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PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY: BALANCING DETERRENCE AND GLOBAL NON-PROLIFERATION NORMS

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy has been shaped by its need to balance deterrence against India with adherence to global non-proliferation norms. The country's nuclear program, initiated in 1972 under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was a direct response to India's nuclear ambitions and the perceived threat of Indian hegemony in South Asia. Following India's nuclear test in 1974, Pakistan accelerated its nuclear program, culminating in its first successful nuclear test on May 28, 1998. This test marked a significant shift in the regional strategic balance, providing Pakistan with a credible deterrent against India. However, Pakistan's nuclear ambitions have often placed it at odds with global non-proliferation efforts, particularly the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), leading to international scrutiny and sanctions. Despite these challenges, Pakistan has maintained that its nuclear program is purely defensive, aimed at ensuring regional stability and deterring aggression. The evolution of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine reflects a focus on "tactical deterrence," emphasizing punitive retaliation rather than aggressive war-fighting capabilities. This approach aligns with its broader goal of maintaining a strategic balance with India while navigating the complexities of global nuclear diplomacy. Pakistan's nuclear strategy has also been influenced by its economic constraints and the need to counter India's conventional military superiority. The country's nuclear program has become a cornerstone of its national security policy, with successive governments upholding its continuity despite international pressure. As Pakistan continues to navigate the challenges of nuclear diplomacy, it faces the dual task of maintaining its deterrent capabilities while engaging with global non-proliferation norms to ensure regional and international security.

Keywords: Pakistan, nuclear diplomacy, deterrence, non-proliferation, India, South Asia, tactical deterrence, NPT, strategic balance.

Introduction

Pakistan started a nuclear program under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1972, following the loss of its eastern wing, now Bangladesh, in the 1971 War of Liberation. The U.S. and the USSR were then allies in the Cold War. Neither superpower took notice

of the developing situation in South Asia. Pakistan then moved to develop a nuclear deterrent as the only option to restore the strategic balance in its confrontation with India. In 1974, India tested a nuclear device leading Foreign Minister of India, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, to comment that they do not worry about China because China has a nuclear bomb and they also have a nuclear bomb with which they can demolish Pakistan. (Huque, 2010) The Indians are considering using a nuclear bomb against Pakistan. That led to the acceleration of the Pakistani nuclear program (H. Cassidy, 1989). First, the focus was on the acquisition of nuclear fuel cycle facilities. Pakistan, situated in a hostile security environment, suspected India of pursuing hegemonic designs. Unable to improve its conventional arms qualitatively because of economic constraints, Pakistan resorted to nuclear technology to address the imbalance with India in a cost-effective manner. This was subsequently interpreted as the development of an atomic bomb by the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It became an article of faith for all future leaders.

On September 07, 1981, General Zia-ul-Haq, who had been in power since July 1977, chaired an important meeting of the Development Committee; his decision would have decisive and far-reaching consequences for the nation and its future. He approved the controversial two-track strategy that involved both an overt nuclear power program as well as a covert weapons program aimed at achieving military capabilities. This pivotal decision set the course for Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. His successors, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, upheld the continuity of this vital program, despite facing significant financial imperatives and challenges. Nawaz Sharif, in particular, took the program to its logical conclusion, firmly establishing Pakistan's nuclear stance. (Lodhi, 2024) The country faced heavy American odds, especially given the United States' commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which undercut critical technologies and placed Pakistan in a difficult position on the international stage. The international coercion that stemmed from this commitment was intensified through the Symington Amendment, which imposed further restrictions. Nevertheless, Pakistan endeavored to endure and persist through these trials and tribulations, determined to carve out its path in the nuclear arena.

Historical Development of Pakistan's Nuclear Program

One of the most heated regions in terms of political and military confrontation is South Asia. Indeed, ever since the creation of Pakistan and India only after a few months of their birth, they inherited a legacy of bloodshed and mistrust. Due to sheer size and resources, India has always cherished revanchist ambitions in the realm of global and regional politics. This sentiment was further exacerbated by its hegemonic designs in the region, and that is the fundamental reason behind its refusal to accept partition. On the other hand, Pakistan, as a smaller neighbor, tried to cope with it by forming

alliances with global powers. However, the ultimate answer to India's military coercion emerged in the shape of the first successful indigenous atomic bomb test on May 28th, 1998. This deadly demonstration of military might not only alarmed the strategic community of India but also gave the right answer to a much-vaunted Indian bomb. Now finally, the strategic balance amply tipped in favor of India would be re-corrected in favor of Pakistan (Narang, 2022).

As far as the internal political, economic and social implications of such politico-military decisions are concerned, they are by no means free from dissatisfaction and tensions. However, the bottom line for such an alarming decision would be to maintain the strategic balance between the two arch-rivals. In addition to deterrence, it would provide a rare opportunity to materialize an ambition of Muslim hawks which Pakistan could not achieve through the history of almost 52 years.

