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Is South Asian Nuclear Politics Different?

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The central question before us is whether it is appropriate for South Asians to learn from the US-Soviet experience of the Cold War. This raises other questions:

1. Are the two sets of relationships comparable? Is there in South Asia a "cold war" essentially similar to the Cold War?
2. Should the theoretical lenses we use for both sets be the same? Can we learn from the one about the other?
3. Is the thinking and practice relating to nuclear weapons in the two sets comparable?

Cold War – Global and Regional

There are a number of significant similarities between the Cold War and South Asia's cold war.[1]

> In both cases, a systemic hegemon is confronted by a challenger.[2] There is a difference in scale (one global, one regional), but not in structure. While the hegemon is much larger in respect of economic power and conventional military forces, nuclear weapons play the role of equalizer.

[1] I use the term "Cold War" for the US-Soviet relationship, "cold war" as a generic term.
[2] On hegemony and challenge, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

In both cases, there is a history of political antagonism. US-Soviet rivalry goes back to the 19th century.[3] India-Pakistan hostility, of course, begins from the beginning, following partition and independence in 1947.

Rivalry over geographic space (the world, Kashmir) is compounded by differences in political systems (liberal-capitalist v socialist, civilian-constitutional v military-dominated) and cultural differences (East v West, Hindu-dominated composite culture v Islamic culture).

The Cold War was characterized by deep ideational differences reflected in a zero-sum ideological rivalry, which could be characterized as identity difference. This bears some similarity to the differences between India and Pakistan on national identity: India stands for a heterogeneous, secular society (now threatened by the Hindu right), Pakistan for an Islamic society. Both identities are shaky, hence the critical importance of Kashmir.

Both sets of relationship are characterized by military confrontation of a particular kind: large conventional forces, the possession of nuclear weapons, and high tension and rhetoric accompanied by war avoidance and the search for advantage within the constraints imposed by nuclear weapons. This generates crises and the specter of war, as well as competitive behavior in the form of repeated threats and counter-threats, and tit-for-tat testing.

At the same time, there are also important differences between the two sets:

The Cold War was global in scope, whereas the South Asian cold war is limited to a relatively small area. In the latter, extra-regional powers can and do play a role in the subcontinental conflict.

The former involved globe-spanning alliances, the latter no more than loose bilateral arrangements by either side to augment its strength.

[3] John G. Stoessinger, *Nations in Darkness: China, Russia and America*, 3rd ed., (New York: Random House, 1981).

Unlike the Cold War antagonists, India and Pakistan are not economically autonomous (though they tried to be). They have always been relatively vulnerable to economic pressures from outside the region.

South Asia's ideational differences are not as deep as those that existed during the Cold War. Though national identity is a serious problem, there is (as yet) no fundamental difference between the Indian and Pakistani political and economic systems: both strive for some form of capitalist liberal democracy.

While the Cold War saw vast nuclear forces in a state of near-the-edge confrontation, the subcontinental cold war has witnessed small and undeployed nuclear forces in potential confrontation.

The India-Pakistan relationship is beset by a factor unique among nuclear adversarial relationships: the presence and activity of terrorists. These actors are at least partly autonomous and have the capacity to create nuclear instability in the region through acts of terrorism, including nuclear terrorism.

On the whole, there is a good case to be made for treating the South Asian confrontation as a cold war, with the caveat that not all cold wars may be the same. The last point on dissimilarities between the two cold wars is critical: the character of South Asian nuclear thinking and posture is clearly different. Size may be a function of technology and resources, but posture is not.

Theory and Understanding

Some scholars have argued that the world is a bifurcated one. The developing world is very different from the developed, and theories devised to study the latter may not be useful in understanding the former. From this standpoint, international relations theory, which claims to explain the world around us, has serious limitations because it is "essentially Eurocentric theory, originating largely in the United States and founded, almost exclusively, on what happens or happened in the West."[4] Third World politics is

[4] Stephanie G. Neuman, "International Relations Theory and the Third World: An Oxymoron?" in Stephanie G. Neuman, ed., *International Relations Theory and the Third World* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 2.

