

**THE INDO-PAKISTANI NUCLEAR CONFRONTATION:
LESSONS FROM THE PAST, CONTINGENCIES FOR THE FUTURE**

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Introduction

In 1998, India and Pakistan conducted a series of nuclear tests, making evident to the world and each other that they had a robust nuclear weapons capability. Despite the tests, the two countries fought a short war in 1999 and came close to fighting a second war in 2002. In both confrontations, the U.S. played an important role in helping to prevent escalation. The confrontations were followed by an extended diplomatic process called the Composite Dialogue that began in 2004 and has served as a kind of umbrella for discussing the disagreements between the two sides. Given this recent history, it is likely that diplomatic dialogue and military confrontation will *both* play a role in resolving Indo-Pak conflict over the next several years. U.S. policies may also play a positive role in preventing crises from occurring and in mediating them when they do. This paper will review what happened in the two military confrontations and what lessons the two sides may have learned from them. It will then assess the implications of these conflicts for future crises, what scenarios may be envisioned for future conflict, and what steps the U.S. might take to reduce the prospects for nuclear use.

In the end, India and Pakistan control their own future, but the U.S. can no longer afford to be a bystander in South Asia. Positive diplomatic developments over the past decade have resulted in the U.S. being engaged in South Asia on a permanent basis. It is unlikely—and probably not desirable for either India or Pakistan—that the U.S. would return to its historic pattern of paying attention to South Asia only in times of crisis. The effects of nuclear proliferation and international terrorism give Indo-Pakistani relations global consequence.

The Kargil War

What happened?

In 1999, India and Pakistan fought a short war over disputed territory along the Line of Control (LOC) that separates their forces in Kashmir. It began in May when shepherds on the Indian side of the LOC encountered Pakistani infiltrators occupying land that had been vacated by Indian soldiers early in the winter. The commander of the army, V. P. Malik was briefed on the incursion, but it initially appeared to be little more than normal artillery firing that characterizes the military confrontation along the LOC. Further reconnaissance, however, revealed a more widespread Pakistani occupation of key points around the town of Kargil. Although Islamabad claimed that the forces occupying the disputed ground were local “freedom fighters,” in fact Pakistan had deployed elements of the Northern Light Infantry into positions vacated by Indian troops, seizing a 200-kilometer stretch of territory. Once it was fully assessed, India saw that Pakistan’s action significantly challenged India’s control of the main highway through Kashmir and threatened to cut off resupply to India’s forces based on the disputed Siachen Glacier. India escalated at the point of Pakistan’s attack, but finding itself fighting up almost vertical heights, was unable to dislodge the invaders. When he was apprised by the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) of events on the ground on May 15, General Malik advised that helicopters be brought into the battle, additional troops requested, and the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) informed of the

developments.² The Indian government then moved into crisis mode established an ad hoc crisis committee and escalated forcefully against Pakistan's positions.³

The ad hoc crisis team soon decided to take a step that "upped the ante." India deployed air assets against Pakistan's entrenched positions, which India recognized could have "far reaching consequences" for Pakistan⁴. J. N. Dixit, a key member of the committee, saw the potential for serious military escalation:

... the use of the air force would change the nature of the military conflict ... if India decided to deploy the air force in Kargil, India should be well prepared to anticipate the expansion of war beyond Jammu and Kashmir, and respond to expanded Pakistani offenses in other parts of India⁵.

The implications of the decision were not lost on India. The use of air assets was an escalatory step, and Pakistan might in turn escalate still further. The war could expand beyond Jammu and Kashmir, which by definition would mean fighting across the international border.

Pakistan had started the war and showed no signs of giving up the fight on the battlefield; India was also prepared to escalate rather than back down. Were they prepared to do the same with their nuclear assets? The record is less open on this issue, but Malik notes that India had "one or two intelligence reports indicating that Pakistan Army personnel were noticed cleaning up artillery deployment areas and

² General V. P. Malik *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), p. 107; Pervez Musharraf *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 87-98.

³ S. Paul Kapur, "Nuclear Proliferation, the Kargil Conflict, and South Asian Security," *Security Studies* 13:1 (Autumn 2003), pp. 79-105; and S. Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), esp. Chapter 6.

⁴ *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, December 15, 1999), p. 105.

⁵ J. N. Dixit *India—Pakistan in War and Peace* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 55-6.

missile launch sites at the Tilla Ranges.” Even though India had no specific information that Pakistan “was readying its nuclear arsenal... we considered it prudent to take some protective measures [and] some of our missile assets were dispersed and relocated.”⁶ On the other side of the conflict, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary, Shamshad Ahmed stated on May 31 that Pakistan would not “hesitate to use any weapon in our arsenal to defend our territorial integrity.”⁷ Years after the war was over, an American official, Bruce Reidel, reported that on July 3, “more information developed about the escalating military situation in the area—disturbing evidence that the Pakistanis were preparing their nuclear arsenal for possible deployment.”⁸ The escalation to nuclear readiness appears to have been all too real.

As the war progressed, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif grew increasingly nervous. He consulted with the United States and was told in no uncertain terms that his country had started the war and it was his responsibility to end it. Strobe Talbott, then-U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, later wrote that the U.S. “put the blame squarely on Pakistan for instigating the crisis, while urging India not to broaden the conflict.”⁹ After a hasty flight to Washington DC to consult directly with U.S. President Bill Clinton on July 4, Sharif returned to Islamabad and ordered the troops off the Kargil heights and back to their barracks. In his version of the war, Musharraf claimed that

⁶ Malik, p. 259-60.

⁷ “Pakistan May Use Any Weapon,” *The News* (Islamabad), May 31, 1999.

⁸ Bruce Reidel, ‘*American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House*,’ Center for the Advanced Study of India, Policy Paper Series 2002, p. 3.

⁹ Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2004), p. 158.

there had been no need for Sharif to recall the troops, that in fact they were holding up well and were prepared to continue fighting.¹⁰

Lessons and consequences

Coming only a year after the reciprocal nuclear tests of May 1998, the Kargil War makes clear that the acquisition of nuclear weapons did not prevent India and Pakistan from engaging in war. Indeed, nuclear weapons appeared to have little effect on Pakistan's planning. Only a small number of military leaders hatched the plan to seize the Kargil heights, and none of them apparently considered what role nuclear weapons would play. In a forthcoming volume on the Kargil conflict, the key planners appear not to have been dissuaded from their plan by the fact that India had demonstrated a fairly robust nuclear capability.¹¹

In retrospect, the Kargil war appears to have contained a certain degree of mirror imaging even though circumstances had changed dramatically with the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Pakistan's own response to India's similar seizure of contested territory along the Siachen Glacier in 1984 seems to have unduly influenced Pakistan's calculations. Pakistan had attempted to dislodge Indian troops from Siachen for several years, but finally decided that evicting the Indian troops would require a major offensive. Pakistan's military planners therefore assumed that India would draw the same conclusion regarding Kargil. Thus Pakistan was surprised when India mounted a vigorous attack against Pakistan's positions and even escalated to the use of aircraft.

¹⁰ Musharraf, p. 96.

¹¹ Peter R. Lavoy (ed.), "Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict. (forthcoming, 2009)

This possible outcome was evidently never considered—nor was the corollary that escalation could continue to the nuclear level.

