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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM

TO: M - Ambassador Ronald I. Spiers

FROM: INR - Hugh Montgomery

SUBJECT: India, Pakistan and Nuclear Proliferation

With all the pressures on your time I doubt you are able to look at many of INR's longer Intelligence Reports. I want to bring the attached one (Report 778-AR) to your attention for two reasons:

First, it deals with a subject on which you are an expert.

Second, it is one of many products resulting from INR's Scholar/Analyst Teams which were originally funded by a Production Enhancement Award from the DCI back on your INR watch. These have made a major contribution to our efforts to increase production of anticipatory intelligence and basic research--efforts centered in INR/LAR--another one of your legacies to INR.

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BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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ASSESSMENTS AND RESEARCH

(U) INDIA-PAKISTAN: PRESSURES FOR NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION[1]

Summary

Pakistan's nuclear program is likely to be the major source of tension in Indo-Pakistani relations over the next five years. Despite Islamabad's repeated denials, available evidence points to a clandestine program directed toward nuclear weapons capability. The questions are how long will it be before Pakistan attains that capability and, once it has it, whether it will take the "nuclear option"--for testing, production, and deployment of a bomb.

Because of India's own proven capability, it would fear that Pakistan was developing weapons covertly, even if attainment were not followed by a test, leaving room in turn for uncertainty as to Indian pursuit of a covert program in response. If Pakistan did test, India probably would refrain initially from developing weapons but would at least resume testing on a scale to demonstrate its resolve and technological capacity. Mutual fear then could impel both sides to pursue weapons development further, at least covertly.

A preemptive Indian military strike against Pakistan's nuclear facilities is not a likely

1/ This paper is drawn from an overall survey of trends in Indian foreign policy prepared by Robert Hardgrave, University of Texas, as part of INR's Scholar/Analyst Program. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the US Government. See also INR Report 761-AR, "India-USSR Relations: Long-Term Trends," LIMITED OFFICIAL USE, January 18, 1984, and 762-AR, "India-China: Prospects for Improved Relations," LIMITED OFFICIAL USE, January 18, 1984.

reaction, considering the risks of failure and even the costs of success to India, in terms of its foreign relations, exposure of Indian territory to the resulting radiation, and the danger of Pakistani retaliation.

A situation where both sides had nuclear weapons might provide stability by a "balance of terror," but the risk of nuclear war by miscalculation under South Asian conditions would seem to outweigh the attraction of such stability. The situation also would upset the nuclear balance not only in South Asia but also on a broader scale.

Pakistan's program is not the only source of pressure on India. A pro-bomb lobby in India argues in terms of prestige, technological development, and a nuclear capability in place. There is no countervailing anti-nuclear movement (nor is there in Pakistan). The Indian Government has sturdily resisted the nuclear option, partly out of consideration for Indian technological shortcomings and financial weakness. Its constancy might be shaken by a serious security peril, however, such as a Sino-Soviet rapprochement that eroded New Delhi's confidence in the USSR as a deterrent to China. In addition, some present Indian policy priorities such as deterrence against a Chinese nuclear threat and exclusion of superpower involvement from the subcontinent militate against arms-control measures.

The US probably would have little leverage on proliferation once the parties conducted nuclear tests. Until then, by contrast, the US has some fairly crucial leverage, by virtue of its influence over the supply of advanced conventional arms to Pakistan. Withholding such arms would be a significant sanction against exercise of the nuclear option by Pakistan. Providing them, conversely, could give Pakistan the security that might obviate the nuclear option. The question is one of degree. Arming Pakistan to the extent that it threatened Indian security could fuel an arms race that would increase the danger of nuclear proliferation.

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Pakistan's Nuclear Program and Possible Indian Reactions

Most observers now believe that Pakistan is not as close to nuclear capability as once thought, but, barring major technological problems, Pakistan should reach capability within the next five years. Whether or not Pakistan takes the nuclear option, it seems determined to have that option.

The situation is inherently unstable, for in the capacity to choose the weapons option is the capacity to develop a bomb covertly. India today can have the demonstrated capacity to manufacture a nuclear weapon but forgo the decision to do so--either overtly or covertly--because Pakistan does not yet have the capacity. When both India and Pakistan have the capacity, the fear that one might already have taken the covert option may be sufficient to impel the other to do likewise. Nuclear technology today is sufficiently advanced that a test may not be necessary. Israel, for example, is believed to have developed a nuclear weapon without actually having tested it.

If Pakistan does proceed to a nuclear test (Bhutto, who initiated the Pakistani program, insisted there was no such thing as a "peaceful nuclear explosion"), India would be compelled to respond in some way. There would be enormous political pressure for India, having successfully conducted its own nuclear test in 1974, to take the weapons option and move toward production and deployment. Most well-informed observers in India, however, believe that the government would continue to resist the weapons option. In these circumstances, India likely would resume tests, probably with a series.

