vertical will decrease.

2. Unless there is an FMCT, there will be more nukes.

3. Iran will be a tipping point. Saudi Arabia might want to get Pakistani nukes….

LOOKING TOWARDS SOUTH ASIA 2060 – SPECULATIONS:

1. **Medium Probability:** The India-China economic rivalry becomes absolutely the most important thing for India. Pakistan has decisively defeated Islamic extremists. Knowing that Pakistan will be a thorn in its side, India makes significant concessions to Pakistan on Kashmir and Indus waters. The rapprochement between Pakistan and India begins.

2. **Medium Probability:** India keeps rising, Pakistan slipping. In a replay of the US-Soviet race, Pakistan breaks its back trying to keep up with India. Chaos breaks loose. Pakistani nukes become a nightmare to locate.

3. **Low Probability:** the move by America and Russia towards Global Zero gains currency. Ten years from now, participation of any country in world trade is made conditional upon zero production of fissile materials. India and Pakistan are forced to go along.

4. **Low Probability:** that there is actually nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

CONCLUSION: Notwithstanding the one minute of Doomsday Time recently added to our safety, life on the planet remains deeply imperiled. South Asia needs to wake up and get rid of nukes.