one of intra-state rather than inter-state conflict, with state units lacking in cohesion and legitimacy and plagued by substantial problems relating to economic, social and political development. From this perspective, a proper understanding of the Third World requires a different kind of theory than that which currently prevails.[5] By extension, it could be argued that the Cold War offers little of value in understanding India-Pakistan relations. The "different theories for different worlds" argument exaggerates the differences between the developed and the developing countries. It betrays an inadequate acquaintance with non-European history, which is replete with "Western"-style balance of power politics, and fails to observe the similarity across time between post-Napoleonic Europe and 20th-century South Asia, both of which were marked by ethnic and class turbulence as large empires collapsed, industrialization took hold, and new ideologies emerged.[6] As it happens, no new theory has come along to provide a better explanation of Third World political behavior. We do not need one. I doubt if it is useful to look for different basic patterns of strategic behavior in trying to understand India and Pakistan.

However, a case can be made for more discriminating theory which distinguishes between behavioral patterns based on different modes of strategic thought and organization. On one hand, we should not be surprised to see India and Pakistan behave very like the US and the Soviet Union when they engage in the combination of brinkmanship, competitive symbolism and nuclear restraint characteristic of nuclear rivals. A third relationship – between the Soviet Union and China – carries many similarities. We discern from this the peculiar mix of aggression and caution typical of nuclear rivalries. On the other hand, if the way in which different sets of rivals think about nuclear weapons and organize them is different, then there are obvious limits to the extent to which knowledge gained from one set is of utility in understanding the other. On general questions about the nature of cold war competition, how cold wars end, or what kinds of problems might occur relating to organization (accident, misperception), we could usefully draw from Cold War experience to anticipate what may happen to the India-Pakistan relationship. Lessons about the requirements of deterrence, stability, arms

[5] K. J. Holsti, "International Relations Theory and Domestic War in the Third World," in Neuman, ed., *International Relations Theory and the Third World*.
[6] A wider time frame diminishes even this difference.

control, and even crisis behavior are likely to be less applicable across relationships. Nuclear-strategic behavior in the two pairs has been of a very different character. For instance, Cold War nuclear strategy required very large and diverse arsenals and was preoccupied with questions of balance and vulnerability. South Asian minimum deterrence is relatively tolerant of concerns about balances and vulnerability as compared to assured destruction strategy. The requirements of the former are very few, those of the latter extensive.

A further complication is that there is nothing clear-cut about nuclear weapons. On the contrary, they are inherently self-contradictory. Because they are so powerful and undiscriminating in their effects, they are commonly thought of as "non-usable" weapons. Yet they have been used – not once, but twice – and there is no guarantee that they never will be. They are at one and the same time (a) *regular weapons*: just another kind of military instrument, more powerful than others, which are usable in war and hence must be fully integrated into war planning; (b) *special weapons*, the use of which may be contemplated only in circumstances of great adversity; and (c) *explosive devices*, which portend such untold damage that their use is justified only by the need for survival.[7] All three conceptions coexist uneasily within all nuclear-armed states. At one end of the spectrum, nuclear weapons are military instruments, and at the other, they are political instruments.

The problem with nuclear weapons is that their divergent military and political facets are hard to disentangle. As military instruments they are, like other weapons, incorporated into national force structures. In this role, they have operational meaning for military personnel (and for some strategists) whose job is to think of their utility as instruments of war. Like other weapons, they are assessed in terms of their accuracy, speed, reliability, and so on. On the other hand, for political leaders who see them as political instruments, the overriding objective (at least, after Nagasaki) is to ensure that they are *not* used. The two roles are inextricably linked: the political non-usability of nuclear weapons is the direct consequence of their operational usability. This inherent contradiction can never be

[7] Morton H. Halperin, *Nuclear Fallacy: Dispelling the Myth of Nuclear Strategy* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1987), pp. 49-60.

resolved. But it would seem fair to say that politics comes first, and that even those who contemplate nuclear weapons in usable terms would prefer that they not be actually used.

All of this applies as much to the US-Soviet relationship as to the India-Pakistan one. But on this shaky foundation have been built very different nuclear postures and relationships. In both cases, it is an established axiom that nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. Yet the Cold War saw immense arsenals constructed and deployed, while South Asia's cold war has seen intense hostility but no deployment. How do we explain the difference?