The role nuclear weapons may play, whether deployed or not, in deterring action or in sending a threat may not have been fully appreciated. President Musharraf argued that since “our nuclear capability was not yet operational...talk of preparing for nuclear strikes is preposterous.”¹² This contradicts the threats implied by Shamshad Ahmed’s comment noted above, but in any case seems to suggest that Musharraf believed that nuclear weapons only play a role when they are operationally deployed, without defining what “deployment” would entail. How were India’s leaders supposed to know that Pakistan’s weapons were not operationally deployed, and why would that knowledge lead them to conclude that their actions would not provoke a nuclear response? Are nuclear weapons only useful for intra-war deterrence? What lessons Pakistan drew remains to be fully explored.

On India’s side, it is also not clear what role nuclear weapons played. India was not deterred from escalating at the point of attack and chose to mount a major offensive to regain the lost ground. Yet India’s troops were under strict orders not to cross the Line of Control. That said, John Gill notes the “military and political leadership was careful to keep the option of cross-LOC operations open and used public statements by senior officials to highlight the latent threat of escalation.”¹³ Was the limit on crossing the LOC due to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons? If so, why did the restraint not also apply

¹² Musharraf, p. 98.

¹³ John Gill, ‘*Military Operations in the Kargil Conflict*,’ in Peter R. Lavoy (ed.), forthcoming.

to the use of aircraft? It is clear from Dixit's comment above that India knew that step could result in the possible expansion of the war. Yet they authorized the escalation.

On balance, it is difficult to reach firm conclusions about what lessons were learned about how deterrence worked at Kargil. Despite this, there is by now an assumption in Pakistan that Pakistan's nuclear capability forced India to fight a limited war, even though India was not deterred from escalating with respect to resources and was ready to fight across the international border if necessary. In addition, it is unclear how and whether "limited" war—typically defined in terms of limits on space, resources, time and objectives—can remain limited in a nuclear environment. India's COAS Malik points to the decision not to cross the LOC as a good example of how political control will ensure that wars in the nuclear age will not escalate. The decision to limit the war geographically but not in terms of resources, however, contradicts this optimistic assertion. Furthermore, India was prepared for escalation beyond the limits it initially intended to impose.

Finally, the duration of the war was determined by the Pakistani Prime Minister bending to U.S. pressure. From the perspective of the Pakistan military, however, the war could—and should—have continued. As President Musharraf writes, when asked by Prime Minister Sharif on July 3 as he was boarding his plane to Washington whether it would be necessary to accept a cease-fire and withdrawal, "My answer was the same: the military situation is favorable; the political decision has to be his own... It remains a mystery to me why he was in such a hurry."¹⁴ Thus Kargil provides at best a mixed lesson in how war may stay limited under the nuclear cloud.

¹⁴ Musharraf, p. 97.

There was a lack of consensus among Indian and Pakistani observers about the outcome of the war as well as the influence of nuclear weapons. Pakistan felt that the military was acquitting itself well on the battlefield and had been sold out by politicians. Furthermore, Pakistan felt that its central objective had been achieved—Kashmir had been brought back to international attention. In contrast, India was convinced that Kargil was a victory for its own forces. India's troops had prevailed on the battlefield, India's political leaders had not been intimidated by Pakistan's nuclear weapons, and Pakistan had been portrayed to the international community as the aggressor.

A further somewhat worrisome outcome of the war is that Pakistan convinced itself that India was deterred from escalating because of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. In short, nuclear deterrence allowed Pakistan a certain freedom of action while it constrained India's response. This is a troubling conclusion if it inspires reckless actions in the future. It is doubly troubling in that the danger of nuclear escalation apparently did not affect the planners. If this betrays a belief that nuclear deterrence has an automatic character, it suggests that future conflicts may also be planned without due consideration of how the other side may utilize its nuclear and conventional capabilities.

A lesson that both sides seem to have drawn from Kargil is that although nuclear weapons do not prevent war, they do keep it controlled. Reason and hope suggest that this will always be the case, and the logic of nuclear deterrence supports such a conclusion. But people often act unreasonably and illogically, while wars have a way of turning out quite differently than initially planned. Therefore one cannot confidently cite

the Kargil war as an exemplar of how wars will be fought and whether nuclear weapons will remain in the background.

A final outcome of the 1999 war was the adoption by India of a nuclear doctrine that was introduced in draft form on August 17, 1999 and presumably was intended to inform Pakistan about how far it could and could not go in a conflict before it would face nuclear consequences.¹⁵ It specified that India would develop a triad of delivery platforms. It stated that “credible, minimum nuclear deterrence” is a “dynamic concept related to the strategic environment, technological imperatives, and the needs of national security.” Thus it would have to change according to these factors, which would dictate the size, components, deployment and employment of India’s nuclear stockpile. The document specified command and control arrangements, research and development plans, and other elements of the overall decision structure. The key message it contained was that,

...any threat of use of nuclear weapons against India shall invoke measures to counter the threat and any nuclear attack on India and its forces shall result in punitive retaliation with nuclear weapons to inflict damage unacceptable to the aggressor.¹⁶

The message seemed to be that if Pakistan again threatened to use “any weapon” in its arsenal, as it had during Kargil, India would respond likewise by readying its own weapons. If Pakistan used nuclear weapons, India appeared to be threatening the rough equivalent of the 1950s U.S. threat of massive retaliation.

¹⁵ “Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine,” Section 2.3 (a), August 17, 1999, available at <http://meadev.nic.in/govt/indnuclid.htm> and www.pib.nic.in

¹⁶ Ibid

Pakistan responded to India's nuclear doctrine with a challenge of its own. Three former senior foreign policy officials wrote a broad response to the new doctrine. Agha Shahi, Abdul Sattar, and Zulfikar Ali Khan argued that India's new doctrine would threaten Pakistan's ability to respond.¹⁷ In their view, India's declaration of a no-first use posture, if also adopted by Pakistan, would allow India to conduct a conventional first strike. Pakistan would therefore adopt a posture of flexible response and would use nuclear weapons first if necessary. The three authors specifically cited any attempt by India to occupy large parts of Pakistan's territory or to seize its communications junctions as causes for Pakistan to use nuclear weapons. In an interesting assertion, they claimed that nuclear deterrence had already worked in the mid-1980s when India decided against striking preventively at Pakistan's nuclear installations, in 1987 when an Indian military exercise threatened to boil over into cross-border war, and 1990 when Kashmir erupted in demonstrations following the kidnapping of the Kashmir Home Minister's daughter. This came as news to India and many analysts who did not see nuclear deterrence at work in any of these confrontations. The fact, though, that Pakistan considered nuclear deterrence to have prevented military action in those three instances underscored the lack of common understanding between the two sides about the role nuclear weapons played. It also begged the question why the planners of Kargil had paid so little heed to the role of nuclear weapons in their deliberations, while at the same time suggesting that Pakistan might take a number of provocative actions in the belief that nuclear deterrence prevented large scale war.

¹⁷ Agha Shahi, Abdul Sattar and Zulfikar Ali Khan, "Securing Nuclear Peace" *The News* (Islamabad), October 5, 1999.

