Chapter Six

THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF INDIA’S NUCLEAR POSTURE

The tumultuous events of May 1998 did not signify a dramatic change in New Delhi’s strategic capabilities, but they did signal a critical shift in India’s strategic direction: By transforming what was previously a “nuclear-capable state” into a “nuclear weapon power,” the Vajpayee government committed the country to a new trajectory that is unlikely to be reversed by any succeeding regime. The pace of change with respect to nuclearization may vary depending on the external and internal circumstances India faces, but the strategic decisions already in place will not be rescinded by any future government—even one composed of parties utterly opposed to the BJP. Thus, so long as the regional and global nuclear environment remains similar to what it is now, India will not move in the opposite direction of denuclearization as the P-5, the G-8, and U.N. Resolution 1172 demanded in the aftermath of its nuclear tests. On this question, there is complete unanimity among all the major Indian political parties: Given that New Delhi has already claimed the status of a nuclear weapon state, the gradual development of its strategic capabilities will emerge as the new “consensus” position in national politics, and thanks to this fact, India will remain a nuclear weapon power for the foreseeable future. Its precise legal status, especially as this relates to the NPT, will be debated for many years to come, but what seems clear is that the multiple trends long under way in India will only be reinforced and formalized as a result of its decision to resume nuclear testing in May 1998. These trends include the continued covert research, development, and production of nuclear weapons for existing and new delivery vehicles; the continued re-
search, development, testing, and slow production and acquisition of new delivery systems, including various ballistic and cruise missiles; and, in general, the continuation of creeping weaponization, understood here as the measured development of the technologies, plans, procedures, and organizations necessary for the conduct of effective nuclear operations in an emergency.

Inasmuch as these trends have been under way in India since the early 1980s, the country’s 1998 nuclear tests portend an “equilibrium change” rather than a radical transformation of the existing regional strategic environment. This evolutionary alteration, however, will be increasingly manifested through overt reminders such as periodic missile testing, continued acquisition of new delivery systems, steady modernization of supporting infrastructure, and perhaps increasingly vocal references to weaponization—understood now in the strict sense of developing nuclear payloads for the various delivery vehicles due to be inducted over time. None of this, obviously, translates into a new commitment to transparency on New Delhi’s part: The Indian arsenal (like the Pakistani and Chinese arsenals, for that matter) will continue to be highly opaque with respect to the details of its architecture and operational policies, its command-and-control arrangements, and even some aspects of its declaratory doctrine. Despite continued opacity in these issue areas, however, New Delhi can be expected to episodically disclose certain elements of its nuclear capability. To be sure, some of these disclosures will be driven simply by the fact that many of the relevant technologies cannot be developed or acquired covertly. Consequently, announcing their presence is probably the best form of public diplomacy, especially if it allows India to garner certain deterrence benefits as a result. In other instances, however, public utterances about India’s strategic programs will be grounded largely in the logic of “costly signaling.” This form of communication has a long and useful history.

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1The term “equilibrium change” is borrowed from Morton Kaplan’s classic work System and Process in International Politics (New York: Wiley, 1957), pp. 6–8, where it refers to any movement that contributes to the achievement of new operating levels in an otherwise stable political system. “Equilibrium change” thus stands in contrast to “systems change,” which refers to the complete transformation of the “system of action” itself.

in South Asian regional politics because it serves as a means of "tacit bargaining" with one's adversaries, while simultaneously helping reassure one's own populace about the efforts of state managers with respect to ensuring security.

Irrespective of why such public disclosures occur in a given instance, any notice of increasing Indian capabilities is bound to accentuate the triangular security dilemmas that already exist within the greater South Asian region. This unfortunate development cannot be avoided, since security dilemmas by their very nature materialize because the capabilities developed by one country for its own defense invariably threaten the safety of others. The only sure way to avoid security dilemmas is thus to forgo all defensive preparations entirely, but since such pacifist solutions are unlikely to appeal to any state, including those in South Asia, both the region and the world at large will have to either find ways to ameliorate these dilemmas or simply learn to live with all the jostling that will accompany the progressive nuclearization of the subcontinent. While India's "passage to nuclear power" will thus have strategic consequences for both Pakistan and China—many of which may be nettlesome—it is most likely that security competition in the Indo-Pakistani case will turn out to be much more discomfitting than any competition involving India and China. This judgment is vociferously contested by Indian hawks, who, while arguing that "Pakistan is not too weighty a nuclear threat," sometimes hold out the hope that Islamabad's nuclear forces "may even be complementary should the unitary strategic space of the subcontinent ever be reclaimed with the seeding of an entente cordiale." While such sentiments may appear reasonable to some in New Delhi, they are disconcerting to state managers in Islamabad, who insist that Pakistan's nuclear capabilities are explicitly designed to prevent the re-creation of "the unitary strategic space"—however brought about—that characterized the Indian subcontinent prior to its partition in 1947. Precisely

in International Crises, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1992, for different but complementary concepts of costly signaling.


5Ibid.
because this is the outcome to be avoided at all costs, Islamabad is likely to overemphasize the importance of nuclear weaponry, making the Indo-Pakistani pattern of nuclearization more troublesome than its Sino-Indian counterpart.

All things considered, however, the competitive nuclearization of the Indo-Pakistani dyad is likely to be unsettling simply because relations between New Delhi and Islamabad have been more competitive than cooperative during the last 50-odd years. The reasons for this state of affairs are complex and cannot be analyzed here in any detail, but suffice it to say that each country, as a result of history, has found itself in the unfortunate position of functioning as an objective constraint on the hopes, visions, and ambitions of the other, with the result that territorial, ideological, and power-political drivers of conflict all interact viciously to make the Indo-Pakistani rivalry much more acute than the Sino-Indian one has ever been. This propensity for competition today is only magnified by the deformities of the Pakistani state, which manifest themselves in an excessive fear of Indian intentions and in an inordinate dread of Indian capabilities. There is good reason to believe that Islamabad’s anxieties may be misplaced on both counts, even if they are otherwise understandable. Ever since 1991, New Delhi has consciously pursued a strategy of looking beyond South Asia to pursue the larger great-power capabilities that eluded it throughout the Cold War. Toward this end, it has attempted to “ignore” Pakistan to the maximum degree possible in order to focus on potentially more profitable policies such as embarking on internal economic reform, deepening its technological modernization, and seeking to revitalize its external relations with important countries like the United States and the rapidly growing economic centers in East and Southeast Asia.

Unfortunately, important sections of the Pakistani elite, especially the military—trapped by their memory of defeat in the 1971 war—continue to believe that New Delhi’s first order of business remains

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6See Tellis, Stability in South Asia, pp. 8–11.

the destruction of Pakistan and the undoing of Partition. India's larger conventional capabilities—which New Delhi maintains in order to service its security requirements along two fronts—reinforces Pakistan's deep-seated fear of India's intentions, and Islamabad's failure to see the constraints limiting the exercise of Indian military power only results in an exaggerated—and tremulous—assessment of New Delhi's martial prowess. A similar misperception about the robustness of the Indian nuclear program has led to the strong belief in Islamabad that New Delhi's strategic capabilities are much more sophisticated and effective than they actually are, and this has in turn fueled an intense Pakistani effort that, although initially aimed at catching up with India, has resulted in what may actually be a lead in some dimensions of strategic capability. The bottom line, therefore, is that Pakistan, for right or wrong, is likely to respond to continued Indian nuclearization with even more feverish efforts of its own: Believing that it faces an enormous task in catching up with its larger, more capable, and to its mind utterly hostile rival, Pakistani security managers are likely to ramp up their strategic efforts much more than the objective circumstances pertaining to the relative balance actually warrant. In so doing, they may precipitate a more resolute Indian counterreaction that could lead the process of competitive nuclearization to become even more interactive than might otherwise have been the case.

Even if such Indian counterreactions are not forthcoming—because New Delhi's strategic enclaves, remaining convinced of their own superiority, do not feel compelled to respond to Islamabad's innovations in kind—a significant danger exists that the multiple baronies that currently dominate the Pakistani nuclear and missile bureaucracies could stimulate the country's strategic programs far beyond the real requirements of national security. The same dynamic, if it occurs in the context of weakening economic performance nationwide and decreasing state capacity, could also fuel the diffusion of strategic technologies well beyond the confines of Pakistan. In any event, internal bureaucratic competition coupled with exaggerated fears on the part of state managers about India are cer-

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8 The structure of the Pakistani nuclear program and the competition between the different baronies within it are well described in Shahid ur-Rehman, Long Road to Chagai (Islamabad: Print Wise Publications, 1999).
tain to provoke a Pakistani response to Indian nuclearization that
goes far beyond what most knowledgeable observers on the outside
would view as either essential or prudent for Islamabad's security. What is most tragic about this state of affairs, finally, is that its prop-
pelling forces are fundamentally rooted in a systematic mispercep-
tion of the relative balance of capabilities existing in South Asia:
India, the nominally stronger military power, is actually weaker than
is commonly believed but may not know it, while Pakistan, the nomi-
nally weaker military power, is actually stronger than is commonly
perceived but does not believe it.