Distinctive Historical Contexts

One reason for the difference is obviously variation in capability and resources. The US and the Soviet Union were able to develop vast arsenals because they were both continent-sized powers with immense resources. India and Pakistan are not comparable. But the differences go much further. The US and the Soviet Union were engaged in a furious arms race marked by a qualitative and quantitative competition that spiraled well beyond overkill capacity. In South Asia, the story is as yet very different. India demonstrated nuclear capability as early as 1974, Pakistan a decade later. Both built bombs covertly and tested only much after they had done so. Having gone officially nuclear, they became involved in increasingly bitter rivalry over Kashmir, which led to two very serious crises in 1999 (the Kargil conflict) and in 2001-2002 (massive mobilization of conventional forces). Yet there is no evidence that they employed their nuclear forces, though both have delivery capability (airplanes and missiles) that can easily target numerous urban centers close to the border. There are historical-cultural factors which may explain why they have behaved differently.

The transition from conventional to nuclear weapons is affected by the historical context in which it occurs. The United States and the Soviet Union were creatures of the Second World War, India and Pakistan were not. One "lesson" of the war was that adversaries could withstand enormous damage in military conflict. The Americans learned this from the failure of their fire-bombing missions in Germany and Japan to force the enemy to surrender. Germany had to be defeated the hard way by territorial occupation. Against Japan, only the use of the atomic bomb, it seemed, achieved the desired effect, and that too when it had virtually been defeated already. The Russians doubtless learned the same, not least from their own ability to withstand colossal losses in not one, but two world wars, and to recover from them and emerge as a superpower. Consequently, it is no surprise that both countries based their nuclear strategies on large forces with great destructive capacities. Nor is it remarkable that they should have believed that the stability of their antagonistic relationship during the Cold War years rested on their ability to destroy each other completely.

India and Pakistan became nuclear powers in a very different context. While social violence, sometimes on a mass scale, has been frequent in the region, organized state violence in the form of war has been restrained. The three India-Pakistan wars between 1947 and 1971 produced relatively few casualties, and no instances of indiscriminate "strategic bombing." The targeting of cities was eschewed. Hence, the rhetoric of "wiping each other out" that has been evident over the last couple of years should be understood as just that: rhetoric. The very idea of "minimum" deterrence indicates that the threshold of tolerance for large-scale damage is low. What we have, in effect, is not deterrence based on MAD, or mutual assured destruction, but on MUD, or mutual unacceptable damage. For the players in the Cold War, it took a lot to deter. For South Asia's nuclear rivals, it does not take much.

Many Western experts have not been able to come to terms with the peculiar nature of Indian and Pakistani deterrence thinking. Both countries have aired no more than bare-bones doctrines. While much has been made of India's Draft Nuclear Doctrine, which was circulated publicly in August 1999, it is well known that the document was little

more than a compromise among members of the National Security Advisory Board holding widely divergent opinions. In fact, as Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh told an interviewer subsequently, the report was released in order to generate a national debate and was "not a policy document of the Government of India."[8] In January 2003, a brief announcement outlined Indian nuclear doctrine.[9] Its main points were:

1. Reiteration of no first use and of non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states;
2. The threat of "massive" retaliation in response to a first strike;
3. The option to retaliate with nuclear weapons against a chemical or biological attack;
4. Adherence to strict export controls; and
5. Renewed commitment to arms control through participations in the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) negotiations, continued observance to the national moratorium on testing, and sustained commitment to universal disarmament.

This left rather a lot unsaid. Besides, the third point contradicts the first and is not particularly meaningful, since India faces no chemical or biological weapons threat to speak of. Pakistani doctrinal statements have been similar, skipping lightly over a great deal of ground.[10] As the smaller of the two states, it has held fast to the first use option. Not much need be made about the difference between the two countries on this point, since Pakistan has not shown any more signs of thinking of exercising the option. If neither deploys, the difference will be notional. If they do, they will in all likelihood do so under conditions of crisis, at which time the question of who fires first is moot. The nature of Pakistani thinking is clear from the stated conditions for nuclear use. While these are generally held to be such that "the very existence of Pakistan as a state is at

[8] "India Not to Engage in A Nuclear Arms Race: Jaswant," (Interview), *Hindu*, November 29, 1999.
[9] India, Ministry of External Affairs, Press Release, "The Cabinet Committee on Security Reviews operationalization of India's Nuclear Doctrine," January 4, 2003 <http://www.meadev.nic.in/news/official/20030104/official.htm>.
[10] P. Cota-Ramusino and M. Martellini, *Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Stability and Nuclear Strategy in Pakistan*, Landau Network-Centro Volta, Como (Italy), January 21, 2002.

