

Nuclear Gains and Losses

PAKISTAN'S nuclear tests are having an impact on the domestic environment more profound than on its defence or foreign relations. The phenomenon was to be expected but its scope is greater than one could have imagined. It is too early to examine the import of Prime Minister's June 11 blockbuster. It has been unloaded upon the country only in the outline.

Moreover, there is as yet no indication as to how the government proposes to bridge the ever widening national chasm between intent and implementation. Necessarily then, this is a tentative assessment of our gains and losses since the nuclear tests.

Rhetorical flourishes and emotional highs notwithstanding, the change in Pakistan's security environment is no substantive. While the shape of what some politicians and analysts grandiosely call the strategic balance between India and Pakistan has changed, the reality remains largely unchanged. There was for nearly a decade an implicit threat that conventional war could result in the use of nuclear weapons, in particular by the party lacking comparable conventional capability. This threat is now explicit. It is debatable whether Pakistan's security interests were best served by maintaining that ambiguity or by following India in the open. I still believe that, notwithstanding Delhi's provocative muscle flexing, Pakistan's security interests have not been served by matching India show-for-show-plus-one. There is no way now to prove or disprove that proposition. The older verities remain:

One is that there exists a balance of mutual destruction which renders irrational, therefore unlikely, the pursuit by either adversary of a decisive conventional war. This fact can redefine the parameters of conflict between them in the following ways: (i) Both sides may decide that the new risks are much too great to continue with old resolve them. (ii) They may continue the conflict at a low level of intensity by proxy warfare, and by bleeding each other by violent and not-so-violent sabotage operations. (iii) Tensions resulting from (ii) may result in the threat or actuality of conventional warfare of limited scope and/or duration. The Indian troops mobilization and Pakistani riposte in 1987 and 1990 are example of threats which did not materialize. (iv) All three options require a sophisticated system of management of the nuclear arsenal in each country, until such time as the parties agree to mutual disarmament.

In case of India and Pakistan, there has also existed a certain concentration of international monitoring of whether or not the two adversaries are reaching a level of confrontation that risks becoming nuclear. It was this phenomenon that produced the United States' forceful diplomatic intervention in summer 1990.

This paradigm has not significantly changed since India and Pakistan conducted multiple nuclear tests. The conflict remains, and neither side has shifted from of positions to make possible a meaningful peace process. The struggle in Kashmir continues with Pakistan's help, and so does India's harsh military effort to suppress it. Since the nuclear tests India has beefed up its military presence there. Covert warfare continues. Since the eleven nuclear tests, Pakistan has blamed India for two bloody acts of sabotage - a bomb explosion in a cinema hall and the blowing up of a railway train. There is no evidence to suggest that the covert warfare between the two countries will not any more bring them close occasionally. To conventional confrontations such as the ones that occurred in 1987 and 1990. There is evidence, however, that the great powers are more cognizant than before of the risks in the simmering Indo-Pakistan conflict.

Pakistani officials and several commentators have been emphasizing this to be a major

gain from the tests. They say that the question of Kashmir has now been placed on the front burner of international politics this is true. But we need inquire into the political value - political, economic or military - of this achievement.

Obviously, the recognition by the United States, the P-5, the G-8, and the UN Secretary General that Kashmir is a core issue that ought to be addressed has not led them to soften their sanctions against Pakistan which welcome their interest, or harden it against India which spurns it.

In contrast to India, Pakistan has exhibited a sophisticated diplomatic posture in recent weeks. The Foreign Office's submissions to the big power's meeting in Geneva and to the Security Council were excellent drafts, carefully worded and admirably nuanced. Similarly, Islamabad's unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing is a wise, no-cost gesture liable to favourably impress international opinion. Yet, these commendable actions are unlikely to affect a meaningful change in great power behaviour. The reason is that no significant shift has occurred in the South Asian equation of power, and in the relative importance of India and Pakistan in the world economy and politics.

When a nuclear balance of terror - in the Pakistan-Indian context this ought to be distinguished from such concepts as 'strategic parity' and 'military balance' - exists between two adversaries, the focus of conflict remains on the conventional capabilities of each. It is for this reason that during the cold war the United States and USSR maintained huge conventional forces and deployed them in each other's proximity in Western and Eastern Europe. This rule applies more strongly in the unique situation of India and Pakistan, as never before had two enemies so close and environmentally integrated possessed nuclear arms.