Given India's apprehension about Pakistan's nuclear program, there has been speculation as to a possible preemptive strike by India against Pakistan. There are five principal facilities in the Pakistani program: the Kahuta uranium centrifuge, reprocessing plants at Chasma and Islamabad, the Multan heavy water plant, and the Karachi nuclear power plant. Kahuta probably would be the critical target in destroying Pakistani capacity to develop a nuclear weapon. Kahuta, however, is underground and well protected. An Indian airstrike or commando raid would have no guarantee of success. Pakistani newspaper reports of Indian-Israeli collusion for a planned Israeli strike from an Indian base are highly improbable.

Any preemptive strike, either directly by India or by a third power with Indian collaboration, would carry high costs for India

and would be most unlikely. It almost inevitably would mean war with Pakistan. It would draw international sanctions and possible embargo of Middle Eastern oil and expulsion of Indian workers from the Persian Gulf. A strike against Pakistani nuclear facilities also would involve the danger of released plutonium and the deadly effects of radiation poisoning over a wide area--including northern India. A preemptive strike against Pakistan likely would bring Pakistani retaliation against Indian nuclear reactors, and India would not want to bring such destruction upon itself.

If India were to take the weapons option in response to a Pakistani test, Pakistan surely would follow with its own program. Even if both countries' initial delivery capabilities were limited (e.g., a free-fall weapon mounted on a deep penetration aircraft--an F-16 or Mirage 2000), they would achieve mutual deterrence in a regional "balance of terror." Indeed, K. Surbrahmanyam, Director of India's Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, sees in this a new level of stability for South Asia. Few are so sanguine. The fallibility of command, control, and communication in South Asia enormously raises the risk of nuclear war by miscalculation.

A decision by India and Pakistan to develop nuclear weapons would have wide impact, not only in stimulating further proliferation but also in upsetting the strategic balance. India's decision to test a nuclear device in 1974 was, at least in part, a response to China's nuclear status and capability, as China's weapon, in turn, had been a response to the Soviet Union. How the nuclearization of South Asia will fit into Soviet and Chinese security remains uncertain and, therefore, an added element of risk.

Other Pressures on India

The Nuclear Debate. The Indian "pro-bomb" lobby has long argued that India should produce and deploy nuclear weapons independently of what Pakistan might do. The nuclear mystique of power, prestige, and technological achievement generates wide popular support for the bomb in both India and Pakistan. Advocates in India argue that simply retaining the "option," given the indeterminate time required to produce and deploy nuclear weapons, is insufficient to meet a possible challenge and to deter attack. They warn of Pakistan's clandestine nuclear program and of the continuing danger of China to Indian security. They call for nuclear weapons to ensure India's self-reliance in a time of crisis.

The nuclear debate proceeds in Indian government, scientific, and intellectual circles. Some early advocates of the bomb, such as Subramaniam Swamy, have had second thoughts, but even those who are generally regarded as opponents (former Prime Minister Morarji

Desai, for example) are not prepared to forswear the option. There is no anti-nuclear movement in South Asia, although some serious doubts are now beginning to be raised about nuclear power as the answer to India's energy needs.

The Government of India has resisted the various arguments for exercising the option and likely will continue to do so, whatever the leadership in New Delhi, over the next five years. This is at least partly because of the lack of technology to sustain a full-scale nuclear weapons program--from research and development through deployment in modern delivery systems. With time, this will be more within India's reach, but unless India is prepared to remain a permanently second-class nuclear power (and thus potentially vulnerable), the costs will be staggering, as the continuing arms race between the US and the USSR bears witness.

Security Situation. A major change in India's security situation, however, could upset this policy. Testing of a Pakistani nuclear device would raise the question, as would a serious deterioration in Sino-Indian relations or Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Although India's relations with China have improved and China is not perceived as an imminent threat, India relies on the Soviet Union as a deterrent to China. A relaxation of tension between the USSR and China might provide the opportunity for closer Sino-Indian relations and a settlement of their border dispute, but it also might be a source of considerable unease in New Delhi. If Sino-Soviet detente raised any doubt as to Soviet reliability, India might feel that its security vis-a-vis China required development of an Indian nuclear deterrent.

The asymmetry of nuclear power is one of the major impediments to the control of nuclear proliferation in South Asia. In 1974, after India's explosion, Pakistan proposed that South Asia be declared a nuclear-weapons-free zone. Pakistan also has proposed that India and Pakistan sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and open all nuclear facilities to international inspection. These proposals are unacceptable to India for three reasons:

--Most critically, Pakistan and India do not share the same threat perception of China, and India is not prepared to deny itself the weapons option so long as China remains a nuclear power.

