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# South Asia's Nuclear Decade

**Bruce Riedel**

Ten years ago this May, India shattered the global non-proliferation regime by conducting five nuclear tests. Pakistan followed its arch-rival's lead. The United States had sought to discourage India and Pakistan from developing nuclear weapons for almost a quarter century, from India's so-called peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974 until its 1998 tests. The US Congress had passed several laws threatening sanctions if tests occurred and those sanctions were imposed. Twice after the tests, in 1999 and 2002, the US intervened at the highest levels to persuade India and Pakistan to step back from the verge of full-scale war and the possible use of their nuclear weapons.

Now the United States has signed an unprecedented civilian nuclear deal which allows India to keep its nuclear-weapons programme and gain access to civil nuclear technology denied it since 1974. At the same time, Washington has absolved Pakistan of involvement in proliferating nuclear technology to many of the most loathsome regimes on Earth, hiding behind the fiction that Pakistani nuclear black marketeer A.Q. Khan was a one-man industry. (The evidence suggests the opposite: that Khan's activities, especially his dealings with North Korea, flowed from state-directed policy with high-level support.) Clearly, US and world attitudes towards the nuclearisation of South Asia have come a long way. Today two active nuclear-weapons states are developing their capabilities and arsenals with little or no restraint

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from the international community. Diplomatic efforts to eliminate the principal source of tension between these rivals, the dispute over Kashmir, are needed to ensure that their weapons will not be used against each other.

### **The May 1998 tests**

When India surprised the world with its weapons tests of 11 May 1998 it was already known to have a nuclear capability. It first tested a nuclear device in 1974 and developed a military capability in the 1980s and 1990s. The decision to test weapons, however, broke a major international arms-control threshold and created a global backlash. Over 150 countries condemned the tests; the United Nations Security Council did likewise and issued a statement calling for restraint by both India and Pakistan; and many other international organisations, including the G8, the Organisation of American States, ASEAN, the EU and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, voiced their opposition to India's actions. The United States imposed sanctions on India under the Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act of 1994 (the so-called Glenn Amendment) and halted all non-humanitarian aid, military contracts and government credits to the country. It also opposed all lending by international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, to India. Other countries imposed sanctions as well, including Japan and the EU member states.

The Indian tests should not have been so surprising, especially to the United States. The Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had been elected just a few weeks before on a platform that called for the creation of a nuclear deterrent, and senior members of the BJP had made clear for years that they favoured a test. The BJP was seen in Washington and other global capitals in early 1998 as a Hindu nationalist party eager to establish its credentials as a tough defender of India. Moreover, its predecessor in office had come close to testing a weapon in December 1995, only to be deterred by vigorous American diplomatic démarches that were based on satellite imagery of India's known test facilities. Those facilities were routinely monitored by US intelligence in the days preceding 11 May and no alert was passed to American policymakers before the test. Even more damaging was the revelation that an obscure Sikh newsletter published in Canada had reported

on 7 May that local residents in the test area were aware of preparations for the test and expected it any day.<sup>1</sup>

At the request of then Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, Admiral David Jeremiah, former Chairman of the Joint Staff, investigated the intelligence failure. He concluded that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was guilty of 'mirror imaging', assuming that the BJP would behave as American parties would in its place. CIA analysts believed that the BJP platform, like Western political platforms, contained pre-election statements that would not necessarily be followed through once the party took office and was 'exposed to the immensity' of the nation's problems.<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah also noted that the CIA was heavily dependent on imagery to evaluate Indian preparations in 1998 and weak on human intelligence that could have provided a tip-off of Indian planning. In particular, the agency had gained few if any insights into the very small circle of BJP decision-makers who were aware of the upcoming tests. It was confused by the 'noise' that the BJP created ahead of the tests: statements that it would not test, would create a National Security Council to study the issue and make no precipitous moves.

In the policy community there was an added element of confusion. President Clinton had dispatched the US Ambassador to the UN, Bill Richardson, to South Asia right after the BJP victory with a mandate to ask the Indians what their intentions were. Richardson was given the BJP public line – the issue was under review, a National Security Council was being created and no surprises were imminent. A very careful parsing of the Indian statements would show they did not explicitly rule out a test, but the general tone was reassuring. Richardson's report to Washington was generally upbeat about the prospects for dialogue with the new BJP leadership. Indeed, the Indians had gone out of their way to propose a special channel be created between the White House and the BJP using the BJP's foreign-policy guru Jaswant Singh<sup>3</sup> and myself at the US National Security Council's South Asia desk. In short, the Indians practised good operational security, exploited America's wish that there not be a test and contributed to the noise that reinforced complacency at CIA headquarters and elsewhere.