Motivations for Pursuing Nuclear Weapons

Pakistan is seeking to protect itself from potential aggressors and establish itself as a regional power by launching a nuclear weapons programme, like its arch-enemy India. The two states tested their nuclear devices in May 1998, opting out of the system of checks and balances which consists of the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The situation startled Washington and Moscow, who were previously inattentive and even indulgent to the disobedience of New Delhi and Islamabad. Efforts to bring India and Pakistan back to the right path were in vain. The south-Asian states are regarded to have joined the Nuclear Club, consisting of the member states of the NPT with official recognition as nuclear weapon states (NWS). With the exception of India, all the nuclear detonation organizers maintain the NPT status quo and aspire to bring all third countries into the regime (Fiedler, 2012). Iran, Iraq and North Korea are the black sheep of the global non-proliferation community. The new roomers of Islamabad's and New Delhi's nuclear status void ambitions to become the sixth and seventh NWS recognised by the NPT. The discreet development of Pakistan's nuclear weapon program in the 1970s and 1980s was a source of apprehension. In the 1990s, the world learned that the Pakistani bomb was close to completion, the US ballistic missiles were supplied by China and reexported the other components of its nuclear weapon programme in exchange for a promise that Pakistan will not develop delivery systems. The Indians put into question the US hopes by conducting explosive test of medium range missiles in September 1996 and ignoring both the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) conclusions and Security Council condemnation. As in the case of its neighbour, economic sanctions were imposed on India. Washington put pressure on Islamabad to accept the RCTBT first in order to persuade PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee to do so. It was the beginning of Pakistan's and India's the battle for the right to conduct nuclear tests.

Evolution of Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrine

There is a growing body of scathing criticism of the nuclear weaponization of South Asia. A critically important aspect of this discourse is the new canons being set up to adjudicate the nuclear conduct of the two South Asian protagonists. The crux of the argument is that, as belated nuclear entrants and marginally responsible states fostering insurgencies on each other's soil, both Pakistan and India fall short of the high moral attributes associated with established nuclear weapon states (Huque, 2010).

Pakistan has consistently put forth the argument that its nuclear capability is not formulated for purposes of war-fighting or acts of aggression; rather, it is intended for deterrence and the promotion of stability within the South Asian region. From Pakistan's perspective, the country envisions adopting a more restrained and passive role for its nuclear arsenal. It places significant emphasis on the importance of asserting a strategy of punitive retaliation, which is aimed at inflicting unacceptable damage on any potential aggressor, specifically referring to India. This particular posture, which can be categorized as "tactical deterrence," bears a resemblance to India's explicitly stated nuclear doctrine. It generally involves the execution of demonstration strikes that occur in a graduated and measured manner, in stark contrast to the kind of colossal devastation and significant mass casualties that are characteristic of what is more traditionally known as mutually assured destruction a key concept in classical nuclear strategy.

Conversely, the guidelines laid out by New Delhi offer a certain latitude for conducting conventional warfare even under the protective umbrella of nuclear capabilities, a strategy that is now identified as 'Cold Start.' In this context, it is the capability for a second strike that is collectively regarded as the fundamental basis for maintaining stability within South Asia's complex security environment. A critical and defining feature of the Deterrence and Defense (DND) philosophy is the no-first-use policy, a principle that Pakistan actively challenges, particularly when taking into account the discrepancies between India's officially declared policy and its actual conduct during moments of crisis (Akhtar, 2022). It is noteworthy to mention that Pakistan does not have a formal nuclear doctrine in place. Instead, the nation prefers to maintain a level of ambiguity regarding its nuclear strategy, a calculated choice made to maximize the effectiveness of its deterrent capabilities. Consequently, the foundational pillar of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is primarily focused on deterring large-scale conventional military attacks originating from India, which could pose a significant threat to Pakistan's political sovereignty and its territorial integrity. In terms of ensuring that its nuclear deterrent remains credible, Pakistan has taken a firm stance against adopting the no-first-use concept. The rationale underlying this position is the belief that

embracing a no-first-use policy could serve as a smokescreen, allowing for the execution of aggressive military strategies by the adversary.

During the Kargil crisis of 2001, Pakistan outright rejected an Indian proposal for a bilateral no-first-use pledge that was made in the heat of that crisis. This stance was firmly rooted in the belief that nuclear weaponry is fundamentally integral to the nation's defense and deterrence architecture. Additionally, this rejection can also be understood through the lens of a prevailing perception within Pakistani strategic circles that questions the credibility of any regional or Indian no-first-use pledge. This skepticism is compounded by a deep-seated distrust towards India's commitments regarding no-first-use policies. Interestingly, in various significant aspects, Pakistan's nuclear posture exhibits parallels to that of India's nuclear strategy. Pakistani officials and strategists believe that their approach to nuclear deterrence against conventional military threats from India shares similarities with the NATO doctrine that was in place during the height of the Cold War.

Shifts in Nuclear Policy over Time

Shifts in Pakistan's nuclear policy have over time paralleled swings in the international system. A pair of current controversies raise the question of which policy vector Pakistan should follow. Unresolved issues regarding the country's nuclear posture touch on a broader debate about the country's foreign policy direction. Since the early 1970s, Pakistan's national security policy has hinged on the threat of an Indian invasion. In case of a conventional attack, the Indian armed forces clearly outmatched the Pakistanis in quantity and quality. During the 1980s, Pakistan appeared to relax its search for a nuclear deterrent (Sattar). In 1985, and possibly again in 1987, Pakistan allowed safe passage of a spy plane engaged in observing military facilities in Afghanistan. The same year saw Pakistan sign on to the Accords with the USSR and to the initiative seeking to roll back the increasing tension with India.

