

## Pakistan's Nuclear Posture

By Rodney W. Jones

INDIA'S and Pakistan's successive nuclear tests of May 1998 marked a fateful watershed for security in the subcontinent. Pakistan sensibly deliberated before crossing its own nuclear Rubicon, but New Delhi's BJP-led dash for nuclear weapon status was a defining event. Proliferation threats before 1998 often were earmarked by *nura kushti* -- jousting for political effect. Now weaponization is a fait accompli and nuclear use could lay huge swathes of the local landscape waste.

Absent a nuclear umbrella, Pakistan's choices in May 1998 seemed stark -- opting for nuclear deterrence with all its incalculable risks, or unilateral nuclear disarmament and progressive loss of self-determination. The die was cast, unsurprisingly, for nuclear deterrence. But what concrete form would this nuclear posture take? An explicit public answer may not soon be available for understandable security reasons. This piece, a conjecture, is an effort to infer Pakistan's most likely posture, given the realities Pakistan faces, in the all too likely event that current efforts to reverse India's continued nuclear breakout fail.

Stopping the physical deployment of nuclear forces by India and Pakistan -- this being one immediate objective of U.S. diplomacy, another being full Indian and Pakistani adherence to the CTBT -- now hangs by a thread. These restraint thresholds may be doomed by the relentless march of provocative events such as the reciprocal Agni-2 and then

Ghauri-2 ballistic missile testing in April this spring, the Pakistani-initiated Kargil conflict in Kashmir from May to July, India's shoot-down of a Pakistan Navy plane near the border in the Rann of Kutch sector on August 10, and most recently India's BJP caretaker government's trial balloon of a draft Indian "nuclear doctrine" on August 17 in the lead-up to the September parliamentary elections.

For the outside world and evidently India, the big Kargil surprise was that Pakistan's military leadership was not self-deterred by India's nuclearization and conventional military superiority from supporting a *mujahideen* intrusion across the "line of control" (LOC) in disputed Kashmir, in digging in on mountain peaks, firing on vehicle traffic along the Srinagar-Leh highway, and threatening to cut off resupply of Indian forces on the Siachen Glacier during the precious few months when the highway was clear of snow. The implication was that top Pakistani military leaders viewed their own nuclearization as a "shield" protecting against an Indian expansion of the conflict.

The big external consequence of Kargil was that it focused international attention on the Kashmir dispute and elicited concern over the nuclear risks of leaving the problem unresolved, a political gain for Pakistan. President Clinton publicly agreed to take a personal interest in Pakistan and India negotiating a bilateral solution of the Kashmir issue through a resumption and intensification of the Lahore Summit dialogue

process, in return for Nawaz Sharif's undertaking to bring about *mujahideen* withdrawal from positions beyond the LOC, largely accomplished by mid-July.

Meanwhile, India won the public relations advantage with praise abroad for its restraint, although it had alerted and mobilized forces along the border with Pakistan, implicitly threatening to expand the conflict and even to blockade Karachi, reflecting the escalatory dangers underlying brinkmanship.

A reminder of the potential for escalation was lodged in India's August 10 shooting down of an unarmed, propeller-driven Pakistani naval reconnaissance aircraft which flew inside the 10 kilometer buffer zone along the border without prior notification. This technically contravened the 1991 bilateral confidence-building agreement against violations of airspace. The aircraft and sixteen occupants were blown up in the air by an Indian MiG-21 fighter which made no effort to establish radio contact. India claimed the Pakistani airplane had crossed the border into Indian airspace, yet the wreckage fell inside Pakistan. Here, India exhibited no restraint.

Finally, despite promises to the United States in diplomatic channels to observe "strategic restraint," India's caretaker BJP government dropped yet another shoe on August 17. Its interim National Security Advisory Board published a draft "nuclear doctrine" document that called for a nuclear declaratory no-first-use policy with the ostensible objective of "minimum credible deterrence"

but based on an expansive nuclear warfighting force structure including a triad of survivable, mobile ground-based, airborne, and sea-launched nuclear strike systems. Without specifying adversaries or an actual threat, the language alluded provocatively to using conventional preemptive capabilities offensively against any party that might threaten to use nuclear weapons against India.

By calling this strategy document a draft, the authors may hope to draw Pakistan reactively into public declarations of its own nuclear policy. One might surmise that Pakistani officials have little to gain and possibly something to lose from being drawn out on impulse about their own nuclear planning. They would not want, for example, to obscure what even respected Indian military critics have described as that document's "aggressive" content by putting out an explicit Pakistani counterpart that probably would then become the main lightning rod of adverse foreign reactions.