The Indo-Pakistani dyad therefore bears careful observation in the
years to come, as competitive pressures here are likely to become
more acute, in part because the strategic research, development, test,
and acquisition programs in both countries will proceed concurrently and, at least from Pakistan's point of view, may also be overly interactive insofar as Islamabad—seeing itself beleaguered—will bend over backward to expand its own strategic capabilities to match those it perceives to exist in India. The strategic benefits of such an overwrought response are still uncertain, because expanded Pak-
istani nuclear capabilities will in no way diminish the country's geo-
physical vulnerability, although they would increase the quantum of deliverable punishments that Islamabad could threaten in any future face-off with India. In any event, the one factor that mitigates the poten-
tial for exacerbated competition between both countries remains
their relatively strong economic constraints. At the Pakistani end, these constraints are simply structural: Islamabad simply has no dis-
cretionary resources to fritter away on an open-ended arms race and
could not acquire resources for this purpose without fundamentally transforming the nature of the Pakistani state itself. At the Indian end, these constraints are more self-imposed: New Delhi has a much larger pool of economic resources that could be allocated to security instruments, but its desire to complete the technological modernization and development programs that have been under way for many decades prevents it from arbitrarily enlarging its budgetary allocations for nuclear programs. The fact that these constraints exist on

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9See the apt remarks in Perkovich, "South Asia: A Bomb Is Born."
10See Shahi et al., "Securing Nuclear Peace," for a good statement summarizing Pakistani views on how Islamabad would respond to continued Indian nuclearization.
both sides therefore implies that future nuclearization in India and Pakistan is more likely to resemble an "arms crawl" than a genuine "arms race." The strategic capabilities on both sides will increase incrementally—and in India will have to traverse a longer distance because of its inferiority vis-à-vis China—but this process will manifest itself largely in slow motion, and that may be the best outcome from the standpoint of both the two South Asian competitors and the United States.\textsuperscript{11}

In contrast to the frenetic response that Indian nuclearization has already evoked in Islamabad, Beijing's response to New Delhi's slowly maturing nuclear capabilities is more likely to be both muted and modest.\textsuperscript{12} In part, this is because China historically has never viewed India as a "peer competitor," and any strategic reactions suggesting otherwise at this point would only undercut Beijing's traditional attitude of treating New Delhi as a parvenu that seeks to punch above its own weight. This is not to imply that China is oblivious to the potential threat that India could pose to it in some circumstances; rather, always being conscious of this possibility, it has traditionally coped with such challenges by refusing on the one hand to provoke India on any core issues of importance to New Delhi while on the other hand taking out sufficient insurance by targeting India, among other power centers in Asia, with a nontrivial fraction of its nuclear reserves. The larger and more sophisticated nuclear arsenal that China has deployed since the 1960s in fact provides Beijing with the ultimate reassurance against any threat that New Delhi might pose. Indeed, the gap in numbers and technological capabilities between the mature Chinese nuclear deterrent and New Delhi's evolving force-in-being is so large that Beijing does not have to respond in any way to India's incipient efforts at developing a minimum deterrent. Although some commentators have offered dire predictions of what China might do as India develops its nuclear assets, including a "nuclear buildup... [that involves] deployment of

\textsuperscript{11} An Indian view confirming this judgment may be found in Chari, "India's Slow-Motion Nuclear Deployment."

missiles in Tibet and other bordering provinces, it is unlikely that Beijing will respond in such an intemperate fashion.

To be sure, Chinese nuclear capabilities will expand in the decades ahead, but this expansion will be driven more by its own modernization efforts (which were already under way for at least a decade prior to the Indian tests of May 1998), its perceptions of U.S. nuclear capabilities, and the future character of the nuclear regime in East Asia than by developments to the southwest of China. Chinese nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis India is in fact so robust that no capabilities India develops over the next decade will allow it to systematically interdict Beijing’s nuclear forces for purposes of either ensuring damage limitation or achieving counterforce dominance. Given this fact, there is little China needs to do in the face of an evolving Indian nuclear capability except what it might choose to do purely for symbolic reasons; both the range of Beijing’s missiles and the yields of its warheads already allow it to hold at risk numerous Indian targets from far outside the Chinese periphery, and consequently dramatic alterations in current Chinese deployment patterns or operating postures vis-à-vis India are both unnecessary and avoidable. Reaffirming this judgment, one of the most perceptive Western analysts of the subcontinent concluded that

the kind of Indian [nuclear] force . . . [likely to be developed] . . . would not necessarily force China into any additional nuclear-related activity. Although India might eventually achieve a deterrent capability in relation to China, a threat capability is another matter. Unless Beijing were to come to see India as a threatening nuclear power—one that might catch up to China’s capability—it is unlikely to be persuaded to proceed with its program of nuclear modernization more rapidly than would otherwise be the case.

What is only likely to reinforce this propensity for an otiose response to India—the fulmination of Indian hawks notwithstanding—is the fact that Beijing’s center of gravity will continue to remain northeast Asia (and Pacific Asia more generally) rather than the

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Indian subcontinent. For most of the foreseeable future, China will continue to be obsessed with the political challenges posed by the possible independence of Taiwan, the uncertain future of Korea, the prospect of a remilitarized Japan, and the potential hostility of the United States. Given such complex challenges, one scholar has concluded that in the South Asian context, "China’s apprehensions seem to turn mainly on being drawn into an arms race on its periphery that it would rather ignore. It has lived with far greater missiles than an Agni pointed at it." At the same time, however, it must be recognized that China’s foreign policy toward the South Asian states has always been much more subtle and multifaceted than it is usually given credit for. Beijing certainly seeks to avoid active interference in the affairs of the Indian subcontinent. Yet this preference historically has not translated into a neglect of its southwestern periphery. Rather, China has consistently sought to maintain and expand the autonomy of the smaller South Asian states while always avoiding any entreaties that could result in its having to lead and sustain a balancing coalition against New Delhi.

Beijing’s assistance to Islamabad’s nuclear weapon program illustrates this dynamic clearly: While it is often asserted that “China seems to believe that it is not in its interest to assist any new nuclear weapons power along its borders, including Pakistan,” there is little doubt that Beijing has repeatedly acted contrary to this belief when strategic assistance is seen as providing a useful means of avoiding potentially deeper political commitments to the security of the Pakistani state. China therefore covertly assisted Islamabad’s nuclear and missile programs because it had the fortunate consequence of ensuring Pakistan’s security at low cost to Beijing while simultaneously diverting New Delhi from its pursuit of a larger global role—precisely one of the preconditions that made China’s relative neglect of India a viable strategy to begin with. If India’s decision to

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resume nuclear testing signals a greater commitment on New Delhi's part to actively reshaping its security environment, it is unlikely that China would want to compound the failures of its past strategy—the consolidation of new nuclear powers on its periphery and the rise of a nuclear-armed India levying political claims on the global stage—by engaging in an unnecessary arms race with India because no matter what such a race does to New Delhi over the long haul, it could prevent Beijing from dealing effectively with the more complex problems it confronts in northeast Asia and beyond. For all these reasons, continued Indian nuclearization is likely to evoke at best a muted response from China in the policy-relevant future.

If the consequences of continued Indian nuclearization are not likely to be provocative where China is concerned, a similarly hopeful conclusion may also carry over to the effects of India's nuclearization on the international nonproliferation regime. This is obviously not the view of many analysts in the nonproliferation community, who have argued not only that the South Asian nuclear tests constitute the iceberg that hit the Titanic but also that "the damage is more severe than it might look from the upper decks." Other analysts have complained that nuclearization in South Asia would inexorably lead to the erosion of nonproliferation "norms" and, as a result, would make the world a more dangerous place. While many of these claims reflect a frightened response rather than a dispassionate analysis, they do embody a profound disquiet that manifests itself in three separate but related claims: (1) that nuclearization in India (and in South Asia more generally) reflects a failure on the part of the international nonproliferation regime; (2) that nuclearization in India (and in South Asia more generally) will engender renewed efforts by other states to seek nuclear weapons; and (3) that nuclearization in India (and in South Asia more generally) will weaken global support for maintaining the existing international nonproliferation regime. Each of these issues will be briefly addressed below.

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Indian nuclearization (and nuclearization in South Asia more generally) represents a failure of the nonproliferation regime only if it is believed that maintaining a club of five de jure nuclear powers is the most sacrosanct objective in international politics. Fortunately, this is not the case: The American architects of the nonproliferation regime recognized from the beginning that India, Pakistan, and Israel would remain recalcitrant because these states were located in areas with high systemic insecurities, and Washington at least—for different reasons in each case—could offer no substitutes that would tempt them to forgo the acquisition of nuclear weaponry. That these nuclear-capable states remained outside the ambit of NPT obligations no doubt created legal ambiguities about their status, but their nuclear capabilities were not viewed as radically subversive of the U.S.-dominated international order. As a result, a remarkably successful nonproliferation regime was constructed and maintained—and has now been indefinitely extended—despite the presence of these small exceptions. The importance of this fact cannot be underestimated because the nonproliferation regime exists primarily as a corralling device intended to prevent the large-scale diffusion of those instruments which can dangerously threaten the interests of the great powers (and the United States in particular). The NPT regime, as it exists today, not only has fulfilled this objective but has actually been more successful than any of its creators expected it to be in 1967: It has managed to get every state in the international system—save three—to accept specific obligations with respect to the acquisition or presence of nuclear weaponry; it has actually managed to roll back, at various points in the past, the nuclear programs of at least seven major states; and, most important, it has provided the great powers with the requisite legitimacy to police all international behavior connected with the maintenance of the regime, including the use of diplomacy, economic coercion, and military force against any cheaters whenever necessary.

