

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA

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The security rationale for India's nuclear weapons as argued by the pro-weaponization lobby has always been characterized by a certain ambiguity. At times, overt weaponization has been justified as a necessary insurance against nuclear blackmail by the P-5, with China's nuclear weapons build-up and U.S. sabre-rattling during the 1971 Bangladesh conflict leading the list of specific examples in support of this argument. On other occasions, the alleged nuclear threat posed by a hostile Pakistan or, more accurately, Pakistan's nuclear capability, has been offered as the rationale. This is reflected especially in statements meant for domestic consumption.

Elements of both arguments characterized the rhetoric of the BJP-led government in the immediate run-up to Pokhran-II and also in its aftermath. The December 15, 1998 authoritative defence of policy reversal by the Prime Minister confined itself to the bare assertion that the nuclear deterrent posture followed the same logic as that of India's conventional defence capability, namely, 'to safeguard the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India against any use or threat of use of force'.¹ Noting that regional issues had been kept apart from disarmament and non-proliferation in the Jaswant-Talbott talks, the statement asserted that 'India's concerns in these matters go beyond the South Asian region and involve a wider perspective'. The suggestion, then, is that India has entered the nuclear weapons game as a global player, not merely in response to regional compulsions.

It is therefore essential to examine whether the pursuit of nuclear weaponization is sustainable in the South Asian context. Underpinning the defence of nuclear weaponization in the subcontinent is the argument that while nuclear weapons are necessary for global security reasons, nuclear deterrence will in fact ensure stability and security in terms of the subcontinental situation, provided matters are handled suitably with Pakistan and China. India's nuclear doctrines are to be developed with this basic argument in mind.

It is not very difficult to see that such reasoning is untenable. In any realistic assessment, there is nothing in the announced nuclear postures that guarantees security or stability. An arms race is inevitable and India will lose substantially rather than gain from the current path of weaponization.

Let us recall in summary the nuclear defence posture outlined by Prime Minister Vajpayee in his Rajya Sabha statement of December 15, 1998. First, India was to have a 'minimum credible deterrent'. Secondly, this nuclear deterrent would be deployed. Thirdly, the new nuclear doctrine would include a policy of 'no-first-use' and also non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states. Fourthly, as a corollary to the no-first-use policy, the aim was to achieve a 'deployment of assets that ensures survivability and capacity of an adequate response', in other words, a second strike

capability.

It is well known that Pakistan has long considered its nuclear weapons capability not merely as a tit-for-tat answer to India's, but also as a hedge against India's strategic superiority in conventional arms. Interestingly, in a colourful statement made on the floor of the U.S. Senate in November 1981, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, ex-Ambassador to India, underlined the same point with reference to Pokhran-I.² Before Pokhran-II, Pakistan had even rejected a suggestion that it sign with India a pact on no-first-use of nuclear capabilities. In the light of this, it was predictable that Pakistan would not join India in a no-first-use but instead propose a general reduction of arms on both sides, linking conventional arms to nuclear weapons. By its acceptance of the logic of deterrence, the current Indian nuclear defence posture serves to validate Pakistan's position.

In this context, no-first-use can be described as a stance that reduces nuclear tensions only partially. While it is better than the nuclear defence postures of the P-5 barring China (a fact that domestic apologists of weaponization do not tire of reminding us), it makes clear that nuclear weapons will be inducted and deployed by India. This provides Pakistan an opportunity to claim that it needs the capability to match India's weapons, thus creating conditions for an India-Pakistan nuclear standoff.

Indeed, this is the same logic by which both the BJP and strategic affairs experts have often argued for an Indian nuclear deterrent to match Chinese capabilities.³ What is sauce for the Indian goose can justifiably be sauce for the Pakistani gander.

The Logic of a Nuclear Arms Race

Under such circumstances, an arms race is inevitable. If India's stance would be one of pushing to protect its nuclear weapons and delivery system in order to maintain a credible second-strike capability, then Pakistan's would logically be the stance of trying to override this advantage by developing a substantially greater first-strike capability. If a policy of deterrence is indeed what the two countries are going to follow, then the pious statements from the governments of India and Pakistan that they do not want an arms race can be entirely discounted. Given the relatively backward technological infrastructure and capabilities and the general economic conditions of the two countries, however, the policy will be implemented not at the breathless pace of weaponization seen at the height of the Cold War but in a slow-motion replay of it.

