



ISSN : 2350-0743

www.ijramr.com



International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research

Vol. 10, Issue 09, pp.8858-8862, September, 2023

RESEARCH ARTICLE

NUCLEAR DYNAMICS IN SOUTH ASIA: AN ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIC RIVALRY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 08th June, 2023

Received in revised form

20th July, 2023

Accepted 16th August, 2023

Published online 30th September, 2023

Key Words:

South Asia, Nuclear Politics, Arms
Race, Stability, India-China-Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Behavioural issues are International community has been advocating for elimination of nuclear weapons since 1946. The United Nations General Assembly at its very first session has discussed on need of nuclear disarmament. Nuclear trajectory remains hot topic throughout the nuclear history. In nuclear debate South Asia played significant role on both the fronts, nuclear disarmament as well as in nuclear proliferation. India remains outcast in nuclear commerce community till India –U.S. civil nuclear deal- 2008. This deal made possible for India for nuclear commerce. Even though India and Pakistan took birth as *de- facto* nuclear weapon states in 1998. But Indo- U.S. civil nuclear deal legitimized India as “Responsible Nuclear weapon State”, whereas Pakistan remains outcast in nuclear commerce. In other words, this deal has put existing mechanism in debate, especially the NPT. In this backdrop of nuclear politics and policies, this paper analyses implications on regional security and stability in South Asia under existing incentives and constraints. To do this, it examines nuclear triangle between India, Pakistan and China, Indo-US strategic partnership, and India’s commitment for nuclear disarmament. Based on this analysis, this article suggests that these countries should cooperate a civil nuclear program which would arrest the pursuit of weapons. This cooperation would facilitate in curbing nuclear arms race in the region. Civil nuclear cooperation is best way forward for controlling further growth of the nuclear we aponprogramme. It can lead toward creating favourable environment for nuclear disarmament in Southern Asia. However, discriminatory policies of extra-regional players may intensify arms race.

INTRODUCTION

International community has been advocating for elimination of nuclear weapons since 1946. The United Nations General Assembly at its very first session has discussed on need of nuclear disarmament. In due course of the journey many mechanisms, treaties, conventions and negotiations were come in existence for nonproliferation and disarmament. For instance, the PTBT, TTBT, PNET, NPT, CTBT, FMCT, PSI, and global zero etc. Within these ups and downs mechanisms of nuclear politics, the NPT come out as most influencing instrument of nuclear nonproliferation. It has created and legitimized nuclear dichotomy. India becomes nuclear outcaste due to the NPT after 1974. India remains outcasted in nuclear community till India –U.S. civil nuclear deal- 2008. This deal made possible for India to participate in the nuclear commerce. Even though India and Pakistan took birth as *de- facto* nuclear weapon states in 1998. So Indo- U.S. civil nuclear deal legitimized India as “Responsible Nuclear weapon State”, whereas Pakistan remains outcast in nuclear commerce. In other words, this deal has put existing mechanism in debate, especially NPT. It had blurred nuclear dichotomy created by NPT and shows nuclear duality toward specific country.

On another hand, during Prague conference, former US President Barack Obama declared ‘America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.’ The speech elicited strong reactions around the world. Elites and media who favour nuclear disarmament applauded. Others booed, warning that a world without nuclear weapons would destabilize regional and global power balances and raise the risks of great power war. Obama’s call for ‘Nuclear weapon free world’ shows reverse gear in nuclear policies of Bush Administration, at the same time China’s nuclear affection toward Pakistan makes South Asia a flash field of nuclear politics. The article concludes that it is in India’s national interest to engage Pakistan in multilateral agreements and treaties on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament initiatives. One way of initiating engagement can be advocating cooperation for nuclear safety and security concerns.

The Nuclear Triangle: It is unique position in the world that three countries have nuclear weapons as well as they sharing their borders. Beijing, Islamabad and New Delhi make a nuclear triangle which made situation difficult for establishing a trilateral dialogue for nonproliferation, disarmament and security considerations. Historically, they have hostile relationship. Geopolitically their relationship is adversarial. This hinders possibilities to create a favorable environment.

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But these countries have potential in existing world order for cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. China has about 240 nuclear warheads. India has up to 100 nuclear warheads and Pakistan between 70 to 90 nuclear warheads (Arms Control Association, 2023). Despite this these countries do not have adequate level of dialogue to curb the arms race. The following analysis brings out this.