Connected with India's nuclear doctrine was the recognition that India was not well positioned conventionally to respond to the kind of war they had faced at Kargil. At an annual conference in New Delhi in January 2000, hosted by the prestigious Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, General Malik presented the case.¹⁸ He argued that India needed to find space between tolerating low intensity war of the kind Pakistan had fomented at Kargil and escalating to nuclear use. The Defense Minister, George Fernandes, seconded this view but no changes were made in force disposition or conventional planning. It would take another round of confrontation for India to address this challenge to its security.

The Twin Peaks Crisis

What happened?

In a certain sense, the 2001-2002 confrontation between India and Pakistan dates to September 11 when Al Qaida attacked the United States and Washington responded by sending troops into Afghanistan. For the first time since World War II, U.S. troops were on the ground fighting a war in South Asia. The cause of U.S. engagement was a global war on terror that Pakistan—after momentary reflection—had joined. Thus engaged, it would prove impossible for the U.S. to avoid getting caught in the middle of the Indo-Pakistani confrontation.

The actual Indo-Pakistani crisis began on December 13, 2001 when terrorists attacked India's parliament building, killing a number of guards but failing in their larger ambition of capturing and assassinating senior members of the Indian government.

¹⁸ Malik, pp. 365-366.

After examining the gunmen's dead bodies, India determined that the terrorists had been supported and probably directed in their actions from Pakistan. India responded by deploying upwards of half a million men along the Line of Control and the international border that divides the two nations. Almost immediately, however, India encountered enormous pressure from U.S. President George W. Bush and U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair not to carry out its threat to retaliate for the attack on Parliament.

Needing Pakistan's support for its operations inside Afghanistan, the U.S. was anxious to avoid a war in South Asia that would draw Pakistan's troops away from the Western border.¹⁹ Washington placed numerous calls to New Delhi, urging Prime Minister Vajpayee to refrain from an attack. The U.S. argued that Pakistan would respond to U.S. pressure to stop infiltration across the Line of Control, so New Delhi should be patient. After a forceful personal intervention by Tony Blair and others, on January 12 Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf went on nationwide television to denounce terrorism and call for a jihad against social ills.²⁰

The speech closed a window of opportunity for India's decision-makers. If they had a quick strike capability, it might have been used to counter Pakistan's apparent support for the terrorist attack against the Lok Sabha. Instead, India was left to apply pressure as best it could under the strictures of its operating doctrine at the time. Called the Sundarji Doctrine for its author, General K. S. Sundarji, it deployed defensive, or "holding" divisions, near the border, with heavy strike corps kept in reserve for attack

¹⁹ Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *U.S. Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis* (Washington: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2006) and Alex Stolar, *To the Brink: Indian Decision-making and the 2001-2002 Standoff* (Washington: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2008)

²⁰ The text of President Musharraf's speech is available at <http://www.pakistantv.tv/millat/president/1020200475758AMword%20file.pdf>

across the international border and deep into Pakistan. Getting this large force into position was a lumbering and time-consuming process, ill suited for a rapid response to a terrorist provocation. India was thus constrained from launching an attack against Pakistan in response to the attack on the Lok Sabha not only diplomatically and politically but by the unwieldy nature of the buildup as well.

Despite India's conventional build-up, it appeared to Pakistan's leaders that nothing would happen because India was primarily focused on influencing the U.S. and the U.K. In their view, the movement of forces was a substitute rather than a preparation for action. Even when terrorists attacked the Indian military camp at Kaluchak in May 2002 and ruthlessly murdered family members of the soldiers deployed along the Line of Control, India still held back. India's main demand throughout the confrontation was that cross-Line of Control infiltration must stop, which prompted a steady flow of diplomatic visits by high-level officials to Islamabad and New Delhi. This culminated in June, when U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage visited South Asia, stopping first in Islamabad and then in New Delhi. When he arrived in India, he declared that Pakistani President Musharraf had agreed to end such infiltration "permanently." By summer's end, India declared that its objectives had been met and the troops were returned to their barracks. The crisis had passed without any shots fired, but again with conflicting interpretations of the result.

Nuclear weapons were never at the forefront of the confrontation but were visible in the background. In January, just as the two sides were close to completing their deployments, Khalid Kidwai, the head of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division, which was in charge of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, granted an interview to two visiting Italian

scholars. In his interview with Paulo Cotta-Ramusino and Maurizio Martellini, he sketched out four red lines that could prompt Pakistan to use nuclear weapons. They broadly repeated the two red lines Shahi, Sattar and Khan had identified but added two more. Kidwai said that in addition to the territorial and communications (“economic strangling”) red lines, if India were to destroy a large part of Pakistan’s land or air forces or destabilize Pakistan politically, Pakistan would be prepared to use its nuclear weapons.²¹

Then, following the Kaluchak incident, the nuclear threat became more palpable. On May 30th, U.S. Ambassador Robert Blackwill ordered nonessential embassy staff and all dependents to leave the country. This was followed by an official State Department travel warning, implying that the possibility of war and of Pakistani use of a nuclear weapon against New Delhi was high enough that the U.S. could not justify endangering the lives of the embassy workers.²² The United Kingdom issued a similar warning to its nationals in the area and other Western governments duplicated the State Department announcement. India was outraged and privately accused the U.S. of capitulating to terrorism.

Despite its annoyance, the nuclear alarm may have had an impact. Although New Delhi had issued its draft doctrine following the Kargil conflict, a possible gap was made evident by the Twin Peaks confrontation. If India had invaded, as it was threatening to do, Indian troops might have found themselves inside Pakistan or

²¹ Paulo Cotta-Ramusino and Maurizio Martellini, “Nuclear safety, nuclear stability and nuclear strategy in Pakistan: A concise report of a visit by Landau Network - Centro Volta,” *Pugwash Online*, January 14, 2002, available at <http://www.pugwash.org/september11/pakistan-nuclear.htm>

²² See Krepon and Nayak, pp. 34-35.

Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. It was not clear from the doctrine, however, how India would respond to Pakistani nuclear use under those circumstances. This omission was addressed in January 2003 when the Prime Minister's Office issued a press release specifying that nuclear weapons would be used "in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere" and in response to a biological or chemical attack on India forces.²³

Lessons and outcomes

From Pakistan's perspective, India had been bluffing through the whole process. Musharraf rejected India's assertions that Pakistan was connected to the terrorist attacks, and saw India's efforts as a failed attempt to drive a wedge between Pakistan and the U.S. Pakistan had called India's bluff and demonstrated that any talk about fighting a limited war was hollow. In fact, as Islamabad saw things, war in 2002 did not need to be deterred because India never intended to fight a war. In the end, Pakistan stood firm and India backed down.

From India's perspective, the U.S. "discovery" of the terrorist threat on September 11 made Washington a Johnny-come-lately to the issue. Washington compounded the problem for India by aligning itself in the new global war on terror with Pakistan, who in India's view was the chief sponsor of terrorism. This misalliance handcuffed India after the Lok Sabha attack. India, the aggrieved party on December 13 and a victim of Pakistan's use of low-intensity conflict in Kashmir for a decade, was pressured by the U.S. to do nothing. The window of opportunity after December 13 closed on January 12, and Musharraf's speech was then used as a club to beat India.