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21 Corroborating details can be found in George Perkovich, “Think Again: Nuclear Proliferation,” Foreign Policy, 112 (Fall 1998), pp. 12–13.
All this suggests that the nuclear nonproliferation regime is actually a resounding success in that the worst nuclear threats to international (and particularly American) security—Iran, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea—are already bound by international obligations that require them to surrender their sovereign rights to weapons of mass destruction. So are numerous other states that might be tempted to acquire nuclear weapons in the future, all of which can be legitimately punished by the United States, in concert with other great powers, if they were ever to violate these obligations. Against this impressive tally stand three exceptions to the regime—India, Pakistan, and Israel—none of which is likely to either disturb the existing international order or threaten the extant hegemony of the United States. Ironically, all three of these countries would probably be inclined to assist Washington in preventing the dissolution of the existing nuclear nonproliferation order because any further diffusion of nuclear weaponry would be just as subversive to their security as it would be to that of the United States. If this does not define the accomplishment of an international regime, there is very little else that will.

The fear that nuclearization in India (and in South Asia more generally) would precipitate renewed efforts by other states to seek nuclear weapons is also based on an utterly tenuous, if not discredited, understanding of the mechanisms operating in international politics. While international anarchy may be seamless in theory, in practice it is usually contained within specific “security complexes.” This implies that the actions initiated by a particular state usually evoke counteractions only by those states directly threatened by these actions and not others. When the states involved are not superpowers (that is, states whose ambit of influence extends over multiple security complexes), the action-reaction dynamic usually peter out at the edge of the geographic cluster defining the historical amity-enmity relations enjoyed by these states. This implies that nuclearization in India will precipitate responses from Pakistan and China but not from any other state located along its wider periphery. The “counterresponses” in both of these instances have already occurred: China was a nuclear power long before India became one and, as argued above, is unlikely to do much more than it already has in response to New Delhi’s nuclear program; and Pakistan, in contrast, will respond to India’s nuclearization but without necessarily causing
any extended chain reaction because of its own decisions vis-à-vis India. This does not imply that further nuclearization in the greater Middle East or in the greater East Asian region cannot occur over time, but such nuclearization—if it does occur—will be the result of specific decisions made by countries such as Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Taiwan, and Japan in light of their own local security environment, their inherent technical capacity, and the cost-benefit attractiveness of nuclearization when compared to some other alternatives for preserving security. Any decision by these countries to go nuclear will not be an imitative—or even a causal—consequence of the Indian and Pakistani decisions to develop nuclear weaponry.²²

Finally, the argument that nuclearization in India (and in South Asia more generally) will weaken global support for maintaining the existing nonproliferation architecture is greatly overstated because most of the existing great powers, including the United States as the chief enforcer of the nonproliferation regime, have demonstrated through their foreign policies that they recognize the difference in threat posed by nuclearization in South Asia compared with potential nuclearization elsewhere. Baldly stated, nuclear weapons in the hands of countries like Iran, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea are simply unacceptable from the perspective of U.S. security, whereas nuclear weapons in the hands of India and Pakistan, however undesirable they may be, plainly do not pose an equivalent threat either to the international order or to the United States. The concern that acquiescing to the existence of nuclear programs in South Asia automatically implies weakening global support for the existing nonproliferation regime thus fails to take into account two crucial realities in international politics: first, that there is no such thing as an "international regime" that exists outside the interests of the most important pow-

²²For a perceptive argument about the invalidity of "demonstration effects" emerging from nuclearization in South Asia, see Muthiah Alagappa, "International Response to Nuclear Tests in South Asia: The Need for a New Policy Framework," *Asia Pacific Issues*, 38 (June 15, 1998), pp. 3–4. The causal consequences of Indian and Pakistani nuclearization are likely to be most relevant only in the case of proliferation decisions made in Iran, but even here it is hard to conclude that Iranian-Pakistani rivalry—which is currently exhibited, for example, in Afghanistan—leaves itself to resolution through the acquisition of nuclear weaponry by Tehran. Should such an eventuality materialize, it will be owed more to Iran’s fears of the United States and its desire to consolidate an Iranian hegemony in the Persian Gulf than to Indian and, by implication, Pakistani decisions to acquire nuclear weaponry.
ers who support it. In this age of unipolarity, this implies that the "international nonproliferation regime" is ultimately an American regime sustained by American power in the defense of what are primarily American interests. This does not in any way exclude the possibility that American interests here may be congruent with the interests of many other states, but it does imply that American power and efforts will be fundamentally responsible for generating the "global support" necessary to preserve the regime because its preservation fundamentally serves the interests of the United States. This very fact highlights a second important reality: The United States and other great powers, to the degree that they have congruent interests, can choose to safeguard the nonproliferation regime despite all the exceptions it contains. This implies that Indian nuclearization (and South Asian nuclearization more generally) can have a corrosive effect on the international regime only to the degree that the major powers allow it to. There is nothing that prevents the United States, for example, from pursuing all or some combination of the following policies to buttress the nonproliferation regime:

- denying India and Pakistan the formal status of being "nuclear weapon states" even as they are seriously treated as "nuclear weapon powers";
- expanding the surveillance, monitoring, and political pressure on undesirable candidate nuclear powers such as Iran, Iraq, and North Korea even as the United States moves to improve relations with India and Pakistan;
- increasing the pressure on key suppliers like Russia, China, France, and Germany to prevent further diffusion of strategic technology to all countries of proliferation concern;
- developing a range of counterproliferation plans and technologies that enable the United States to operate effectively even in the presence of suspected nuclear capabilities possessed by regional adversaries;
- accelerating existing plans to progressively reduce the nuclear arsenals possessed by all nuclear weapon powers; and
- working with India and Pakistan to limit the further spread of weapons of mass destruction even as all the other nuclear
weapon states focus on marginalizing these weapons as instruments of high politics.

Obviously, all of these policies are already pursued to some degree or another, which only underscores the point that the United States can preserve the international nonproliferation regime successfully despite the nuclearization currently occurring in India and, more generally, in South Asia. By itself, the nuclearization of the subcontinent does not spell the doom of the international nonproliferation regime, and if the latter eventuality comes to pass, it may have to do more with how the United States responds to the challenge of proliferation globally than with any selective proliferation that has already occurred.\textsuperscript{23} The nuclearization of South Asia suggests that Washington ought to intensify its nonproliferation efforts worldwide, but the best defense against further proliferation might be, as Richard Haass once put it, “a proliferation of proliferation policies”\textsuperscript{24} in which states are targeted discriminatorily through a mix of policy instruments depending on their relative capabilities and the threat they pose to U.S. interests. Such a discriminatory strategy might seem duplicitous to nonproliferation purists, but there is no good reason to avoid duplicity in international politics if it enhances American interests. After all, the goal of U.S. grand strategy should first and foremost be the preservation of its security and the enhancement of its primacy—but because promoting nonproliferation is only a means to that end, its pursuit should not be absolutized to the neglect of alternative policies that may cement U.S. security and primacy far more effectively in some given case.

The above discussion suggests that the most obvious immediate implication of India’s nuclearization (and of nuclearization in South Asia more generally) is the likelihood of a weak arms-race instability ensuing between India and Pakistan but not between India and China. India’s nuclearization—and that in South Asia more generally—is also unlikely to have radically deleterious effects on the international nonproliferation regime because the “costs” of prolifera-

\textsuperscript{23} For thoughtful comments on this question, see Perkovich, “Think Again: Nuclear Proliferation,” p. 13.

tion here have already been absorbed by the regime’s willingness to treat these states as exceptional since 1967. The future burdens on the regime will also be minimized by continued U.S. efforts to limit the exceptionalism permitted thus far, and so long as current non-proliferation efforts continue unabated, there is no reason other candidate proliferants should be able to escape the regime’s constraints in a way that India, Pakistan, and Israel all did previously for unique historical reasons.

When these twin consequences of Indian nuclearization are considered, it is important to keep the first phenomenon in perspective. The low-grade arms-race instability that is predicted to obtain in the Indo-Pakistani dyad will occur mainly because concurrent nuclearization usually engenders problems of simultaneous competitive adjustment, whereas these instabilities are likely to be absent in the Sino-Indian case because the problem here is simply one of catching up at the Indian end. Even in the Indo-Pakistani case, however, the weak arms-race instability that is currently expected can be avoided if Islamabad focuses on developing a deterrent that is simply sufficient for its own needs rather than attempting to match India’s capabilities across the board. In the nuclear age, it is simply more profitable for a state to focus on increasing the survivability of its own deterrent rather than attempting to expand the threat posed to an adversary’s assets: If Pakistan invests its resources in a manner consistent with this orientation, the weak form of arms-race instability that would otherwise ensue in the subcontinent could be diminished. In any event, the saving grace is that arms-race instability, even if it were to occur in strong form, cannot by itself cause deterrence breakdown. It may involve a waste of economic resources—always an undesirable outcome in South Asia—and may lead to an episodic upsurge in discordant “atmospherics” that may have the effect of fueling mutual suspicions about the political intentions of the two antagonists. This outcome, too, is undesirable, but if this is the worst consequence of nuclearization in South Asia, it is still better than many other outcomes that can be imagined for the region.