In the immediate aftermath of the tests, the US led an international effort to convince Pakistan not to follow India's lead. The intelligence assessment of the situation was straightforward: Pakistan could and would match the Indian tests at a time of its choosing, probably soon. No one disputed the

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*The intelligence assessment was straightforward*

likelihood of a Pakistani test. Nonetheless, the US and much of the rest of the world was determined to stop Pakistan from following the Indian example.

Pakistan had been developing a nuclear weapon since India's 1974 test. Defeat in the 1971 war with India, which led to Bangladesh's independence, had already convinced the Pakistani army that it needed nuclear weapons; but the 1974 Indian test provided additional incentive. A major national commitment followed, symbolised by the famous statement of Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto that 'even if Pakistanis have to eat grass, we will make the bomb'.<sup>4</sup> High priority was set on importing key technologies and expertise from abroad, and the regime was prepared to steal if necessary.

A key scientist in this process was a young graduate from the University of Leuven in Belgium, Dr A.Q. Khan, who began importing centrifuge technology he had stolen from his job in the Netherlands. According to Khan, by 1983–84 the Pakistani programme was sufficiently advanced to do 'cold tests' (testing without a fissile explosion) of a device.<sup>5</sup> Whether the programme was this advanced by 1983 or not, the US Congress was sufficiently concerned by 1985 to pass the famous Pressler Amendment requiring the president to certify annually that Pakistan did not have a nuclear weapon. The Reagan administration, which needed Pakistani assistance to achieve victory against the Soviets in Afghanistan, repeatedly certified Pakistan over the objections of many in the intelligence community who argued that the country was clearly across the threshold. Only in 1990, when the war in Afghanistan was over and the intelligence about Pakistan's programme overwhelming, did President Bush invoke the sanctions called for by the Pressler legislation.

After India's tests in 1998, the US embarked on a two-part strategy to try to persuade Pakistan not to do the same. Firstly, the president and the senior

leadership of the US government launched a full-court diplomatic push to convince Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to forgo following India's lead. Other world leaders, including UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, were enlisted in the jawboning effort as well. Secondly, the White House developed an incentives package to make non-testing very much in Pakistan's interest. These two strategies were intended to reinforce each other and hopefully persuade Sharif to stand down.

The diplomatic strategy started with several phone calls from President Clinton to Sharif in which the American used his considerable personal charm to make the case that Pakistan did not need to follow India's 'mistake' with another 'mistake'. He noted that India was isolated after the tests; the moral advantage lay with Pakistan. This advantage would be lost by a Pakistani test. Pakistan's economy, moreover, was much weaker and smaller than India's. Sanctions would hurt it more. Indeed, foreign aid comprised 6–8% of Pakistan's budget; in India it was less than half as important. Clinton noted that the world knew Pakistan had a nuclear capability and the country did not need to prove it by testing. He urged Pakistan not to fall into an Indian 'trap' and test its own bomb.

Sharif made it clear he was not impressed by these arguments. For him, testing was both a national security issue and a domestic political issue. The Pakistani street wanted to stand up to India and show the world Pakistan was just as nuclear capable. The Pakistani army also wanted a test to prove its strength, and feared that India would gain a technological advantage from testing that Pakistan would not.

Sharif did hint that progress on Kashmir would make a difference. If the United States and the international community committed themselves to a major effort at peacemaking in Kashmir then he might have the cover to prevent a test. As Sharif put it, if Clinton would only devote one-tenth of the effort he put into the Arab–Israeli conflict to mediating between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, then the nuclear problem would lose its salience in Pakistan. Clinton saw this as a trap. While he was personally interested in resolving Kashmir in order to defuse tensions in the subcontinent, he knew that a highly visible mediation effort was a non-starter for India and would be refused, leaving him exposed and ineffective.

Clinton was joined in his diplomatic efforts by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and General Tony Zinni, head of United States Central Command, who were dispatched to Islamabad for face-to-face meetings with Sharif and the Pakistani military high command in an effort to convince them to stand down. Talbott published a lively description of the effort in his book, *Engaging India*, in 2004.<sup>6</sup> The Pakistani foreign minister virtually threw the US team out of the ministry; the Pakistani army commander was more polite but equally negative; and Sharif played Hamlet, bemoaning his fate and offering no way out. The Pakistanis were unimpressed by the sanctions placed on India, predicting (correctly) that in a few months Washington would start to roll them back and in a few years they would be gone completely.

