

Making Weapons, Talking Peace

Resolving Dilemma of Nuclear Negotiations

Advice on nuclear issues in both Indian and Pakistan is dominated by the nuclear weapons complex, the military and the foreign ministries – institutions that have a vested interest in maintaining their power, influence and funding. To find a way forward both governments would do well to seek out other perspectives, find people outside government to develop new ideas, and encourage public debate.

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It is talking time again. Hardly a day goes by without a report of Pakistani and Indian officials, foreign secretaries or foreign ministers meeting and talking. This a welcome respite from the past several years of tension interrupted by crises and threats of war. While talking is better than fighting, it is important to remember that India and Pakistan have met and talked many times since the 1999 Lahore summit, where the prime ministers claimed that they shared “a vision of peace and stability between their countries, and of progress and prosperity for their peoples”.¹

However, stripped of the rhetorical commitments to ‘peace and stability’, the Lahore agreements were little more than limited transparency measures. The goal then was to assure the international community that having tested their nuclear weapons, India and Pakistan would behave as ‘responsible’ nuclear weapons states. But what followed Lahore was not peace or stability but the Kargil war, the armed stand-off in 2002 after ‘jihadis’ attacked India’s parliament, spiralling military spending, missile test after missile test, and the consolidation of nuclear strategies.

If the current round of nuclear talks is to offer anything better than leaders and the public in India and Pakistan will have to get serious about changing their ways of thinking about nuclear weapons, and recognise the need for concrete measures

that help slow the momentum towards ever larger and more destructive nuclear arsenals. This is necessary to set the stage for any kind of nuclear disarmament: unilateral, bilateral, regional or global. An inevitable part of this process will be to break the monopoly of the nuclear weapons community, the scientists, strategic thinkers and pundits, military forces, and bureaucrats who shape nuclear policy. They have brought us the bomb and now seek to keep it, because it keeps them.²

Challenging Nuclear Assumptions

Leaders in Pakistan and India are of two minds when it comes to their nuclear arsenals. On the one hand, they recognise that these weapons cast a dark, potentially fatal shadow over the future of both countries. India’s new foreign minister Natwar Singh recently declared “To me personally, the most important thing on our agenda should be the nuclear dimension”.³ General Musharraf claimed that “we have been saying let’s make south Asia a nuclear-free zone” and added that “If mutually there is an agreement of reduction of nuclear assets, Pakistan would be willing”.⁴ These are hopeful indications.

At the same time, officials and leaders on both sides seem bewitched by the power of the bomb. They each believe that the threat of massive destruction represented by their nuclear weapons is a form of protection, and so a force for good. Lost in this nuclear logic, they are forced to concede that the possession of nuclear

weapons by the other state serves the same purpose. This is reflected in the joint statement released after the expert-level talks on nuclear confidence building measures held in New Delhi on June 19-20, which claimed: “Recognising that the nuclear capabilities of each other, which are based on their national security imperatives, constitute a factor for stability.”⁵ This formulation was repeated in the statement after the meeting of the two foreign secretaries in New Delhi on June 27-28.

The idea that nuclear weapons are a ‘factor for stability’ flies in the face of both reason and experience. The incredible destructive power of nuclear weapons is meant to spawn fear in adversary states. But this fear also incites these states to seek the same weapons and produces a widening spiral of instability and escalation. It was fear of Nazi Germany acquiring nuclear weapons that led the US to initiate the Manhattan Project, and fear of a nuclear-armed US that led the Soviet Union to seek its weapons. The subsequent 40-year long superpower cold war is a history of hostility, crises and ever growing conventional and nuclear arsenals.⁶ Efforts at talks to reduce the nuclear threat always met with opposition from a chorus of strategic thinkers, policy-makers and armed forces, who all saw in the bomb a source of power and advantage.⁷ Nuclear weapons have served to create stability in one area; they have ensured and protected a vast nuclear weapons complex. The enduring clout of these complexes is revealed by the persistence of thousands of nuclear weapons and large nuclear weapons laboratories with colossal budgets and numerous personnel in both the US and Russia, 15 years after the end of the cold war.