If India's next government ratifies the contents of the strategy document and takes definitive steps to deploy nuclear-equipped delivery systems from the indicated nuclear arsenal -- which would mean further crumbling of the international effort to dissuade India crossing the nuclear divide, Pakistani defense authorities presumably will feel compelled to define an operational nuclear deterrence strategy, provide a public rationale, and deploy supporting nuclear forces.

The conjecture here assumes that these developments would be tailored to Pakistan's objective national defense situation -- which faces India's asymmetrical conventional military forces and nuclear capabilities -- and would

reflect the actual nuclear weapon and delivery system resources available to Pakistan. Given these factors, what might the actual posture be, and how would it address the unavoidable stability/instability issues of military deterrence and crisis management?

Since Pakistan has limited defense depth to repel a sustained conventional attack by India's numerically larger forces against the Punjab heartland, and is potentially vulnerable to a massive armored thrust across the desert against its narrow lines of communication between Punjab and Sind, Pakistan's military leaders probably would consider the core objective of their nuclear weapons to be an effective deterrent against a major Indian intrusion that could threaten Pakistan's self-defense capacity with collapse, putting national survival at risk. Other military purposes would be hard to identify. Tactical nuclear weapons use over land, for example, would be counterproductive, at least in the Punjab sector, because this would invite reciprocal Indian use that itself could be strategically disabling to Pakistan.

By the turn of the century, conservative estimates by experts suggest that Pakistan's nuclear inventory might consist of approximately two dozen weapons, against an Indian inventory that might range from 4 to 8 times as large. The small inventory itself presumably would lead Pakistani defense planners to reserve nuclear weapons exclusively for strategic targets.

Pakistan's defense planners almost certainly have thought through the main issues of nuclear-equipped delivery systems, their survivability under conventional preemptive and

nuclear attacks, and their destructive capacity against various types of target, given tradeoffs of range, reliability, accuracy, and yield.

Force structure options exist in Pakistan's tactical fighter aircraft and missile acquisitions. Aircraft are recallable and have flexibility and precision of attack, but in the local asymmetry that prevails Pakistan's aircraft are more vulnerable to surprise attack on their bases as well as air defense attrition after launch than India's dispersed and larger air force. Ballistic missiles are more assured of penetration but may be less accurate and, once launched, cannot be recalled. The Gulf War demonstrated that mobile ballistic missiles can be concealed against preemption even by the most advanced air forces.

For force survivability and strategic range objectives, the conjecture is that Pakistan's planners would allocate the limited nuclear weapons about equally between aircraft and mobile ballistic missiles. The testing of the Ghauri-2 missile suggests the objective of being able to hold targets at risk all across India, even deep in the south.

Pakistan's military probably will conclude that countervalue targeting will yield the highest deterrent or strategic value, and that nuclear warfighting (protracted or escalating nuclear exchange) is not a meaningful option. Presumably the aim points therefore would be in urban areas, consisting of key industrial installations or areas with high economic value, and certain infrastructural assets, such as big hydroelectric installations.

End part 1 (To be concluded)

## **Pakistan's nuclear posture-II: Arms control diplomacy**

By Rodney W. Jones

THE availability of commercial imagery in recent years has meant that fixed targets can be located and surveyed at arms length, in advance.

Deployment will pose difficult resource and technical challenges of new facility construction, secure communications channels, and rigorous personnel selection, training, and organization, to maintain high levels of nuclear system security, connectivity, and responsiveness under alert conditions of dispersal, deception, and concealment. Deployment will also require attention to the daunting problems of passive defense of cities and industry against nuclear attack.

As these problems are worked through, Pakistan's defense planners presumably would refine their nuclear defense conceptions and settle on an operational posture. While Nawaz Sharif used the same language India had earlier ("minimum credible deterrence") in his May 20 Defence College address, the conjecture here is that the posture Pakistan is likely to adopt could best be described as "maximally credible deterrence".

Operationally, this posture probably would forgo any presumption of a nuclear disarming (preemptive) strike objective -- which Pakistani reflection probably would show is unattainable against India, and beneficially could be renounced.

This would assume that India would not initiate nuclear use because it enjoys the advantage of

conventional military superiority. It probably would assume that Pakistan's nuclear use would be only in extremis. The posture would be publicly reticent on the specific conditions that would trigger Pakistani use, and it would not foreclose the option of nuclear first use.

Maximum nuclear deterrent credibility arguably could be structurally inherent in such a Pakistani posture. Due to the existing asymmetries in defense depth and conventional military capability, Pakistani defense authorities would face enormous pressure to resort to nuclear retaliation if their conventional forces suffered heavy attrition and could no longer withstand an invasion.

Credibility could be inherent technically, as well, in a combination of aircraft and mobile-missile, deep strike capabilities whose most plausible targets would be countervalue types. Credibility would also flow from the condition that Pakistan's likely operational arrangements for system dispersal, concealment and availability could be proficient enough to enable the force to survive a conventional preemptive attack for days but not necessarily weeks.