A prospective withdrawal from Afghanistan would remove an immediate threat to Pakistan. However, the broader context of the subcontinent should lead to a continuation of Pakistan's previous nuclear policy. In the aftermath of 1971, Pakistan accelerated its attempt to obtain nuclear weapons as a security guarantee against further Indian encroachment. Over the course of the mid and late 1970s, the Indian nuclear program was very rudimentary. Consequently, Pakistan was able to seek a counterforce minimal deterrent posture. By the early 1980s, India was making strides in its civilian nuclear program which could have been converted toward a weapons capability. Faced with the specter of a nuclear India, Pakistan pursued a military program adequate to deter New Delhi. Since 1979, it has been Pakistani policy to maintain ambiguity regarding its nuclear program. Given the new South Asian strategic situation, Pakistan would likely revert to a higher profile nuclear posture.

Current Principles Guiding Pakistan's Nuclear Strategy

Pakistan has articulated five fundamental guiding principles that shape its nuclear strategy, each serving a unique purpose in the context of its defense and security planning. The first principle emphasizes the reliance on a credible minimum nuclear deterrent, which aims to ensure that any potential aggression from adversaries is met with a legitimate and effective response capable of safeguarding the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The second principle focuses on maintaining a robust second-strike capability, which is crucial for deterring any aggressive actions by providing assurance that Pakistan can retaliate significantly even after suffering a nuclear attack. This concept of second-strike capability is critical for ensuring that adversaries understand the futility of a first strike, thereby enhancing overall regional stability.

The third guiding principle of Pakistan's nuclear strategy is full spectrum deterrence, which underscores the importance of a measured and responsive policy to any provocation, allowing for proportional responses to various levels of conflict. This signifies that Pakistan is prepared to engage in a comprehensive range of military responses that cater not only to strategic threats but also to operational and tactical levels, thereby ensuring a robust deterrent posture. The fourth principle asserts the need for a policy of measured response, which is aimed at denying an adversary the opportunity to achieve its war objectives. This approach is meticulously designed to ensure that any military confrontation does not spiral into uncontrollable escalation and highlights Pakistan's focus on calculated military engagement that seeks to maintain peace through strength.

Finally, the fifth principle advocates for a policy of non-aggression against non-nuclear weapon states, reinforcing Pakistan's commitment to responsible nuclear stewardship while affirming its right to defend its national interests. The overarching objective of these principles is to nurture a stable deterrence relationship with India, amidst the complex geopolitical landscape of South Asia, marked by historical tensions and unresolved disputes. The current nuclear strategy and posture of Pakistan operate within the framework of these guiding principles, enabling the country to adhere to international non-proliferation norms as delineated in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

However, the dynamics of Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy are influenced by a myriad of global and domestic factors that shape its strategic choices. Since Pakistan conducted its nuclear tests in May 1998, the South Asian region has transformed into a critical flashpoint; this is particularly exemplified by the continuing volatility of the Kashmir conflict, which remains a core issue fueling ongoing tensions. The crises witnessed during February-March 2019 further illustrate the precarious nature of the India-

Pakistan relationship and the potential for miscalculation. Stakeholders, including peacebuilding organizations, express grave concerns regarding the risks of accidents, unintended escalations, and strategic miscalculations that could ignite a full-scale military conflict, with catastrophic implications for both nations and the broader international community (Butt, 2025).

Drawing parallels to the Cold War era, the reliance on faulty early warning systems led to numerous crises driven by brinkmanship, and such precedents loom large in the contemporary era of nuclear proliferation. With an increasing array of nuclear weapons and their diverse delivery systems now available, the specter of large-scale nuclear warfare poses an even greater existential threat to both belligerent states and global peace. This inherent danger exists within the nuclear relationship between Pakistan and India two nations navigating the treacherous waters of a historically conflict-ridden and volatile South Asian context, compounded by territorial claims, security dilemmas, and diverging perceptions of threat.

In light of these challenges, the principal task for Islamabad remains the pursuit of fostering a stable relationship with India, which is critical to ensuring its national security and maintaining effective deterrence while striving for a peaceful coexistence in the region. The guiding principles of Pakistan's nuclear strategy are meticulously crafted to ensure that military deterrence remains both credible and minimal, acting as a shield against potential external aggressors. Central to this strategy is the understanding that a credible minimum deterrent is essential for achieving lasting peace, thereby reinforcing the foundational tenets of strategic stability in a complex and challenging geopolitical environment.

Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal

Nuclear Arms Race in Pakistan and India: Deterrence and Global Nonproliferation Concerns. The nuclear arms race in South Asia is the subject of increasing concern and unease. Prospect of nuclear conflict in South Asia has been said by one analyst to embody "the massive dangers of apocalyptic war". Today, South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) sustains approximately one fourth of humanity and two of the poorest nations. At least by some definitions, they are also Powers nos. 6 & 7 in the world. This analysis the historical roots of the nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan and examines some of the pressing nonproliferation and deterrence concerns. (Sadiq & Ali, 2023) While the nuclear aspirations of other states are noted, the primary focus is on the regional dynamics between Pakistan and India.