There is abundant evidence in south Asia that there is no stability to be found in the shadow of the bomb. India’s nuclear pursuits encouraged Pakistan to follow suit. India’s 1974 nuclear test further increased Pakistan’s determination to have the bomb. Pakistan’s acquisition of nuclear capability in the mid-1980s brought no stability. As the Indian government’s official Kargil Review Committee Report put it, “Pakistan’s progress towards nuclear weaponisation coincided with an increasingly assertive political posture towards India”.⁸ Events after the May 1998 nuclear tests bear this out. The Kargil war

followed barely a year after the nuclear tests. It was the largest military engagement ever between two nuclear armed countries; many hundreds of soldiers died on each side.

Nuclear weapons were central to the Kargil war. Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan, has stated that in 1996 Pakistani military officers had presented her with plans for a Kargil-style operation, which she vetoed.⁹ After the nuclear tests, Pakistan's political and military leaders were evidently convinced that the operation might be feasible after all. The nuclear shield was supposed to restrict any possible Indian response while the threat of escalation to a nuclear war would serve to raise international concern about the Kashmir dispute and, it was hoped, lead to rapid international mediation.

Crisis has followed crisis. A little over two years after the Kargil war, India and Pakistan were enmeshed in another military confrontation involving an estimated half a million troops, about two-thirds of them Indian, facing off across the border. According to Indian defence minister George Fernandes, the Indian military was 'raring to go'. He also warned Pakistan not to consider using nuclear weapons, saying: "We could take a strike, survive, and then hit back...Pakistan would be finished".¹⁰ Pakistan foreign minister Abdul Sattar was quoted as saying that his anxieties were 'mounting not only by the day but by the hour'.¹¹

In May 2002, prime minister Vajpayee told front-line troops in Kashmir that the time had come for a 'decisive fight', adding, 'we will win again'.¹² Soon after, an Indian army officer briefed a senior journalist about plans for a quick attack that would set back "Pakistan's military capability by at least 30 years, pushing it into the military 'dark ages'," adding that "casualties in men and machines in such an operation will be high and the military has firmly told the politicians to prepare the nation for losses and delayed results, as fighting will be fierce."¹³ Details of the plans for attack, with a 'D-day' of June 15, 2002, have since been confirmed by the Indian Army chief.¹⁴

It is in the face of such history that one must examine the recent peace process – and appreciate that it is of great importance that they succeed in making some real progress towards reducing the risk of nuclear war in the region.

Assessing the Talks

Reading the media hoopla about the talks, one may be pardoned for thinking that two countries had in fact made dramatic progress towards reducing nuclear risk. Sad to say, the aim, as in the case of

the Lahore agreement, seemed more to portray themselves as 'responsible' nuclear weapons states. The agreements themselves amounted to little more than a step sideways.

The only 'new' measure is another hotline, this time linking the two foreign secretaries, through their respective foreign offices, "to prevent misunderstandings and reduce risks relevant to nuclear issues". There are several hotlines already. J N Dixit, a former foreign secretary of India and newly appointed as national security adviser reports that in November 1990 prime ministers Chandrashekhar and Nawaz Sharif met during a SAARC Summit in Male, and "decided to establish a direct hotline. They also took a decision to activate the hotline between the offices of the foreign secretaries and the directors of military operations". In Dixit's judgment "hotline conversations between the director-generals of military operations remain routine and the prime ministerial hotline has seldom been used, as has the hotline between the two foreign secretaries".¹⁵ The war, near war and turmoil in the past five years certainly suggest that these lines of communication are not very satisfactory in preventing or defusing crises.

The other agreed measure that has been highlighted is the agreement to notify each other of upcoming missile tests. This was in fact agreed to in Lahore in 1999 and was part of the Memorandum of Understanding¹⁶ signed there. Since then, the two states have been informing each other about missile tests, of which there have been many. Now, five years later, they have simply agreed again that they will conclude such a notification agreement.