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25For the dilemmas and tensions facing Pakistan in this regard, see Farah Zahra, “Pakistan’s Road to a Minimum Nuclear Deterrent,” Arms Control Today, 29:5 (July–August 1999), pp. 9–13.
At least two other issues require further analysis from the perspective of policy, and these relate to the effects of India’s nuclearization on deterrence stability and crisis stability (especially on that subset known as “first-strike stability”).\textsuperscript{26} Although several previous discussions in this book have offered relatively optimistic prognoses of the prospects for both deterrence and crisis stability, these prognoses have been grounded almost entirely in abstract and \textit{a priori} discussions of how these challenges might emerge in the region. Consequently, the conclusions advanced must be treated as indicative rather than determinative because they are based to a significant extent on deductive logic rather than on empirical scrutiny of the key issues. Thanks to this fact, no definitive conclusions about deterrence and crisis stability can be offered right now because any such assertions would require detailed analyses of the size, character, and disposition of conventional and nuclear forces (and strategic targets) in India, Pakistan, and China as well as some understanding of how conventional and nuclear deterrence interact in both individual countries and across various dyads. It is hoped that this work, which is currently under way at RAND, will be made publicly available in the future so as to corroborate the judgments advanced below and throughout the book. Until the fruits of that research are available, however, the following summary remarks will have to suffice.

Where deterrence stability is concerned, it is likely that both the Indo-Pakistani and the Sino-Indian dyads will experience reasonably high levels of stability in the policy-relevant future because the two most important states, China and India, are currently not locked into the pursuit of any revisionist objectives with regard to each other. Both India and China have also formally—and in practice—adopted a pacific posture with respect to their outstanding territorial disputes. Pakistan, in contrast, is both formally and materially the most

prominent revisionist entity in South Asia given its commitment to altering the prevailing status quo in Kashmir. Yet even Islamabad has for all practical purposes ruled out the alternative of securing political change through the pursuit of nuclear or conventional war even though it continues to engage in nuclear coercion at the subconventional level and could occasionally lapse into the temptation to engage in shallow cross-border operations in efforts to attract international attention to its claims on Kashmir. These actions might in turn invoke comparable Indian counterresponses, but such eventualities probably represent the current limits of premeditated war in South Asia. The prospects for deterrence stability are therefore high because no South Asian state is currently committed to securing any political objectives through the medium of major conventional and, by implication, nuclear war. This condition is only reinforced by the high levels of “defense dominance” obtaining at the military level, and thus it is not at all an exaggeration to say that deterrence stability in South Asia derives simply from the Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese inability to successfully prosecute quick and decisive conventional military operations, especially with respect to wars of unlimited aims. As research elsewhere has demonstrated, India’s gross numerical superiorities vis-à-vis Pakistan are misleading and do not enable it to rapidly win a high-intensity land war even if it acquits itself favorably in the air and naval campaigns occurring in the theater.\textsuperscript{27} Both India and Pakistan can defend their territorial integrity adequately with the forces they currently have in place but would be hard pressed to dramatically change the terrestrial status quo through a quick conventional or even nuclear attack. The Indo-Chinese balance along the Himalayas is similarly stable for now because the Chinese do not have the logistics capability to sustain any major conventional conflict in support of their more ambitious territorial claims, while the strong and refurbished Indian land defenses, coupled with India’s superiority in airpower, enables New Delhi to defend its existing positions but not sustain any large-scale acquisition of new territory. Consequently, deterrence stability exists along this frontier as well.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27}Tellis, \textit{Stability in South Asia}, pp. 5-22.
\textsuperscript{28}This argument is based on Tellis et al., “Sources of Conflict in Asia,” pp. 156-158.
In the final analysis, what makes this situation metastable is the fact that neither India nor Pakistan—nor, for that matter, China—has the strategic capabilities to execute those successful damage-limiting first strikes that might justify initiating nuclear attacks in a crisis. Even China, which of the three entities comes closest to possessing such capabilities, would find it difficult to conclude that the capacity for “splendid first strikes” lay truly within reach, and even if it could arrive at such a determination, the political justification for these actions would be substantially lacking given the nature of its current political disputes with India. On balance, then, it is reasonable to conclude—at the level of first approximation—that a reasonably high degree of deterrence stability currently exists within the greater South Asian region.

Obviously, these judgments say little about inadvertent wars or wars brought about by miscalculation or misperception, and should deterrence breakdown occur in the future, it is most likely to result from one or more of these possibilities.\textsuperscript{29} In this context, it is pertinent to note that the subcontinent historically has not witnessed any conflicts brought about through inadvertence or misperception, at least in their pure form, and while conflicts rooted either in miscalculation or in catalytic causes have indeed occurred—often because of Pakistan’s desperate efforts at drawing international attention to its cherished cause, Kashmir—it is not unreasonable to expect that the acknowledged presence of nuclear weapons on all sides would inhibit any interactive sequences that could lead to serious forms of deterrence breakdown in the future. As Avery Goldstein argued, “Indians are likely to refrain from military operations that can escalate to the nuclear incineration of Pakistanis (and vice versa) not because they have mastered Brodie, Schelling, Waltz, and Jervis, nor because they care about their neighbors, but rather simply because they care about their own countrymen.”\textsuperscript{30}

Although this argument is both reasonable and reassuring, two gnawing uncertainties remain. The first uncertainty derives from the presence of weak state structures and, by implication, the possibility

\textsuperscript{29}For different avenues toward deterrence breakdown, see Tellis, Stability in South Asia, pp. 55-62.
of deficient strategic decisionmaking, especially in Pakistan. The severe motivational and cognitive biases that have historically afflicted Pakistan’s higher decisionmaking institutions on matters of war and peace do raise fears about the prospect of extreme responses that might be precipitated in a crisis.\(^\text{31}\) If overwhelming fear and helplessness combine with a suicidal destructiveness to overpower reason and inhibit the systematic processing of information during an emergency, it is possible that immoderate actions might occur irrespective of whether the objective circumstances warranted such decisions to begin with. These failures of rationality, which could be compounded by exigencies of domestic politics, civil-military discord, and biased and unreliable intelligence, could in principle occur both in India and in Pakistan, but if the historical record is any indication, the consequences of its occurrence are likely to be far more troublesome in the latter than in the former.\(^\text{32}\) And although the fearsome potency of nuclear weapons is supposed to minimize the possibility of just such catastrophes, there is by now a sufficient margin of uncertainty to justify the fear that catastrophic deterrence breakdown in South Asia could arise as a result of various pathological forms of “cognitive closure.”\(^\text{33}\)

The second uncertainty derives from the possibility of catalytic wars. Catalytic wars are conflicts brought about either by the actions of third parties or by the principals involved with the intention of entrapping third parties into intervening in an ongoing conflict. Such wars have occurred with some frequency in South Asia, in at least one instance with disastrous consequences.\(^\text{34}\) Catalytic wars are particularly problematic events from the perspective of deterrence

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\(^\text{31}\) For a trenchant review of these biases, see Altaf Gauhar, “Four Wars, One Assumption,” \textit{The Nation}, September 5, 1999.


\(^\text{34}\) For a good analysis of past South Asian conflicts, their causes, and their manifestations, see Sumit Ganguly, \textit{The Origins of War in South Asia: The Indo-Pakistani Conflicts Since 1947}, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).
stability because they could occur first without the consent or control of the competing states, as \textquotedblleft local insurgents or separatists may take initiatives that could be difficult to control,\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{35} and second as a result of aggressive state actions that, despite the poor prospect of any lasting military success, are nonetheless pursued in the belief that \textquotedblleft outside actors would intervene to stop the war before . . . [protracted conflict or irretrievable defeat] . . . was reached.\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{36} In any event, the greatest damper on the temptation to abet or initiate such wars, particularly from Pakistan's perspective, is the growing recognition in Islamabad—amply corroborated during the Kargil crisis—that neither the United States nor the other great powers, including China, Pakistan's most steadfast ally, have an interest in supporting any Pakistani revisionism involving the use of force initiated by Islamabad or by its surrogate allies battling India. This development, coupled with the fact that India's economic, political, and conventional military strength already bequeaths to it a large measure of safety against threats both to its external security and to its internal integrity, offers the best hope against the undermining of deterrence stability by threats of catalytic war over the long term.