It would be futile and counter-productive for India to try and win such a race by virtue of its greater economic strength. In the context of nuclear weaponization, a weakened, rather than stable, Pakistan

is likely to pose a greater concern for India's security (it must be added, for the sake of even-handedness, that from a Pakistani standpoint, a weakened, rather than stable, India is likely to be a greater concern to Pakistan's security). The proponents of nuclear weaponization have apparently not paid any attention to a lesson that can be learnt from Russia's experience: faced with a deterioration of its conventional military strength over the past few crisis-ridden years, Russia has resiled from its commitment on no-first-use of nuclear weapons and the Russian Duma has seriously resisted the ratification of START-II.

The clarifications given to the Rajya Sabha by the Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister on the term 'minimum' in India's minimum credible deterrent hardly helped matters.⁴ According to these clarifications, the 'minimum' is not to be understood as a definite number or to be pinned down in any way, but is to remain flexible, to be decided as the security situation warrants, or, in plain-speak, to be decided unilaterally by India as the government of the day deems fit. Such a posture is obviously not conducive to avoiding an arms race or developing a 'nuclear restraint' regime in tandem with Pakistan since it leaves unclear what India seeks to build by way of a nuclear arsenal. What is minimal for Indian security hawks with respect to China will certainly not be seen as minimal by Pakistan.

Further specific implications of nuclear weaponization depend on the assessment of the current capabilities of India and Pakistan. We have already examined India's current capabilities at some length. Pakistan indisputably possesses the capability for highly enriched uranium weapons, possibly with sufficient flexibility to deliver them as missile warheads. The fission weapons that both countries possess will initially be deliverable only by aircraft, but one may reasonably expect that warheads deliverable by short-range missiles will be available in the near term. Densely populated areas in both India and Pakistan will be within the range of nuclear weapons. In the medium term, the development of longer-range missiles will render even larger parts of the two countries vulnerable to attack. Submarine-based missiles, an extremely costly proposition, appear to be a long way off, if they are going to be inducted at all. C³I systems on both sides will take considerable time to develop.

The adventurist test-launch of Agni II and the Pakistani answer to it, amount to forcing the pace of the South Asian arms race and destabilizing whatever temporary equation seemed to be established after the nuclear explosion of May 1998. The destabilization of security calculations built into the pursuit of deterrence seemed at work. The aggressive Indian official boasts invited retaliatory claims from Pakistani government and Army leaders about nuclear, missile and superior fighting capabilities. General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, was quoted as saying: "We have reached a certain level within our means and to maintain or enhance that level would not cost much...our problem is not of reaching anywhere in the world. Let them spend the money on building Agnis....We have the capability of reaching anywhere in India and will destroy a few cities, if required". "In order to deal with the threat mainly from India", he claimed, the Pakistan Joint Staff Headquarters had calculated a force level adequate to "deter aggression"; and

the Pakistan armed forces had the capability of "ending the war on a favourable note". Significantly, following the provocation of the Agni II test launch, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff elaborated on plans for a C³I system which he claimed would be in place by mid-May 1999.⁵ One could not have asked for a quicker and more convincing debunking of the claim that nuclear weaponization would not lead to an arms race and increase tensions in the subcontinent.

In sum, India's nuclear capabilities will not bring it anywhere close to the league of the existing nuclear weapons states and therefore its 'minimum credible nuclear deterrent' will not be taken seriously even within the framework of deterrence theory as it exists. That the government of the Hindu Right and the pro-weaponization lobbies in India were quite aware of this unflattering reality was clear from the unctuousness with which the government initiated a series of security dialogues with the nuclear weapons states, with the sole and significant exception of China. What is plain to any informed external observer is that India's standoff in nuclear weaponry will be exclusively with Pakistan. The current suggestion of a global security rationale, which was absent in the perspective presented by Vajpayee's letter to Clinton, represents a defensive response to fears expressed worldwide about the dangers of a nuclear confrontation in the subcontinent and to the political-diplomatic pressure brought to bear on India and Pakistan, particularly by the P-5 led by the United States.