²³ Press release from the Prime Minister's Office, available at www.pib.nic.in.

Because the U.S. wanted to fight its own war against terrorism in Afghanistan and needed Pakistan's help to do it, India was pressured to hold back. This may have made a virtue of necessity, since India at the time was saddled with the Sundarji Doctrine, but it was nonetheless galling to have to forgo a military response. Indeed, practicing restraint after the Kaluchak incident was very damaging to Indian civil-military relations, as the army was anxious to respond but was prevented from doing so for political reasons.

It was then even more disturbing to India to find the U.S. apparently knuckling under to veiled Pakistani nuclear threats. The decision to withdraw civilians from New Delhi demonstrated a craven lack of resolve that rewarded the perpetrator of terrorism while punishing its victim. Nuclear weapons seemed to have had a greater effect on the U.S. than on India itself. In sum, however, the 2002 confrontation, coupled with the problems identified in the Kargil conflict, revealed strategic weaknesses in India's defense policy and constraints on India's freedom of action that called for change and new thinking.

Just as 1999 caused new thinking in India about a nuclear doctrine, the 2002 confrontation made India take a new approach to conventional war. India had kept its response at Kargil limited geographically, but at great expense in terms of manpower. Its inability to mount a quick response to the terrorist attack in 2001 resulted in a costly and extensive build-up of conventional forces and also became a national embarrassment for the India army. Not only had what India declared to be Pakistani-supported terrorists attacked the symbol of India's democracy, they had murdered the dependents of soldiers preparing for a war that was never fought. Army post-mortems

on the 2001-2002 confrontation reached a number of conclusions. The Sundarji doctrine may have been appropriate in an earlier time for different needs, but it resulted in a slow motion and lumbering deployment of forces. It would have to change. In addition, Army analysts realized that even if the Sundarji doctrine were successfully implemented, it could very well cross key Pakistani red lines for the use of nuclear weapons. A new doctrine would have to account for Pakistani insecurities and avoid destabilizing intra-war deterrence. Finally, the new doctrine would also have to account for the intervention of third parties. A window for retaliation had been open from December 13 to January 12. The U.S. and the U.K. exploited this time to prevail on India's politicians and allow President Musharraf to evade the consequences of the terrorist actions. A new doctrine would have to enable India to strike on a very short time scale.²⁴

The new doctrine was dubbed Cold Start and was unveiled in April 2004. The idea was to restructure the Indian army so that it could address the defects made evident in 2002. With Cold Start, the ponderous holding divisions would be divided into eight or ten smaller integrated battle groups, each of which would be able to conduct shallow-penetration attacks across the border with Pakistan with relatively little lead-time required. This new doctrine would position the Indian army to conduct limited war against Pakistan, thus allowing New Delhi to retaliate against Pakistan swiftly before Islamabad could prepare militarily and before outsiders could intervene diplomatically, while also reducing the risk of escalation once the armies were engaged.

²⁴ Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter 2007-08), pp. 158-190.

The contours of the Cold Start doctrine beg a number of questions regarding India and Pakistan's approach to limiting war. One of the more extreme interpretations of the objectives of the Cold Start doctrine would be the destruction of the Pakistan army.²⁵ This maximal position is almost certainly not endorsed by India's civilian leadership, or by its entire military. Once introduced as a possible objective, however, Pakistan must treat it as at least a possible contingency that could become reality during conflict. Even if India explicitly rejected this objective, it brings up the problem of finding limits that both sides can accept and communicate. Suba Chandran makes the point that it is "essential to communicate to the other side the extent to which one would go in a limited war situation."²⁶

In addition to communicating that the political objectives are limited, geographical limits will have to be identified. Borrowing from Thomas Schelling's discussion of tacit bargaining in a nuclear environment, India needs to ask whether new conspicuous stopping places can be mutually agreed once the LOC and international border are breached.²⁷ This may be difficult, as V. R. Raghavan argues "...there is no mutually agreed set of limitations between India and Pakistan on a future war—as there were none in past wars—neither side has control over the other's salencies."²⁸ Pakistan has said that it would respond to a conventional Indian attack by escalating at the point of

²⁵ See Subhash Kapila, "India's New 'Cold Start' War Doctrine Strategically Reviewed," South Asia Analysis Group Paper no. 991, May 4, 2004.

²⁶ Suba Chandran, "Limited War with Pakistan: Will it Secure India's Interest?" ACDIS Occasional Paper, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, August 2004 available at www.acdis.uiuc.edu/Research/OPs/Chandran/ChandranOP.pdf.

²⁷ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 67-74.

²⁸ V. R. Raghavan, "Limited War and Nuclear Escalation in South Asia," *The Nonproliferation Review*, Fall/Winter 2001, p. 15.

attack and expanding the war elsewhere at a point of its own choosing.²⁹ How will India and Pakistan agree on a new geographical limit once Cold Start has been implemented and either the LOC or the international border—obvious current limits, whose symbolism was reinforced in Kargil—have been breached? As noted earlier, one of Pakistan’s red lines for nuclear use is territorial. If India attacks Pakistan and conquers a large part of its territory, Pakistan may respond with nuclear weapons. Implementing Cold Start without breaching this space threshold may be complicated once the bullets start flying. In addition to reaching tacit understandings about new geographical limits, they must also identify new limits on means during the induction of Cold Start. India breached the “no aircraft” understanding during Kargil. Communicating new limits while Cold Start is being implemented and Pakistan is escalating in response will be extremely difficult.

One of the obvious dangers as India plans how to conduct limited war is the prospect that Pakistan will be pushed to escalate. One of the goals of Cold Start is to avoid such an outcome, but it is difficult to predict outcomes once troops are engaged on the battlefield and new opportunities arise. The Shahi, Sattar and Khan response to India’s nuclear doctrine said that Pakistan would not use nuclear weapons tactically and Pakistan has since indicated that it would use nuclear weapons in a relatively widespread attack. Given that any such use would compel India to respond in kind, leaving both countries devastated and rendering governance in Pakistan problematic at best, it is possible that Pakistan would reconsider how best to exploit its nuclear weapons during a war. Though highly fraught, the limited use of nuclear weapons might

²⁹ Personal interviews with Pakistan Army officials in Islamabad, June 2003.

appear to be a better option for Pakistan if the alternative to non-use was conventional defeat and the likely destruction of the state. The next section will discuss the possible consequences of this new thinking and how conflict may again erupt in South Asia.

Thinking about future crises

Status of the Composite Dialogue

Following the 2001-2002 confrontation, Pakistan and India reopened their political dialogue. At the annual meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in January 2004, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani President Musharraf announced that they had agreed to resume the peace process that had been sidelined for several years. On February 18, 2004 they made the formal announcement that a bilateral 'composite dialogue' would begin in the May-June 2004 time frame.³⁰ It is certainly too early to conclude that diplomacy has replaced conflict—the dialogue was suspended for several months in July 2006 after terrorists detonated as many as seven bombs on Mumbai trains—but diplomatic channels remain open, with the dialogue separated into eight different baskets. The baskets include Kashmir, peace and security, Siachen, Sir Creek, the Wullur Barrage, terrorism and drug trafficking, trade and the promotion of friendly relations. These ministerial-level discussions have so far achieved varying degrees of success.