stake," the actual conditions fleshed out speak of the loss of "a large part" of Pakistani territory, the loss of "a large part" of its land or air forces, the "economic strangling" of Pakistan, and "political destabilization" or "large scale internal subversion" of Pakistan. The breadth of these conditions for nuclear use make them quite meaningless strategically, except as a general warning to the effect that "you never know what we'll do." When asked whether the conditions were not too broad and vague, General K. Kidwai repeatedly stressed that "rational decision making" precludes nuclear war, and that India and Pakistan will not come close to the nuclear threshold.[11] All of this shows a decidedly political conception of nuclear weapons that is quite different from that which prevails in the US.

South Asia's Divergent Strategic Trajectory

The military-political dichotomy inherent in nuclear weapons and strategy exists in both sets of relationships under discussion, but the ratio between the two components is different in each case. In Cold War thinking and practice, the military facet of deterrence thinking was a very powerful one because of the historical context described above. Both sides built large and sophisticated arsenals even as they sought to avoid war. The dichotomy is evident from the incongruence between Eisenhower's strategy of massive retaliation and his warning to senior military officials that "there is no victory in war except through our imaginations, through our dedication and through our work to avoid it."[12] The important place given to operational considerations brought a strong focus on weapon characteristics, modes of deployment, vulnerability, reliability, and so on. Such considerations push strategy toward a maximalist position. The bigger and more sophisticated the arsenal, the better.

In much of the exposition of nuclear doctrine, the concept of "credibility" remains central. American strategy, for example, requires that for deterrence to be credible, the US must possess large numbers of sophisticated weapons, and that they must never be

[11] Ibid.
[12] Cited in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 135n.

"vulnerable" to larger numbers or better weapons in the possession of an adversary. Indian doctrine is said to be one of "credible" minimum deterrence, but what exactly is meant by "credible" has never been made conceptually clear. The issue of credibility is really a problem of one's *own* perception of deterrence strategy. Because the rationality paradox (threatening to do what one wishes to avoid) makes deterrence inherently problematic, national strategists have to convince *themselves* that deterrence is credible. This breeds a "self-regarding" logic that pushes strategic thought in the direction of the concrete characteristics of nuclear weapons. Numbers, reliability, accuracy, etc., become important features determining credibility. This kind of thinking is an extension of thinking on conventional weapons. But nuclear weapons, of course, are different from conventional weapons: they are not straightforward "Clausewitzian" instruments of politics. As Kenneth Waltz so concisely puts it, "contemplating war when the use of nuclear weapons is possible focuses one's attention not on the probability of victory, but on the *possibility* of annihilation," and hence "the problem of the credibility of deterrence, a big worry in a conventional world, disappears in a nuclear one."[13] This produces (or should!) an "other-regarding" logic that rests deterrence on the risk faced by the adversary. The two logics, in practice, coexist uncomfortably in a specific historically determined ratio and tend to harden over time.

Because of their different historical context, India and Pakistan have espoused a much more political and other-regarding logic of deterrence than the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia. This enables them to be content with a few weapons that are not only not mated to delivery vehicles, but are kept in unassembled condition. (This is especially significant when we consider the "gap" between India and China.) Ironically, this measure of relative safety has enabled them to assume more aggressive postures, using nuclear weapons as political instruments to try and secure strategic advantage. US-Soviet confrontations involved the imminent danger of nuclear weapons use owing to the deployment of weapons on alert status, the Cuban Missile Crisis being the most prominent case. In addition, attempts to coerce adversaries involved oblique threats to resort directly to nuclear weapons through "nuclear signaling." For instance, in 1969, the

[13] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities," *American Political Science Review*, 84, 3 (September 1990), pp. 731-745.

United States used this tactic to threaten the Soviet Union, and in the same year, the Soviet Union did likewise to China. India and Pakistan have not directly waved the nuclear stick, but have tried to extract advantage from its existence in the background, i.e., by raising the threat/fear of a nuclear outbreak.