The Pakistanis also made another pitch for a Kashmir settlement effort. Sharif pressed Talbott to compel the Indians to live up to the terms of a 1948 UN Security Council resolution that Pakistan interprets as requiring India to withdraw its forces from Kashmir and hold a referendum on whether Kashmiris wish to join Pakistan (they would not get the option of choosing independence under the Pakistani interpretation of the resolution). Like Clinton, Talbott could see little room for progress on this basis.

Importantly, the Pakistanis also expressed their genuine and well-founded fears about Indian post-test intentions. They believed the Hindu nationalist government in New Delhi was determined to break Pakistan as a nation – perhaps even physically dismember it into smaller statelets – and establish hegemony over the entire subcontinent. They felt the Americans would lose their anger over the Indian tests in at most a few years and then return to building relations with one of the fastest-growing and largest economic powers in the world. Moreover, the Pakistanis predicted that in a short time the United States and other world powers would be competing to establish a permanent seat for India on the UN Security Council.

After his diplomatic strategy failed, Clinton ordered his national-security team to work out a deal offering Pakistan military and economic aid that would be too tempting to turn down. This was no simple task as Pakistan in 1998 was already subject to numerous sanctions under the Glenn Amendment for developing its nuclear programme in secret and in viola-

tion of promises to previous administrations. Military sales to Pakistan were prohibited without Congressional waiver. Indeed, in 1990 President Bush had suspended the delivery of 71 F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan when the intelligence community officially reported to the White House and Congress that Pakistan was building nuclear weapons. To make matters worse, the US did not refund the \$658 million the Pakistani government had already paid for the aircraft, arguing that Pakistan had misled Washington about its nuclear programme and was in violation of contract.

The Clinton team engaged in intense talks with the Congressional leadership to get room to manoeuvre. Many on Capitol Hill recognised the need to prevent a Pakistani test and were open to waivers and other legislation to put together a package for Islamabad. After intense discussion and plenty of White House pressure a package of military and economic incentives was prepared. Many of these took the form of grants and loans to boost the Pakistani economy, but the F-16 problem was also resolved by a commitment to return the payments Pakistan had already made. The total package would be worth around \$6 billion.<sup>7</sup> Secretary of Defense William Cohen played a key role in putting together the package and told the press at the time that 'the US is prepared to ... establish a new relationship with Pakistan if it agrees not to conduct a nuclear test'.<sup>8</sup> The president also offered Sharif a state visit to the White House during which the package would be presented to Congress and the world. The Pakistani leader would be hailed as a man of peace who had made the difficult choice to forsake a test and would be generously rewarded for his brave decision.

On the evening of 26 May 1998 Pakistani diplomats in several capitals began telling their counterparts from the host countries that Israel, in collusion with India, was about to launch a military attack on Pakistan to destroy its nuclear infrastructure. Israeli Air Force fighters were allegedly already in India to carry out the attack and would then fly home to Israel. In the White House, this ridiculous story was interpreted as a harbinger of a test by providing an excuse of self-defence. The next morning Sharif sheepishly called Clinton to apologise for 'disappointing' him and Prime Minister Blair. Five nuclear weapons were exploded during the next few hours in the Baluchistan desert. Sharif told the Pakistani people that the score was

settled with India and that Pakistan had a 'New-Clear Vision' for the future. Washington imposed additional sanctions on Pakistan a few days later.

The Pakistani decision was condemned around the world with one major exception. From his lair in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden told al-Jazeera, 'at a time when Israel is stocking up on hundreds of nuclear weapons and atomic bombs ... we support and congratulate the Pakistani people when God blessed them with a nuclear weapon, because we consider it the Muslims right to have it'.<sup>9</sup>

The UN Security Council passed resolution 1172 condemning the Indian and Pakistani tests and urging both to halt their weapons-development programmes and become parties to the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It offered one small concession to Pakistan by urging the two nations to 'find mutually acceptable solutions that address the root causes of their tensions, including Kashmir'. By identifying Kashmir as a cause of the rivalry and putting it on the global agenda, this step was a small tilt toward Islamabad at New Delhi's expense.

Ironically, in less than a year the Pakistanis got their money back for the F-16s. The Justice Department concluded that the US would lose a court suit brought by Pakistan in the US on the merits of the case and recommended an

out-of-court settlement. The Treasury Department provided \$324m from a fund maintained to pay litigants who would probably succeed in claims against the US government, and the Department of Agriculture made up the difference in wheat credits to Pakistan.