On Kashmir, a number of confidence building measures (CBMs) have been achieved and discussed including the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and Punch bus lines, crossing points on the LOC, and intra-Kashmir trade and truck services. The peace and

³⁰ "Historic' Kashmir talks agreed," BBC Online, 6 January 2004, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3371107.stm

security dialogue, held at the Foreign Secretary level (as are the Kashmir meetings), produced agreements on the pre-notification of missile flight tests and nuclear accidents, a foreign secretary hotline and upgraded DGMO hotline, and reaffirmation of the ceasefire. It has not, however, been able to broach the issue of strategic restraint, leaving both sides unfettered as they increase their nuclear weapons stockpiles and expand strategic capabilities. The Siachen glacier dispute and Wullur Barrage remain contentious, but a joint survey of Sir Creek was agreed and may form the basis of a final settlement. Though no tangible results can be cited on drugs and terrorist issues, the two sides remain engaged and appear not merely to be casting aspersions on the other. Whether that spirit survives the deadly bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul on July 7, 2008 remains to be seen. Finally, the trade and friendly relations baskets remain subject to the political atmosphere and perhaps are notable for still proceeding as much as anything else. Pakistan remains concerned that India's tariff structure, especially regarding textiles, is too restrictive.

Though India and Pakistan are engaged in this structured dialogue, it is fragile and unlikely to weather any strong jolts. The Mumbai train bombings derailed it for a short period of time, but India came back to the table. Repeated attacks, however, could well force India's hand. The July 2008 terrorist attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul, now determined by India to have been supported by Pakistan's ISID, is yet another example of the stress that is continually placed on the relationship and the efforts at diplomacy. So far, the desultory progress on the diplomatic front provides relatively little material gain to offset any sense on India's part of being played for a

patsy. Conflict therefore cannot be ruled out and a number of possible scenarios can be envisioned.

Conflict scenarios: triggering events

A number of possible triggers for conflict are evident. The first and most obvious is another terrorist attack on an important economic or political symbol. The attack on India's embassy in Kabul was not sufficiently damaging to cause a crisis much less conflict. This can be a tricky issue for India. New Delhi wants to avoid intemperate and inaccurate remarks that would inflame relations with Pakistan at a time when India would like to see Pakistan achieve political stability. It is not in India's interest to get in the way of Pakistan reaching a political accord that would stabilize its current government in Islamabad. At the same time, the experiences in 1999 and 2001-2, as detailed above, make India want to avoid again appearing to be a passive and ineffectual victim of terror. Another attack on an important symbol or with significant loss of life may force New Delhi to act, however. It does not appear to be in Pakistan's interest to support any terrorist activity, but with Pakistan's military no longer running the country, there could be an increase in unauthorized activity by the army or the ISID. This might be justified internally as a means to assert the military's independence, to galvanize opposition to India's involvement in Afghanistan or to force India's attention back to Kashmir. Furthermore, the terrorist organizations within Pakistan may well draw their own conclusions about what needs to be done regarding India. A violent action even two steps removed from ISID may be enough to compel India to go after the source rather than the immediate perpetrator of a terror attack.

A second possible triggering event would be the assassination of a key political leader. Political violence is regrettably common in South Asia, Benazir Bhutto's death only being the latest in a string that includes Rajiv Gandhi, Zia ul-Haq, Indira Gandhi, Liaquat Ali Khan, and Mohandas Gandhi. As with the Kabul bombing, there would have to be quite reliable evidence that Pakistan was somehow behind the killing for it to prompt an Indian response. Even in the absence of solid evidence, however, suspicions could lead to escalating tension which itself could be a sufficient trigger. Another aspect of this factor would be the assassination of a lesser political leader such as one of the Kashmir politicians working with New Delhi, such as Omar Abdullah or Mehbooba Mufti. The likely resulting demonstrations and violence within Kashmir would inevitably increase tensions between India and Pakistan.

War could be instigated either in connection with or separate from an assassination of a prominent Kashmiri leader. Should militancy return to Kashmir, fanned by Pakistan or a spontaneous response to some real or imagined affront, it could take a more venomous form than previously seen. The demonstrations that followed the August decision by India to cede ground in Kashmir to Hindu penitents visiting the Amarnath shrine did not foment a new round of Indo-Pakistani conflict, but did make evident how tenuous relations are over this region. If Taliban or Al Qaida elements turned their energies to supporting Muslims in Kashmir, the outcome could be savage. Suicide bombing is now part of Pakistan's landscape—a few well-planned suicide bombings in Kashmir could easily trigger a dramatic Indian response across the LOC.

Another possible trigger for war may be India's Cold Start doctrine, whether it has been fully implemented or not. Pakistan is not inclined under current conditions to pre-empt as it has done in the past. In December 1971, when war was effectively already underway in East Pakistan in the form of Indian support for the Mukti Bahini guerrilla forces, Pakistan conducted pre-emptive air attacks against India's Western positions in the hope that India would engage in the West, where Pakistan held slightly better positions, and defer attacking in the East, where Pakistani forces were isolated and vulnerable. Pakistan did not pre-empt in 1987, however, even though India's Brass Tacks exercise began to look like preparation for an Indian attack against Pakistan. Pakistan still sees itself as potentially vulnerable to an Indian armored attack, however, and although the Cold Start doctrine is intended to allay Pakistani fears that any of its red lines would be crossed in a conflict, it could well have the opposite effect. If Pakistan fears that it cannot rebuff Indian forces at all the points of attack envisioned in Cold Start, it may decide to take the initiative in a future crisis and launch an attack at a point of its own choosing rather than allow India to dictate the terms of a conflict.

War could also result indirectly from a coup by radical elements within Pakistan's army against the current moderate leadership. Again, this is an unlikely eventuality, but a new civilian government may well target the army and wish to punish it for the nine years of army rule from 1999 to 2008. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has rhetorically asked why only civilians should be hanged, a clear reference to the military decision in 1979 to hang Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and at the same time a threat to Pervez Musharraf for his role in the October 1999 coup and subsequent leadership of Pakistan. As Prime Minister from 1996 to 1999, Nawaz sought to neuter the various opposing

centers of power in Pakistan—opposition parties, the Supreme Court, the National Assembly, the media, the Army—and if re-elected may try to do so again. If Chief of Army Staff Kiyani were to accept civilian intervention as former COAS Jehangir Karamet did in Sharif's earlier term, more radical elements could attempt a putsch. The consequence would be enormous turbulence within Pakistan, possibly including the imposition of martial law, a step Musharraf was loath to take. Such a sequence of events could set the stage for rising tensions and accusations hurled at India, potentially setting the stage for a new round of conflict.

An unpredictable but possible trigger for conflict could be a nuclear accident. This would likely occur in connection with one or more other factors that had escalated tension, but if a nuclear accident occurred even during a minor confrontation, both sides might suddenly face the reciprocal fear of surprise attack. Even if it were during routine activities—an electrical fire at a nuclear weapon manufacturing site or a nuclear release at a reprocessing plant—the side responsible for the accident might try to cover it up. If that were successful there might be no problem, but the probability of success would be low. Then the discovery of the cover-up would inject fear into the other side—if it was only an accident, why not admit it? If instead of trying to cover up the accident, full disclosure was made, the other side might ask for more information to ensure that no harm was intended. It would be natural in such circumstances, however, to resist offering too much information, yet failure to be completely forthcoming would only exacerbate the situation, creating further tension.