China: In April 2004, China claimed that it ‘possesses the smallest nuclear arsenal’ among the five NPT nuclear-weapon states. China is the sole nuclear-weapon state to declare publicly that it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons. Beijing has emphasized that this vow stands ‘at any time or under any circumstances.’ China conducted the last test in July 29, 1996. But China has not publicly declared a halt to the production of fissile material, highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium. One independent estimate calculates that China has accumulated as much as 25 metric tons of HEU and six metric tons of plutonium for weapons². The proliferation record of China shows that China aided Pakistan’s nuclear and missile programs. Iran, Libya, North Korea, and Saudi Arabia also have been identified as Chinese proliferation recipients. But China’s proliferation activities seem declining over the last years. Indeed, Nuclear Supplier Group members, including the United States, saw enough improvement in China’s nuclear export behaviour that they extended membership to China in 2004. China has played a key role in hosting and helping mediate the so-called six-party process to achieve North Korea’s nuclear disarmament.

India: Indian Nuclear policies claim that the development of India’s nuclear stockpile is based on maintaining a “credible minimum deterrent.” Although India stated in January 2003 that it would not use nuclear weapons against states that do not possess such arms and declared that nuclear weapons would only be used to retaliate against a nuclear attack, the government reserved the right to use nuclear weapons in response to biological or chemical weapons attacks. India conducted its last nuclear test in May, 13, 1998. But India continues to produce fissile material for weapons purposes and refused to cease such production even as part of U.S.-Indian civilian nuclear cooperation deal. New Delhi has approximately 500 kilograms of plutonium available for nuclear weapons and up to another 11.5 metric tons of reactor grade plutonium in spent fuel, which could be reprocessed for weapons use.¹ India pledged in July 2005 to adhere to the guidelines of Missile Technology Control Treaty. But a senior U.S. official indicated that the initiative does not target Indian transfers because it is a U.S. ally.² Whereas Indian pragmatists have argued for active participation of India in various arms control agreements and initiatives, pragmatists have not only supported for signing CTBT, but also initiatives such as the PSI.³ Similarly, the Indian pragmatists suggest that India should prepare the groundwork for the FMCT rather than opposing the treaty.⁴ So current trajectory of Indian foreign policy shows

much interest in multilateral engagement and leading role for nuclear nonproliferation at various platform, which have contradiction with traditional approach of Indian foreign policies. But traditional India is advocating for disarmament. India has concluded bilateral confidence-building measures with Pakistan. After their tit-for-tat nuclear tests in 1998, the two rivals volunteered to abstain from nuclear testing. They also have established a hotline to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war and agreed to exchange advance notifications of ballistic missile flight tests. In March 2006, India pledged to subject more of its nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards as part of a U.S.-Indian initiative to exempt India from current U.S. and multilateral nuclear trade restrictions.

Pakistan: Pakistan has not ruled out the possible first use of nuclear weapons in a conflict. Pakistani officials have claimed, however, that nuclear weapons would be used only as a matter of last resort. Pakistan’s secret nuclear weapons program began in the early 1970s and was spurred on by India’s first nuclear test in 1974. The effort was aided by the theft of nuclear technology and know-how from the European company URENCO by Abdul Qadeer Khan, who became a leading figure in Pakistan’s nuclear weapons establishment. Although U.S. intelligence was aware of Pakistan’s illicit program, the United States continued to provide military assistance and foreign aid to Islamabad up until 1990 when President George H. W. Bush decided that he could no longer certify that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear device. U.S. sanctions related to Pakistan’s nuclear program were dropped after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks when the United States decided to pursue closer relations with Pakistan as part of the U.S. declared “war on terror.”

Pakistan has concluded bilateral confidence-building measures with India. At the 65- member Conference on Disarmament, Pakistan is calling for negotiation of an “effectively verifiable” fissile material treaty. In light of its existing fissile material stockpile disparity with India, Pakistan also wants the agreement to apply to existing stockpiles rather than simply outlawing future production. Several states, including the United States, oppose these Pakistani positions, particularly the latter demand. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei of China said on BRICS press conference that “India is an important neighbour of China. China is vigorously committed to developing military-to-military relations with India,” and he added, “China always values our military exchanges with India, and believes the two sides could proceed from the overall interest of bilateral relations, and follow the principle of seeking for common ground while solving differences, to promote the sound and stable development of our military relations”.⁵ From above discussion it seems that Pakistan and China have close ties on nuclear issue. Pakistan’s nuclear programme is India oriented. The “No first use Policy” of both China and India indicates that it paves the path for disarmament and nonproliferation. It is historical fact that China and India had war in 1962, these Asian giants have conflict on some issues. But the graph of cooperation also increasing with high speed in various sectors, so war is not seeming possible in foreseeable future between India and China. In case of India and Pakistan it is difficult predict but changing perception of security and emerging new threats showing that cooperation on nuclear issues is possible, but it

¹Mian, Zia, A. H. Nayyar, R. Rajaraman, and M. V. Ramana, *Fissile Materials in South Asia: The Implications of the U.S.-Indian Nuclear Deal*, International Panel on Fissile Materials, September 2006, 36 pp.

