

Ten Years of Pokhran II: Four Articles Recount and Remember the Stupid Insanity

Tuesday 13 May 2008, by [RAMANA M.V.](#), [SEN Sukla](#), [SRI RAMAN J.](#), [VANAIK Achin](#) (Date first published: 11 May 2008).

The most immediate and visible effects of Pokhran II [Indian nuclear tests] were ugly jubilations within and strident condemnations and harsh sanctions imposed by the international community.

Beyond that Pakistan went publicly nuclear within a fortnight. It would have been just impossible without the Indian peg. Advani, the then Home Minister, had been talking of shift in the “geo-strategic position” on account of Pokhran II, implying that now Pakistan must behave. Pakistan simply made the “shift” stand on its head.

As a consequence, Vajpayee had to rush to Lahore in the following February on a “peace mission” soon after the visit of Strobe Talbott to these two belligerent neighbours. (Giriraj Kishore, a VHP honcho, from Ahmedabad where the VHP had been in session, decried the visit and called upon Vajpayee to visit Lahore, but not in a bus but riding on a tank!) In the following April (as if in an ironic response to Kishore’s call), in less than a year after Pokhran II, massive infiltration into the Indian side of Kashmir from across the LoC was discovered and the Kargil War ensued soon after in the following May. The War, with repeated threats of exchange of the ultimate weapon by both the sides, was eventually brought to an end (in July 1999), without the threatened apocalypse, through the personal intervention of Bill Clinton. Such aggression from the other side happened after a gap of long 34 years.

Then Kandahar happened soon after in the following December (1999). The Indian External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, had to suffer the grossest humiliation of personally escorting released militants to Kandahar.

On December 13 2001, the Indian Parliament building came under armed attack. Operation Parakram that immediately followed as a measure of “coercive diplomacy” to subdue Pakistan just meekly fizzled out after long ten months.

These were some of the major immediate outcomes of the Pokhran II. A shameful saga marked by stupid insanity.

Contents

- [I. Ten years after Pokharan](#)
 - [II. India’s Nuclear Anniversar](#)
 - [III. Nuclear Exhibitionism \(...\)](#)
 - [IV. Ten dilemmas of nuclear](#)
-

I. Ten years after Pokharan: Deeper into the morass

M.V. RAMANA

Since Pokharan, we have been witness to an opportunistic shift in the stance of the government, from an outright condemnation of nuclear deterrence to an unabated enthusiasm for the development of a full-fledged arsenal.

Hand in hand, expenditures on non-nuclear military activities and acquisition of conventional weapons have also increased dramatically...The impact of these expenditures, of course, falls primarily upon the poor and the vulnerable.

In 1996, the International Court of Justice offered a historic Advisory Opinion where it ruled that "the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of international humanitarian law" and endorsed unanimously a legal obligation on all States "to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control." Earlier, as the case was being considered, India submitted a Memorial where it argued that nuclear deterrence should be considered "abhorrent to human sentiment since it implies that a state, if required to defend its own existence, will act with pitiless disregard for the consequences of its own and adversary's people". This description is apt. Though just an unproven assumption, nuclear deterrence relies on the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction aimed at killing large numbers of people in the wishful hope that such annihilation would deter another country from attacking because of fear.

Some years later, in January 2003, the Indian government issued a nuclear doctrine which explicitly stated that the country is pursuing nuclear deterrence, though this was qualified as a minimal one. But the doctrine also warns that "nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage". Unacceptable damage, in plain English, means that these nuclear weapons would be dropped on cities, each killing lakhs or millions of innocent people. The few years between the clear and forthright condemnation of deterrence and the enthusiastic invocation of deterrence are among the most important in recent Indian history.

The biggest event occurred 10 years ago, on May 11, 1998, when three nuclear devices exploded in the Pokharan desert. Two days later, two more explosions were conducted and Prime Minister Vajpayee proudly announced that India was now a nuclear weapon State. Pakistan's leaders, showing that they too subscribed to the twisted logic that drives the acquisition of nuclear weapons, conducted six explosions of their own on May 28 and 30. With those tests, the half-century-old conflict between India and Pakistan acquired a nuclear edge.