Unlike Russia and America, cases of successful, diplomatic action to delay the nuclear tide are rare: Argentina-Brazil and South Africa come to mind. Realistic US policy toward the spread of nuclear weapons to the nations of South Asia would be long-term and would have to evolve with changed circumstances. To draw near can be no

comforting task - nor, however, is the analysis offered with any degree of comfort. Instead, an examination of the concerns attendant upon nuclear competition for two of the least well-off members of the nuclear club is undertaken. The hope is some enhanced understanding among policymakers of the choices available, of the future dangers, and of the shorter or longer term implications of the steps presently under consideration.

The nuclear aspirations of Pakistan and India are first sketched and the tools of nuclear analysis reviewed. The armory and its deployment receive attention. Here support is drawn from, another Cassandra of 1988. That is a chilling, almost dreadful read today, not only in its insight, but in its eerie confidence that the argente diplomatic rhythms of India, Pakistan and the United States in the coda of the Reagan Administration can produce the stable equilibrium necessary to keep nuclear arsenals from being sprung. Whilst 'Apocalypse '88' failed to launch at the end of Cold War, it seems to have found comfort in its calmer, colder sequel in the new Asia. But that is getting ahead of the horrifying story of six years back (Zehra & Uddin, 2022).

Types of Nuclear Weapons in Pakistan's Arsenal

Pakistan has evolved an unspoken, nuanced, and carefully-calibrated nuclear policy revolving on the fine line of use of such weapons in a conflict situation. Any contemplation of the use of nuclear weapons will inevitably be guided by intent, which in turn will, at least theoretically, be influenced by the types of nuclear weapons in the arsenal. Differentiation may be made in the context of weapon systems when contemplating the intent that could be attributed to each.

There are various types of nuclear weapons in Universal Arsenal, including Hiroshima-type gun assembled weapons, Nagasaki-type implosion weapons, hydrodynamic ally improved implosion weapons or Teller Ulam configuration, low-yield, wide blast radius warheads specifically designed for use against forces in the field or area targets like the US B-61 free-fall tactical bomb with yields selectable from below one kiloton to over 300 kilotons, and neutron weapons. Regarding efficacy-intensive weapons, these would include large-yield bombs and/or neutron weapons designed with the express purpose of causing widespread devastation through blast, heat, and particularly large-scale fallout from the weapon. Of the weapons that are most effective against war sustaining capabilities, these would generally be high-yield weapons with delivery systems. That definition includes not only ballistic missiles but also aircraft delivered weapons, which are far more flexible in terms of range, circular error probable (CEP), and target coverage. It excludes most artillery fired and short-range missile delivered weapons unless it is possible that such systems might be used to generate escalation (Rusman2022).

Size and Capabilities of Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal

Though Pakistan is beginning to deploy nuclear-capable ballistic missiles and has the technical capability to arm its F-16 Fighter aircraft with nuclear weapons, a state department official has stated, "we haven't seen a deployment of Pakistani nuclear weapons. There are certainly efforts... in terms of missile programs and F-16s". The official added that while it is "technically feasible" to equip the Pakistani U.S.-made F-16s as a delivery system for nuclear weapons, it is still "harder" to do so with M-11 missiles acquired by Pakistan from China. Another U.S. official warned that what he referred to as the "unreliable" nature of short and intermediate range nuclear-capable missiles and aircraft now being developed by India and Pakistan could heighten regional tensions. He said that when a missile equipped with a nuclear warhead is put on "active forward deployment" (implying it is part of attacking forces) it increases the "danger" of "use," adding "both sides are developing these nuclear capable weapons" and "both end up with strike capabilities and a range much larger than traditionally," leading to a "sort of vicious circle process". (Gupta, 2024) Although Pakistan has refrained from conducting a nuclear test, the Pressler Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act may require the President to designate Pakistan as a country which has acquired a nuclear explosive device or the essential components for such a device. There has been some conflicting news on the amount of plutonium that Pakistan has produced. However reports that sources in the European disarmament community place Pakistani production at "40-50 kg of plutonium per year."

Pakistan's Strategic Partnerships and Alliances

Pakistan also maintains strategic partnerships and alliances. A close relationship has developed with China. The two nations share a common strategic interest in limiting Indian power on the subcontinent. China has provided technical support in the development of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and missiles. In addition, Beijing has supplied arms worth over \$1 billion, including the sale of a prototype design for a nuclear weapons. Believes that Pakistan's nuclear paths has followed similar lines to Israel. Both nations sought outside assistance when they were unable to acquire nuclear weapons capability on their own. These states were able to exploit previous Western initial indifference, and then grudging acceptance of the status quo. Israel in the 1970s and Pakistan in the 1980s succeeded in sidestepping effective Western, especially US, non-proliferation efforts.