South Asia's New Nuclear Games

The politics of nuclear weapons has generally been understood in terms of bilateral relationships. In South Asia, however, we see a new use for nuclear weapons since India and Pakistan went nuclear officially in 1998. Both countries engaged in a creative expansion of nuclear strategy *to invite outside intervention* in their conflict over Kashmir. Pakistan did this in 1999 by initiating the Kargil conflict, a large-scale covert intrusion into Indian-held territory in Kashmir. India engaged in a similar, though not identical, exercise through the mobilization of conventional forces in a border confrontation after the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001 (hereafter, for the sake of brevity, referred to as the December 13 Crisis). In both cases, the belligerents attempted not so much to use or threaten to use nuclear force, but to *create a fear of nuclear war* in the global community, especially the United States, in the pursuit of their limited political ends. Each hoped thereby to harness American intervention for its own purpose, primarily to use the United States to pressurize the other into making political concessions on the Kashmir dispute.

Ironically, the real threat of a direct resort to nuclear conflict by either has never been serious. But the West's repeated characterization of the region as "the most dangerous place on earth" and periodic warnings of nuclear catastrophe have generated fears that India and Pakistan have used for their respective political ends. Pakistan launched its Kargil venture in order to drag India to the negotiating table and extract a deal on Kashmir. India countered with a war-like mobilization in the aftermath of December 13 to build intense American pressure on Pakistan to cease its support for cross-border terrorism.

Under the "stability-instability paradox," the nuclear stand-off between India and Pakistan permitted the playing of conflict games with the intention of pursuing political objectives related to the long and bitter dispute over Kashmir.[14] Both the crises – Kargil and December 13 – involved the "use" of nuclear weapons for strategic purposes of a kind different from those normally associated with nuclear weapons.

In both cases, there was no direct threat to use nuclear capability. The belligerents engaged in much saber-rattling and dire warnings about what would happen if the other attacked. There was an indirect threat of nuclear *response* rather than initiation of conflict, with Pakistan intimating nuclear use in the event of a major conventional attack, and India threatening an overwhelmingly powerful second strike should Pakistan initiate nuclear use. So far, this seems to be fairly close to standard deterrence behavior, as in the US-Soviet relationship, but in fact there is a profound difference.

Both crises involved the mobilization of *sub-nuclear* capability to create a *general fear of nuclear war* in the global community and the United States in particular. Thus, the implied threat of nuclear conflict was aimed politically at a *third party*. The objective, of course, was to galvanize the third party into action. In Kargil, Pakistan attempted to use the United States as its instrument to compel India to negotiate on Kashmir. In the December 13 crisis, India compelled the United States to put intense pressure on President Musharraf to abandon his support for Pakistan-based terrorist groups operating in Kashmir. True, there were elements of direct bilateral pressure as well, but the real target of both crisis initiators was the United States.

In both cases, the initiator of the crisis attempted to extract political gain by generating fear of nuclear conflict. This meant going beyond the generally accepted deterrence role of nuclear weapons. It involved giving a new dimension to the old relationship between politics and force. Western deterrence theorists have argued that

[14] Michael Krepon & Chris Gagné, eds, *The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia*, Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington, DC, June 2001.

> the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter; that nuclear weapons have overturned the Clausewitzian relationship between politics and the instruments of war. South Asia has put Clausewitz upright again, not by actually using nuclear weapons as instruments of war, but by using them indirectly in creative ways for political ends.

The two crises were not identical. In Kargil, Pakistan resorted to a covert approach. The forces which occupied territory on the Indian side of the agreed Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir were mainly regular Pakistani troops, but in mufti. The aim was to create a crisis without officially crossing the LoC, i.e., to obtain a military advantage while retaining official deniability. The idea was to evoke a general fear of escalation from subconventional to conventional to nuclear conflict and thereby induce international intervention. In the December 13 case, India made an overt threat to cross the LoC and the border (in areas other than Kashmir) without specifying the nature of the threatened intervention, but leaving open the possibility of escalation from limited conventional engagement to an unknown – conceivably nuclear – level. Since escalation can never quite be predicted, the possibility of it occurring was enough to create the fear of nuclear conflict and thus invite American intervention.