²Boese, Wade, “The Proliferation Security Initiative: An Interview with John Bolton,” *Arms Control Today*, December 2003, p. 37.

³Ollapally, Deepa & Rajagopalan, Rajesh, “The Pragmatic Challenge to Indian Foreign Policy”, Vol. 34, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp. 151. Accessed on 15/04/11 from, <http://www.twq.com/11spring/index.cfm?id=435>

⁴Ollapally, Deepa & Rajagopalan, Rajesh, “The Pragmatic Challenge to Indian Foreign Policy”, Vol. 34, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp. 151. Accessed on 15/04/11 from, <http://www.twq.com/11spring/index.cfm?id=435>

⁵<http://www.thehindu.com/news/article1697147.ece?service=mobile>

needs political will from either side. Non reciprocity action from India can lead to arms reduction.

The Indo-US and Pak-Sino Strategic Partnership: The increasing role of China and the US is complicating the South Asian nuclear dyad. This is another factor which has great potential for determining dialogue for regional stability and peace in South Asia. South Asia is a hub of world politics since World War II. It was also a playground of world politics during cold war era. Pakistan since its birth allies of U.S., it was also ally in “war on terror”. India was leader of Non Alignment movement during cold war era. It also had good relation with USSR during cold war. In current scene India seems as strategic partner of U.S. whereas Pakistan seems as close strategic ally of China vis-à-vis United States of America. It is driven by the immense geostrategic transformations of the last decade, the rise of China, the rise of India, and the attacks of September 11. It is also driven by common interests and shared threats. Indian elites know full well that if India is to play the role which they all wish for it, it must embrace economic globalization and break through the accumulated institutional and cognitive structures that hold much of its population in thrall and in poverty. Moreover, it must keep pace with China if it does not want to be eclipsed even in South Asia, not to mention elsewhere.⁶

A source at the Russian Foreign Ministry told *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that since 11 September 2001 Beijing has substantially reviewed its position in South Asia. Much more attention has begun to be devoted to India, and China has realized that Delhi must be brought more actively into the sphere of Chinese geopolitical and foreign economic interests. The Chinese leadership has also begun to regard the Kashmir issue in a new light, finding out for itself that terrorist groupings of radical Islamists from Xinjiang (Xinjiang) have entrenched themselves in the territory of that former Indian principality. And though Pakistan remains the stronghold of Chinese influence in South Asia, nonetheless there is clear evidence of a desire on Beijing's part to balance its policy in this area.⁷

The United States of America and China both have strong grasp on Pakistan. At the same time, both the United States of America and the PRC are interested to intensify cooperation with India. India has free hand to choose partnership under current geopolitical situation. Unlike India, Pakistan was born without a strong political center and without a strong national party structure.⁸ Most of scholars argued that Indian foreign policy is bending towards the U.S., but it also cooperating with China with same speed. For instance, acclaimed expert of the India-China relations argues that ‘the recent pace of China-India rapprochement indicates a cooperative rather than a confrontationist attitude shared by both countries.’⁹ India has to engage Pakistan on the issues of arms control and nonproliferation. It is good time for India to initiate the process; it will help India to serve its best interest at forthcoming nuclear security summits and in leading its long-standing commitment to the goal of general and complete disarmament.

⁶Blank, Stephen 'The Geostrategic Implications of the Indo-American Strategic Partnership', *India Review*, 6:1, 1 - 24

⁷Andreyev and Verlin, “Geometry of Asian Security.”

⁸Ganguly, Sumit and Pardesi, Manjeet S. ‘India and Pakistan: The Origins of Their Different Politico- Military Trajectories’, *India Review*, vol.9, no.1. Jan-March, 2010, p- 62.