There is, however, another more remote but nonetheless real threat that cannot be discounted where the issue of catalytic war is concerned. This contingency is rooted in the possibility that "Pakistan's inability to solve its internal problems [could] become a security problem for India."\textsuperscript{37} If the events leading up to the 1971 war were to be replicated in Pakistan in the future, the South Asian region could well experience another episode of deterrence breakdown with even more catastrophic consequences this time around, as an imploding Pakistan could employ all the means at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, in a "Samson option" designed to punish what it perceived to be Indian aggression, irrespective of whether New Delhi was in fact behind the insurgent challenges leading up to Pakistan's potential breakup. The threats embodied by catalytic war in multiple ways—when conjoined with the challenges imposed by cognitive closure, especially in Pakistan—will thus continue to sub-

\textsuperscript{35} Joock, \textit{Maintaining Nuclear Stability in South Asia}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 24.
vert the otherwise relatively high prospects of deterrence stability in South Asia.\textsuperscript{38}

If the contours of deterrence stability in South Asia can be readily discerned, the same cannot be said with respect to crisis stability. In part, this is because the still-evolving Indian and Pakistani nuclear capabilities do not yet lend themselves to the kind of analytical modeling that would justify any strong claims about the first-strike stability of these deterrents. What can be said right now, however, is that the desired Indian force-in-being—if operationalized in the manner described in previous chapters—is heavily \textit{biased} in support of crisis stability. The evolving Pakistani nuclear deterrent, though not analyzed in this volume, also appears to be biased in favor of crisis stability even though it does exemplify critically important differences in command-and-control arrangements, deployment patterns, and readiness rates in comparison to its Indian counterpart.\textsuperscript{39} What completes this generally irenic picture is the highly slack operating posture of the Chinese deterrent: Beijing’s nuclear capabilities are neither intended nor deployed for the conduct of prompt operations, and China’s strategic forces as a whole are still incapable of executing the “limited deterrence”\textsuperscript{40} missions attributed to them by some Western theorists. For at least another decade if not more, the

\textsuperscript{38}These fears have acquired new currency in the post-Kargil era for three reasons: (1) in Pakistan, resolving the Kashmir dispute has now become the central and nonnegotiable issue to be tackled first in any future discussions with India; (2) in India, dealing with the Kashmir insurgency has moved beyond “reactive” strategies to a contemplation of various military operations conducted at if not beyond the Line of Control; and (3) in both countries there is now a new refusal to even initiate dialogue unless the other gives up its key bargaining levers held in anticipation of negotiations. See Paul Mann, “India Derides Nuclear ‘Alarmism,’” \textit{Aviation Week & Space Technology}, April 3, 2000, pp. 29–30.


\textsuperscript{40}Johnston, “China’s New ‘Old Thinking’: The Concept of Limited Deterrence,” pp. 5–42.
Chinese nuclear deterrent will be oriented primarily toward conducting relatively simple forms of "delayed second strike," and that in effect implies that even China's strategic forces, although much more sophisticated in comparison to South Asian capabilities, actually share an important characteristic with the latter: a relatively relaxed routine operating posture that is heavily biased toward crisis stability.\footnote{This is well recognized by Indian observers of the Chinese military. See, for example, Savita Pande, "Chinese Nuclear Doctrine," Strategic Analysis, 23:12 (March 2000), pp. 2011–2036.}

The fact that the nuclear capabilities of all three states—India, Pakistan, and China—are not structured for the conduct of prompt operations seems to have eluded many commentators in the United States, who, especially in the aftermath of the nuclear tests of May 1998, spewed forth several assertions that one scholar correctly described as "more visceral than thoughtful."\footnote{Goldstein, "Scared Senseless? The South Asian Nuclear Tests" p. 1.} Examples of such assertions include claims that both sides "would... have weapons on aircraft or missiles capable of striking with as little as 3 minutes] warning"\footnote{Cirincione, "Viewpoint," p. 102.} and that "India or Pakistan might opt to Launch on Warning (LoW) of attack."\footnote{Withington, "Nuclear Dilemmas Seize Asia," p. 13.} Not only are such assertions misleading, but the evidence that ought to underwrite them simply does not exist. Consequently, the alarmist conclusions often derived about stability from raw geographic or technical facts are usually dubious and, more dangerously, could skew U.S. policy in directions that are either fruitless or counterproductive. As things stand today, there is simply no evidentiary basis for the claim advanced, for example, by Evan Medeiros that "the two sides [meaning India and Pakistan] are working themselves into just about as unstable a posture as you can imagine... It's a nightmare."\footnote{Cited in Tony Emerson, "Asia's Ground Zero," Newsweek International Edition, April 22, 1996.} If anything, the data available thus far suggest the opposite: The effort to develop a force-in-being in India—with a comparable sort of posture emerging in Pakistan—is more supportive of crisis stability than many other kinds of deterrent postures imaginable.
Since this reality is often underappreciated, it is not surprising to find some analysts still arguing that “the United States must unequivocally demand that India and Pakistan join the Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapon states.” Still other have urged a “nuclear rollback in South Asia” based at least initially on the lessons learned from previous nonproliferation successes elsewhere in the world. There are several reasons past examples of rollback have limited applicability to South Asia. What is more to the point, however, is that the Clinton administration wisely chose not to pursue such chimerical goals but instead focused its attention on securing a more limited objective—namely, the institutionalization of a nuclear restraint regime covering both India and Pakistan. This search for a restraint regime is essentially based on the fact that nuclear capabilities in South Asia are here to stay, and while their eradication may be a distant goal to which Washington still aspires under the logic of the NPT, slowing down the pace of research, development, testing, and deployment of regional nuclear forces is perhaps the best alternative that the United States can hope to attain in the policy-relevant future. Pursuing this more circumscribed objective is eminently sensible and accords better with the prevailing realities in the region—but it must be borne in mind that even success here is not at all assured.

There are five broad components to the restraint regime that the United States government has advocated in its separate bilateral discussions with India and Pakistan. These involve (1) urging India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT and to support an early completion of the FMCT; (2) urging India and Pakistan to avoid nuclear weaponization and the creation of a ready arsenal; (3) urging India and Pakistan to avoid further missile testing, production, and deployment; (4) urging India and Pakistan to institutionalize strict export controls on the diffusion of strategic materials and technologies to other actors; and

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(5) urging India and Pakistan to resume a diplomatic dialogue that leads to the resolution of their outstanding political differences.\textsuperscript{49}

Defining the objectives of the restraint regime in this broad, generic way allows for a brief assessment of the critical issues involved with each of these goals—at least where India and its future deterrent are concerned. In the immediate aftermath of the May 1998 tests, the Vajpayee government announced that India would be prepared to convert its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear testing into a formal commitment. The conditions required for such a commitment were not specified but were presumably to be hammered out in negotiations with the United States. Just prior to the fall of the BJP government in May 1999, the Indian state began the arduous process of securing a "national consensus" in support of formally signing the CTBT—a demand issued by the United States in order to preserve the successes achieved thus far in the realm of global non-proliferation and to limit the emerging Indian (and Pakistani) nuclear arsenals to the lowest qualitative levels possible. The Indian efforts at creating a national consensus in favor of signing the treaty, however, appear to have foundered on two counts: the failure to secure a complete withdrawal of the U.S. sanctions imposed after the May 1998 tests prior to any Indian signature, and the U.S. Senate's own refusal to ratify the treaty prior to the review conference that was supposed to be held in September 1999. Both of these issues are important to New Delhi for different reasons: The former holds out the hope of consolidating the momentum in the improvement of U.S.-Indian relations, while the latter is critical by virtue of India's belief that the U.S. failure to ratify the CTBT would allow China to renege on its own commitments to the treaty—with all the consequent implications for Indian security. Thanks to the uncertainties currently clouding both issues, it would appear that a formal Indian accession to the CTBT is now farther off than ever despite the fact that several senior scientists, including the former Chairman of India's AEC, have publicly stated that signing the treaty would in no way crimp the country's ability to maintain an effective deterrent.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{49} Details about the restraint regime can be found in Chidanand Rajghatta, "U.S. Restraint Regime for India, Pak Covers N-Capable Aircraft," \textit{Indian Express}, November 13, 1998.

\textsuperscript{50} "Signing CTBT Will Not Weaken Country."
is more disquieting in this context is that several moderate Indian political parties that might otherwise have been expected to sign the treaty were they in power have now urged the government not to sign the CTBT if it cannot be linked to a specific time frame for global nuclear disarmament.\textsuperscript{51} On balance, therefore, India is likely to maintain its self-imposed moratorium on testing in the near term but is unlikely to sign the CTBT at any time soon because withholding its consent is perceived as the only leverage India has with respect to both the withdrawal of U.S. sanctions and the surety of ratification by all the established nuclear weapon states. If India does not sign the CTBT soon—because issues such as the U.S. sanctions and U.S. failure to ratify the CTBT continue to intrude—then its temptation to resume nuclear testing could increase. A persistent delay in securing India’s signature to the treaty will only encourage elements within the Indian nuclear and military establishment (and among its strategic elites) to push for renewed nuclear testing. Moreover, the Indian government, which thus far has been restrained, may give in to such pressures either prior to acceding to the treaty or simply because other strategic objectives—such as strengthening ties with the United States—have simply not borne the fruits expected in the interim.