In 1998, Sharif probably did not want to test a nuclear weapon. He recognised that Pakistan would suffer more from international sanctions than India (which it did). But India presented a national-security threat to Pakistan; its test challenged Pakistani honour and credibility, and threatened to

make Pakistan look weak. Accepting Clinton's package, no matter how generous, would have been seen as dishonourable. Moreover, many Pakistanis believe the United States would never have delivered on its promises, given its track record of broken commitments, as with the F-16s. As Teresita Schaffer, a former US diplomat who served in South Asia, put it, 'neutraliz-

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*Its test  
challenged  
Pakistani  
honour and  
credibility*

ing India's military advantage by developing nuclear capability consistently ranked higher on Pakistan's priority list than receiving economic aid and even military supplies from anyone, including the United States'.<sup>10</sup>

To this day, most Pakistanis argue they had no choice but to test. Indeed, after North Korea's test of a weapon in the autumn of 2006, a former Pakistani ambassador involved in the 1998 Talbott talks wrote that the allegations of Pakistani support for North Korea's weapons programme (i.e. A.Q. Khan's role) 'only prove the wisdom of the Sharif government in not knuckling under to US pressure and going ahead with the nuclear tests in 1998. Had Pakistan not done so on the coattails of the Indians, it would not have escaped the wrath of the West.'<sup>11</sup>

In 1998 the international community almost unanimously urged Pakistan not to test a nuclear weapon and to thus keep intact the non-proliferation regime. Led by the United States, the international community offered Pakistan generous compensation for taking the high road and threatened (and ultimately invoked) serious sanctions for testing. The leaders of the United States and the United Kingdom made direct appeals to the Pakistani prime minister to desist. The G8 and the UN Security Council both called for restraint. Pakistan listened but did not comply because of its fundamental security concerns about India, concerns that the international community was unable to address.

### **Talbott's post-test diplomacy**

In the wake of the Pakistani tests, Washington moved to implement sanctions on both India and Pakistan and adopted a new approach: coordinated bilateral diplomacy with New Delhi and Islamabad to get them each to cap their new weapons programmes, sign the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty and accept a halt to fissile nuclear production in the context of the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty negotiations. Deputy Secretary Talbott was put in charge of this effort and led an inter-agency team to conduct the diplomacy. The goal was to get the two countries to compete but this time for sanctions relief by adopting elements of the global non-proliferation regime.

Over the next two years Talbott and his team would meet with their Indian and Pakistani counterparts around the globe in an ultimately fruitless

effort to secure their support for the Test-Ban Treaty and other benchmarks. The effort was dealt a deathblow when the US Senate refused itself to ratify the treaty on 13 October 1999. As Talbott rightly put it, the Senate vote was a 'political debacle'.<sup>12</sup> The rug was pulled out from under his diplomacy by the Republican majority on Capitol Hill.

But the Talbott negotiations were not without concrete results in the US–India relationship. The discussions between Talbott and his counterpart, Jaswant Singh, set the stage for a revolution in the relationship between the world's two largest democracies. After decades of talking past each other and sterile argument over non-proliferation, the two countries began to genuinely engage each other on their core interests. A new strategic partnership was being created.

President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 inaugurated the new era between the countries. The president captured the imagination of Indians in a way rarely seen in the interaction between nation-states. His speech to the Indian parliament, for example, was greeted with thunderous applause by members of the right, centre and left of Indian politics – even hardened Communists jumped from their seats to embrace him. Jaswant Singh, who was then India's minister for external affairs, noted that Clinton's 'presidential visit contributed more to a total transformation of Indo-American relations than any other single event of recent times'.<sup>13</sup>

No such breakthrough came with Pakistan. In contrast to the warm reception he received during his visit to India, Clinton's five-hour visit to Islamabad was cold and sterile. Security concerns dominated the visit and Clinton avoided embracing the new military dictator of the country, General Pervez Musharraf. US relations with Pakistan were paralysed by a welter of sanctions and recriminations.

Central to the breakthrough with India and the collapse of talks with Pakistan was the Kargil War of 1999. In the spring of that year Pakistani forces occupied commanding positions on the mountains of central Kashmir across the Line of Control that had demarcated the ceasefire line between the two combatants for decades. The Indian army launched a major offensive to recover the lost territory.

For the first time in the history of Indo-Pakistani warfare, the United States came out clearly on the side of India. The Clinton administration unequivocally blamed Pakistan for the conflict and demanded a full withdrawal behind the Line of Control. As Indian External Affairs Minister Singh noted, 'this step, along with recognition by the United States and other nations of the menace of cross-border terrorism, was a very significant strategic gain'<sup>14</sup> for India.