How stable would the resulting political and military relationship be? The short answers probably differ somewhat for crisis management and arms race activities, but are not necessarily reassuring. Nuclear crisis stability will be dependent partly on the perceived credibility of Pakistani nuclear use

under duress, orchestrated by official statements and alert actions during a crisis.

For Pakistani decision makers, the core issue of nuclear strategy and operational posture probably will be whether the deterrent is seen exclusively as the ultimate sword to punish large-scale aggression, or is attributed with broader purposes, e.g., a shield to cover limited uses of force for political gain. The latter strategy probably would involve higher risks of instability than the former.

Stability will be higher to the degree to which both sides refrain from efforts to change the basic status quo by the use of military force, avoid aggravating the other's internal security problems, and genuinely search for diplomatic ways to solve important differences. This recipe is difficult to follow when there are such deep-seated and volatile differences as those embedded in the Kashmir dispute, overall power on either side is so unequal, and the temptation is irresistible in this era of instantly televised images to use political theater for influence. Not surprisingly, outsiders tend to be skeptical that a robust nuclear stability can be achieved with India.

Arms race dynamics intrinsic to nuclear proliferation among highly-motivated adversaries carry other instabilities, the more so when the underlying resource and military imbalances primarily evoke one side's insecurity and deep obstacles to decisive diplo-

matic leadership exist in society and government on both sides. The search for a technical advantage that might neutralize the other's nuclear threat can be a powerful incentive, but tends to become a never ending drain on scarce resources.

In view of these facts, Pakistani leaders probably will conclude that a key goal of security policy must be the lifting of their opponent's threat of conventional preemption, a recommendation Tanvir Ahmad Khan made in these pages recently. That is a legitimate focus not only of defense preparations but also of arms control proposals.

Arms control diplomacy can provide a political buffer against the destabilizing propensities of military crises and arms competition, if the security logic of the arms control constructs is clear. This can be true even if the other side is not eager for agreement. Hence, for completeness, this conjecture on Pakistan's nuclear posture imagines arms control options that Pakistani officials logically would consider as supplements to their security diplomacy and, if need be, to enhance stable nuclear deterrence.

An arms control issue that surely would be faced and resolved internally is whether to define and stick to a nuclear "sufficiency" criterion that clarifies in Pakistani minds what could and could not be accepted in negotiations. Without this negotiating compass, the tendency could be ad hoc reactions to every hinted change in Indian posture and programs, and ill-conceived efforts to match every publicized Indian capability.

Besides the global CTBT and FMCT efforts which Pakistan is on record as supporting in principle, the conjecture here is that Pakistani officials would see a national security logic in raising soundly constructed bilateral proposals that would, for example, call on India to:

(1) mutually forgo deployment of nuclear forces, and if that is overtaken by events outside Pakistan's control, to urge agreed ceilings on deployed nuclear forces, agreed limits on ballistic missile range, and a ban on introducing new types of ballistic missiles (note that a self-defined Pakistani sufficiency criterion could also be used to decide ceilings that Pakistan might offer to adhere to, or a 2,000 km range limit, or other restrictions on missiles that it would observe anyway, provided the threat does not grow in unexpected and fundamentally different ways; stipulating benchmarks would draw outside attention to existing disparities, any large change in the baselines, and unexpected qualitative developments);

(2) remove India's preemptive conventional threat by restricting peacetime levels of conventional forces close to the borders, capping military exercises well short of the levels reached in recent years -- to remove a standing start invasion capability;

(3) accept and jointly invite international technical monitoring of confidence-building and nuclear crisis prevention measures by UN-organized or other outside parties (possibly analogous to voluntary participation in the international seismic network which is organizing to support the global ban on

nuclear testing), and arguably needed now to restore the viability of the 1991 Indo-Pakistani agreement to restrict airspace along the borders; and

(4) conduct a joint military study of regional criteria for limits on the introduction of destabilizing arms and the technical basis for cooperative measures for controlling armed international terrorism in the region.

Authentic Pakistani proposals, even when unrewarded by immediate movement in bilateral negotiations, would give added depth to Pakistan's diplomatic engagement with India on security matters, add substance to Pakistan's diplomatic reputation, and possibly win some measure of confidence among international circles in the self-discipline of its nuclear security posture.

Pakistan's leaders will think through how even the intangibles of arms control diplomacy can help the nation keep its powder dry and avoid entrapment in the political whipsawing and the emotional toll of what could be a protracted nuclear armaments competition with India. This may also help enlarge political space and time to focus domestic effort consistently on other vital national agendas, particularly a positive direction for the nation as a whole, social and economic development, and other tasks that are also indispensable to national security over the long term.

Concluded

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