The missile test notification agreement, when it comes, will do nothing about limiting either state from continuing to test missiles with ever longer range, greater accuracy, and more destructive power. That this will happen is certain. No sooner were the talks over than General Musharraf announced proudly "We are conducting a missile test every second day. I give you

important news that within two months Pakistan will conduct a big missile test."¹⁷ Within days after the talks, India tested its Agni missile.¹⁸ India's new defence minister Pranab Mukherjee has said that the longer range Agni-III missile would be tested 'as and when required', and preparations to test it from a range in Orissa are reportedly underway.¹⁹

Reducing Nuclear Danger

India and Pakistan have to go beyond just finding ways and means for officials to talk to each other about the risks of nuclear weapons, and agree on measures that will concretely reduce the nuclear danger. A little common sense shows there are some obvious things that they could do, if they want to do more than just build 'confidence' while their nuclear arsenals keep growing.²⁰

Both India and Pakistan have emphasised repeatedly that they seek only a 'minimum' nuclear arsenal. General Musharraf's remarks about Pakistan's willingness to consider a 'reduction of nuclear assets' makes clear that this threshold has already been crossed. This should be no surprise. Pakistan and India have been making the fissile material (the nuclear explosive) for their weapons as fast as they can for decades. They already have enough for several dozen nuclear weapons each.

The table shows the casualties that would be inflicted if they each used only five of their weapons against the other's cities (assuming each weapon is about the same size as those tested in May 1998).²¹ A total of about three million deaths is predicted for these cities in India and Pakistan, with an additional 1.5 million severely injured. The experience of death and destruction on this scale would be beyond imagination for either country.

India and Pakistan can inflict much more than this devastation, using only a fraction of their nuclear weapons stockpile. It is beyond any understanding why they continue to produce more fissile material

Table

City	Total Population within 5 km of Explosion	Killed	Severely Injured
India			
Bangalore	3,077,937	314,000	175,000
Bombay	3,143,284	477,000	229,000
Calcutta	3,520,344	357,000	198,000
Madras	3,252,628	364,000	196,000
New Delhi	1,638,744	176,000	94,000
Pakistan			
Faisalabad	2,376,478	336,000	174,000
Islamabad	798,583	154,000	67,000
Karachi	1,962,458	240,000	127,000
Lahore	2,682,092	258,000	150,000
Rawalpindi	1,589,828	184,000	97,000

for more nuclear weapons. The two countries should stop making more fissile material. And, no more of the existing fissile material stockpile should be turned into nuclear weapons. Each additional weapon could destroy yet another city.

It is clear that weapons like those tested in May 1998 are destructive enough to kill hundreds of thousands of people in any major subcontinental city. Nevertheless the nuclear weapons establishments in India and Pakistan, as in similar establishments in other countries with nuclear weapons, pursue research and development activities to make their nuclear weapons both more destructive and more compact. If the future is to offer something other than the paranoid logic of racing to build more and more lethal weapons, the two governments should call a halt to such activities.

One step towards curtailing new weapons development is a prohibition on explosive testing of nuclear weapons. In the recent meeting, India and Pakistan repeated their unilateral declarations to conduct no further nuclear weapons tests. But, neither seems willing to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the 1996 international agreement banning explosive nuclear weapons tests – which has been signed by all the other nuclear weapons states (US, Russia, Britain, France and China, as well as Israel), and by 166 other countries. The reluctance of India and Pakistan is hard to understand. Their joint statement says each state will refrain from nuclear testing “unless, in exercise of national sovereignty, it decides that extraordinary events have jeopardised its supreme interests”. This conditionality is already there in Article 9 of the CTBT, which allows a state to withdraw from the Treaty, and by implication carry out a nuclear test. Therefore, India and Pakistan would lose nothing by signing this Treaty.