The conflict came to a crisis in early July 1999 just after Sharif invited himself to Washington in a desperate bid to salvage political face from the disaster his army, led by Musharraf, had gotten him into.<sup>15</sup> The critical intelligence issue during the Kargil War was whether either or both states would feel sufficiently threatened to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. On the eve of the summit meeting between Clinton and Sharif, US intelligence detected evidence Pakistan was preparing its nuclear arsenal for possible use. Apparently the Indians also detected preparations.<sup>16</sup> Musharraf has subsequently claimed that Pakistan had no operable nuclear-weapons system in 1999,<sup>17</sup> a claim that is not taken seriously by experts. One Pakistani diplomat directly involved in the crisis has written recently that 'had the Americans not been brought into the equation to ensure an effective cease-fire, disaster would have been inevitable'.<sup>18</sup> Sharif has also admitted recently that 'Musharraf's misadventures in Kargil in 1999 brought [Pakistan] close to nuclear confrontation with India'. Indeed he rightly quotes Clinton as saying 'the world should thank Nawaz Sharif for averting a nuclear conflict between Pakistan and India'.<sup>19</sup>

In the end Pakistan backed down, the war ended, and the way was opened for Musharraf to oust Sharif later in the year. Tensions between India and Pakistan did not diminish, however; indeed they got worse. On the eve of the new millennium, Kashmiri terrorists hijacked an Indian airliner from Kathmandu, Nepal, and forced the pilot to fly to Kandahar, Afghanistan. The plot clearly involved the Pakistani intelligence service, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation. Singh negotiated the release of the hostages in return for the release of several Kashmiri terrorist leaders held in Indian jails. He has labelled the incident the 'dress rehearsal' for 11 September 2001 since it involved the same dark constellation of terrorist forces that struck America.<sup>20</sup>

### Strategic changes since 11 September

The attacks of 11 September 2001 had important consequences for Washington's relationship with both Pakistan and India and the effort to stem their nuclear development. On 11 September, Pakistan's policy of appeasing the Taliban and supporting its military came to an end. Within hours of the attacks, the CIA told the White House that al-Qaeda was responsible and had planned the attack from its base in Afghanistan. In a few days, the UN Security Council issued a statement demanding the Taliban hand over bin Laden.

By coincidence, the director of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lieutenant-General Mahmud Ahmed, was in Washington on 11 September making a series of calls at the CIA, State Department and National Security Council. No one knew more about the extent of Taliban-Pakistan cooperation than Ahmed. Indeed his mission on the trip was to persuade the Bush team to open a dialogue with the Taliban and accept it as a legitimate player in the region. Instead he was immediately summoned to the State Department to meet with Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and receive an ultimatum from the US government.

According to Musharraf's account of that meeting, Armitage told Ahmed that Pakistan had to decide whether it was with the United States or against it. Should Pakistan stand by its relationship with the Taliban, Armitage threatened to bomb Pakistan 'back into the Stone Age'.<sup>21</sup> Armitage has denied he threatened to attack Pakistan but has confirmed that he gave the ISI leader an ultimatum, to either help America or be seen as an enemy.

Almost immediately, Pakistan's policy toward the Taliban changed. Musharraf sent a delegation to Afghanistan led by Lieutenant-General Ahmed to present the international community's demands. Afghan leader Mullah Omar stalled for time and convened a meeting of Taliban religious scholars to review the situation. They recommended that Omar try to persuade bin Laden to leave Afghanistan of his own will. Whether Omar did so is not known; what is clear is that bin Laden did not leave and the US embarked on *Operation Enduring Freedom* in October 2001 to assist the Afghani Northern Alliance in toppling the Taliban regime (Islamic Emirate). Lieutenant-General Ahmed was fired from his post a few days later, appar-

ently because he lacked enthusiasm for the new policy toward his former clients.

Shortly after the start of military action against Afghanistan, Pakistan deserted its Taliban ally. Pakistani military advisers, pilots, tank crews and other military personnel in the Taliban army fled the country and returned to Pakistan. Some of the troops had to be airlifted out of Afghanistan after being surrounded by the advancing Northern Alliance forces from Konduz in the northern part of the country. Others simply drove overland to Pakistan. Without their allies, the Taliban was even more vulnerable to the vastly superior US-backed Alliance. The collapse of their resistance came quickly. By the end of the year the Islamic Emirate was replaced by a government installed by the Northern Alliance. Most of the Taliban fighters simply slipped away to their villages in the border region.