Was there a real danger of war in either crisis? On the face of it, yes. Kargil brought actual combat between the two forces along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. This could conceivably have escalated into a bigger war. Yet, the fact remains that Pakistan's commitment was a cautious and limited one. Its troops took part in fighting in an "unofficial" capacity, and were not backed up when the fighting turned against them. In contrast, India was able to throw its forces into the fray on a very large scale. At the same time, Indian forces were under strict orders not to transgress the LoC, which raised the cost of fighting considerably. Both sides clearly sought to avoid a full-scale conflict. Nor is there evidence of steps taken to nuclearize the confrontation. Bruce Reidel's claim that Pakistani nuclear forces were activated during the Kargil conflict has not been substantiated so far.[15]

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[15] Bruce Reidel, *American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House*, Center for the Advanced Study of India, Philadelphia, 2002 <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/casi/reports/RiedelPaper051302.htm>.

The December 13 Crisis was also characterized by restraint. Both sides threatened defensive use of nuclear weapons, but the threat was not a grave one. Massive conventional mobilization was not followed by fighting (barring a couple of minor skirmishes), and again there was no deployment of nuclear weapons. The presence of American forces in Pakistan at the time made the possibility of a war very low.[16] Even if low-level border skirmishes had broken out, the United States would have intervened rapidly, possibly by interposing some of its own forces in the area of confrontation. There is every indication that India's initial threat of war was a calculated one designed to do no more than what it did: induce American pressure on Pakistan to reject cross-border terrorism.

The two crises show an element common to Cold War shadow boxing, as well as to similar behavior on the part of the Soviet Union and China in 1969. In every case, the adversaries confined themselves to strong words accompanied by limited action that threatened war without actually precipitating it. What is different about the India-Pakistan cases is that nuclear weapons remained inactive and, even if a war had broken out, would not have entered the picture immediately. There was instead, tacit agreement on a "two-steps-short rule." Both stayed two steps or thresholds below nuclear conflict, i.e., below full-scale conventional war, which in turn was below the threshold of nuclear conflict. In contrast, in the US-Soviet and Soviet-China cases, the prospect of a one-step shift to nuclear conflict was not only present because of nuclear deployment, but was from time to time actively held out as a threat.

South Asia's post-1998 crises raised tensions but did not change the situation. Both attempts at coercion failed to achieve their objectives. Kargil brought an unfavorable reaction from the US, ultimately forcing Pakistan to withdraw. December 13 did bring US pressure on Pakistan to reverse it policy of support for cross-border terrorism, but the reversal was a temporary one. In each case, there was no basic change in strategy.

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[16] K. Subrahmanyam, "Indo-Pak Nuclear Conflict Unlikely," *Times Of India*, January 2, 2002.

Pakistan continued to support terrorist groups active in India, while India continued to mull options involving the use of force.

Conclusion

1. The two cold wars are comparable, and so, in broad terms, are the behaviors they produce, i.e., high levels of confrontation accompanied by relatively cautious war-avoiding behavior. We do not need different theoretical lenses to understand them. But we do need theory to be discriminating: to acknowledge and account for differences across sets of relationships.

2. The two cold wars differ significantly with respect to the specifics of nuclear thinking and posture. In both cases, there is a dichotomy between the military and political logics of nuclear weapons. But they diverge significantly in their prioritization of these logics. The US-Soviet relationship gives an important place to operational considerations. The India-Pakistan one, in comparison, gives primacy to political considerations. The lessons of the first are thus not useful for mitigating the problems of the second. However, there is a possibility that the India-Pakistan relationship will drift toward the US-Soviet type. This may happen because of the pulls of operational systems still in the process of being organized, and because minimum deterrence has as yet not been clearly thought through. For instance, minimum deterrence is by definition tolerant of "imbalances." Yet arguments against missile defense in India and Pakistan have focused on its destabilizing potential by using arguments about imbalance. Similarly, the search for a wide range of platforms may result from the pressures generated by techno-bureaucratic interests, but their validation is possible only with reference to doctrine. That can only be couched in terms of balance and vulnerability, which do not fit in with the minimalistic political logic of minimum deterrence. It follows that if nuclear doctrine and postures in South Asia draw closer to their

Cold War counterparts, the lessons of the Cold War would then become more relevant.