If the accident occurred during the transfer of a weapon or a nuclear component to a safer storage area or to a site for mating with other components, tensions would

escalate dramatically. Why was the transfer being made? How many other weapons were being transferred? How many were already transferred and ready for launch? Had intelligence that was previously considered solid now proven to be erroneous? Even if the exaggerated fears captured by such questions were *not* running through the minds of the decision makers in the opposite capital, it might well be assumed by the state that was moving the weapons that such thoughts *were* influencing the other side. And if they were, would it not make sense for the other side to ready its own weapons with as much haste as possible? How and whether such a cycle could be broken would depend on a host of psychological and political factors, all of which could be highly stressed by the unraveling events. India and Pakistan have addressed this issue by reaching an agreement regarding nuclear accidents (discussed subsequently in the CBM section). Full disclosure that an accident occurred does not necessarily solve the fears raised here, however, leaving this issue a potential source of tension and misunderstanding.

A last illustrative example of a possible trigger for war between India and Pakistan would be a substantial ethnic uprising in Pakistan. Pakistanis believe that India has in the past aided and abetted Baluchi national aspirations. It is possible that a more coordinated uprising could take place in Baluchistan, perhaps with support from India, anti-Punjabi Taliban elements, or Al Qaida terrorists. This would be unlikely without other contributing factors being present, such as an aggressive Islamabad government intervention in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). Support for a Baluchi uprising might be used as a distraction to take forces away from the FATA or elsewhere. Pakistan might respond against India by another Kargil-like incursion or

open support for terrorists in Kashmir. This congruence of events could force India's hand and provoke cross-LOC or IB maneuvers to confront Pakistan.

Conflict scenarios: what would war look like?

War in the future might look much like war in the past. Pakistani support for proxy forces, primarily irregular militants operating outside government control, would most likely originate from Kashmir but conceivably could have a base in Bangladesh or Nepal. Pakistan's goal in supporting proxy forces would be to tie up the Indian Army as much as possible, bleeding and hectoring its forces to convince India that a diplomatic resolution to Kashmir on Pakistan's terms must be found. A parallel to this kind of conflict would be Indian support for the same kind of activity in Baluchistan without the same longer-term objective of resolving Kashmir, but rather to make clear that two can play the same game with damaging consequences for Pakistan. India's goal would be to force Pakistan to deploy its forces away from other fronts, thus reducing Pakistan's ability to respond elsewhere on the IB or LOC.

These proxy efforts have been conducted in the past but without either side taking the war to the source of support across the border. Although Cold Start was developed in part to provide India with an ability to intervene in response to terrorist activities inside India, there are options short of Cold Start that could produce a different kind of war. Rather than invoking Cold Start as presently conceived, India could respond to Pakistani support of proxy war inside Kashmir by conducting a "punish and leave" strategy.³¹ This might be an incursion by special Indian forces for no more than a 3-4 day period to allow the destruction of key training camps and supply routes. An

³¹ The term is from Michael Krepon.

alternative might be a “punish and stay” operation, more like the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 or the US invasion of Cambodia in 1971. In both cases the invasion force would be sent in for a fixed but significantly longer period of time with the intent of disrupting the enemy’s ability to continue resupply or staging. Both run the risk that Pakistan would expand the war elsewhere along the contested boundary. That, however, would force India to fight entirely defensively at points of Pakistan-initiated conflict, which could consequently reduce the dangers associated with Cold Start.

Conflict would look quite different if India invoked its Cold Start doctrine in response to a Pakistani provocation. Here there could be at least three broad variants: success on all the seven or eight fronts that Cold Start envisions; success on a few fronts and failure on the others; or failure on all the fronts. The latter outcome would create fewest problems from the point of view of escalation and nuclear use, but is also the least likely given India’s superiority in conventional terms.³² The second possibility might be a more likely outcome. Pakistan might choose to concentrate its forces at key defensive points to overcome India’s thinned out forces that are called for by the Cold Start doctrine. Confronting Indian forces at a few critical choke points or in defense of vulnerable cities would be more important than stopping every one of the seven or eight points of attack. The result might be more like a stalemate, assuming that the successful Indian offensives stopped after achieving the planned shallow penetration. Battlefield initiative might carry some commanders away, however, especially if they encountered light and only harassing resistance. Whether Pakistan would interpret a deeper penetration by a lighter force as crossing the territorial red line would depend on

³² The Military Balance 2008 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008), pp. 341-345 and 349-351.

the dynamic circumstances at play elsewhere along the border. The most dangerous scenario would probably be the first, where Indian forces succeeded in surprising Pakistan and were able to penetrate along seven or eight fronts and then dig in and hold their positions. Seeing itself defeated along a broad swathe of territory would force Pakistan into making critical decisions about nuclear escalation.

Such a decision would also be forced on Pakistan's leaders in the event of an outright cross-border war such as what India was threatening in 2002. Whether the new Cold Start doctrine will be flexible enough to allow a massed invasion consistent with the earlier Sundarji Doctrine is not clear. But a powerful deep thrust into Pakistani territory at one or more points would likely overwhelm Pakistan and force it to counterattack elsewhere in a flanking maneuver. The dynamics of that kind of conflict would again be difficult to predict but it is more likely that India would be able to prevail on the ground than Pakistan. In such a case, Pakistan would have to decide whether escalation to nuclear weapons would make any sense. How those weapons may be employed will be discussed in the next section.

Limited nuclear use options

As noted earlier, India has declared that it will not use nuclear weapons first, but reserves the right to retaliate against nuclear, chemical or biological use against Indian forces anywhere. In the hypothesized scenarios depicted above, Pakistan is in most cases the state on the losing end of the conventional war and in contrast espouses a first use doctrine. It is therefore more likely that Pakistan would need to consider more carefully than India what nuclear steps it might have to take in certain dire circumstances. What might limited nuclear use look like?

Decisions would be made under duress, with troops backpedaling on the battlefield, and the international community using a combination of threats and rewards to induce Pakistan to show restraint. Under such circumstances, Pakistan almost certainly would first issue a threat to resort to nuclear weapons. It is popularly believed that Pakistan used public comments by Dr. A. Q. Khan in 1984 and 1987 to threaten India with nuclear weapons. His February 1984 interview with *Nawa-i-waqt* came when India appeared to be considering a preventive strike against the Kahuta uranium enrichment facility, and his January 30, 1987 interview with the Indian journalist Kuldeep Nayar occurred just at the close of the tense Brass Tacks face off.³³ These incidents may have been what Shahi, Sattar and Khan were thinking of in saying that nuclear deterrence had worked in those years. The comments by Shamshad Ahmed during Kargil may have been intended to convey a similar warning, but all the pronouncements were somewhat veiled.