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*Pakistan  
deserted its  
Taliban ally*

Musharraf has explained his decision to abandon the Taliban in his memoirs, *In the Line of Fire*, published in 2006. According to his account, Musharraf conducted a war game immediately after Ahmed reported his conversation with Armitage and concluded that Pakistan could not prevail in a military conflict with the United States. Moreover, Musharraf concluded that the Indians would be the major beneficiary of a Pakistani decision to stand by the Taliban. As he put it,

I also analyzed our national interest. First, India had already tried to step in by offering its bases to the US. If we did not join the US, it would accept India's offer. What would happen then? India would gain a golden opportunity with regard to Kashmir ... Second, the security of our strategic assets would be jeopardized. We did not want to lose or damage the military parity that we had achieved with India by becoming a nuclear weapons state.<sup>22</sup>

In short, the decision to reverse a decade of Pakistani policy towards Afghanistan derived from Pakistan's underlying concern about maintaining nuclear parity with India. For making this decision Pakistan was

handsomely rewarded. Musharraf was granted a state visit to Washington in February 2002 and was promised economic assistance and debt relief. In 2003 Musharraf visited Camp David and President Bush announced a five-year, \$3bn economic and military assistance package. In 2004 Pakistan was designated a 'major non-NATO ally' which meant additional technology-sharing between the two militaries. In 2005 Washington promised once again to sell F-16s to Pakistan to demonstrate the 'bad old days' were truly over. By 2007 Pakistan had received over \$10bn in assistance from the United States, the vast majority in military aid.

Most importantly, Pakistan was absolved of past wrongdoing in the export of its own nuclear technology to several of the world's most dangerous states, including Libya, North Korea and Iran. For over a decade Pakistani institutions – specifically A.Q. Khan's nuclear labs and proliferation networks acting as instruments of the state with high-level approval – had been involved in the transfer of their nuclear technology to other countries in return for cash (Libya) or missile technology (North Korea). The United States repeatedly sanctioned various Pakistani entities involved in these transfers, most notably the Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) run by Pakistan's foremost nuclear engineer, A.Q. Khan. Khan routinely sent Pakistani Air Force transports to deliver and pick up materials related to this proliferation activity; the records of these transports constitute strong evidence of Pakistan's involvement in proliferation.

In January 2004 Khan was removed from his position at KRL and 'confessed' that he had engaged in 'unauthorised' proliferation activity. Musharraf decided that this was sufficient punishment for his crimes and that he would not be interviewed by any third party about his activities. On 5 February 2004 Khan was pardoned by Musharraf. The United States went along with this fiction and accepted Musharraf's account. All efforts to hold Pakistan accountable for its previous proliferation activities ended. In short, Islamabad was handed a 'get out of jail' card.

Unlike its relationship with Pakistan, Washington's relationship with India did not change dramatically after 11 September. President Bush pursued improved relations with New Delhi just as Clinton had done. Sanctions were gradually lifted and a high-level dialogue developed.

When Singh made his first visit to Washington after Bush's inauguration, the president dropped in on his meeting with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, a symbolic way of maintaining the momentum begun by Clinton. After 11 September the relationship became even stronger and closer. India's long experience with terrorism made it a natural partner in the 'war on terrorism', even if Pakistan was also now a member of the anti-terrorism coalition. This harmony was soon tested, however.

On 13 December 2001, Kashmiri terrorists attacked the Indian Parliament in an attempt to kill the senior leadership of the republic. India blamed Pakistan for supporting the group responsible, Jaysh-e Mohammad. Singh wrote later that the incident had 'once again' established 'that terrorism in India is the handiwork of Pakistan-based terrorist outfits known to derive their support and sustenance from ISI'.<sup>23</sup> India mobilised its armed forces for *Operation Parakram* (Valour), prompting Pakistan to do the same. Within days over a million soldiers faced each other along the India–Pakistan border. Tenet warned publicly that the two countries were on the brink of war.

One of the side effects of the sharpened Indo-Pakistani confrontation – one little appreciated at the time – was that Pakistani troops were diverted by the thousands from positions along the border with Afghanistan precisely when Osama bin Laden and hundreds of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters were fleeing into the badlands on the Pakistani–Afghan border. The coincidence may not be entirely accidental. To this day, the motives of the 13 December attackers remain unclear. Certainly they intended to provoke a crisis with India; whether they also sought to help bin Laden is unknown, but this was the effect of their actions.

The situation got even more tense in May when terrorists killed 32 people on a bus in Kashmir. India expelled the Pakistani ambassador and Prime Minister Vajpayee, normally a very cautious speaker, said, 'India has accepted the challenge thrown down by our neighbour and we are preparing ourselves for decisive victory against the enemy. We will not let Pakistan carry out its proxy war against India any longer.'<sup>24</sup> The US State Department on 31 May issued a travel advisory, warning American citizens to leave India and Pakistan as 'the risk of intensified hostilities between India and Pakistan cannot be ruled out'. The United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia and

Japan issued similar warnings. India was affected much more severely by these warnings as Pakistan had been under travel warnings since 11 September.

