



A Status Report on South Asia

May 11, 2001

South Asia is a region of the world with growing economic and strategic significance. India, in particular, possesses a market of over one billion people, a well-developed high technology sector, and a large pool of skilled labor. It is also the world's largest democracy and is viewed by Bush administration officials as a potentially valuable counterweight to China, which the administration considers a "strategic competitor." Pakistan is plagued by political uncertainty and economic turmoil that could undermine stability in both South Asia and the Middle East.

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South Asia is also fraught with nuclear dangers. Both India and Pakistan maintain active nuclear and missile programs, and both are producing fissile materials for nuclear weapons. Neither country has signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), although they adhere to self-imposed moratoriums on nuclear tests. Tensions over the disputed territory of Kashmir remain high, and in May 2001 India's military conducted large-scale war games that included nuclear attack scenarios. Given this combination of nuclear buildups, security tensions, and mistrust, the possibility that an armed skirmish over a territory such as Kashmir could escalate to the nuclear level— either intentionally or by accident— remains dangerously high.

NUCLEAR FORCES [\(1\)](#)

India

India is believed to have enough weapons-grade plutonium for 45-95 nuclear weapons. However, the number of fully assembled weapons is likely smaller, and warheads are currently stored separately from aircraft and missile delivery systems.

India's missile force consists of approximately 50 short-range, liquid-fueled Prithvi missiles and a limited number of solid-fueled Agni-I missiles. In January 2001, India tested the 2500 kilometer-range Agni-II, which now appears ready for operation. In addition, a naval version of the Prithvi is under development, as is the 3500 kilometer-range Agni-III, which will be able to hit targets deep in Chinese territory. In April 2001, India successfully launched an experimental satellite into space using rocket booster technology that could also be used to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile. However, it is believed that most of India's nuclear weapons are intended for delivery by aircraft. For this purpose, India possesses Mirage 2000 fighters of French origin and Sukhoi SU-30 fighters acquired from Russia.

Pakistan

Pakistan is believed to have enriched enough uranium for 30-50 nuclear weapons, and now has a facility in Rawalapindi capable of reprocessing enough plutonium for approximately two weapons per year. Unlike India, Pakistan is thought to have used much of its fissile material to manufacture nuclear weapons.

Pakistan possesses between 30 and 80 short and medium-range ballistic missiles. The liquid-fueled Ghauri-I and II are most likely derived from the North Korean No-Dong, while the solid-fueled Shaheen-I borrows Chinese technology. Two other medium-range missiles— the Ghauri-III and Shaheen-II— are being developed. Pakistan's force of nuclear-capable aircraft includes A5 fighters of Chinese origin, Mirage fighters from France, and 32 American-made F-16s.

Deployment status

Neither India nor Pakistan has deployed nuclear weapons. Thus, the two countries see little reason to invest the substantial political and financial resources necessary to developing sophisticated nuclear command and control infrastructures and nuclear doctrines. In 1999, India released a "draft" nuclear doctrine that expressed commitment to the principles of no-first use of nuclear weapons, credible minimum deterrence, and development of an effective triad of nuclear forces on land, in the air, and under the sea. However, the doctrine does not constitute official policy. It only establishes a broad outline for a future policy, and does not preclude India from significant buildups in nuclear forces.

Pakistan has repeatedly rejected Indian proposals for a treaty of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, and has said that it would consider using nuclear weapons if it felt its existence to be threatened. Pakistan relies on this threat of first-use because India possesses superior conventional military forces. Defense spending in India grew by 13.8% this year and by 28% in 2000. In addition, India is buying weapons from Israel and signed a \$4 billion arms deal with Russia last year. This expansion of Indian conventional forces heightens Pakistan's reliance on its nuclear weapons.

In February 2001, Pakistani officials stated that they would consider putting nuclear-armed missiles on submarines in the future. However, Pakistan is several years away from developing either a submarine-launched

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ballistic missile (SLBM) or a warhead small and powerful enough to be placed on an SLBM.

DEVELOPMENTS IN KASHMIR

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947-- two of them over Kashmir. Pakistan nearly ignited a fourth war in 1999 after its troops crossed the disputed line of control in Kashmir's Kargil Mountains. In addition, groups of militant Kashmiri separatists-- some of which are supported by Pakistan-- have been waging a violent rebellion against Indian rule that has claimed more than 50,000 lives since 1989.