3. At present, they are not. The primacy of the political conception of nuclear weapons in South Asia has significant implications for attempting to achieve stability in the region. Arms control will not be problematic because it will not be bogged down by concerns of balance and vulnerability. On the other hand, the initial push will be difficult to make because it will reduce the scope for using nuclear weapons as instruments for political manipulation. Pakistan is more likely to pose a problem here because it is the dissatisfied power, the challenger looking for change in the status quo.

4. The main challenge is to prevent the South Asian nuclear "worldview" from shifting toward the Cold War one, bringing in its wake ever larger arsenals, deployment, and accompanying risks. This may eventually bring a familiar result: crisis-driven arms control. But getting there is a prospect that invites more anxiety than comfort. An imperative need, therefore, is to come to grips with minimum deterrence, its fundamental assumptions, and its "operational" requirements. Concomitantly, it would be useful for Indians and Pakistanis to elaborate on their respective doctrines; see how far they overlap and how far they do not; assess how far the differences are bridgeable; and attempt to mitigate the most outstanding problems thrown up. Remarkably, despite their differences, notably the fact that one arsenal is controlled by military personnel and the other by civilian leaders, their postures are similar, so there is room for optimism.

5. The presence of terrorists – some with revolutionary mindsets and potential for indiscriminate mass killing – in the region creates a unique situation, linking terrorism, nuclear terrorism and nuclear strategy. Terrorism is already central to India-Pakistan tensions. Pakistan's use of terrorists under the safety of the nuclear umbrella has brought the two countries close to war twice since the 1998 tests. With Pakistan itself under terrorist threat, and Islamic radicalism (linked to the

Taliban and Al Qaeda) still strong in the region, it is not all clear that Pakistani control over the numerous terrorist groups is significant. These groups retain the potential to trigger war between then two countries, possibly by an act of nuclear or radiological terrorism. In the reverse direction, should incessant India-Pakistan tension lead to nuclear deployment at some point of time in the future, terrorists will have greater scope for shaping events through terrorist attacks on nuclear forces, which may be indistinguishable from enemy attacks.

6. The United States will continue to be the referee in South Asia. The trilateral game played by India and Pakistan has ensured this. However, the US role has been episodic rather than sustained, and has lacked a clear conception of what can be done. Some guidelines may be suggested: (a) throw away Cold War prescriptions, and see India and Pakistan as new and different players (this may also help better understand North Korea, which is playing comparable games); (b) attempt to separate the extraordinarily difficult territorial (Kashmir) dispute from the nuclear-strategic challenge (India and China have done it); (c) drop the old nonproliferation baggage, and push for the transfer of nuclear safety technologies; (d) clarify and emphasize the linkages between terrorism, nuclear terrorism, and nuclear strategy that are unique to the region and have the potential to cause chaos.

7. Intellectually, we might be able to draw useful insights on the brinkmanship of nuclear-armed states by closer examination of analogous behaviors from the subject areas of (a) animal behavior and (b) rhetorical and symbolic behavior. Both are areas of what may be called sub-combat behavior.

8. Some areas that need attention include:

   Is there a critical point at which changes in South Asian strategic thinking and behavior will accommodate “Western” deterrence theories?

Are British, French and Chinese doctrines better points of reference? They do not quite fit because the British and the French have had the benefit of a larger alliance nuclear umbrella, while the Chinese appear to have an expansionary bias in their "limited deterrence" thinking. Yet, like India and Pakistan, all three are tolerant of "imbalances" and base deterrence on unacceptable damage rather than assured destruction.

A key question is: under what conditions might South Asian nuclear weapons be deployed? This needs to be considered with reference to crisis deployment as well as "peacetime" deployment.

Are Western fears of preemption relevant to the region? (If a consistently "political" nuclear doctrine is sustained, they should not be, but….)

Similarly, does missile defense destabilize minimum deterrence? Prima facie, it should not, since no one is claiming that it will neutralize all nuclear weapons.

What kind of arms control is feasible? Given the strongly political nature of South Asian nuclear thinking, arms control will not likely be hampered by the minutiae of numbers, types of delivery vehicles, throw weights, etc. The appropriate path may be an extension of what has already taken place: communication (test notification), symbolic agreements (non-attack on nuclear facilities) and tacit understandings (non-deployment).

Subnuclear conflict options have still to be explored:

- Is "limited" conventional war still possible?
- Covert war (as in, or analogous to, Kargil)?
- Special operations?
- Air/naval strikes?