Under the conditions posited here, any threat from Islamabad would need to be far more official for it to have immediate effect. It would certainly have to be time-bound and specific—“we will do X in place Y if Indian troops have not silenced their guns by time Z.” To reinforce its seriousness, Pakistan would need to proceed with visible readiness steps, for example moving truck convoys (both dummy and real) to potential assembly points, broadcasting the deployment of missiles armed with conventional and nuclear weapons at undisclosed launch pads (possibly communicating to third parties the coordinates of some of them to reinforce the point), and so on. Pakistan might also

³³ Interview with Dr. A. Q. Khan, *Nawa-i-waqt*, Pakistan, February 10, 1984; Kanti Bajpai, P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Stephen Cohen and Sumit Ganguly *Brasstacks and Beyond: Perception and Management of Crisis in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997), pp. 39-40 and 106-107.

want to leave itself options in order to demonstrate resolve without starting a nuclear escalation.

A third step therefore might be to test a weapon to quicken the decision-making pace for India. That would require already having a weapon in place, which is highly unlikely, but could perhaps be done with a week's notice. Moving a weapon into position for such an eventuality would require substantial foresight by Pakistan, but is in the realm of the possible.

A fourth escalatory step—or third if a weapon had not been pre-positioned in a test tunnel—would be to conduct a “test” in the atmosphere, perhaps on a missile fired toward the Arabian sea. Each of these steps would require a time lapse to allow India to see reason and stop its offensive – but at the same time, it may be difficult to stop the action on the battlefield in a timely manner. There could be a real problem of actions and threats overtaking the decision process in New Delhi. In any case, Pakistan would be forced to make a fateful decision whether finally to use one or more weapons against Indian targets. With the armies likely enmeshed and intermixed on the battlefield, dropping a weapon would require care to avoid also killing Pakistani soldiers. This could argue for using a weapon well behind Indian lines, but that could produce only marginal effect on the actual fighting. Pakistan might instead target a military base close to the front.

The next escalatory step would be a fairly large-scale attack. It is possible to imagine steps short of such an attack, as described above, but at some point Pakistan would likely see no reason not to attack with large numbers of weapons on a range of military and industrial—and potentially civilian—targets. There might be an effort made

to avoid Muslims, but at such a dreadful point it would be quite difficult to practice much target discrimination. Any attack would be both destructive and suicidal, since it would shatter any lingering caution on India's side, and a similar attack would almost certainly follow in response. Both sides would be left with unimaginable damage and a long and painful recovery. Depending on the extent of the damage, there could also be widespread but likely temporary (1 to 2 years) global consequences for food production, health, and the environment.³⁴

What comes next?

Current CBMs

India and Pakistan have agreed to a number of confidence building measures (CBMs) over the years whose record of success is, to quote the Stimson Center, a prominent proponent and supporter of CBMs in South Asia, "spotty at best."³⁵ As noted earlier in this paper, they have also made some progress in the Composite Dialogue on additional CBMs. One of the longer lasting and more touted nuclear-related CBMs is the agreement reached between Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi not to attack one another's nuclear facilities. This arose out of the concern in the 1980s that India was planning to conduct an attack against Kahuta. To assuage Pakistani concerns, India proposed that the two sides exchange lists of their nuclear facilities and

³⁴ See Owen Toon et al, "Consequences of Regional-scale Nuclear Conflicts," *Science*, Vol. 315, 2 March 2007, pp. 1224-5.

³⁵ The Stimson Center site provides a review of the concept of confidence building measures as well as a chronology previous Indo-Pakistani efforts; available at <http://www.stimson.org/southasia>

agree never to attack the listed sites. This CBM has held steady for almost two decades.

Another CBM that emerged from a crisis was the April 1991 Agreement on the Advance Notification of Military Exercises, Maneuvers and Troop Movements. Communication channels were available in January 1987 when the Indian Exercise Brass Tacks threatened to explode into war. Reciprocal misinterpretations of the other sides' movements—by Pakistan of the orientation of India's exercise, by India of Pakistan's responsive military positioning—created heightened tension that was resolved by diplomatic discussions.³⁶ To avoid a repeat of that crisis, the two sides agreed on pre-notification mechanisms, which have also so far been useful in maintaining military communications and reducing apprehensions.

As technical capabilities expanded, so too did CBMs. For example, in 1999 the two sides reached an agreement to pre-notify each other of flight-testing of ballistic missiles. With the two sides having developed a fairly large suite of missiles, they have by now conducted an equally large number of tests. Given the close proximity of the countries and short flight times of missiles, this agreement has special value and has been used quite frequently. The existence of a CBM, however, does not guarantee that stability will follow. In April 1998, after Pakistan duly notified India and then conducted a test of its new Ghauri missile, India was sufficiently irritated that it went ahead with the decision to test nuclear weapons.³⁷

Other CBMs are on the books but are not fully implemented. For example, one CBM created a hotline between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs)

³⁶ See Bajpai et al, chapters 2 and 3.

³⁷ Private conversation with former Indian NSA Brajesh Mishra, April 2008.

but off-the-record reports indicate that the respective DGMOs can be reluctant to pick up the phone lest that act be interpreted as a sign of weakness in a time of tension—precisely when the hotline is supposed to come into play. There is a scheduled once-a-week call, but when the need is greatest, this CBM has been underutilized. There has been a hotline between the Prime Ministers as well, going back to 1999. But just as technology creates needs, it can eliminate needs and we may see the day when the two Prime Ministers simply include one another in their “favorite five” on their cell phones.

Another prominent attempt at a CBM was the Lahore Declaration that highlighted Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee’s historic bus trip to Pakistan in February 1999. This declaration sketched out a number of positive cooperative steps regarding nuclear stability, but as India’s Foreign Minister later commented, the bus to Lahore got hijacked to Kargil.³⁸ The Kargil war broke out only a few months later and it was soon evident that Pakistan’s military leaders had been planning the intervention even as the political leaders were breaking bread—or naan as the case may be—together. That said, one of the elements of the Lahore memorandum was implemented eight years later when the Agreement on Reducing the Risk of Accidents Relating to Nuclear Weapons was signed in February 2007. This CBM specifically addressed the contingency hypothesized earlier in this paper, where the other side might misinterpret a nuclear accident and trigger counter moves. A swift and complete explanation of any nuclear accident would certainly serve to dampen fears, but its implementation, if such an accident occurs, will require great transparency. Both sides will need to overcome their fears during a crisis,

³⁸ Jaswant Singh, *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2006), pp. 200-229.

which may prove to be a test not just of this agreement but of their political systems and national will.

A number of links between the two countries are regularly severed during crises, which creates opportunities for the two sides to show that they are improving relations when the severed links are finally re-established. Such measures as foreign secretary meetings, air links, flag meetings between military commands, sports exchanges (esp. of cricket teams), opening consulates, and ministerial-level talks are sometimes hailed as signs of improved relations and the restoration of confidence. That kind of “progress” may do little more, however, than set the stage for a new round of cuts to demonstrate anger when a new crisis begins to boil. In an odd way such links may allow each side to blow off steam and send a message well short of conflict, thereby increasing crisis stability. To count them as CBMs though might cheapen the currency.