Nuclear threats

The edge was to be seen soon. Contrary to the claims of nuclear weapons advocates, who promised peace and a cessation of war, India and Pakistan fought over Kargil bitterly within a year of the tests. Though limited geographically, the war is estimated to have cost about 1,700 Indian lives and nearly 800 Pakistani ones. Indian and Pakistani officials delivered indirect and direct nuclear threats to one another at least 13 times. There are also plausible, though not convincing, reports that the two countries did prepare their nuclear arsenals for potential use.

Kargil was the first major confrontation between two nuclear powers. Indeed, the war may even be the first caused by nuclear weapons. The late Benazir Bhutto stated that in 1996 Pakistani military officers had presented her with plans for a Kargil style operation, which she vetoed. It would therefore seem that the 1998 tests convinced Pakistan's political and military leaders that the

operation might be feasible with nuclear weapons to restrict any possible Indian riposte.

The pattern of nuclear intimidation seen in Kargil was to be repeated during the major military crises that followed the militant attack on the Parliament in December 2001. Even Prime Minister Vajpayee warned: “no weapon would be spared in self-defence. Whatever weapon was available, it would be used no matter how it wounded the enemy”. On the other side of the border, former chief of the Pakistan Army, General Mirza Aslam Beg, declared: “We can make a first strike, and a second strike or even a third”.

Although it did not develop into war, a number of factors make the 2002 crisis more dangerous than the Kargil war. Unlike Kargil, where Pakistan is clearly seen to have lost, especially politically, both sides claim the 2002 crisis as a victory. On the one hand General Musharraf’s promise that he would rein in Pakistan-based militant organisations is seen as proof that India’s “coercive diplomacy” worked. Pakistan’s case is simpler. Despite the huge build-up of forces by India, and much talk of attacking so-called terrorist camps within Pakistan, no military attacks actually occurred. That a massive military confrontation with strong nuclear overtones is seen by both sides as a victory increases the likelihood that similar incidents will occur in the future.

Nuclear costs

The obvious lesson of these two military crises, that nuclear weapons cause insecurity, has been ignored by nuclear advocates. Instead, they claimed that just testing nuclear weapons is insufficient for deterrence and called for the kinds of steps that India had earlier criticised nuclear weapons States for taking. Following their advice, India has not only adopted use-doctrines and practices similar to those of nuclear weapon States, but has also embarked on developing the paraphernalia needed for the adoption of these doctrines. These include a triad of delivery vehicles, including aircraft capable of dropping nuclear bombs, missiles launched from land and sea, and a nuclear submarine; training the military to use these; a command and control structure to oversee the deployment and use of nuclear weapons; components of an early warning system and an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defence system. No one has been keeping count of the crores of rupees being spent in this process. Hand in hand, expenditures on non-nuclear military activities and acquisition of conventional weapons have also increased dramatically. This is in direct contradiction to the erstwhile claims of nuclear advocates that the acquisition of nuclear weapons would reduce expenditure on conventional weapons. The impact of these expenditures, of course, falls primarily upon the poor and the vulnerable.

One of the adjectives appended to deterrence in India’s nuclear doctrine is minimal. (The other adjective — credible — is superfluous. A deterrent that is not credible cannot deter.) When asked to delineate what constitutes minimal, policy makers resort to obfuscation. Minimal, they claim, is a dynamic concept and one which cannot be specified in advance. Given the massive destructive power of nuclear weapons, it should be obvious that a dozen or so suffice to obliterate several cities and millions of people in Pakistan or China. But going by current public estimates, the fissile material stockpile just from CIRUS and Dhruva, the two reactors reportedly assigned for making plutonium for weapons, should be sufficient for over a hundred nuclear weapons. Perhaps the meaning of minimal is simply that it is not maximal.

That the future arsenal size sought by policymakers is much larger was made clear during the negotiations and public debates surrounding the nuclear deal that is being negotiated with the United States. As a report from the International Panel of Fissile Materials, which the author is a part of, shows, the number of reactors that the DAE strenuously kept outside of safeguards can produce several dozen nuclear weapons worth of plutonium every year (available at www.fissilematerials.org).