In contrast to its diffidence over signing the CTBT, India has supported initiating the negotiations that would lead up to the FMCT.\textsuperscript{52} On this issue, the Indian position is analogous to that of the United States, which argues that the FMCT should apply only to future stockpiles of fissile material and should involve no efforts at creating any transparency over past stockpiles owned by various nuclear powers. While the broad policies of the two countries are thus congruent, the devil, as usual, lies in the details, and it is still too early to tell whether India will sign the final version of the treaty if in fact one is negotiated over what may be objections to its specifics. In any case, having a draft treaty for signature is an event that lies many years away, and what India’s position will be at that time is anyone’s

\textsuperscript{51}Congress Not for CTBT Now," \textit{Indian Express}, May 10, 1999. The intent of the Congress Party on this question is still unclear because the same report suggests that the refusal to back a national decision on signing the CTBT may also be linked to the exigencies of electoral politics.

\textsuperscript{52}Negotiating an FMCT," \textit{The Hindu}, November 19, 1998.
guess. At the moment, Indian policymakers seem willing to support a treaty that complies with U.S. interests despite the fact that they may have a much smaller stockpile of fissile materials than many Western assessments suggest. This potentially anomalous conduct, however, does not support the inference that India’s fissile-material inventory must therefore be bigger than is commonly believed. Rather, it must be remembered that India today appears willing to support a treaty that is still several years away from completion and, even then, might sign such an instrument only if it preserved complete opacity over past inventories: New Delhi’s acquiescence here would derive not from the fact that it has larger-than-expected holdings of fissile materials but rather from its belief that continued uncertainty about the true size of its inventory provides greater deterrence benefits than could be garnered from a larger but completely transparent stockpile. Irrespective of what India’s position on the final FMCT text may eventually be, however, New Delhi has already rejected Washington’s interim demand that India declare a “voluntary” moratorium on the production of fissile materials pending the successful negotiation of the treaty.53 This action indicates that New Delhi will continue to expand its fissile-material stockpile for all the strategic reasons described earlier even as it persists in maintaining a pervasive opacity over the size of that stockpile. And this, in turn, suggests that Washington is unlikely to secure part of its second goal in the ongoing dialogue with India despite the fact that there are in principle no differences between India and the United States on this issue.

While India’s general stance with respect to the CTBT and the FMCT, when taken at face value, is not diametrically opposed to the interests of the United States, its position on the second and third components of the restraint regime—nuclear weaponization and missile development—stands greatly at variance with U.S. preferences. The rationale for pursuing these twin objectives at the U.S. end is ultimately based on two beliefs: first, that a nuclear-free South Asia is safer than a nuclear South Asia; and second, that the South Asian region is a volatile area that represents the most likely locale for a future war fought with nuclear weapons. While the first conviction may appear to be a natural consequence of the larger nonprolif-

eration policy the United States has pursued, it does exemplify something more than just an ordinary nonproliferation prejudice. In many cases, it represents the private but considered judgment of many U.S. policymakers, who argue that the prevailing command structures, the acute resource constraints, and the limitations of rationality—all of which take on a special resonance in the case of Pakistan—conspire to make New Delhi’s security hostage to the weakest links in Islamabad’s security system and, as such, warrant ridding the region of nuclear weapons altogether.54 The second notion, in contrast, is based on the more widely held impression that the ongoing disputes in the region, including the low-intensity war in Kashmir, present numerous opportunities for escalation that could spin out of control. While Indian policymakers are more likely to concede the legitimacy of the concerns underlying the first belief even as they reject the inferences inherent in the second (which are often based on the expectation that New Delhi might up the ante in an acute crisis), they are nonetheless unwilling to contemplate any alternative that involves eschewing the development of a nuclear deterrent of some kind at this point.55 They will admit that a “ready arsenal,” configured for the prompt conduct of nuclear operations, is not desirable from the viewpoint of Indian interests. On this score at least, they will acknowledge that nuclear capabilities ought to be arrayed only with a relatively long fuse, although the exact length of this fuse has not yet been publicly acknowledged. Different entities within the Indian establishment have proposed various desirable response times ranging from hours to days, and while both the urgency and the extent of actual retaliation in wartime may be conditioned more by adversary actions than by New Delhi’s preferences, Indian security managers today remain adamant that their reluctance to deploy a “ready arsenal” does not translate into a termination of nuclear weaponization and missile development.56

54The best example of this argument in the public literature has been formulated by Stephen P. Cohen, “Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: Strategic Considerations Reconsidered,” report of the IPCS seminar held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, January 4, 1999, available at http://www.ipcs.org/issues/articles/166-ndlcohen.htm.


India will therefore continue to weaponize its nuclear capabilities despite whatever U.S. preferences on this score may be. Weaponization here will proceed in both senses of the term defined earlier: both in the loose sense, where it refers to the progressive development of the plans, procedures, technologies, and organizations necessary for the conduct of effective nuclear operations, and in the strict sense of developing, testing, and integrating nuclear payloads with specific delivery vehicles. In both instances, however, the processes of weaponization will remain primarily covert, as India's nuclear capabilities are at a stage where, so long as New Delhi does not revert to full-up nuclear testing in the field, most of its weaponization can be carried out clandestinely and with minimal notice (even though some activities will betray distinctive physical signatures that can be detected by national technical means). Washington's desire to have New Delhi commit to avoiding any weaponization is based on the belief that "latent nuclear capacities" alone ought to suffice for purposes of ensuring Indian security. Irrespective of whether this belief is true or not, the decisions arrived at in New Delhi after the May 1998 tests suggest a different vision of adequacy: For better or worse, India (and, for that matter, Pakistan) has decided that developing a "constitutable deterrent" rather than maintaining merely latent nuclear capacities is the most appropriate course of action. Consequently—and consistent with U.S. preferences—India will eschew developing a "standing force" of the sort represented by a ready arsenal, but it will move beyond the minimal posture represented by the American demand for maintaining latent nuclear capacities to something resembling a middling alternative—and this constitutable deterrent will take the form of a force-in-being that requires completed weaponization even if it precludes the deployment of actual, ready, standing nuclear forces. Since the weaponization required by this force-in-being will for the most part be completed surreptitiously, India will at best promise to carry out this process in as non-provocative a fashion as possible if it chooses to offer any promises in this regard at all. Most likely, however, it will demur from complying with the U.S. demand for avoiding weaponization simply by pointing to the fact that a force-in-being—which the country believes is essential for its security today—requires the completion of weaponization in both the broad and narrow sense referred to earlier.
A similar judgment holds with respect to the demand that India cease missile development, testing, production, and deployment. Most analysts believe that this component of the restraint regime is predicated on the belief that aircraft-based deterrents are more stable than missile-delivered weapons because the short reaction times embodied by the latter, the inability to recall missiles once launched, and the deep concerns about the limitations of rationality and the character of the command-and-control systems in both countries, especially in Pakistan, all demand an effort to suppress the development and deployment of nuclear-armed missiles in South Asia. Irrespective of how valid these concerns may be, the United States government has correctly recognized that ballistic and cruise missiles will be developed or acquired, tested, produced, and deployed by both India and Pakistan, albeit for different reasons. Islamabad will acquire ballistic missile systems primarily because its air-breathing elements face severe constraints on penetrativity in any operations against India. India will develop ballistic missile systems primarily because none of its air-breathing platforms, currently or prospectively, has the required range to reach critical targets located deep within the Chinese landmass. Both states, appreciating the greater simplicity of missile attack operations, the lower probabilities of intercept associated with missile delivery, and the enhanced survivability enjoyed by mobile missiles in the field, will therefore continue to make nuclear-capable missile systems the mainstay of their strategic deterrents over time.

Recognizing just this fact, the United States government has focused not on getting India to eliminate its missile development program altogether—however preferable that might be for nonproliferation reasons—but rather on inducing India to terminate the development, testing, and production of new missiles after the current programs are concluded. In effect, the United States has sought to limit the possibility of an open-ended missile development program in South Asia where newer and more lethal missiles are continually developed not out of strategic necessity but rather out of bureaucratic momentum. At this point, however, it is unclear whether this objective can be successfully achieved. In part, this is because the missiles India requires for its force-in-being will not be available in operational form for at least five to seven years, and the number of missiles necessary may require production operations to persist for
what may be the better part of the next decade, if not two. This development and production process may spawn better and more improved variants of the basic design, with the result that testing and production of newer systems may persist more or less continually for some time to come. Any promise made now by New Delhi to eschew the development of follow-on systems after the current R&D efforts are completed thus has uncertain credibility at best and at worst will be completely unenforceable. All that the United States can achieve at this juncture is to communicate the gravity of its concerns and, it is hoped, secure from New Delhi a better understanding of the limits of Indian ambitions. Acquiring such an understanding, then, would enable the United States to discuss how such capabilities may or may not comport with India’s present desire for a “minimum” deterrent while simultaneously communicating to New Delhi that future improvements in U.S.-Indian strategic ties will always remain contingent on the degree to which India can be relied on to act in accordance with its own commitments.