⁹Singh, Swaran, 'China-India Relations: Moving Beyond the Bilateral' Accessed from <http://bstorg.free.fr/Chine/ISSI/session2.htm> on 16/04/11

In ongoing nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament India has unique position and chance, in joint statement issued during Indian PM Manmohan Singh's Nov. 2009 visit to Washington DC, both sides had underlined that, “Shared vision of a world free of nuclear weapons and pledged to work together, as leaders of responsible states with advanced nuclear technology”. Prof Singh argued that in present circumstances and partnership India has favorable factors to India's disarmament policy that was never before in the favour of India.¹⁰

India's Commitment for Disarmament: India has a long-standing commitment to the goal of general and complete disarmament. As early as 1948, India called for limiting the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes only and the elimination of atomic weapons from national armaments. India was the first country to call to an end to all nuclear testing in 1954. This was followed up in subsequent decades by many other initiatives, for example, on the Partial Test Ban Treaty, and the call for international negotiations on nuclear non-proliferation. In 1978, India proposed negotiations for an international convention that would prohibit the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. This was followed by another initiative in 1982 calling for a ‘nuclear freeze’ - i.e. prohibition on the production of fissile material for weapons, on production of nuclear weapons, and related delivery systems.

The central pillar of India's policy on nuclear disarmament is the ‘Action Plan for Ushering in a Nuclear-weapon free and Non-Violent World Order’ proposed by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the Third Special Session on Disarmament of the General Assembly in June 1988. The heart of the Action Plan was the elimination of all nuclear weapons, in three stages by 2010 and placed emphasis on nuclear disarmament that is global, universal and non-discriminatory in nature. In a view of expert ‘this Action Plan was neither the first nor last of its kind but it does an important watershed in the evolution of both global as also national cumulative wisdom toward towards building an NFWF.’¹¹ Most presciently, the Action Plan noted, ‘beyond a point, nuclear disarmament itself would depend upon progress in the reduction of conventional armaments and forces. Therefore, a key task before the international community is to ensure security at lower levels of conventional defence. India was compelled by considerations of national security to establish and adopt a policy of keeping its nuclear option open while it continued to work for global nuclear disarmament. India was obliged to stand apart on the CTBT in 1996 after having been actively engaged in the negotiations for two and a half years precisely because the issues of non-proliferation, global disarmament and India's concerns about her security and strategic autonomy were ignored. India's continued commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is clear from the voluntary measures announced by India after undertaking a limited series of underground nuclear tests in 1998. India remains committed to converting its voluntary moratorium into *de jure* obligation accordance with India's long held positions disarmament. India has declared that it will maintain minimum credible nuclear deterrent and will not engage in an arms race.

¹⁰Singh, Swaran, ‘Towards A Nuclear Weapon Free World: Indian Perspectives’, *AIR POWER Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 3, MONSOON 2010(July-September), p.120

¹¹Singh, Swaran, ‘Towards A Nuclear Weapon Free World: Indian Perspectives’, *AIR POWER Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 3, MONSOON 2010(July-September), p.114

India has declared a no-first-use doctrine. Addressing the Indian Parliament on May 27, 1998, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee announced that 'our leaders also realized that a nuclear weapon free world would enhance not only India's security but also the security of all nations. That is why disarmament was, and continues to be, a major plank in our foreign policy'. India is willing to strengthen this commitment by undertaking bilateral agreements as well as by engaging in discussions for a global no-first-use agreement. India believes that a global no-first-use agreement would be the first step towards the delegitimization of nuclear weapons. India has also called for a Nuclear Weapons Convention to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons just as the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) have banned the other two categories of weapons of destruction.¹²

Further, India has an impeccable record on non-proliferation which is ensured through a stringent and effective system of export controls. Global recognition of this record was evident in the near complete lack of opposition to opening of international civil nuclear cooperation with India in 2008. India believes that the indefinite and unconditional extension of the NPT has only served to legitimize nuclear arsenals of the NPT states possessing nuclear weapons into perpetuity, thus posing a major obstacle to the goal of global nuclear disarmament. India welcomes the recent efforts by some heavily armed nuclear states to take steps in good faith for nuclear disarmament with the aim of eventually fulfilling obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. India supports the negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the FMCT that is universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable. India has been a responsible member of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and 'will continue to take initiatives and work with like-minded countries to bring about stable, genuine and lasting non-proliferation, thus leading to a nuclear-weapon-free world'.¹³

CONCLUSION

The Indo-American deal has enabled Washington and Delhi to board a moving train and accelerate its journey to a common destination, forcing other interested bystanders to seek to catch up with it as well lest their vital interests be significantly harmed. Indeed, other powers' awareness of this partnership is obliging them to compensate India handsomely even as they complain about it.¹⁴ Therefore, this agreement is strategic in the highest sense, i.e., it transforms the playing field and introduces a new dynamic that everyone must reckon with. But that reckoning and the widening ramifications of this partnership are inestimably of benefit to both Washington's and Delhi's, it can be extended to security of whole Asia through cooperation with Pakistan on nuclear energy. On other hand, some argue that Pakistan and China both are working to create conditions of peace and stability in the region. The recent trends in Pakistan-India and Sino-India relations are

positive and would help in creating a peaceful and conducive environment.