It is unlikely that India's claimed second-strike capability will be put to any serious test at the present stage. Currently, if India's missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft are not deployed near the border, they are likely to be invulnerable. Neither Pakistan's delivery systems nor its C³I capabilities will enable it to target these assets so effectively as to incapacitate them in their entirety. Conversely, any forward deployment of these assets to sites closer to the border will be read as an aggressive gesture. Such adventurism is likely to promote an increased state of readiness of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. India's linkage of missiles to nuclear warheads, made explicitly in several statements after Pokhran-II, has rendered the forward deployment of its short-range missiles as a conventional deterrent problematic. In general, the continued development of missiles and suitable warheads can be expected to be a destabilizing factor since they are harder to detect and less vulnerable to interception and have much shorter flight times (of the order of a few minutes) than strike aircraft. A cheaper second-strike option, such as one involving short-range nuclear-tipped missiles on mobile launchers, can add substantially to instability in crisis conditions and encourage Pakistan to use a similar strategy. Defence Minister Fernandes has confirmed that this is indeed the intended strategy of the government in his remarks after the test-launch of the Agni II.⁶

For the next several years, potential Indian and Pakistani nuclear arsenals are unlikely to possess the ability to incapacitate or seriously damage each other's military, particularly nuclear, assets. Each side will be far more capable of seriously damaging the other's civilian targets. Pakistan can, with a fair degree of certainty, inflict serious damage on at least a few major Indian population centres and

India can certainly react in like manner. But is it credible that an Indian government will be willing to gamble with the lives of millions of people and not actually shift to a first-strike posture in a crisis situation? No-first-use may be an announced doctrine. But if there is a grave crisis with the possibility of a nuclear confrontation, the temptation to move towards a first-strike posture will be overwhelming if nuclear weapons are already deployed. Armies in the real world plan for the use - not the non-use - of their weapons.

The proponents of weaponization argue that since India is a peace-loving country that has never initiated an attack on a neighbouring country, Pakistan should accept India's mutual no-first-use offer. But the development of a regime of nuclear restraint on this basis requires that the other side accept the argument even under extreme conditions. Such moral claims, sharply disputed already, will tend to be even less acceptable to the other side now that India has declared itself a nuclear weapons state, seeks to deploy a nuclear arsenal, and speaks about developing a second-strike capability. If such arguments are genuinely meant, it would then appear that the government of the Hindu Right, egged on by the pro-weaponization lobby, has pushed the country towards nuclear weaponization by compromising its security in the near term and exposing its population to a first-strike capability in the event of a crisis, all in exchange for an illusory insurance against possible nuclear threats in the distant future from unidentified sources.

Even if, for the sake of argument, we accept the terms of deterrence theory, stability in the subcontinent with fully deployed nuclear weapons will depend critically on the ability of India and Pakistan to read and influence the thinking of the other in relation to its security and also to be able to understand the possible reactions of the other in various situations. The two sides need to communicate to each other through words and deeds. Deterrence theory holds that to be successful this requires, apart from constant political-diplomatic communication that will be at a premium in India-Pakistan crisis situations, substantial technical investment in C³I. Sophisticated and expensive C³I would appear to be a necessity even if India and Pakistan do not use the high-alert, counterforce strategies of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. With deployed weapons but without sophisticated C³I systems in place, wrong signals or the misreading of each other's intentions and capabilities are bound to heighten the danger of actual use of nuclear weapons.

Accidental use of nuclear weapons is also a real danger to be guarded against. As Pervez Hoodbhoy, the well-known Pakistani physicist and anti-nuclear weapons activist, has pointed out, if weaponization is not rolled back through democratic and popular pressure, Pakistan and India, given their low C³I capabilities, are likely to opt for a dispersed deployment of nuclear weapons.⁷ With such an option, the natural strategy will be to promote the decision-making autonomy of nuclear-armed units. This is bound to multiply the dangers of unauthorized or accidental use of nuclear weapons. Nor is it clear that any C³I system will be able to cope with the kind of problems that arise from the geographical proximity of India and Pakistan, including flight times for missiles that will be of the order

of a few minutes. The margin available for determining whether an alarm is genuine or false will be extremely small.