By formally joining the Treaty, India and Pakistan would help ensure that the international community is better placed to restrain any nuclear weapons state or would-be nuclear state from carrying out a nuclear test. This was why the idea of a treaty banning all nuclear tests was floated in 1954 by prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Since then, over 2,000 nuclear tests have been conducted around the world. These made possible unimaginably destructive nuclear arsenals, killed and injured uncounted numbers of people through radioactive fallout and contaminated the environment for centuries to come. It was to stop this that the CTBT was crafted. Now, even though it is a signatory to the CTBT, US nuclear weapons laboratories and nuclear hawks are seeking new nuclear

weapons for use against third world countries. They want to resume testing, perhaps in the next few years. If this is allowed to happen, nuclear weaponeers and militaries in other nuclear weapons states, including in Pakistan and India, will surely push to follow the US lead. It is important to prevent a second age of nuclear weapons testing.

A natural corollary to the ban on nuclear weapons testing is a ban on flight testing of ballistic missiles. Such a ban would inhibit the development of longer range and more accurate, thereby more destructive, missiles. The furious pace of missile development in south Asia and the tit-for-tat testing programmes makes such a ban all the more urgent.²²

Despite the best laid plans and supposedly fool-proof technology, accidents do happen. This is reflected in the Lahore agreement, where the two governments committed to “reducing the risks of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons”. These risks are directly linked to the deployment of nuclear weapons; deployment might involve, for example, putting the weapons on ballistic missiles or keeping the weapons at military airbases close to planes that may carry them. If nuclear weapons are not given over to military forces and not kept ready to use, there is much less danger of them being used by whoever happens to have charge of them at that moment, or of them being involved in an accident.²³ These are elementary safety measures. All India and Pakistan need do, at least as a start, is to announce that they will not deploy their nuclear weapons.

This idea has some support even among senior Pakistani policy-makers. Speaking recently in Beijing, Agha Shahi, a former foreign secretary and foreign minister, suggested that as part of a “nuclear restraint and a nuclear risk-reduction regime” for Pakistan and India, “it would be prudent in this situation to keep warheads unassembled and separated from missiles, not mounted for immediate firing.”²⁴ This would be in keeping with India’s official posture of No First Use of nuclear weapons. There is no reason to keep nuclear weapons fully assembled and mounted on missiles and ready to fire unless a state intends to launch a rapid nuclear attack.

As part of the Lahore agreements, India and Pakistan committed “to notify each other immediately in the event of any accidental, unauthorised or unexplained incident that could create the risk of a fallout with adverse consequences for both sides, or of an outbreak of a nuclear war between the two countries, as well as to adopt measures aimed at diminishing the

possibility of such actions or incidents being misinterpreted by the other.” The new nuclear hotline is meant to address the first part of this agreement. The two states should go on and agree to draw up together a list of all the possible “accidental, unauthorised or unexplained” incidents that they would like the other side to tell them about. This would lay the basis for sharing descriptions of what measures each has taken to reduce the risks of possible accidents and unauthorised incidents. Talat Masood, a retired Pakistani Lieutenant-General, has proposed that India and Pakistan jointly conduct exercises in responding to nuclear accidents and share experience on safety issues.²⁵

All the steps suggested here are no more than common sense. But this is often in short supply in all countries with nuclear weapons. Advice on nuclear issues in both India and Pakistan is dominated by the nuclear weapons complex, the military and the foreign ministries. Because they deal with nuclear weapons, this advice is shrouded in secrecy. Expert they may well be, infallible no one is. And, like all institutions, they inevitably have a vested interest in keeping their power, influence and funding, and seeking more. It is these very agencies that have brought us to the point of having to worry about the risk of a nuclear war that might kill millions and of nuclear accidents. To find a way forward, governments in both countries would do well to seek out other perspectives, ask for second opinions, find people from outside the government establishments who can help develop new ideas, and encourage an informed and open public debate.

