

## Blinded by the Bomb

Against all civilisational values, Islamabad and New Delhi proceed to prepare their bombs and missiles – for nuclear war to be fought on our soil.

ZIA MIAN | Nov 01, 2005

For decades, leaders of India and Pakistan have been bewitched by the power of the bomb. Regardless of their various other differences, they seem to have believed that the threat of massive destruction represented by nuclear weapons is a force for good, and that the weapons themselves are vital to the well-being of their respective countries. President A P J Abdul Kalam, for instance, has claimed that nuclear weapons are “truly weapons of peace”. For his part, President Pervez Musharraf has declared that his country’s nuclear weapons are as critical and important as national security, the economy and Kashmir.

For those not blinded by the Bomb, however, the pursuit of nuclear weapons has brought nothing but a competition in destructive capabilities and crisis after crisis. The Cold War seemed proof enough, but the lessons have been lost to those who rule in India and Pakistan. New Delhi’s nuclear ambitions have served only to encourage Islamabad to follow blindly. The 1974 nuclear test at Pokhran sharpened Pakistan’s determination not to be left behind and, as many had feared, the bomb was not willing to be left in the shadows for long. First India and then Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in May 1998.

Things went from bad to worse. The Kargil War followed barely a year afterwards, proving that two nuclear armed countries could indeed fight wars – contrary to the suggestions of some. Many hundreds of soldiers died on each side, as the leadership

in the two countries threatened apocalypse. A little over two years later, India and Pakistan prepared to fight again. An estimated half-million troops were rushed to the border and, as days turned into weeks and months, nuclear threats were made with abandon. What lessons were learned from the extended standoff at the border? None, it seems – other than perhaps that each country needed to be better prepared to fight a nuclear war.

In 2005, both countries carried out major war games that assumed the possible use of nuclear weapons. An India-Pakistan nuclear war, in which each used only five of their available nuclear weapons, would kill an estimated three million people and severely injure another one-and-a-half million. Meanwhile, even as Southasian and world public opinion press both countries to step back from the nuclear brink, New Delhi and Islamabad respond with efforts to portray themselves as ‘responsible’ nuclear states. At the same time, they continue to push forward as hard as possible with their arms race.

The abyss between words and deeds was clear from the first public show of nuclear responsibility – the 1999 Lahore summit between prime ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Mian Nawaz Sharif. Even though the two men had ordered their nuclear establishments to undertake tests barely a year earlier, in Lahore they discussed “sharing a vision of peace and stability” and “progress and prosperity” for their peoples. The summit produced little in the way of tangible progress on controlling the nuclear arms race. The two states did agree to inform each other about ballistic missile tests, but it was only in October 2005 that they finally followed through on that agreement. Even so, the accord does nothing to limit the future development or testing of missiles.

### **War games**

The Subcontinent is in the middle of a missile race. Both India and Pakistan have tested various types of missiles in recent years, even taking initial steps towards the

deployment of nuclear-armed missiles. India has introduced the 2000 km-range Agni-II missile into its arsenal. Pakistan has done the same with the 750 km Shaheen missile, as well as having tested the 1500 km Ghauri. These missiles would need as little as five minutes of flight time to reach important cities in the 'opposing' countries.

Just as happened during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, in Southasia the development of these missiles has triggered a frantic search for a defence shield, as well as a counter to such a defence. India has sought ballistic missile defences from Russia, Israel and the US to neutralise Pakistan's missiles.

Pakistan has responded by testing a 500 km-range ground-launched cruise missile, which General Musharraf linked to concerns about Indian plans: "There was a feeling that there was an imbalance, which is being created because of the purchase of very advanced-technology weapons ... Let me say this improves the balance."

The quest for advantage triggers the quest for balance and on it goes. It is no surprise that military budgets in both India and Pakistan have spiralled since the nuclear tests began. India spent over INR 2.2 trillion on its military between 2000 and 2004. Gen Musharraf has revealed that Pakistan has spent more since 2000 on its nuclear arsenal than it had in the previous 30 years.

The future looks worse. In June 2005, the US and India signed a 10-year defence-cooperation agreement, which involves the sale of advanced weapons and assistance to both India's space and nuclear programmes. As a senior US official explained: "[Our] goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century," adding, "We understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement." The agreement's purpose was made clear when former US ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, asked, "Why should the US want to check India's missile capability in ways that could lead to China's permanent nuclear dominance over democratic India?"

The June decision was followed in July with a more explicit nuclear deal, in which the Bush administration agreed to overturn US and international regulations that have for decades restricted India's access to uranium, the raw material for both nuclear fuel and nuclear weapons. For its part, India will separate its military and civil nuclear facilities and programmes and will volunteer its civil facilities for inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The US has not asked India to halt the production of nuclear weapons material as part of the deal; India is unlikely to do so. Access to the international uranium market would allow India to free up more of its domestic uranium for a significant expansion of its nuclear weapons capabilities. India's options could, for example, include building a third nuclear reactor to make plutonium for more weapons; beginning to make highly-enriched uranium for weapons; or making fuel for the nuclear submarine it has been trying to build for decades.

Pakistan has now asked for the same deal from the United States. Former army chief Jahangir Karamat, now ambassador to the US, has warned: "The balance of power in Southasia should not become so tilted in India's favour, as a result of the US relationship with India, that Pakistan has to start taking extraordinary measures to ensure a capability for deterrence and defence." The US has refused Islamabad's request, citing, among other things, Pakistan's role in spreading nuclear weapons technologies to North Korea, Libya and Iran, and its refusal to come clean on the A Q Khan affair. Despite all the talk of a 'minimum deterrent', Pakistan may now seek to prepare for an expansion of its own programme. A former Pakistani foreign secretary has even argued that Islamabad "should refine its deterrent capability by stepping up research and development and by integrating strategic assets on land, air and sea – though even that project would be costly and take years."

## **Time of madmen**

The increasingly powerful nuclear weapons complex in both India and Pakistan is overwhelming good sense and derailing the possibility of peace. On both sides, with similarly narrow goals, nuclear weapons proponents are driving the Subcontinent ever faster down the path toward bigger and more dangerous nuclear arsenals and war. The time has come for us to echo the words of the American sociologist Lewis Mumford, writing soon after the dawn of the nuclear age: "Madmen govern our affairs in the name of order and security. The chief madmen claim the titles of general, admiral, senator, scientist, administrator, Secretary of State, even President."

If Southasia is to survive its own nuclear age, we will need strong peace movements in both Pakistan and India, as well as throughout the rest of Southasia. The first steps have already been taken. The Pakistan Peace Coalition, founded in 1999, is a national network of groups working for peace and justice. On the other side of the border, Indian activists in 2000 established the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace. These movements will need all the help and support that they can get to keep the generals, presidents and prime ministers in check. Leaders in India and Pakistan must be firmly told that the people will not allow a nuclear war to be fought.