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India Pakistan: The Question of Nuclear War

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Abstract:

The paper studies the Indo-Pak relations in pre and post nuclear war era. An effort has been made to provide a variety of opinion on the relations between the two nuclear powers of the South Asia. The historical account of wars and some skirmishes between the two countries is also subject matter of the study. The paper is relevant and significant as it provides the theoretical account on the pre and post nuclear relationship between India and Pakistan. It explains the relation between the two countries through the prism of nuclear optimism and nuclear pessimism. This theoretical account may provide a predictive to the readers whether the India and Pakistan may fight a nuclear war or not.

Keywords: Army, command and control, crisis, crises, nuclear weapons, India, International Border, Kargil war, Line of Control, Mumbai attack, nuclear optimists, nuclear pessimists, Pakistan, Parliament attack, skirmishes, and war.

Historically, India and Pakistan relations have mostly been conflictive in nature. Both India and Pakistan have claimed sovereignty over the former Indian princely state of Jammu and Kashmir since the British departure from the subcontinent in 1947. Their dispute over the Muslim-majority territory was the root cause of two Indo-Pakistani wars, in 1947-48 and 1965; Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the first war. Neither country has been willing to compromise over Kashmir, partly for strategic reasons, but mainly because this would threaten the legitimating ideology on which each modern state was founded. Pakistan's claims that the subcontinent's Muslims could safeguard their legitimate political rights only through the formation of a separate nation-state. India's idea of a secular nation-state rested on the successful integration of all minorities, including Muslims, into the Indian political order. Therefore, since the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, when Britain left the sub-continent, India and Pakistan have been arch rivals. So far, the two countries have fought four wars in 1947-48, 1965, and 1971 and in 1999. In 1999, both countries fought a limited war in the Kargil region of Kashmir. In 2001-2002, both the countries were at the verge of war after the Indian Parliament attack took place. The attack triggered a ten-month crisis between the two nuclear powers of South Asia that in turn caused apprehensions about nuclear escalation in the region. A brief description of these crises that occurred before or after 1998 is pertinent to mention here in order to get an historical overview of volatile relations between India and Pakistan in pre and post nuclear era.

1. The 1947 War

This war is called the First Kashmir War. The war started in October 1947 when the Maharajah of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was pressured to accede to either of the newly independent states of Pakistan or India. On October 22, 1947, Tribal forces prompted by Pakistan attacked and occupied the princely state, forcing the Maharajah to sign the agreement to the accession of the princely state to India. The war ended with the intervention of the United Nations. The United Nations was invited by India to mediate the quarrel. The UN Security Council passed Resolution on April 21, 1948 and insisted that the opinion of the Kashmiris must be ascertained. The war ended in December 1948 with the Line of Control dividing Kashmir into territories administered by Pakistan, which include northern and western areas and India which include southern, central and northeastern areas (Nayak and Krepon, 2002).

2. The 1965 War

This war started following Pakistan's Operation Gibraltar. The operation was designed to infiltrate forces into Jammu and Kashmir. India blamed Pakistan that for trying to precipitate insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir against Indian rule. India retaliated against this operation by launching an attack on Pakistan. This resulted into the outbreak of second Kashmir war. The war lasted in five-weeks and caused thousands of casualties on both sides. The war was witness to the largest tank battle since World War II. It ended in a United Nations (UN) mandated ceasefire and the subsequently with the Tashkent Declaration. This was the second war between India and Pakistan since their partition. The war like the first one was fought on the issue of Kashmir. The external intervention prevented both the countries to go from a certain limit. However, the war had not any global repercussions, as both India and Pakistan were non-nuclear weapons states (Nayak and Krepon, 2002).

3. The 1971 War

India and Pakistan relations witnessed some thaw of seven years duration after the 1965 war. The relations once again came to a standstill with the outbreak of the 1965 war. This time war was unique in that it did not involve the issue of Kashmir, but was rather precipitated by the crisis brewing in erstwhile East Pakistan. Following Operation Searchlight, about 10 million Bengalis in East Pakistan took refuge in neighboring India. India intervened in the ongoing Bangladesh liberation movement. After a pre-emptive strike by Pakistan, full-scale hostilities between the two countries commenced. Within two weeks of intense fighting, Pakistani forces surrendered to India following which Bangladesh was created. Therefore, since their Independence India and Pakistan fought three major wars. However, the impact of these three wars had not been a global one as both India and Pakistan were non-nuclear states. The crises that occurred in the post-1998 era such as the Kargil war of 1999 and the Parakram crisis of 2001-2002 were seen in a different way as both the countries had now joined the nuclear powers club in 1998 (Ganguly, 2001).

4. The 1999 War

Commonly known as Kargil War, this conflict between the two countries was mostly limited. In February 1999, Pakistani troops along with Kashmiri insurgents infiltrated across the Line of Control (LOC) and occupied some Indian territory particularly in the Kargil district of Jammu and Kashmir State. India establishment later detected this development and launched an offensive to regain the posts in May-July 1999. In this way, India and Pakistan got involved into Kargil war. In the end, India recaptured its territory and Pakistan pulled out its forces from beyond Line of Control. The Kargil war finally came to its end, when the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif met the President of the United States Bill Clinton on June 1999. Both the countries resumed their talks. India called it 'Operation Vijay' while Pakistan termed it 'Operation Badr'. The 1999 crisis was different from other crises in the sense that this crisis occurred when both India and Pakistan were nuclear powers. There were apprehensions that both the countries might use the nuclear weapons. However, the conflict did not escalate to the nuclear level.