Armitage traveled to Islamabad in early June to warn Musharraf to cool tensions. He was promised a 'permanent' end to cross-border infiltration of insurgents and terrorists into Kashmir from Pakistan. India trumpeted this declaration when Armitage arrived in New Delhi the next day but was sceptical it would produce results. In the end its effects were minimal but some decrease was observed.

For almost a full year, the two rivals confronted each other along their border in a lengthy and costly military build-up. There is no doubt that some

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## *India stepped back from the brink*

Indian officers were eager to have it out with Pakistan once and for all. But cooler heads prevailed in New Delhi.

After a year of tension, India stepped back from the brink and quietly demobilised its forces. India used the successful staging of provincial elections in Kashmir as its excuse for pulling back. Warnings from Washington, London and other capitals probably helped end the crisis by raising the concern level of Indians and Pakistanis, especially the business communities that were hurt by the flight of expatriates and tourists.

Bush visited India and Pakistan in March 2006. The tone of the visit was quite different in each country. In India Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a historic civilian nuclear-power deal that gave India access to advanced US nuclear technology and opened the door to sales of nuclear reactors, reversing decades of American non-proliferation policy. In turn, 14 of India's 22 nuclear facilities became subject to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency as civilian power facilities; the others were labelled military sites. The result of months of negotiations, the deal was passed by the US Senate in late 2006 despite sharp criticism from many arms-control experts. The vote was strongly in favour with many Democrats joining the Republicans in affirming their support for a strong American relationship with India in the twenty-first century.

In contrast, Bush's discussions in Islamabad focused almost entirely on terrorism. Pakistani assistance in capturing several mid-level al-Qaeda ter-

rorists was lauded in public, while in private Bush pressed Musharraf to do much more against the Taliban and Kashmiri terrorist groups. Musharraf was promised additional American aid, including a possible sale of F-16s, but it was clear Pakistan would not get its own nuclear deal with Washington.

### **Time for Kashmir?**

The US–India deal provides a mechanism to place some of India's nuclear infrastructure under greater international scrutiny. The International Atomic Energy Agency has supported the plan. It is a wise accommodation to reality and should be supported, but it will not end, or even slow, the nuclear arms race in South Asia.

Ironically, the deal is now in trouble because of criticism in India that it is too restrictive and imposes too much oversight on the Indian programme. The opposition has accused Prime Minister Singh of giving too much away in the negotiations. The Communists, allies of Singh's Indian National Congress party in the national government, have charged the deal is too pro-American and moves India away from its traditional non-aligned status towards a strategic partnership with Washington. In the United States, the deal has been attacked by many non-proliferation specialists for giving too much to India. If the Democrats win the next presidential election they may try to reopen the negotiations and make the deal more binding on India, a move that would probably kill it and leave no controls on the Indian programme.

No such agreement is likely with Pakistan for the foreseeable future. The country is now facing its most severe internal political crisis since 1999. Musharraf's survival as president is in doubt. No conceivable successor is likely to rein in the existing nuclear programme. Pakistanis take great pride in their nuclear deterrent, the first and only in the Islamic world. It is unlikely that either of the two major political parties will place restraints on its development, as both supported the programme when in office in the 1990s.

Only a decade after the shock of the nuclear tests, the United States has the best relationship it has ever enjoyed with India and a working – if

uneasy – connection with a wary Pakistan. Moreover, the bilateral relationship between Islamabad and New Delhi is better than it has been in decades despite lingering Pakistani support for Kashmiri terrorism. The two have reopened transportation links, restored diplomatic relations and taken other measures to build confidence between them.

Still, the underlying source of friction, the Kashmir conflict, has not been addressed. Sixty years ago, the first US ambassador to India, Henry Grady, wrote that 'Kashmir is the one great problem that may cause the downfall of India and Pakistan'.<sup>25</sup> That prediction remains as true today as then. With its strong position in the subcontinent Washington should now try to quietly press the parties to find a solution to the Kashmiris' desire for greater self-rule. India's territorial integrity should be preserved but the disputed territory should gain special status. This will require very delicate diplomacy but the pay-off could be great.