New attitudes

During the 1990s, one oft-heard argument from those espousing nuclear weapons was that while these were evil, they were a necessary evil. To the extent that the pressures of this lobby were resisted, India acquired weapons only reluctantly. That was then. What is on display today is unabated enthusiasm for the ongoing development of a full fledged arsenal. And all the attitudes that go with being a State possessing nuclear weapons.

Such a shift in attitude was on display during the unexpected vote against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2005. While much attention was focused on US pressure, there was something deeper too. In an earlier era, Indian leaders would have denounced the hypocrisy of the United States, with its immense nuclear arsenal, lecturing Iran about its small uranium enrichment plant. Now, one heard many policy-makers talking about why nuclear proliferation was dangerous and Iran should not be allowed to have nuclear technology. Non-proliferation, which used to be seen as immoral, has come to take the place of disarmament, the truly worthwhile goal.

The opportunistic switch in stance is somewhat akin to what has been called the third class railway compartment syndrome. Those waiting on a crowded platform clamour in the name of justice and fairness to be let into compartment. But once inside, the opportunist shuts the door and keeps the others outside, with force if necessary.

In July 1946, following the US attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Mahatma Gandhi observed, "the atom bomb has deadened the finest feelings which have sustained mankind for ages...It has resulted for the time being in the soul of Japan being destroyed. What has happened to the soul of the destroying nation is yet too early to see." Unfortunately in our case, the first decade after Pokharan has already started making the impacts quite clear. It is not too late to reverse these.

* From The Hindu, 11 May 2008:

<http://www.hindu.com/mag/2008/05/11/stories/2008051150020100.htm>

* *M. V. Ramana is Senior Fellow, Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment and Development at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, and co-editor of Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream.*

II. India's Nuclear Anniversary

By J. Sri Raman

May 11 will mark the tenth anniversary of an event that represented a turning point in the history of modern India. On that date in 1998, the largest South Asian state turned away from a long-pursued path that had taken it to a place of pride in the region and in the international arena.

Even after the three nuclear weapon tests on that scorching day in Pokharan, a desert site in India's scantily developed State of Rajasthan, and two more blasts at the same spot two days later, official India has continued to call for nuclear disarmament everywhere. The call, however, has little credibility, especially after New Delhi's strident declaration of India as a nuclear weapon state.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government has discreetly made it known through a ministerial aside that no official celebration of the anniversary is in the offing. This, it has been made clear, does not mean that the government considers the tests any less glorious than anyone else. It does not, even if the tests were carried out under former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and invited trenchant criticism from at least a section of Singh's Congress Party.

As Minister of State for Defense M. M. Pallam Raju told a television channel the other day: "I think when we are talking about India's nuclear program, we have every reason to be proud of what we have achieved. Being proud of Pokharan itself is a reason for celebration, but I don't see any further reason to celebrate the (1998) detonation."

Raju argued that the tests "demonstrated India's capability," but had "detrimental effects" in terms of sanctions "which have affected our strategic ... programs...." He added: "So I do not see any reason why it (the anniversary) should be advertised loudly." The minister was manifestly wrong on the sanctions and the strategic program, as we shall see presently. But why are all sections of India's political spectrum, except the left, so proud of Pokharan?

None of them, of course, would like to identify nuclear militarism as part of their ideology. Every one of them, therefore, answers the question with ironical claims. The first of these claims is that the Pokharan tests, along with the Pakistani ones conducted in the Chagai hills of Balochistan on May 28, 1998, have actually served the cause of India-Pakistan peace. Another claim is that May 11 actually helped India stand up to the mighty US and other nuclear powers under Washington's influence.

The absurdity of the first claim is obvious. Those who advanced it even asserted that, with India and Pakistan becoming nuclear-armed rivals, even a conventional war between them was ruled out. They were proven wrong within a year of the tests. Hostilities erupted in the Kargil sector over the Himalayan heights on May 8, 1999, with the two sides trading nuclear threats for the next two months. And the subcontinent was pushed to the brink of a nuclear war in the summer of 2002, with the neighbors massing a million troops on the border. The subsequent India-Pakistan peace process has been conducted in such a way as to ensure that no serious advance was made on the nuclear issue at all.