5. The 2001-2002 Crisis

Operation Parakram was biggest and longest ever mobilisation of the Indian armed forces along the International Border and Line of Control (LOC) in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In this operation, India mobilised thousands of Indian troops along the India-Pakistan border. India held Pakistan responsible for assisting the perpetrators behind the attack. The operation was the largest military exercise initiated by any Asian country. The operation was launched with an intention of utilizing military pressure for meeting political ends in addition to regular diplomacy. The crisis is also known as 'Parakram Crisis'. The crisis began on December 13, 2001 when militants attacked the Indian Parliament while it was in session. The Government of India determined that the attack was carried out by the two militant groups, Lashker-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohamad and blamed that both were backed by Pakistan. India Government took the attack seriously by describing it an assault on India existence and honor. India reacted by launching 'Operation Parakram'. Under Operation Parakram, more than 500,000 troops were mobilised by India along the Line of Control (LOC) and the International border. India blamed Pakistan for the assault and demanded that Pakistan should crackdown on both, Lashker-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohamad militant groups by taking certain concrete measures such as dismantling their hideouts and ceasing bank accounts of their leaders. India asked Pakistan to hand over twenty most wanted persons who were involved in different terrorist activities on Indian soil. India warned that if Pakistan did not comply with Indian demands, then India would strike to dismantle the training camps of militants in Pakistan controlled Kashmir. In return, Pakistan too mobilised its troops along the Line of Control (LOC) and International border. The ten-month mobilisation of forces was on both sides and there were apprehensions that India and Pakistan might go for an all out war. The statements made by the political and military leaderships of both the countries caused great concern that the region might witness nuclear crisis. However, the region witnessed a peaceful end of the crisis.

6. The 2008 Mumbai Attack

The 2008 Mumbai attacks were twelve coordinated shooting and bombing attacks across Mumbai, India's largest city. The Government of India again determined that the attack was carried out by the two militant groups, Lashker-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohamad and blamed that both were backed by Pakistan. The attacks, which drew widespread global condemnation, began on Wednesday, 26 November and lasted until Saturday, 29 November 2008, killing 164 people and wounding at least 308. India's National Security Guards (NSG) conducted Operation Black Tornado to flush out attackers. India response was not similar to that of the operation parakram as India did not mobilize its troops along the line of control or at international border. Similarly the recent skirmishes along the LOC (Line of Control) in which the killing of soldiers took place and ceasefire violations have occurred. These incidents and accidents have raised apprehensions from both the sides that to what extent the two nuclear powers of South Asia can stretch their conflict. Because people have an idea that both countries are nuclear powers and the possibility of nuclear war can't be rule out.

The trajectory of events that characterize the Indo-Pak relations since the partition of India in 1947 is a perennial fear of a war. And since 1998 the fear is more dreadful due to the presence of nuclear weapons. Now, the question of nuclear war between the two nuclear powers of South Asia has hardly any space in the contemporary era. There are certain points to validate the argument. Both the parliament attack of 2001 and Mumbai attack of 2008 were of serious nature. But the respond from India on both occasions was different. The attack on Indian parliament triggered a lot of debate over Indian response to Pakistan. The Indian response to the attack was a serious one in the form of Operation Parakram. The then Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee called this assault, as 'Aar Paar Ki Ladayi' and warned for a strong action against the perpetrators of the crime. The Ministry of External Affairs in India too advocated that this time it was mandatory to teach the enemy a lesson. The preparations were made to launch an operation against the Pakistan. This operation was a combination of mind and muscle power. The mind

portion of the operation was in the form of diplomacy to pressurize Pakistan while the muscle power was in the form of huge mobilization of military forces across the Line of control and International border. However, the Indian response to the Mumbai was far less than to the Parliament attack. In it there was use of diplomacy, but the muscle power element was missing. There was no mass mobilization across the border. Despite the fact that India could not do teach any lesson as Prime resounded in 2001-2002, the behavior of India in 2008 was more moderate. Here one can expand the argument that if in future any such attack takes place on Indian soil, the Indian establishment can't do anything to Pakistan. The reason for such prediction is that the presences of nuclear weapons play a central role in keeping away both the countries from fighting a major war. Ganguly and Hagerty argue that inspite of some compelling incentives to attack each other India and Pakistan did not do because both had a fear that war might escalate to the nuclear level (Ganguly and Hagerty, 2005). Pravin Swami holds a similar view. He argues that nuclear weapons played a central role in ensuring that the crisis provoked by the terror strike on India's Parliament did not lead to war. He mentions that the presence of nuclear weapons influenced the mindset of policy establishments on both sides on the need for peace. He adds that it is a matter of fact that the presence of nuclear weapons still plays an important role in securing results favorable to peace and stability in South Asia. While South Asia's nuclear landscape controlled India from unleashing its conventional forces across the border, Pakistan also was forced by these new conditions to scale back its decades old proxy war against India. He also contends the argument of Mistry that non-nuclear factors played an essential role in de-escalation of the crisis. He argues that neither non-nuclear factor in itself explains the long-term outcome of the 2001-02 crisis, because the US diplomats had long tried to rein in Pakistani support for militant groups, but had little success until their calls were supported by the Indian war threat. Nor had India's fast economic growth convinced Pakistan that its best interests lay in seeking peace (Swami, 2009). Ganguly and Hagerty also argue that from 1990 onwards to Parakram of 2001-2002, the shade of nuclear weapons played a sturdy deterring role in determining Indo-Pak relations (Ganguly and Hagerty, 2005). Therefore, there are least chances that the two countries may go for a nuclear war. The presence of nuclear weapons will stabilize the relations between the two countries and no country will stretch the conflict beyond a certain limit.

7. References

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