In November 2000, India declared a unilateral cease-fire in the Indian-controlled section of Kashmir. Pakistan responded by urging its troops to exercise "maximum restraint" along the contested line of control. Although India extended the cease-fire for three additional months in February 2001, the two countries have yet to take additional steps towards peace. India has tried to open a dialogue with Kashmiri militants, but the latter insist on three-way talks that would include Pakistan-- a format that Pakistan demands but India opposes. Several militant groups have therefore rejected the cease-fire and are continuing their attacks.

GOALS FOR U.S. POLICY

The Bush administration faces a tough dilemma as it reviews its policy for South Asia: how to bilaterally engage India and Pakistan while continuing to emphasize the destabilizing nature of nuclear buildups and the importance of nonproliferation. Former President Clinton tried unsuccessfully to integrate the two countries into the nonproliferation regime. When he toured South Asia in March 2000, he urged India and Pakistan to restrain their development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, sign the CTBT, support negotiations for a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, and adopt strict export controls on nuclear and missile materials and technology. Instead, the visit was interpreted in India as an affirmation of the country's nuclear status, and raised the perceived political value and international prestige that India and Pakistan have attached to their nuclear weapons programs.

Despite the lack of success, nonproliferation should continue to be a key focus of the U.S. policy agenda for South Asia. Closer bilateral relations with India and Pakistan should be linked to progress on the following goals:

Non-deployment of nuclear weapons

India and Pakistan currently lack sufficient financial and technological resources to put in place the sophisticated command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) mechanisms needed to support nuclear deployment. Thus, deploying nuclear weapons would dramatically increase the risk of accidental or unauthorized nuclear strike in South Asia.

A decision to deploy could also precipitate a return to nuclear testing. To be credible, nuclear weapons and delivery systems must work with a high degree of reliability and efficiency. India and Pakistan would almost certainly require additional tests to perfect even a basic weapon design, let alone a warhead compact and sophisticated enough to be delivered on a missile. Although one of India's 1998 test explosions was reportedly a thermonuclear device, Indian officials have suggested and U.S. intelligence indicates that the test was at least a partial failure.

Finally, allowing nuclear deployments would signal acceptance of the nuclear weapon status of India and Pakistan, and could encourage other states to challenge the nonproliferation regime.

Extension of the nuclear test moratorium and signature of the CTBT

Without the benefit of additional nuclear tests, India and Pakistan would be unable to field more sophisticated nuclear weapons, such as thermonuclear devices small enough to be launched on missiles. They would also not have enough confidence in weapon performance to permit large-scale deployments.

The U.S. should therefore encourage India and Pakistan to continue their moratorium on nuclear tests and pressure them to sign the CTBT. This will not be easy, especially since India and Pakistan are unlikely to sign unless the U.S. ratifies the treaty. The Senate rejected the CTBT in 1999, and the Bush administration does not intend to seek ratification any time soon. Furthermore, Indian nuclear scientists have been pressuring the government not to sign the treaty.

However, whereas Pakistan previously refused to sign the CTBT on account of India's rejection of the treaty, its position is beginning to soften because of economic concerns. Japan is promising desperately needed aid amounting to over \$500 million if Pakistan signs the CTBT. In addition, several Pakistani officials have recently urged military leader Pervez Musharraf to sign.

Resolution of the Kashmir dispute

Efforts to prevent deployment must be complemented by high-level U.S. attention to the underlying security tensions that may create pressure to deploy, or worse, lead to the actual use of nuclear weapons. Specifically, the administration should offer to work with India and Pakistan to achieve a peaceful and permanent resolution to the Kashmir dispute. This may prove to be a time-intensive and frustrating process, but it is crucial to long-term stability in South Asia.

Strong export controls

The U.S. can cooperate with India and Pakistan to strengthen and better enforce controls on the export of nuclear and missile components and related technology. Both countries are already believed to have very good records on nonproliferation of sensitive technologies. In August 2000, the Pakistani government released a statement insisting that "Pakistan is unilaterally and unequivocally committed not to export any sensitive materials, equipment and technologies to any country," calling its record in this area "impeccable."

Eventual accession to the NPT

Although India and Pakistan are unlikely to join the NPT anytime soon, the U.S. should continue to insist that the two countries eliminate their nuclear weapons and join the regime as non-nuclear weapon states. The goal of non-deployment only makes sense in this context of South Asian de-nuclearization. Moreover, quietly tolerating India and Pakistan's nuclear programs could motivate other states to pursue nuclear capabilities and thus undermine the NPT.

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1. ¹ Sources: Federation of American Scientists; Natural Resources Defense Council; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and David Albright, "India's and Pakistan's Fissile Material and Nuclear Weapons Inventories, end of 1999," Institute for Science and International Security, October 11, 2000.

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