In contrast to the knotty problems posed by nuclear weaponization and missile development, the last two components of the restraint regime urged by the United States face much better prospects of attainment. Without much difficulty, India will institute national controls on the diffusion of strategic technologies because it is in its own interests to do so. Many of these regulatory mechanisms already exist in Indian law, and wherever lacunae are discovered it is reasonable to expect that New Delhi will remedy them. It is clearly not in India’s interests to encourage further proliferation, and for that reason India is most likely to comply with U.S. requests in this matter more than in any other out of sheer self-interest. Almost all the producers of strategic technology in India also happen to exist in the public sector, where New Delhi’s writ runs firmly. None of these enterprises is controlled by authorities who enjoy any excessive autonomy within the Indian state; consequently, the chances that one or more of these organizations might pursue their parochial interests, irrespective of how that is reconciled with the objectives of the state writ large, is highly remote. In any event, the U.S. government would do well to carefully monitor India’s activities with respect to its trade in critical materials with various countries of concern. It is entirely possible that New Delhi could occasionally succumb to the lure of engaging in such trade either because of the commercial benefits in-
volved or because the commercial transactions in question happened to skirt the restrictive technology-control regimes maintained by the United States. Should such transactions be detected, Washington should chastise India both publicly and privately while simultaneously communicating to New Delhi that the evolving U.S.-Indian rapprochement will always be constrained if India cannot demonstrate due sensitivity to critical U.S. concerns about trade in strategic materials with potential adversaries of the United States.

In time, New Delhi is also likely to resume public dialogue with Pakistan on matters of mutual concern. India’s dialogue with China, which was interrupted by the May 1998 nuclear tests, has now resumed—with hopeful portents.\textsuperscript{57} Resumption of the dialogue with Pakistan will take somewhat longer, as New Delhi—upset by the events at Kargil and by continued violence in Kashmir—appears determined to isolate Pakistan and penalize it as long as it possibly can through a new policy of “malign neglect.” Yet even Indian policymakers recognize that a dialogue with Pakistan must resume eventually if for no other reason than the fact that it serves the interests of all actors concerned. At the moment, New Delhi’s precondition for resuming this dialogue has been a cessation of violence in Kashmir and a reduction in cross-border infiltration. If Pakistan is seen to embark on even tentative steps in this direction, India will have no choice but to resume the dialogue that was interrupted by the tragic events associated with Kargil and its aftermath.

At the very least, such a dialogue would help reduce the political temperatures at a time when all South Asian states could use the breathing room offered by these confidence-building measures to address the more pressing problems related to the continuation of economic reform or the preservation of order in domestic politics. Continued political dialogue would also help clarify the nature of strategic intentions on all sides with the objective of reducing surprises, assisting evolutionary change, and, over the long term, changing the antagonistic perceptions that are currently held by each side. In the near term, this dialogue would also allow each country to adjust to the changes in strategic capabilities that may be

\textsuperscript{57}For a good assessment of these developments, see J. N. Dixit, “Beijing on Our Mind,” Hindustan Times, August 2, 2000.
occurring on the opposite side without the need for an exaggerated response of one’s own. Thus, it may even slow the pace of nuclearization at the margins or at least prevent the competitive action-reaction cycle from perniciously increasing in velocity.

It must be noted, however, that these benefits are unlikely to carry over into a resolution of the “core” disputes, especially in the case of India and Pakistan. The issue of disputed territories in the Sino-Indian case is a different matter; despite Beijing’s general reluctance to specify the “line of actual control” along the Himalayan border, it is possible that China would move toward a satisfactory resolution of all of its border disputes with India once it was convinced that New Delhi posed no genuine threat to its fundamental interests. Unlike the territorial disputes in the Indo-Pakistani case, the disputed Himalayan territories hold no emotive claims for China; their importance to Beijing is purely instrumental and, except for the Aksai Chin, which hosts the strategic lines of communication between Xinjiang and Tibet, serve primarily as useful instruments for intimidating India whenever necessary. In contrast, Indo-Pakistani territorial disputes—especially those relating to Kashmir—are highly emotive and involve claims that are considered to be intrinsically valuable on both sides: Indian and Pakistani claims over Kashmir in particular are in “absolute” conflict, and it is highly unlikely that any amount of dialogue will ever resolve the issue to the satisfaction of both. In a power-political sense, the Kashmir dispute is simply unresolvable because the side most committed to changing the status quo—Pakistan—also happens to be the weaker of the two disputants, while the stronger entity—India—not only feels un compelled to alter its current claims but also can sustain the existing structure of political control in Kashmir indefinitely and at minimal cost to its body politic. For these reasons, the best that can be expected of the present Indo-Pakistani dialogue, at least where the outstanding territorial dispute relating to Kashmir is concerned, is the gradual diminution of violence and a return to civility in the disputed state; the evolution of a “working relationship” between New Delhi and

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58 Recent reports suggest that during meetings of the “experts group” in November 2000, China in fact agreed to exchange maps of the “middle sector” for the first time. See “Sino-Indian Ties Looking Up: Jaswant,” The Hindu, November 25, 2000.
Islamabad; and a gradual accommodation in both India and Pakistan to the reality of divided control over the former Himalayan kingdom.

On balance, therefore, the restraint regime pursued by the United States since the May 1998 tests is likely to enjoy only mixed success, at least as far as India is concerned. New Delhi is likely to maintain its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear testing for a while longer even if it declines to sign the CTBT in the absence of normalized relations with the United States or in the face of incomplete ratification of the treaty by the established nuclear powers. It has supported the initiation of discussions leading up to the conclusion of an FMCT, although its final response to the draft treaty that may emerge from such a process obviously remains uncertain. In the interim, however, it will not agree to any moratorium on the production of fissile materials. New Delhi will continue to pursue both nuclear weaponization and the development and production of various missiles, especially the Agni series currently under way, although these efforts will not materialize in the form of ready and standing nuclear forces. India will comply with U.S. requests that it establish a rigorous national regime to prevent the external diffusion of strategic technologies, and it will resume a dialogue with Pakistan eventually (while continuing its current dialogue with China) even if these efforts do not end in a conclusive resolution of all the outstanding disputes that currently exist between these states. Whether Washington will be satisfied with the mixed achievements emerging from the U.S.-Indian dialogue is still unclear, in part because the strategic objective of improving U.S.-Indian relations has never been cogently articulated by the United States. There is no doubt, however, that the dialogue initiated by the Clinton administration in the aftermath of the May 1998 tests has resulted in the most intense and consistent conversation about national interests ever conducted in the history of bilateral relations between the two countries.

At the end of the day, therefore, the greatest achievement of this process may turn out to be the fact that the two sides have come to steadily appreciate the strategic concerns of the other somewhat better than they did before the dialogue began.59 At the Indian end,
the very fact that such a dialogue has occurred is itself important because it serves to redress in some way New Delhi’s traditional grievance about being treated less than seriously by the United States. At the U.S. end, the dialogue has been useful insofar as it has allowed Washington to persuasively make the case for India’s accession to the CTBT regime—an objective of great importance to U.S. global interests—even as it has enabled senior U.S. officials to catch a glimpse of India’s ability and willingness to restrain its ongoing strategic programs. The general opacity about most details relating to New Delhi’s desired nuclear force architecture and its operating posture remains a source of some anguish and frustration, and hence it is not surprising that several U.S. diplomats have gently urged New Delhi to display more transparency with respect to its nuclear deterrent. These calls have in most instances centered on understanding the question “How many missile systems and warheads does India need to have a minimum nuclear deterrent?” U.S. requests for transparency on this issue have been driven in the first instance by a desire to prevent India and its neighbors from inadvertently locking themselves into an action-reaction cycle that inevitably degenerates into an arms race. However, these requests are also driven by the desire to avoid continual surprises and by the need to secure concrete and tangible manifestations of restraint, especially with respect to force levels, force composition, and force posture.

Not surprisingly—and quite consistent with its prevailing practices on strategic matters—India has opposed these demands for transparency. This opposition has sometimes been articulated on the rhetorical grounds of defending sovereignty but may be rooted more substantially in the fact that India still does not know what its force-in-being will look like when it is eventually completed. This should not be surprising because as the analysis in this book reveals, the nuclear deterrent New Delhi desires is still several years and possibly up to two decades from completion. In any event, while the desire for greater transparency in Indian intentions and capabilities

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61-These concerns were cogently articulated by U.S. Ambassador to India Richard Celeste in several statements made in New Delhi during December 1998 and January 1999. For a useful report of Celeste’s argument, see K. V. Krishnaswamy, “Celeste Defends Demand on Deterrence,” The Hindu, January 23, 1999.
is understandable, any transparency in force size, structure, and posture could become problematic if it brings the tensions between political restraint and first-strike stability to a head. This issue becomes relevant only when the nuclear deterrents in question are composed of relatively small and potentially weak forces that, however conducive they are to the objective of furthering restraint, could become dangerous magnets for attempted disarming strikes in the context of a crisis. Because Indian and Pakistani nuclear capabilities are relatively weak—the political pretensions and inflated rhetoric of their elites notwithstanding—it is probably better, from the perspective of larger U.S. interests, that these capabilities be kept continually hidden behind a dense veil of secrecy. Continued opaqueness represents their best defense against what may be even episodic temptations of preemptive attack, and to the degree that these temptations can be successfully neutralized through the institutionalization of pervasive uncertainty, the critical U.S. objective of preserving deterrence and crisis stability in the region will only be further enhanced even if some other local nonproliferation preferences must take a back seat in the process.