It will be no easy path from our present nuclear-armed confrontation to the “peace and stability, progress and prosperity” promised at Lahore and so far denied. We must walk it together with courage and conviction. **EW**

Notes

- 1 Lahore Summit Declaration, available at URL <<http://meaindia.nic.in/event/2001/07/14event01.htm#7>>.
- 2 See Achin Vanaik, ‘Deconstructing the Self-image of the Indian Bomb lobby’ (paper presented at the ASA Decennial Conference on Anthropology and Science, Manchester University, July 14-18, 2003) and M V Ramana, ‘La Trahison des Clercs: Scientists and India’s Nuclear Bomb’ in M V Ramana and C Rammanohar Reddy (eds), *Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2003.
- 3 Indian foreign minister Natwar Singh speaking on the BBC, ‘India to prioritise nuclear issue in upcoming Pakistan talks’, Agence France Press, June 10, 2004.
- 4 ‘Musharraf ready for mutual reduction of nuclear arsenal with India’, Agence France Press, June 4, 2004.

- 5 Joint Statement, Expert Level Talks on Nuclear Confidence Building Measures, June 19-20, 2004, available at URL <<http://www.meaindia.nic.in/prhome.htm>>.
- 6 See for example, Kurt Gottfried and Bruce Blair (eds), *Crisis Stability and Nuclear War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988.
- 7 Herbert York, *Making Weapons Talking Peace: A Physicist's Odyssey from Hiroshima to Geneva*, Basic Books, New York, 1987.
- 8 *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2000, p 190.
- 9 'Benazir vetoed Kargil-style operation in '96', *The Indian Express*, February 8, 2000, available at URL <<http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/20000209/ifr09020.html>>
- 10 'Interview with George Fernandes', *Hindustan Times*, December 30, 2001, available at URL <<http://www.hvk.org/articles/1201/149.html>>.
- 11 Richard Beeston and Zahid Hussain, 'We will win nuclear war, says India', *The Times*, London, December 31, 2001 available at URL <<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines01/1231-01.htm>>.
- 12 'Time for a decisive battle has come: Vajpayee', *Rediff on the Net*, May 22, 2002, URL <<http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/may/22war1.htm>>.
- 13 Rahul Bedi, 'India Plans War Within Two Weeks', *Daily Telegraph*, London, January 6, 2002, available at URL <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2002/06/06/wkash06.xml>>
- 14 Ashok K Mehta, 'India was on brink of war twice', *Rediff on the Net*, January 2, 2003, available at URL <<http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/jan/02ashok.htm>>.
- 15 J N Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace*, Books Today, New Delhi, 2002, p 277.
- 16 Lahore Summit Memorandum of Understanding, from the website of Indian Ministry of External Affairs <<http://meaindia.nic.in/event/2001/07/14even01.htm#7>>
- 17 Mike Collett-White, 'No slow down in Pakistan nuclear programme', Reuters, July 1, 2004.
- 18 'Agni variant test-fired', Press Trust of India, July 4, 2004.
- 19 'India likely to test Agni-III missile in July', Indo-Asian News Service, June 23, 2004.
- 20 A broader set of arms control measures in the context of the Lahore Agreement was proposed in Zia Mian and M V Ramana, 'Beyond Lahore: From Transparency to Arms Control', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 17-24, 1999, pp 938-42.
- 21 Adapted from Matthew McKinzie, Zia Mian, A H Nayyar and M V Ramana, 'The Risks and Consequences of Nuclear War in South Asia' in Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian (eds), *Out of The Nuclear Shadow*, Lokayan and Rainbow Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp 186-96.
- 22 For an argument about the need for a comprehensive global missile control regime, including a ban on flight tests, see Andrew Lichterman, Zia Mian, M V Ramana and Jürgen Scheffran, 'Beyond Missile Defence', International Network of Engineers and Scientists against Proliferation/Western States Legal Foundation Briefing Paper, March 2002.
- 23 For a description of the causes and likely consequences of nuclear weapons accidents, see R Rajaraman, M V Ramana and Zia Mian, 'Possession and Deployment of Nuclear Weapons in South Asia: An Assessment of Some Risks', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 22, 2002, pp 2459-65.
- 24 'Pak Not To Accept LoC As Permanent Border: Agha Shahi', *Paknews*, June 16, 2004.
- 25 Talat Masood, 'Towards N-stability in South Asia', *Dawn*, June 20, 2004.