The troubled record of India-Pakistan relations bristles with instances of border 'incidents' and confrontations, major as well as minor, that would be deadly in a nuclear-armed environment. Without independent intelligence capability, including national technical means such as satellites, both sides are also vulnerable to misapprehensions and misinformation from third parties. The development of appropriate C³I capabilities is, in fact, a long process; the situation in the intervening period is likely to be volatile. We have already cited (see Chapter 3) expert testimony that during the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union, especially the former, often failed to read the other's words and deeds correctly despite high-quality C³I capabilities, and that this led to incredibly critical situations. There is no reason whatever to believe that an India-Pakistan nuclear stand-off will be an exception to this rule.

Overall, it appears that after Pokhran-II and Chagai, India's nuclear policy and nuclear defence posture have succeeded only in degrading, if not compromising, the country's security. It is clearer now than it ever was that the longstanding policy of keeping the nuclear option open on the basis of self-restraint, opposition to the discriminatory global nuclear order and a serious commitment to nuclear disarmament was eminently sustainable. In fact, it can be recognized as the only policy that could have met the requirements of India from a democratic and progressive standpoint.

What is a sustainable policy option today in terms of winning peace and stability in the subcontinent? The key lies in stopping and rolling back, a process of nuclear weaponization that is yet fully to be under way. India's top priority must be to commit itself to the non-induction and non-deployment of nuclear weapons. Pakistan, facing enormous constraints in continuing with any serious programme of nuclear weaponization, has stated more than once that it sees no need to deploy nuclear weapons provided that India agrees not to do so. Other major steps that need urgently to be taken to resolve the perilous situation brought on by Pokhran-II and the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff are discussed in the concluding section of this tract.

These steps will also ensure that missiles and strike aircraft that are currently in use will not be suspect as nuclear weapon delivery systems. Further confidence-building measures will also be necessary to ensure that conventional missile capability in particular does not act as a destabilizing factor in the future.

The moratorium on testing that is in place needs to be continued and strengthened, preferably through the adoption of a resolution or an Act of Parliament. This will effectively curb the tendency on the part of hawkish forces as well as the scientific establishment in the atomic energy and defence research sectors to push nuclear weaponization outside the purview of democratic public scrutiny. Any attempt to tamper with the fundamentals of nuclear policy will be subject to effective parliamentary supervision. Such a policy will provide little room for intervention by U.S. imperialism and its

allies in security issues in the subcontinent and also enable India to return to pursuing a serious agenda for global nuclear disarmament. Unless India and Pakistan are agreed that nuclear non-deployment is a matter of top priority, there is no prospect of peace and stability in the subcontinent. This is the least that is owed to the 'one-sixth of humanity' in whose name the government of the Hindu Right cynically conducted its nuclear misadventure.

Indo-Pakistan Dialogue

The eleven claimed nuclear explosions in South Asia and the talk of weaponization, deterrents, second-strike capability and deployment and use of nuclear weapons for 'self-defence' have introduced a dangerous new calculus in an already troubled India-Pakistan relationship. After the early euphoria vanished, after the initial flurry of intemperate language died down and after infructuous official-level meetings ended in mutual recrimination, the realization grew at the government level in both countries that a process of top-level political dialogue must be initiated. Pressure for Indo-Pakistan talks covering a range of outstanding issues, including the nuclear mess and Kashmir, also came from the United States, the key 'interlocutor' who has been allowed to become an intervenor in South Asian nuclear affairs and indirectly, in the India-Pakistan political relationship. With all this, the process of dialogue between India and Pakistan has picked up since October 1998. While this represents a positive political development, there is no room for complacency since little progress of substance has been made on the nuclear issue.