A similar situation arose with Libya's interest in acquiring chemical weapons delivery systems and the Pakistani connection. Secretary of State personally threatened to break off US diplomatic ties with Pakistan, although in the end Pakistan was able to provide a respectable performance to US Congressional inquiries into the matter. A report concluded that Pakistan's nuclear program had made such significant successes in the last 3-5 years that US experts were now convinced. However, bipartisan US

criticisms of Pakistan's nuclear path have risen since the Reagan Administration abandoned its eight year effort to impose an aid sanctions. Pakistan claims the ability to deliver nuclear warheads by air, land and sea, although these are not as advanced as the Indians. Fears of a possible naval confrontation in the Arabian Sea were raised in 1986 when Pakistan paraded its Mirage V aircraft armed with except sea-skimming missiles. The F-16 fleet has the range to reach most of India's 1,300 million people, yet US controls severely hamper its use. Nonetheless, the sought to sell land attack Harpoon missiles to Pakistan as a reply to India's acquisition of similar Soviet missiles (H. Cassidy, 1989).

Relationship with China

The nuclear program of Pakistan was initiated primarily under the leadership of the military ruler, Zia ul Haq. This development arose from the geopolitical dynamics between Pakistan and India, close neighbors that have historically engaged in three significant wars over the past fifty years. Many historians argue that the Army's inability to launch a direct military offensive against India, especially after the territorial adjustments in the region, was a key factor influencing this decision. The argument suggests that Zia ul Haq viewed the nuclear program as a strategic move to secure additional time and resources for the Pakistan Army, given that a substantial part of the government's budget was already being allocated for military purposes (Arshid et al.2023). The earnest development of Pakistan's nuclear program accelerated notably following India's atomic explosion in 1974. In response to this event, the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) was designated to take the lead role in nuclear program activities, while responsibilities concerning the enrichment of uranium were distributed among various institutions. A considerable portion of the National Development Council was also tasked with this initiative.

Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto strongly opposed the perception that the nuclear program was solely an initiative to counter the so-called 'Hindu bomb' narrative that had surfaced in India. During this period, the U.S. president voiced concern over the precarious narrative involving both India and Pakistan, rather than considering China as the main adversary. Afterward, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also implemented Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) during his tenure from 1990 to 1993, which resulted in only a minor reduction of conventional weapons. During these years, numerous agreements were reached at official levels, enhancing dialogue between the two nations. It was during this critical time that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto successfully persuaded Abdul Qadeer Khan, a key figure in Pakistan's nuclear ambitions, to join the national nuclear program. A.Q. Khan initiated discussions both in person and via telephone with his counterparts to procure essential materials required for advancing

Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. This initiative yielded significant outcomes for Pakistan's nuclear program over time, reflecting a commitment to developing its nuclear arsenal. However, growing suspicions regarding Indian nuclear capabilities from the outset left Pakistan increasingly anxious, especially in light of the nuclear deal between China and India, which raised further concerns. The United States notably reached an agreement with the Chinese government stipulating that it would not sell nuclear reactors to Pakistan on open market terms. Simultaneously, India and China engaged in negotiations leading to a nuclear deal for the provision of two additional nuclear reactors to be constructed in West Bengal. From the perspective of the People's Republic of China, the economic benefits of these reactor establishments in India were substantial. The ongoing summit proceeded with the signing of the nuclear agreement between India and China concerning the construction of two light water reactor plants in Rajasthan, representing a significant strategic alignment between these nations.

During General Musharraf's tenure, in addition to the previous directives, plans were initiated to fully explore the potential of the Gwadar port. In the early operational years, once the Gwadar port became functional, a reinforced arrangement for transporting vital cargo with Chinese support through the region of Kashmir began to take shape, indicating a growing cooperation between Pakistan and China (Dinesh, 2021). Furthermore, two important meetings concerning the Siachen conflict took place in 2007, culminating in a gathering of Siachen experts in June. Despite the contentious nature of the issue surrounding India, responses to Pakistani concerns have been largely sympathetic, although this is contingent upon maintaining a cordial relationship with China. Thus, it becomes crucial for Pakistan to signal its commitment to engage China's influence in facilitating compromise on the Siachen glacier, highlighting the intricate web of geopolitical relationships that underscore the nuclear discourse in South Asia.

Collaboration with Saudi Arabia and Other Countries

By now, the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia wide range collaboration in military and domestic sectors is well known and documented. Both countries have strong economic, military, and intelligence cooperation. They both frequently cite their historical, religious, and geographical relationships. In the last fifty years, both states have entered into a range of agreements for economic, military, and civilian purposes. On many occasions, Pakistan provided military aid to Saudi Arabia. There is liquid and empirical evidence that both countries maintain their nuclear relationship.

It was the first in December 1971 that both countries publicly pronounced their strong nuclear cooperation. Reports indicated the discoveries of the proliferation of nuclear weapons-related materials to Pakistan and intelligence gathering for China from Pakistan's Kahuta based nuclear facility. In the presence of the then-Pakistani Prime

Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo and President General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, euphoric King Khalid Bin Abdul-Aziz toured the Kahuta site. Although this tour could not evade later international restrictions, still Pakistan moved forward (Cho, 2021).