Once re-established, however, the content of the senior level meetings can produce new opportunities, if not formal CBMs. The Foreign Secretaries’ met in June 2004 to discuss the sensitive issue of peace and security in Kashmir and in September 2005 they discussed the overall peace process; the respective Commerce secretaries met in August 2004 to discuss difficult trade issues; the Foreign Ministers and Prime Ministers meet regularly at SAARC, the United Nations and elsewhere for discussions. This may seem like cold comfort given the severity of their dispute, but some venue for discussion, if not resolution, is seen by both sides as positive, necessary, and for now, good enough.

Options for U.S. support

Concerns about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal became particularly pronounced following the September 11, 2001 Al Qaida attacks. Although the Al Qaida bases were across the border from Pakistan in Afghanistan, there was still a certain amount of concern about whether Pakistan's nuclear weapons were adequately guarded and contained safety mechanisms. President Musharraf wrote that after 9/11, "Every American official from the president on down who spoke to me or visited Pakistan raised the issue of the safety of our nuclear arsenal."³⁹ Pakistan had only established a robust command and control structure in January 2000 and at first it did not include a separate division for safety and security of the arsenal.⁴⁰ It did assign responsibility for the management and operation of its nuclear program to the Strategic Plans Division, which served as the pivotal secretariat between the Strategic Forces Command in the field and the National Command Authority as the apex decision body. Pakistan and the U.S. were willing to consider areas for improvement and cooperation in this management structure.⁴¹ This is a sensitive area that potentially impinges on the most secret aspect of Pakistan's defense structure, so any expansion of the reported cooperation will be limited and dictated by Pakistan as a sovereign nation.

The same sensitivities apply to India, but it has not faced the same scrutiny as Pakistan since it has not had the same relationship to the Taliban, Al Qaida's ally and erstwhile host. When the issue of safety and security was broached in passing with a senior science and technology advisor to the Prime Minister, the topic was dismissed

³⁹ Musharraf, p. 291.

⁴⁰ Private conversation in Islamabad, Pakistan, January 2000.

⁴¹ David Sanger and William Broad, "U.S. Secretly Aids Pakistan in Guarding Nuclear Arms," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2007, page 1.

quickly with the comment that India has adequately taken care of that problem.⁴² This is suggestive of the difficulty the U.S. may face in engaging India, but if old narratives can be avoided and a common approach considered, there is as much room for U.S.-India cooperation on security, if not yet safety, as there is with Pakistan.

Beyond the narrow management of the nuclear arsenal, the U.S. has vast experience, from mostly successful management of nuclear assets but some from grossly unsuccessful management practice.⁴³ It is therefore in a position to discuss best practices with Pakistan and India. “Best practices” can be interpreted in different ways, of course, but the strategic dialogues between Pakistan and the U.S. and India and the U.S. could include discussions of transportation safety, emergency search operations, personnel reliability standards, alternatives for perimeter security, and so on. Although tricky from a protocol and NPT perspective, bringing the heads of India and Pakistan’s nuclear management directorates to Omaha for meetings and discussions at the U.S. Strategic Command could be extremely instructive. Educational exchanges can also help, whether it is placing Pakistani and Indian officers in U.S. academic institutions or supporting American instructors in the staff colleges to teach a specific course or serve as a resource person for a specified duration. On the U.S. side, bringing Indian and Pakistani military instructors for a fixed term assignment with the National Defense University could be extremely interesting and create bonds that could serve U.S., Indian and Pakistani foreign policy objectives.

⁴² Private conversation in New Delhi, March 2008.

⁴³ The recent transfer of live nuclear warheads on aircraft across the continental United States without the knowledge of anyone in the chain of command being only one egregious example.

India and Pakistan are not ready for any comprehensive cooperative threat reduction efforts. Indeed their view of what “cooperative”, “threat” and “reduction” mean and imply may be at odds with views held in Washington. That need not prevent sharing experiences and approaches, however, in order to improve understanding of the nuclear management challenges and perhaps improvement of the operations in the field. A variety of cooperative efforts are underway regarding technology transfer, including the Megaports and container security initiatives but they fall outside the compass of nuclear management. Weapon and materials accounting and control must be done by Pakistan and India on their own so long as they see their nuclear stockpiles as part of their defense programs. Fissile material stockpile and production remain contentious topics at the Conference on Disarmament but remain high on the agenda for bilateral U.S. dialogues.

Some issues can productively be addressed in Track II fora, and although there have been many over the years with mixed results, the effort is worth making. U.S. government officials are willing to admit that certain issues (e.g., counter terror cooperation, nuclear stability, regional conflict) can be difficult to discuss in official dialogues. A somewhat routine exchange of inter-agency-cleared talking points is necessary but can be productively supplemented with informal discussions among policy cognoscenti who are then able to identify problem areas and opportunities for policy development that might otherwise be missed.

Pakistan’s greatest need at present in the area of conventional military hardware has to do with counter-terrorism equipment and training. Some of the same equipment might usefully be transferred to India. A more interesting area has to do with U.S.

considerations of transferring ballistic missile defense technology to India. Given that Pakistan is worse off in a defense-dominant world, it is unlikely that the transfer of defensive technology equally to both sides would solve Pakistan's concerns, even if the technology were being discussed. It cannot be overemphasized that defense does not serve Pakistan's interest, since as the weaker power, the threat to use nuclear weapons serves a legitimate security interest. In a defense-dominant world, Pakistan would again become vulnerable to Indian conventional superiority. As the stronger power, India continues to be interested in ballistic missile defense and so far the U.S. has been open to the idea. India has already acquired some relevant technology from Israel and is considering Russian technology as well. Pakistan appears already to be responding to the possibility that India will acquire some kind of defensive system and can be expected to expand its offensive capability accordingly. In a sense therefore, providing defensive technology to India fuels the arms race, but the U.S. is not alone in that market.

Technology transfer in the area of nuclear management and operations is problematic. The U.S. so far has interpreted Article I of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in restrictive terms. The entire U.S.-India civil nuclear deal also brings up complicated issues of what is allowable, who are the legitimate end-users of the material, what restrictions must be enforced on internal transfer, and so on.

Conclusion

The 1999 and 2001-2 confrontations could have been worse without the intervention of the U.S. That said, neither India nor Pakistan sees the U.S. involvement

as an unadulterated good. Many in the Pakistan Army feel politicians who were too quick to succumb to U.S. pressure stabbed them in the back. Meanwhile, many in India feel that the U.S. fear of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and compulsion about Al Qaida blinded it to the perfidious Pakistan regime and therefore unduly pressured India not to act in its own best interest. Thus another round of crisis or war between India and Pakistan will confront some of this lingering resentment. On balance however, the U.S. will be engaged and has constructed relations with both countries that at least until recently were as positive with both countries at the same time as anyone can recall. With a new civilian regime in power in Islamabad and elections due by early 2009 in New Delhi, U.S. influence cannot be assumed. The U.S. may be hard pressed to sustain the positive diplomatic atmospherics of the past eight years, but must bend every effort to do so in order to preserve some ability to offer its own good offices in a future confrontation. This paper has sketched out some dire scenarios for conflict in the future. Resolving the dispute will fall to India and Pakistan themselves, but they may see value in turning to the U.S. Sound diplomacy and technical engagement can help make it politically tolerable within these two countries for the U.S. to play that role, if and when the time comes.