Even in the first round of talks between the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries, the mismatch or incompatibility between the official Indian and Pakistani positions on the question of reducing the nuclear threat became quite obvious. The central element of the Indian side's approach was a mutual 'no-first-use' agreement, even before such a posture was officially announced at home. The Pakistan government's counter-proposal revolved round a general 'no war' pact together with negotiated reductions in both nuclear and conventional arms. Another key problem for India was Pakistan's attempt to link Kashmir to the nuclear issue. As we have seen, the problem was partly of the BJP-led government's making.

The level of India-Pakistan diplomacy was raised dramatically when a scheduled round of official-level talks was pre-empted by the inauguration of the Delhi-Lahore bus service by Prime Minister Vajpayee on February 20, 1999 and his subsequent meeting with his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, at Lahore. Given the proximity in time between the announcement of the plan for a bus ride to the border and a Prime Ministerial meeting in Lahore and the just concluded visit of the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, to both capitals, one may reasonably suspect a nexus between the two. In any case the United States, in its role as *de facto* mediator on the nuclear issue in the subcontinent, had been insistent on progress being made by India and Pakistan bilaterally to reduce the nuclear danger in the subcontinent.

The Vajpayee-Sharif meeting generated substantial interest and enthusiasm in both India and Pakistan, revealing afresh that a

meaningful agenda for peace and stability can count on a large popular constituency in both countries (notwithstanding some attempts by chauvinistic Right-wing political elements in Pakistan to make trouble during the Vajpayee visit). But on the nuclear issue, the Lahore exercise was long on rhetoric and short on substance.

The Lahore dialogue produced three documents: the 20-paragraph Lahore Declaration, an eight-point Joint Statement and an eight-point Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).⁸

The Declaration refers to the nuclear issue in the following terms. The Prime Ministers, recognizing "that the nuclear dimension of the security environment of the two countries adds to their responsibility for avoidance of conflict between the two countries", agreed that their governments "shall take immediate steps for reducing the risk or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons and discuss concepts and doctrines with a view to elaborating measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields, aimed at prevention of conflict". The Joint Statement basically communicates the top-level decision to systematize the dialogue, notably through periodic meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the two countries "to discuss issues of mutual concern, including nuclear-related issues".

So far as the nuclear issue is concerned, the MoU signed by the two Foreign Secretaries seems to be the document of most substance. This records the agreement of the two sides to -

engage in bilateral consultations on security concepts and nuclear doctrines, with a view to developing measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields, aimed at avoidance of conflict;

undertake to provide each other with advance notification in respect of ballistic missile flight tests' and to 'conclude a bilateral agreement in this regard';

undertake 'national measures to reduce the risks of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons under their respective control'; notify each other immediately in the event of any accidental, unauthorized or unexplained incident that could create the risk of a fall-out with adverse consequences for both sides, or an outbreak of a nuclear war between the two countries'; 'adopt measures aimed at diminishing the possibility of such actions or such incidents being misinterpreted by the other'; and 'identify/establish the appropriate communication mechanisms for this purpose';

continue to abide by their respective unilateral moratorium on conducting further nuclear test explosions unless either side, in exercise of its national sovereignty, decides that extraordinary events have jeopardized its supreme interests;

conclude an agreement on 'prevention of incidents at sea in order to ensure safety of navigation by naval vessels and aircraft belonging to the two sides';

'periodically...review the implementation of existing Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and where necessary, set

up appropriate consultative mechanisms to monitor and ensure effective implementation of these CBMs';

undertake a 'review of the existing communication links (e.g. between the respective Directors-General, Military Operations) with a view to upgrading and improving these links and to provide for fail-safe and secure communications'; and 'engage in bilateral consultations on security, disarmament and non-proliferation issues within the context of negotiations on these issues in multilateral fora'.

The Lahore Declaration and the MoU reiterate the recognition by both sides that "an environment of peace and security is in the supreme national interest of both sides" and that "the resolution of all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, is essential for this purpose". The Joint Statement records progress made on the matter of liberalizing the visa and travel regime between the two countries and raise the hope of some modest bilateral cooperation and consultation in a few other fields.

On the nuclear issue, however, the key message of the Declaration and the MoU is that the two governments are bent on holding the course towards nuclear weaponization, whatever be the political, social and economic costs. As far as the Indian official position is concerned, an agenda calling for a national commitment not to induct and deploy nuclear weapons is simply not up for discussion.