--A South Asian nuclear-weapons-free zone under security guarantees from the US, the USSR, and China is viewed in New Delhi as a design to contain India's power and influence. It would, in effect, be yet another means of external support sought by Pakistan as a counterweight to India's predominance in South Asia.

--India rejects the concept of a nuclear-weapons-free zone, as it does the NPT, as a legitimation of nuclear weapons in the hands of those who already possess them and as a means by which those powers seek to retain their nuclear weapons monopoly.

Moscow and Beijing. Neither Moscow nor Beijing appears to be contributing pressures to proliferation. The Soviet Union expressly opposes proliferation and has given India no encouragement in taking the nuclear weapons option. China's position is that it is the sovereign right of any nation to develop its own nuclear weapons. There have been various press reports, of concern to India, of Chinese technical assistance to Pakistan in its nuclear program and Chinese willingness to test a Pakistani bomb at its own grounds in the Takala Makan Desert.

That China would assist Pakistan in fabricating a nuclear weapon seems unlikely and at odds with Chinese interests. China has sought to improve relations with India and to encourage Indo-Pakistani detente in order to check the expansion of Soviet influence in South Asia. Chinese nuclear assistance to Pakistan surely would undermine these efforts--deepening tension between India and Pakistan and forcing India into greater security dependence upon the Soviet Union.

US Leverage on Proliferation

Under the terms of the US Non-Proliferation Act of 1978, nuclear testing by Pakistan and India would trigger the suspension of US assistance to each nation. The US thereby would lose whatever leverage it may have had with each in restraining movement toward acquisition of nuclear weapons. The US, as well, would in effect have opted out of the region as a strategic counterweight to the Soviet Union.

If India were to take the nuclear weapons option in response to Pakistani tests, or if it were to pursue a weapons program on its own initiative, public opinion, especially in the US, would call for the imposition of severe international sanctions against India--closed loan windows, trade restrictions, and denied access to high technology. But once India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons, sanctions may do little more than to leave India more dependent on the Soviet Union, and Pakistan on China.

At the present stage, by contrast, the US does have leverage, at least on the pivotal role of Pakistan. Pakistan is almost wholly dependent on external sources for conventional arms and would quickly exhaust its supply of spares if there were a cutoff. China cannot supply technologically advanced weapons, and third-

party transfers--through Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or Turkey, for example--would be a necessarily limited and insecure source.

A nuclear deterrent--if that is Pakistan's goal--would not displace the need for conventional arms. Without a conventional deterrent, Pakistan would be compelled to respond to any attack or incursion with "massive retaliation" or to acquiesce to aggression. Moreover, in the South Asian context, unless Pakistan faced nuclear weapons across the border in India, its own bomb would provide no greater deterrence to an Indian attack than effective conventional weapons. In its deep-penetration air strike capability, Pakistan already has sufficient strength to inflict enormous damage on India and thus to deter an Indian attack. Pakistan does not, however, have the strength to defeat India militarily--nor would nuclear weapons give it that strength, for a nuclear Pakistan soon would be checked by a nuclear India with second-strike capability.

Supplying conventional weapons to Pakistan can be a positive force against proliferation in South Asia. These weapons can give Pakistan sufficient confidence in its own security that it would find the nuclear option less attractive and unnecessary. Pakistan today no longer seeks parity of military strength with India; it needs only the capacity to deter an Indian attack.

The challenge, however, is to provide this deterrence without creating a threat to Indian security. Any provision of conventional weapons to Pakistan in amounts that upset the ratio of military strength on the subcontinent or that introduce a new level of sophistication in arms, as did the F-16, will fuel the arms race and may increase the danger of nuclear proliferation in South Asia.

Pakistan's security is inextricably bound to that of India and of the subcontinent as a whole. Security does not rest on weapons alone. The challenge is as much in modifying perceptions, in building trust on both sides; for India does not view itself as a threat to any nation and sees aggressive intent in Pakistan's armaments. In providing arms to Pakistan, the US should consult India and at least seek to assuage India's fears of any danger to its own security.

Prospects

Nuclear proliferation in South Asia is not inevitable. Indo-Pakistani detente would reduce the danger but not wholly solve the problem of doubt. Given India's security concerns vis-a-vis China and its position with regard to the "legitimacy" accorded the nuclear weapons powers by the NPT, there is little prospect for

the declaration of South Asia as a nuclear-weapons-free zone or for opening all nuclear facilities in the region to international inspection.

Within the framework of Indo-Pakistani detente, however, is the possibility for a nuclear accord between the two states. An Indian proposal, for example, to extend the scope of the joint commission on cooperation in the field of nuclear energy might be an important first step on a long road toward mutual inspection and the development of a South Asian equivalent of Euratom.

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