A high official who requested not to disclose his name due to the sensitivity and nature of his job admitted the past presence of Saudi technicians at both Khan Research and Development Laboratories and Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, as well as the later visit of Pakistani scientists to Saudi Arabia. Officially the Saudi officials came to Pakistan for advocacy of the Qur'an Institute of Pakistan and the particular purpose of their visits was to help build intensive collaboration at the SAARC wide level between both states. The Saudi officials were taken to the Pakistan defense production facilities and it was agreed for scientists exchange programs.

One equivalent pattern of Pervez Musharraf's nuclear diplomacy that is underreported was his visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka. It is widely agreed upon the Pakistani mindset that Indian influence increased rapidly in the region because of perceived dangerous nuclear deals with India. The Pakistani government observed that the shift in composition of SAARC invited Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives, Bhutan, and obtained defense, space, and nuclear assistance for China, at least in case of space collaboration. So President Musharraf undertook an important diplomatic offensive for lobbying with Pakistan-friendly states. There were two main goals of that conference: to isolate India on the regional front, particularly in SAARC, and to counter this influence by engaging Pakistan-friendly states. So an alternative regional alliance would be created to counterbalance the annual conference in Dacca redemption of strategic parity with India.

International Perceptions and Reactions to Pakistan's Nuclear Program

Politically, the reaction to Pakistan's nuclear capability has been overwhelmingly negative, with global efforts spearheaded by the United States to halt, or at least slow, the acquisition of the bomb. Pakistan has had, essentially, two parallel policy goals in the nuclear realm. The first is to achieve, unambiguously, a deliverable nuclear weapons capability, and the second is to do so without triggering international economic, or other, sanctions. Since testing is believed necessary both to signal the acquisition of the bomb and to ensure its deliverability, it has always been an element of the first policy aim. However, avoiding sanctions is seen to require not testing, or, at least keeping the program ambiguous. By continuing to deny the program's goal is actual testing, Pakistani leaders made the issue part of the broader issue of non-proliferation. Pakistan argued the conditions they faced were fundamentally unfair. Premier Bhutto, the father of Pakistan's bomb program, said as early as 1972 that "some of us must have the atom bomb for our own protection" (H. Cassidy, 1989). He did not put this in the context of India's explosion in that year, but as part of the

broader issue that development of the bomb by the NWS was a discriminatory policy. Given the perceived relative advantage held by the superpowers, it was argued, the possession of nuclear weapons constituted a fundamental affront to humanity.

Global Reactions to Pakistan's Nuclear Tests

World reaction to the Pakistani nuclear tests followed the predictable lines. From Switzerland, site of the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, came the first protest on the day of the first Pakistani test. The next day, UN Secretary General took the microphone calling it "very bad news" and urged Pakistan to reconsider its policies. The world's powers, the Permanent-5 members of the UN Security Council, reacted with broad condemnation. The US, at the forefront of them all, swiftly slapped economic sanctions on Pakistan and demanded lock-stocking-barrel end to its nuclear weapons program (Krishnan, 2023). India responded by deciding to conduct its own nuclear explosions that it argued was driven by the "shock" that the declared threshold had been breached by Pakistan. The world reaction therefore was a mixture of condemnation, calls for restraint, and mature balancing by some countries. The Western world condemned the tests, ordered sanctions, and furthered nuclear targeting of Pakistan. Russia, having moved closer to Pakistan after the latter's nuclear programme became public, and in a quid pro quo wooing of Pakistan away from the Americans, held informal talks with Pakistan's ruler-cum-chief executive-cum-chief-of-arm-forces to ascertain "seriousness" of the tests by the former. The Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom visited Islamabad as a show of solidarity, but his actual message was hedged and cautious. France and China, long-standing strategic partners of Pakistan, went ahead with their plans and inked political and economic agreements with the military regime. Green Party politicians in Germany coined new expressions of anguish for the Bundestag to deliberate, while various NGOs across Europe staged token protests outside Pakistani embassies. Muslim countries, other than those who imparted the bomb on Pakistan, also protested the tests. Since Pakistan played the "Islamic bomb card" when talking about its bomb, these countries felt morally obligated or were geopolitically compelled to express displeasure with what was unfolding in the Islamic Republic. Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, and Bangladesh, hardly known for their democratic traditions, vehemently repudiated the Pakistani tests.

Impact on Regional Stability and Security

The acquisition and testing of nuclear weapons in May 1998 by India posed important national security challenges for Pakistan, which had to develop an effective response. For India, doctrines regarding the employment and potential use of nuclear weapons remained ambiguous. Given its substantial conventional military preponderance, nuclear weapons were deemed a tool to neutralize domestic threats and aid India's ambition of regional dominance, potentially assuming a counterforce character

against Pakistan too. The two asymmetries, India's large economy and resource base vis-à-vis Pakistan, and India's quantitative and qualitative troop superiority in the conventional domain, were central. Discrimination in the membership of both the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime constituted a significant structural constraint on the Pakistani government. It raised Pakistani concerns about the danger of marginalized membership in the dynamics of the international nuclear and missile regimes. Pakistan sought to lessen the strategic asymmetry by relying on deterrence-oriented nuclear and missile capabilities, which would be adequate, proportionate and effectively credible vis-à-vis India. Turkey emerges as the key potential supporter due to the common geo-politics, the continued interest of Pakistan for missiles and distinct technological advances Turkey wanted to invest.