However, the US-India strategic cooperation in defence, especially in the areas of missile defence and nuclear technology, are matters of mutual concern for China and Pakistan.¹⁵ Under such strategic considerations, nuclear energy is a rich source of energy which has tremendous potential to provide energy in future to the mankind and in the South Asia Particularly. Pakistan and India both face the problem of energy deficit, whereas China and United States of America are peaceful coexistence. Nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation are basic concerns of both the China and U.S. China had proposed for a world nuclear weapons convention on the occasion of its first nuclear tests in October 1964 and the Chinese policy makers and scholars have also continued to show interest in nuclear disarmament.¹⁶ Today, the whole world is debating the NFWF in the backdrop of Prague Speech of President Obama. As Prof. Singh clearly argued that 'this is also first time in the history of the nuclear age that none of the major powers seems to oppose these initiatives towards the NFWF' (Singh 2010: 114).

A great Indian strategic thinker K. Subrahmanyam argued for delegitimising nuclear weapons and undermining their attraction as the currency of power in international relations. The second feasible reason for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament can be paradigm shift in concept of security. Security is no longer possible in Westphalian system of nation – states. New threats makes cooperation as an essential prerequisite in the field of clean energy, environmental security and terrorism rather than military confrontation and old deterrence. 'The old deterrence or proliferation paradigms have little relevance to the new reality' (Rahman 2011). Manpreet Sethi describes that debate of NFWF is based on two basic issues, 'the desirability of achieving such a state; and the feasibility of doing so'.¹⁷ She further argues for 'progressively devaluing nuclear weapons and eventually delegitimising them'. India is arguing for global no-first-use convention. It can lead for new such norm under current scenario. The third major argument provides by scholar against nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is that nuclear weapons provide stability in regions and at global level. But stability did not require the obsessive accumulation of nuclear weapons to the insane levels of the height of the cold war.¹⁸ So, it is in best interest of India and Pakistan to cooperate for nuclear weapon degradation and disarmament.

Nuclear triangle and Strategic partnership necessitates cooperation for nuclear security, despite hostile political calculations. Whereas, India's long-standing desire for disarmament and emerging global campaign for elimination nuclear weapons shows desirability for non-proliferation and disarmament in South Asia and world as whole. As Global Zero coordinator Brace Blair and his colleagues recently argued that what is possible between India and Pakistan is 'incremental disarmament' through nuclear confidence building measures (NCBMs).

¹⁵ Rehman, Fazal-ur, 'China-Pakistan Relations', Accessed from <http://bstorg.free.fr/Chine/ISSI/session2.htm> on 14/04/2011

¹⁶ Shen Dingli, 'Toward a nuclear weapons free world: a Chinese perspective', Cited from Singh, Swaran, 'Towards A Nuclear Weapon Free World: Indian Perspectives', AIR POWER Journal, Vol. 5 No. 3, MONSOON 2010 (July-September), p.114.

¹⁷ Manpreet Sethi, 'Approach to nuclear Disarmament: Devalue to Discard', in Sethi, ed., n.2, p.85

¹⁸ Foffe & Davis James W., 'Less Than Zero: Bursting the New Disarmament Bubble' Foreign Affairs, Vol.90. No.1, p.10

¹² Accessed from http://www.un.int/india/india_and_the_un_disarm.html on 15/04/2011 Accessed from <http://www.indiagov.org/speeches> on 15/04/2011

¹³ Accessed from http://www.un.int/india/india_and_the_un_disarm.html on 15/04/2011 Accessed from <http://www.indiagov.org/speeches> on 15/04/2011

¹⁴ Skosyrev, 'India and Pakistan on Verge of D'tente.' Accessed from <http://www.informaworld.com/smp/section?content=a770826400&fulltext=713240928#EN0084> on 14/04/2011

It includes CBMs such as lowering the alert status of nuclear forces, removing target coordinates from guidance systems and separating warheads from launchers. But it is possible through equal participation and equal status, instead of divide and rule policy.

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