The Indians have rightly been miffed by Musharraf's habit of floating his thinking on Kashmir to the press first, but they have reacted with some positive signs to his latest overtures. He has backed away from long-standing Pakistani demands for a plebiscite in Kashmir and suggested dealing with the region's constituent parts on a case-by-case basis rather than as a single entity, opening the door to some kind of partition. India has favoured limited confidence-building measures such as opening the bus line from Kashmir's capital Srinagar to the capital of Pakistani Kashmir, Muzaffarabad. It has reduced its military presence in the region somewhat and sought to reduce human-rights abuses by its forces. Prime Minister Singh has said he welcomes Musharraf's ideas and looks forward to the day when one could breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore and dine in Kabul, a vision of a subcontinent at peace with itself for the first time in decades. The positive noises from New Delhi come despite continued ISI support for terrorists and infiltration across the Line of Control.

The Indian leadership apparently has recognised that it has no good military options to deal with Pakistan now that both states are proven nuclear capable. The Kargil War was an early indication that nuclear weapons have made conventional military options too dangerous. In 2002 India mobilised its armed forces for a showdown with Pakistan that lasted almost a year.

Indian military planners were never able to suggest a viable military option to the BJP government that did not have the potential to trigger a nuclear strike.

For his part, Musharraf has come a long way from being the instigator of the Kargil War to a possible peacemaker. He seems to have realised that India cannot be forced out of Kashmir by terrorism, limited war or nuclear threats. Musharraf may also recognise that Pakistan cannot clear itself from charges of involvement with terrorist organisations as long as it is intimately bound to Kashmiri groups like Lashkar-e-Tayiba.

Now that he no longer wears his military uniform and is under attack at home, Musharraf is probably less capable of taking on the challenge of resolving the Kashmir dispute. But whoever has power in Pakistan should be encouraged to find a solution that is honourable and practical for the Kashmiri people. Should a credible democratic, civilian and secular government emerge from the current troubles it is in Washington's interest to help that government resolve the issue both for its own sake and to help keep the Pakistani army in its barracks and out of the political arena.

None of this is to suggest peace is at hand or that a nuclear conflict is impossible. South Asia remains a potential tinderbox, which is why it is so important to use this period of relative quiet to engage in preventive diplomacy to resolve the Kashmir question. The opportunity for diplomacy is riper than usual in this new era. The effort to create international constraints on the Indian and Pakistani nuclear-weapons programmes failed. Our goal now must be to do all we can to ensure they are never used.

## Notes

- 1 The Sikh newsletter was featured in many news stories after the tests. For example: Elaine Sciolino, 'Nuclear Anxiety: The Blunder; Scooped on Tests, U.S. Scorns a Sikh Journal', *New York Times*, 16 May 1998, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E05EED61130F935A25756C0A96E958260>.
- 2 Admiral David Jeremiah, press conference, National Press Club, Washington DC, 2 June 1998.
- 3 Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb*, rev. ed. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), p. 47.
- 4 Quoted in Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant*

- Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 157. Bhutto actually made the statement for the first time when he was foreign minister in 1966 in reaction to a question.
- 5 Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan*, p. 159.
  - 6 Talbott, *Engaging India*.
  - 7 'Pakistan Analysts Term US Package Flimsy', *The Hindu*, 27 May 1998, p. 1.
  - 8 'US Ready to Offer Pakistan a Package', *Financial Times*, 26 May 1998, p. 3.
  - 9 The interview can be found in Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 72.
  - 10 Teresita Schaffer, 'US Influence on Pakistan', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1, Winter 2002–03, p. 172.
  - 11 Tariq Fatemi, 'North Korea Tests', *Dawn*, 21 October 2006.
  - 12 Talbott, *Engaging India*, p. 180.
  - 13 Jaswant Singh, *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2006), p. 320.
  - 14 Singh, *A Call to Honour*, p. 228.
  - 15 I have described the events of that visit in an essay published several years ago: Bruce Riedel, *American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2001).
  - 16 Singh, *A Call to Honour*, p. 227. He notes: 'We had some information regarding some deflective activity in Pakistan's Tilla ranges, near Jhelum, indicating that it could be operationalising its nuclear missiles.'
  - 17 Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 97.
  - 18 Tariq Fatemi, 'The Peace Process Revisited', *Dawn*, 25 November 2006.
  - 19 Nawaz Sharif, 'Pakistan's One Man Calamity', *Washington Post*, 17 November 2007, p. 24.
  - 20 Singh, *A Call to Honour*, p. 238.
  - 21 Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, p. 202.
  - 22 *Ibid.*
  - 23 Singh, *A Call to Honour*, p. 265.
  - 24 'Tensions Rise in South Asia', Associated Press, 23 May 2002.
  - 25 Quoted in Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), p. 96.