The tests have not improved Pakistan's conventional capability, actually or potentially. To the contrary, in this respect at least the sanctions are likely to hurt Pakistan much more than India which has a much larger, broad and diversified industrial base. It is a significant indicator that in its recent budget India increased its formal defence spending by 14% while the informal increase - i.e., if one counts allocations to its R&W and military-industrial complex - amounts to an estimated 33%. Pakistan, by contrast has increased defence spending by 8% which barely meets the inflationary costs. It is most likely that in the coming years, the military disparity between the two countries will continue to grow.

The one aspect in which a substantive change may have occurred in Pakistan's favour is its standing in the Middle East. The region's governments and people are living under the frightening shadow of Israel's nuclear arms. Israel is not, by any definition of the word, a peaceful power. It is still committed to an expansionist agenda of achieving Eretz Israel. It is still colonizing what remains of Palestinian land in the native Arab's possession. A significant portion of its political society still aims at destroying the holy Muslim sites of Jerusalem. It still occupies, in violation of the United Nations Charter, the territories of three sovereign Arab countries. It is still diverting and draining the water so essential to the survival of millions of Arab people.

And yet, it still enjoys the wholehearted support and protection of the United States. It is only natural that the beleaguered Arabs should welcome the emergence of a potential nuclear balance in their vicinity. Yet the truth is that Pakistan is not in position to benefit significantly from this favourable Middle Eastern disposition. Pakistan's ruling establishment knows that at the slightest hint of it the wrath of the United States shall fall on us; only then shall we experience real sanction. It is a risk that cannot be taken, and our officials have been vowing not to take it. So this too is an unrealizable gain.

Beyond the change in atmospheric conditions, which rarely endure, Pakistan's passage from

having been an explicit nuclear weapons country has not substantially changed its strategic position. By contrast, the fallout has so far been considerable at home. A state of emergency was imposed almost simultaneously with the announcement of the tests in Chagai. The fundamental rights granted by the Constitution are suspended. The President, reads the proclamation which was later approved by the parliament was pleased to declare that the right to move to any court, including a High Court and the Supreme Court, for the enforcement of all the fundamental rights conferred by chapter 1 of part 2 of the Constitution shall remain suspended for period during which the said proclamation is in force.

Nothing, except the goodwill of executive authority, stands between the citizens' manifold rights and their violation. It is an extreme, draconian measure which democracies rarely if ever employ in the exceptional circumstances of total war or complete anarchy. Ironically the state of emergency was imposed in Pakistan just when the highest authorities in the land were claiming that Pakistan had achieved strategic balance with its adversary, and national security was firmly assured. Are we to assume then that citizens' rights shall deteriorate in this country in inverse proportion to officially proclaimed improvements in its security environment and national power?

The foreign currency accounts held by citizens and expatriates were seized and converted into local currency, arbitrarily and in violation of pledges made by the Prime Minister himself. It is true that these accounts had to be frozen in order to prevent a panic flight of capital and hard currency. But what justifications is there for converting them into rupees, hurting large numbers of middle class citizens, expatriates and investors, and ruining above all the credibility of the state. Unless the government rectifies this injustice soon, the consequences of this amoral opportunism will be felt by the state and society for a long time.

On June 11 the Prime Minister addressed the nation, and was promptly entitled a revolutionary. I shall not now comment on his extraordinary speech. Yet, four simple reminders are in order. One is that to date revolutions from above have failed, every where and at all times. Two, what succeeds from above are reforms, provided they are seriously conceived and methodically enforced. Three, enforcement of reforms requires a streamlined, clean, efficient, cooperative, and rule-based administrative machinery. That is in shambles here - obese, corrupt, insecure, and sullen. Four, there is a cardinal rule of reform, revolution, warfare and all such struggles: do not fight on too many fronts simultaneously; make not too many enemies at the same time. Will someone close to him examine the Prime Minister's otherwise commendable agenda in the light of these principles, shut up the yes-men around him, and tell the truth? That one person will do Mr. Nawaz Sharif and Pakistan a very great favour indeed!

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