If the prevention of war, including nuclear war, ought to become the new goal of American nonproliferation policy in the region—an objective whose importance is matched only by the need to prevent the diffusion of strategic technologies to other potential proliferants—the United States should concentrate on shaping the character of the evolving Indian (and Pakistani) nuclear arsenals so that they comport with the following injunctions:

- **Keep 'em small:** A modest Indian arsenal suits American grand strategy more than a large arsenal so long as its constituent capabilities are safe, survivable, and reasonably effective.footnote{62}

- **Keep 'em stealthy:** A surreptitious Indian force can avoid the high costs of ensuring survivability by means other than opacity, and since mobility is a special form of stealth, mobile delivery systems should be encouraged, not proscribed.footnote{63}


• *Keep 'em slow:* An Indian arsenal that embodies anything other than a rapid-response capability does not subvert either Indian or American interests because it helps dampen escalation and because if it has to be employed *in extremis,* "revenge is a dish best eaten cold."

*64*

Although the United States cannot provide India with technical assistance to develop its force-in-being—nor should it seek to—it can play many other useful roles and can also influence the eventual size, shape, and disposition of India's evolving nuclear deterrent so as to reduce the threat it poses to larger American interests. To obtain this outcome, however, the United States must begin—paradoxical though it may seem—by truly accepting the fact that India will maintain a nuclear deterrent of some sort for some time to come. If Washington genuinely accepts this reality and internalizes it as a matter of policy, it may in fact create conditions that allow New Delhi to deemphasize the need for both a larger arsenal and a more provocative strategic posture.

There is no guarantee, however, that such an approach will work. What is nonetheless certain is that the opposing approach will fail. A policy that focuses on explicitly attempting to constrain the Indian nuclear weapon program—or one that explicitly holds the growth in U.S.-Indian relations hostage to securing Indian compliance with some proliferation benchmarks—will only increase resistance in New Delhi. It will, for example, strengthen the position of the hawks within India's domestic debate and will compel the government of India to pursue a far larger and more open-ended strategic weapon program than was its intention. Such reactions will in fact become inevitable because increased U.S. pressures are likely to be viewed as part of a hostile international environment that demands, among other things, expanded—not reduced—nuclear capabilities on the part of New Delhi.

If the net result of either increased American pressure or deepened American recalcitrance is a more extensive Indian strategic capability, the United States will have failed on two counts. First, it will

*)Notes:

have failed to constrain the size, shape, and disposition of the evolving Indian deterrent—presumably the first objective of pursuing such a policy. Second, it will have failed to entice a rising power into a strategic relationship that could provide larger advantages to both India and the United States on a variety of issues ranging from the evolving balance of power in Asia to the emerging challenges of global governance. In this context, it is important to recognize that left to its own devices, New Delhi will more likely than not pursue strategic programs that are more or less modest in their scope and orientation. In the face of external pressures or resistance, however, this native propensity for moderation could be transmuted into domestic decisions that have either the direct or the unintended effect of challenging both U.S. interests and the international order. At this point in the U.S.-Indian relationship, it is therefore likely that a genuine expansion of ties with New Delhi will promise more favorable outcomes for American interests across the board than the traditional U.S. policy—which, obsessed with resolving nonproliferation issues as a precondition to deepened bilateral relations, will result both in numerous lost opportunities along a much wider strategic canvas than just South Asia and in the defeat of every one of Washington’s nonproliferation goals, if only on an installment plan.

Even as the United States countenances such a reorientation in its strategic attitude toward India (and, wherever applicable, toward Pakistan as well), there are three important policy initiatives Washington can undertake in the near term to influence New Delhi’s strategic choices with respect to its evolving nuclear posture.

First, it can play the role of helpful critic. This contribution, however, is best made privately through sustained dialogue and through the various official mechanisms that are now in place at the highest levels for ongoing discussions between Indian and American policymakers. Such "intellectual assistance"—which would continually challenge India to think through the kinds of capabilities it needs, the forms in which they materialize, the posture in which they will be deployed, and the doctrine under which they may be utilized—will be more useful to India (and to Pakistan) over the long term than any quick fixes like transfers of technology. The tenor of these discussions, however, is as important as their substance; U.S. objectives must not consist of browbeating India into meeting certain political demands but must instead focus on understanding where India
stands with respect to its strategic programs at any given point. This understanding ought to be premised on the recognition of an important fact: Indian nuclear weapons do not pose a threat to U.S. security, but Indian nuclear triumphalism could well damage important U.S. interests. Consequently, a continuing dialogue on nuclear issues must focus on eliminating the prospect of repeated Indian surprises in the strategic realm while helping identify those outcomes both sides could commonly strive toward because they serve U.S. and Indian interests simultaneously. Such discussions also provide a good opportunity to inform India about the American experience of managing nuclear forces, including the challenges and problems the United States faced during the Cold War—and to the degree that such discussions are found helpful, they should be further emphasized in the years ahead.

Second, it can begin to share its own assessments about the character of the strategic environment facing India. This contribution may not entail intelligence sharing of any sort but does require a willingness to share certain judgments based on intelligence information that the United States possesses. The utility of this contribution must not be underestimated: All the South Asian states today generally possess relatively poor information about the intentions and the capabilities of their competitors and are consequently apt to base programmatic decisions with respect to their strategic capabilities on a pervasive misreading of their threat environment. Given this problem, it is imperative that the United States search for ways to share its own appreciation of the regional strategic situation with each of the actors involved. In some instances, this may involve sharing bits of information—sometimes those available from commercial rather than governmental sources. Irrespective of the specifics involved, however, the objective of such discussions must be to help India (and other regional states where necessary) make strategic decisions that dampen, not heighten, the ongoing security competition in South Asia. Ultimately, the United States must prepare itself to play the role of an “umpire,” especially in situations where deterrence breakdown or nuclear weapon use is plausible. This will require, among other things, a willingness to expose any attempts that regional states might make to disturb the status quo by means of military, including nuclear, instruments. The challenges associated with this task are numerous and complex, but Washington
should prepare for them at least by assessing the nature of the demands involved, particularly if preventing war—especially nuclear war—is to become (as one can hope it will be) a new U.S. policy objective in South Asia.

Third, the United States can transform its stated preference for Indo-Pakistani reconciliation over Kashmir into a clear and articulated tenet of its regional policy. During President Clinton’s visit to the region in March 2000, the United States began to affirm the proposition that disputed boundaries ought not to be redrawn in blood and that the existing Line of Control ought to be treated as sacrosanct by both sides. Building on this foundation, the United States should encourage both India and Pakistan to negotiate the transformation of the existing Line of Control—with the appropriate modifications necessary to increase security—into a new international border. This solution is unlikely to fully satisfy either India or Pakistan, but since every other alternative is fraught with grave risks and could be obtained only through the medium of war, a future U.S. policy toward South Asia should strongly endorse the negotiated transformation of the Line of Control into an international border. Operationalizing this solution involves several other complicated predicates: It involves urging India to become more responsive to Kashmiri aspirations; it involves urging Pakistan to restrain both its official support for cross-border insurgency and the unofficial activities of various Islamist groups operating within its territory, if for no other reason than Pakistan’s own continued stability; and it involves urging both India and Pakistan to engage in bilateral negotiations, conducted on the a priori understanding that the absence of politically viable alternatives to the current status quo requires both countries to prepare their citizenry for the compromises that acceptance of the Line of Control as an international border necessarily entails.

As the United States attempts to cope with the rapidly changing situation in Southern Asia—of which India’s emerging nuclear capabilities are only one, albeit an important, component—it should not lose sight of the fact that bilateral U.S.-Indian relations still cry

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out for a realistic strategic vision that could serve as the framework within which the sometimes competing interests of the two states may be reconciled. The lack of such a vision historically condemned both countries to a bitter “transactional” approach in which individual policy initiatives quickly became hostage to either transient political moods or bureaucratic pressures on both sides. Nowhere has this been seen more clearly than on the nuclear issue, a phenomenon that once led two prominent observers to remark that “of all the parts of the world where U.S. policy is held hostage by a single-issue constituency, South Asia is one of the worst.”

During President Clinton’s March 1998 trip to South Asia, the President and Prime Minister Vajpayee jointly signed a vision statement that elucidated the resolve “to create a closer and qualitatively new relationship between the United States and India.” With its soaring rhetoric and lofty goals, this statement represented a welcome first step in the long and delicate process of restoring equilibrium to the U.S.-Indian engagement. Yet for all its value, the statement remains incomplete to the extent that it fails to publicly articulate why engaging India—at some cost in American resources, energies, and attention—is necessary for the success of larger U.S. grand strategic objectives in Asia and beyond. Since it fails to amplify this critical issue, the vision statement cannot—and does not—establish either strategic priorities that could help guide bureaucratic choices in both countries or regulative principles that could influence decisionmakers when conflicts of interest are to be reconciled. Articulating such a vision, which embeds India multidimensionally in a larger framework defining American grand strategy, thus remains the most important task facing the new administration as far as U.S.-Indian relations are concerned—and until such a strategic vision is made evident, the U.S. response to future Indian nuclearization (and to nuclearization in South Asia in general) risks being disjointed and ineffective.


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