While the Global War on Terrorism presented Pakistan important new foreign and security challenges, it also produced significant dividends for the nuclear establishment. Pakistan's strategic nuclear arsenal has since mushroomed from about an estimated maximum of 95 warheads in 2005 to reportedly 130-135 warheads in 2009. Although initially it indicated that the sub-kiloton low-yield weapon tested had technological implications for Pakistan's deterrent options, over time it adjusted both its force posture and articulation of doctrine to make clear it saw its nuclear policy as strictly governed by the principles of credibility and effectiveness (Basrur, 2023). Moreover, the high level of sanctity traditionally vested in nuclear assets, and the high standard of operational security maintained by the custodians charged with ensuring physical protection, have worked effectively to maintain the regime's security.

The subsequent military action against Iraq, a state that had no extant deterrent capability, effectively sent a signal to target states to acquire nuclear weapons, should they wish to deter such action. There had been a position to combat potential nuclear proliferation in the region. Likewise, findings detailing the transfer of enrichment technology to Pakistan through a network are believed to have fundamentally reoriented the approach towards a strict non-acknowledgement policy. At the very least a far more aggressive and high level diplomatic approach was expected, including public sanctions, condemnation, and even expulsion from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the export control regimes and other international fora. Despite such disclosures, virtually no attempt was made in the ten years subsequent to the findings to block the further acquisition of nuclear goods by Pakistan. On the contrary, aid quadrupled during the 1980s despite consistent knowledge of Pakistan's weapon program. A degree of strategic myopia, driven by Cold War considerations of the utility of Pakistan as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, the importance of preserving the Afghan civil war 'enabler', and the counterexample provided by aid to India that one

state could not be adequately punished without affecting ties with the other, have been advanced as explanatory factors.

Pakistan's Role in Global Non-Proliferation Efforts

Pakistan's not just India's test of five nuclear weapons on May 11 and 13, 1998, was a watershed event that caught U.S. policymakers and, reportedly, even the CIA by surprise. Although U.S. and Pakistani officials were hemming and hawing about Islamabad's "nuclear capability" at least as early as July 1995, few anticipated that Pakistan would move first and that it would go so big. Indeed, even the CIA had suggested that South Asia's sole Muslim-majority state might exercise "more restraint" . (Mishra & Desai, 2025) Beyond its stunning psychological effect on ordinary Indians and Pakistanis and sending shock waves far beyond the subcontinent, what the duo's nuclear tests of 1998 mean for global security is murky. On the one hand, countries potentially targeted by exploding terrorists might see proliferation of dud-yielding warheads in South Asia as another reason to beef up their own missile defense programmes.

Pakistan's historic rationale for seeking a nuclear deterrent dates to the end of the 1962 border dispute between neighboring China and India. In the wake of that conflict, Pakistani president Mohammad Ayub Khan decided to take steps to match India's growing conventional superiority. Seeing nuclear weapons as a quick fix to bridge his country's perceived collective security deficit, Ayub asked a visiting U.S. mission to help arm Pakistan with battlefield nukes. Rebuffed by Washington, he turned to cheery solicitation of civilian reactors from Canada, France, and the U.S., three countries which were well aware of Pakistani aspirations. From the July 1965 signing of an ominous agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the May 1974 India's first test, Pakistan's then-covert and uranium-based bomb project unfolded like a spy novel. In seeming enmity with its democratic Cold War dynamics, every time the Reagan-era floodgates would begin to open, Pakistan would pull the plug on deliverables. Thus and despite a recent Groundhog Day déjà vu reboot events heretofore have been no clarion call announcing the eventual bang-bang. Indeed, as of today, is to peer behind Islamabad's geopolitical-cluttered curtain to understand its prickly dance of "is" and "isn't" with the Bomb over the past half-century at least.

Compliance with International Non-Proliferation Treaties

Pakistan's Nuclear Diplomacy seeks to answer several questions about the global proliferation regime and Pakistan's violence-related secretive. It details the mechanisms by which the developed nuclear powers of the world have sought to regulate the rapid proliferation of the bomb in the aftermath of an Indian nuclear test in 1974. It broadly investigates Pakistan's response to the global regime.

Pakistan can claim to be the first nation to develop the nuclear technology itself, though other nations, even undeveloped, possess some minimal capability in a certain respect. Second, and much more importantly, it is the first nation to go nuclear in the developing world and, with only a small nuclear infrastructure, to subsequently develop an arsenal. The latter two aspects are the primary concern of this work, with the first merely placing the latter two in a context broader than otherwise available (Hess, 2021). Most discussion of the bomb in the proliferant nations seems to be generated by interactions with the United States and other world powers. That impression, however, is misleading. The third chapter showed that in many nations local configurations were pivotal to bomb decisions, with the United States and other world powers playing crises management roles, rather than as constant determinants of national policy. That broader view of the bomb significantly affects interpretations of its spread and subsequent global rhetoric on the subject.