Thus, on any fair reading, the leading share of responsibility for the failure of the Lahore exercise to achieve real progress towards resolving the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff rests with the BJP-led government. The fact is that in the months preceding the Lahore meeting of the Prime Ministers, the Pakistan government indicated its willingness in effect, to discuss with the Indian side the non-deployment of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan in tandem. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Sartaj Aziz, offered in November 1998 that Pakistan would not deploy nuclear weapons if India took the same position adding that deployment of such weapons was a "reciprocal matter" between Islamabad and New Delhi.⁹ This offer was reiterated on December 12, 1998 by Foreign Secretary Shamsher Ahmed in the context of a visit to Islamabad by U.S Assistant Secretary of State, Karl Inderfurth.¹⁰ Ahmed stated that if India did not deploy nuclear weapons or weaponize its nuclear capabilities, then Pakistan would not have any justification to do so. Some strategic affairs analysts and political commentators in the Indian media have speculated on Pakistan's motives for making the offer on non-deployment, but the fact remains that the Aziz offer is in principle the most far-going of the official proposals made thus far to find a way out of the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff. As for Prime Minister Vajpayee, for all his flowery rhetoric on peace and friendship, a matching response is not on the agenda.

The nuclear 'risk reduction' measures agreed on in principle at Lahore are welcome in themselves. But they fall far short of the minimum requirement. They can even be characterized as moves designed to provide an illusory gloss of progress towards limiting the dangers of nuclear confrontation in the subcontinent. Essentially, the Declaration and the MoU promise that the two parties will

play the deterrence game well and 'safely'. In practice, despite these promises, continuing with weaponization, as we have argued in detail, amounts to exposing the people of both countries to nuclear brinkmanship in the future. The assurances from Lahore are in large part a promise directed at the United States, other nuclear weapons states and economically powerful countries that have put strong diplomatic and economic pressure on India and Pakistan.

In the current scenario, it can be predicted that the bilateral consultations on security concepts and nuclear doctrines promised by both the Declaration and the MoU will be of little assistance in promoting peace and stability in South Asia. The nuclear defence postures of India and Pakistan are no secret. The nuclear policies of the government of the Hindu Right and of the Pakistan Muslim League government remain completely incompatible or mismatched. The mainstream of pro-weaponization Indian policy-makers emphasize nuclear weapons primarily as a strategic and political tool, as the currency of an illusory superpower status. The Pakistan state's rationale for weapons appears to have a more military, fighting-oriented flavour. Finding any common ground in these nuclear defence postures will be an extraordinary challenge.

The stage is undoubtedly being set for a continuing arms spiral in the subcontinent with a new, distinctly nuclear, edge to it. The Lahore Declaration and the MoU dispensed with even the standard disclaimer, common to recent policy pronouncements on South Asian nuclear issues, to the effect that India and Pakistan do not desire an arms race in the subcontinent. The sole positive step was the affirmation of each side's 'unilateral moratorium' on explosive testing, subject of course to the escape provision relating to extraordinary events jeopardizing national security. But given that the one thing the two governments agreed on was an eventual signing of the CTBT, the inclusion of this step was hardly surprising.

Propaganda hype has it that Vajpayee's bus diplomacy and the Lahore process brought about a sea-change in India-Pakistan relations in general and a breakthrough in the nuclear standoff specifically. But aside from the issues about nuclear weaponization we have discussed, two general points are worth remembering.

From the long history of imperialist behaviour during the Cold War, it is clear that the swings between periods of bellicose behaviour and aggressive rhetoric and periods of declarations of peace and the desire for friendship are part of the nuclear game. The swings were caused by a variety of factors, including domestic political compulsions, the need to reassure allies who had their specific concerns and the pressure of popular struggles and movements against the massing of nuclear weapons and nuclear brinkmanship. Although on occasion, positive results were scored during periods of 'thaw' in the Cold War, nuclear arsenals remained awesomely real threats. If the political processes in India and Pakistan and their interaction on nuclear issues fail to produce a breakthrough in the nuclear standoff along the lines demanded in the last chapter below, the subcontinent will only witness a minor league replay of the Cold War game.

