

Significant nuclear events

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Nuclear developments in South Asia have been a persistent embarrassment for international regimes and treaties curbing nuclear weapons proliferation, though it has never been the only cause for their low-achievement threshold. On the other hand were South Asia to work out some nuclear checks and balances for itself, by some strange stroke of fate, it would have to be a domestic effort. Such a venture came to a close in Islamabad last week. The Agni-II test, a day after the Indian team departed for New Delhi, is merely an ugly punctuation mark.

The millennium came to a close with a couple of significant nuclear events. The New Agenda Coalition (working towards non-proliferation on a non-discriminatory basis); April 2000 ratification of Start II by Russian Duma; and the emergence of a Final Document at the May 2000 NPT Review Conference could be categorised as major moves for non-proliferation. The major 'proliferation' events were: US Senate rejection of the CTBT; India-Pakistan May 1998 tests; missile tests in N Korea; US national missile defence preparation; missile tests in Iran. With a mixed bag of events, it is difficult to buy the non-proliferationist argument that the world is going in one direction, and South Asia in another. Were the argument to be granted, it might merely expose the flimsy fabric on which the regimes seem to be seated.

The Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty which has had the greatest distance from South Asian nuclear proliferation events, has remained something Pakistan "would sign the day India does" — till May 1998 explosions when its very existence became a kind of an anomaly. However, a Middle-Eastern school of thought that finds its hypocrisy so overwhelmingly high (in case of Israel which too is officially listed as possessing nuclear weapons, without a proclaimed test) that the last two review conferences had more problems from the Israeli nuclear

weapons programme than the South Asian ones (South Asian representation being absent). Then there is Article VI ("to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.") apparently ignored by the nuclear-haves, which riles not only the review conference participants, but also India and Pakistan.

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ning away from, not only for political reasons but also for the simple reason that they want the option for more tests still open. The fear of being roped into this treaty could possibly trigger another round of tests in India with Pakistan "following suit". A large lobby in India sees more tests necessary, including former Indian Atomic Energy Chairman. US reports predict more tests from India. However, the major blow to the treaty was delivered by the United States whose Senate refused to ratify the treaty in October 1999.

The FMCT prospects, if anything, are an impetus for faster fissile material for India and Pakistan before they succumb to such a treaty. The deadlock at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva is not merely because India and Pakistan cannot agree upon what to do about the "stockpiles" that have already been accumulated (Pakistan does not want to "be frozen in a state of perpetual disparity"). The Chinese insistence that these negotiations coincide with negotiations limiting "an arms race in outer-space" (pertaining to US national missile defence ambitions) has been the primary factor blocking the negotiations. Besides, fundamental issues such as

definition of "fissile" material and a viable verification system remain open ended.

In proceeding with its nuclear agenda, some South Asians find solace in the probability that Bush will take the heat off CTBT and proceed towards NMD. Thus, the Republicans in the US will be ushering in a new era of proliferation.

First, the democratic record regarding non-proliferation has been no better. Clinton's Presidential Directive making nuclear arms corner-

came to the forefront during the Clinton visit last year, what is worth noting now is the size and clout of the Indian-American community — the richest community in the US. The Indian caucus has about 115 members in the House of Representatives, which means about 25% Representatives. Which gets the US-India dealings more on Indian terms keeping non-proliferation talks at bay. The second setback would be the US quest for NMD. If Bush goes ahead with NMD deployment, the negative impact via China goes all the way down to Pakistan via India.

These two factors may be more significant than Bush's policy on CTBT ("in the hard work of halting proliferation, the CTBT is not the answer, it is not enforceable, it offers only words and false hopes"). CTBT was not going to be signed by India or Pakistan "under pressure". In fact, pressure came and went after 1998 tests and the CTBT still remains unsigned by India and Pakistan. In fact, if the US does march towards the NMD, it might want to play around with Senate ratification of CTBT again to appease the non-proliferation lobby.

However, this remains a region beyond the control of global non-proliferation efforts, susceptible to nuclear accidents more than a deliberate nuclear war. An ongoing exercise in the form of an Indo-Pak nuclear dialogue attempting to define the dangers provides hope that some substantive input to the governments is forthcoming.

With Bush coming in, not only would the heat be taken off non-proliferation efforts, an impetus for further proliferation may be provided via NMD and the Chinese response. Any efforts to preserve doctrine from getting "harder" or keeping nuclear restraint from going to the winds will have to be indigenous. Indo-Pakistan talks on nuclear risk reduction now need to focus on some technical aspects in order to arrive at prescriptive measures to be put forth to their governments.

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stone of US national security for an "indefinite period"; his National Security Strategy for 21st Century making nuclear weapons a hedge against "uncertain future", guarantee for allies, disincentive for those acquiring nuclear weapons; Pentagon "Doctrine for Joint Theatre Operation" for potential use of nuclear weapons against non-state actors; and finally, the US right to use nuclear weapons against a chemical or biological weapon attack — all have a "Republican" orientation. In fact, let us not forget that it was the Republicans who went ahead with START I, START II, the Chemical Weapons Convention and unearthed the Iraqi deviation from NPT.

The change in US perspective on South Asia is to be looked at more carefully from a non-proliferationist perspective, rather than the change from Democrats to Republicans. This may be more significant than a less strident US global of a non-proliferation policy, which the Republicans might retain. The Pakistan-specific change in the US policy was offset by: Pakistani counter-tests in 1998, Kargil and flight of democracy. It is now outweighed by domestic factors in the US. Apart from the dynamics that

was trapped in the ice, in this way the current atmosphere with that of previous less human-generated pollution.