Efforts to Strengthen Global Non-Proliferation Regimes

It is firmly denied the Indian test increased the likelihood that Pakistan also would conduct nuclear tests. Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif dismissed the possibility of a test just as he did in 1995 when the Indian government tested an earlier explosive device. The question remains, what is Pakistan's long-term policy toward developing a nuclear weapons capability that goes beyond the short-term development strategy which some critics claim was all Pakistan ever had in mind. Pakistan may also continue to follow an intermediate stockpile option. Once considered unconscionable, a few hundred untested weapons would undoubtedly form a credible deterrent. Pakistan may also choose to go all the way to a nuclear threshold stockpile, say of a 100 to 200 weapons (Danish et al.2023). Pakistan would still have to detonate some it in testing these weapons. Given the fears of an Indian breakout, Pakistan's strategic partners may request it to explode some of these weapons even earlier resulting in huge negative political repercussions. At the same time, a threshold stockpile would not be a guaranteed deterrent. A few nuclear explosions on Pakistani soil would result not in the destruction of India, but of Pakistan. Nor would a stockpile have a benign effect on Pakistan's security, cast as the aggressor. The international community's well founded fears of a breakdown in the nuclear balance would result in an arms embargo on Pakistan and possible Indian incursions.

Future Prospects and Scenarios for Pakistan's Nuclear Diplomacy

The nuclear tests on May 28 and September 30, 1998, by one of the South Asian adversaries, seriously threatened the already precarious regional security. These tests contradicted claims of enhancing strategic stability and security, exacerbating the security predicament of other regional states. In response, these states felt compelled to develop their own capabilities to ensure national security. The indefinite halt of

clandestine nuclear proliferation by Pakistan, or formally acceding to the CTBT and applying the NPT non-discriminatorily under common pressure, appears unlikely. India's strategic arsenal, combined with evolving triad capabilities, and an adversary's potential first-strike initiative could severely threaten command and control centers (Albert et al., 2021). There's also the risk of accidental conflict due to misunderstanding or misjudgment, reminiscent of the Cuban missile crisis. Additionally, efforts to prevent unauthorized use, theft, or smuggling of nuclear materials in a country beset by civil strife and extremism have been dismissed as unrealistic, highlighting the complex dangers posed by the current situation.

Potential Shifts in Nuclear Strategy

Since nine 11, Pakistan's nuclear programme has been the subject of numerous analyses and recommendations. What had earlier been merely apprehensions and suspicions erupted into a blast of outright accusations and warnings with the disclosure that the father of the Pakistani bomb had marketed journal sketches and equipment plans of most of the important processes for manufacturing highly enriched uranium as early as the late 1980s.

The charges against Pakistan generally fall into one of three categories. The first are that it has become the global 'Wal-Mart' or 'K-Mart' of nuclear technology. It has allegedly run a supermarket hawking entire nuclear-weapon production lines and related technologies to the highest post-Cold War bidder, be it Iran, North Korea or Libya. Second-degree charges are that clandestine elements within the Pakistani 'deep state' may have supplied some centrifuge parts and know how, without official sanction, to one or more of these states. While Islamabad has apparently cooperated by providing documents and permitting interviews with Pakistani officials, these claims and indictments continue to drip out periodically.

A second class of concerns about Pakistan's export activities is the sale since the 1980s of turn-key facilities, equipment, technology and materials to such states as Iran, North Korea and Libya. All these transactions have not been officially confirmed or denied, but there appears to be a tacit understanding that they belong to the second-generation evidence, for which another way of saying that the intelligence is less transparent or persuasive. The third and somewhat more nuanced set of assertions and misgivings about Pakistan is what can be called the Condoleezza thesis. It is a legitimate concern that as the host of A.Q. Khan's network for over a decade, there are questions to be answered about the diligence and nature of the controls and surveillance exercised over its nuclear programme.

Conclusion

No Event Worse than New Delhi For decades, Islamabad's first-strike nuclear doctrine remained ambiguous largely due to India's No First Use policy. After 1998, Indian

intelligence realized that a Pakistani nuclear threat made it more vulnerable. As a result, in 2003 the Indian Cabinet approved Cold Start. Less than five years after the Cold Start revelation leaked, Pakistan conducted its first successful multiple-warhead test, enabling it to overmatch India's missile/ABM defense network. In Azad Kashmir, near Sialkot, Pakistan also constructed three underground silos, which hold IRBMs with MIRVs aimed directly at Delhi, Ahmedabad, and the Indian Air Force's Western airbase, Palam. Under these conditions, Pakistani nuclear doctrine could switch to counterforce strike in the event of a border conflict. Such an escalation ladder could lead to uncontrollable nuclear war. Even a controlled nuclear exchange between New Delhi and Islamabad would force Tehran to join the conflict. Given the strategic importance of the southern route of the OBOR for the rising Chinese containment of the Quad, and the fact that the main Chinese part of the Persian Gulf Sea-Pearl River Conveyor Pipe had a projected capacity of only 46% of the cargo that went through Djibouti, Beijing could not stand idly by.

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