Secondly, the Sangh Parivar has played its own game in India of alternating aggressive behaviour with periods of seemingly more

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he demolished Babri Masjid or the issue
var has used this strategy persistently.
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akistan is behind us are living in a world of *maya*.

Hope for the future lies partly in the fact that, for all the extravagant
claims made by the nuclear energy establishments and chauvinistic
politicians, nuclear weaponization in both countries is likely to
proceed slowly. There is time for new political leaderships in both
countries to display the wisdom and the political courage necessary
to draw the subcontinent back from the brink of grave nuclear folly.

From : *Riding the Nuclear Tiger*

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Text of a talk delivered at Women's Studies Conference, Hyderabad, January 2000

THE FEMALE CITIZEN

Sunila Abeysekera

The debate on public policy and women that we have all
been a part of over the past three days has focused on the
state, on the relationship between women and the state, and on the
relationship between the women's movement and the state. Issues
of governance, representation and rights have all been brought on to
the agenda as being critical elements of this discussion. Fundamen-
tal questions such as what form of government do we dare to dream
of have dominated the informal talks in the corridors and during
breaks.

The phrase 'public policy' assumes interaction with the state, in a
situation in which the state is deemed to be responsible for public
welfare and for the distribution of resources. This is the situation in
all South Asian countries. The post-independence South Asian state
has for the most part been perceived as being paternalistic and
essentially benign, provider of basic needs and protector of rights.
This particular form of the state has been called 'welfarist' although
the experiences of many marginalized communities in our region
point to the reality that the state only focused on the welfare of some,
at the expense of others. The role of the state in ensuring the
minimum needs of socially disadvantaged groups led many pro-
gressive groups and individuals to engage with the state. This
engagement often consisted of interventions that sought to shape
state policies in a way that would benefit particularly disadvantaged
communities. Trade union actions to bring about changes in labour
law and regulations, and actions by progressive groups, including
women's groups to reform laws pertaining to violence against
women, can be viewed as concrete examples. It is in this context that
the concept of 'lobbying' and 'advocacy' with the state and coop-
eration with state apparatus became an accepted part of so-called
pressure group politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

Within the women's movement, not only in India and in South Asia
but throughout the world, the years following the first World
Conference on Women in 1975 were years in which various mecha-
nisms - such as Women's Ministries, National Commissions on
Women and various other institutes mandated with the care and

welfare of women - were set up by the state to take steps for the
advancement and empowerment of women. Economic programs
aimed at increasing women's income-generating skills became an
almost essential component of various poverty alleviation schemes.
The achievement of equal rights in the legal sphere was promoted
as a stepping stone towards the achievement of equal status for
women. As the women's movement travelled from Mexico to
Nairobi to Beijing, our commitment to lobbying and advocacy also
moved into the international arena. We prepared National Reports
for various international Conferences, in the understanding that our
interventions at the international and regional level could have an
impact on the situation of women in our own countries and in our
own communities. As we had previously negotiated policy changes
and shifts with our states, we now negotiated them with the United
Nations and with the World Bank. The language of women's rights
as human rights and of women's empowerment and participation
resonated through official UN and World Bank documents. As they
appropriated our language, they transformed the conceptual frame-
work within which this language had a meaning for women in our
societies

There were moments in which it seemed as if some gains had been
made through this process. Yet, as the deliberations of the past days
have shown, there has been an element of delusion in all of this. As
Maitreyi said on the first day, our record of progress is patchy at best
and dismal at worst. We have sought to change state attitude towards
women from diverse perspectives, focusing on small elements, and
rarely challenging the patriarchal normative framework that de-
creed women to be biological and social reproducers first and
citizens second. Thus, what we have achieved in terms of changes
in state policy has been fragmented and piecemeal, ad hoc and
incoherent, to quote the speakers from the first panel at this Confer-
ence.

I don't want at all to negate any of the achievements of any of you,
or of any of the other millions of women activists in the region who
are not here with us today. We are all only too aware of the fact that