Not far less obvious should be the absurdity of the second claim, to those following the post-Pokharan developments. The May 11 detonations marked no defiance of Washington. On the same day, before explaining the rationale of the tests to India's parliament and public, Vajpayee hastened to send a communication to President Bill Clinton. The message defended the tests by citing threats from both China and Pakistan. It also promised India's cooperation as a nuclear weapon state to the US in the campaign against nuclear proliferation and nuclear disarmament! It was no assertion of national sovereignty, but a knock on the door of the nuclear club.

Tributes to the tests in India were particularly appreciative of the supposed fact that they were conducted without the knowledge of US snoopers. On this subject, it should suffice to quote Ranjan Goswami, a security expert specializing in South Asia: "One aspect of the tests is striking: The US did not detect India's tests until after they occurred, whereas in 1994, when Indian Prime Minister (P.V.) Narasimha Rao ordered nuclear testing ..., US detection of the movement at the ... site was leaked to the press, forcing India to cancel the tests. Could this be the US tacit sign to New Delhi that the US desires rapprochement with India and that a nuclear-capable India will be condoned for a variety of reasons - one being to counter China?"

Seen this way, the subsequent and swift development of a strategic India-US partnership was no

surprise. The first major sign of the new relationship came on the third anniversary of May 11, in 2001, with Vajpayee extending a warm welcome to the missile defense program of the George Bush administration. On September 23 of the same year, Bush announced a waiver of sanctions against India as well as Pakistan, introduced after the 1998 tests. A White House memo explained that the sanctions were “not in the national security interests of the United States.” Washington followed up this step with “defense cooperation” deals with both India and Pakistan.

The “strategic partnership,” as we all know, culminated in a US-India nuclear deal being struck between President Bush and Prime Minister Singh. India’s peace movement opposes the deal primarily for the boost it will give to a nuclear weapons program costing billions that the poverty-stricken country is burdened with. The political price India’s establishment is prepared to pay for the deal makes it more than acceptable to Washington and its Western camp.

The price tag is prominently displayed in the Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006, which enables the bilateral deal. The Act calls upon the US government to secure India’s “full participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative” (by which Bush seeks to empower the US Navy and other friendly fleets to intercept and search ships for anti-proliferation purposes).

The Act also asks the administration to secure “India’s full and active participation in United States efforts to dissuade, isolate and, if necessary, sanction and contain Iran for its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, including a nuclear weapons capability and the capability to enrich uranium or reprocess nuclear fuel, and the means to deliver weapons of mass destruction.”

It remains to be seen whether the Singh government succeeds in operationalizing the deal in the face of stiff opposition from the left, on whose support it depends on survival. Neither New Delhi nor Islamabad, meanwhile, has made any secret of nuclear intent.

The missile race between India and Pakistan has been carried a significant stride forward on the eve of the May 11 anniversary. On May 7, India test-fired the 3,500-km range surface-to-surface nuclear-capable Agni-III missile from the Wheelers’ Island site on its eastern coast. The very next day, Pakistan hit back by test-firing a nuclear-capable Haft-VIII air-launched cruise missile of 350-km range, which the military said would enhance its capability to strike at targets on land and at sea.

Official non-observance of May 11, obviously, does not mean that the nuclear threat to South Asia has been averted to any significant extent. The anniversary will be an occasion for peace-loving people to protest the warmongers of the region and their patrons in Washington.

** From Truthout | Perspective, Saturday 10 May 2008:*

http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/051008F.shtml

III. Nuclear Exhibitionism - Footfall of “Hindu” Fascism

Sukla Sen

Ekta, Mumbai

From Ayodhya to Pokhran ; Ram Mandir to Shakti Peeth ; Jai Shri Ram to Bam Bolo.

The BJP/RSS has yet again changed gear - this time, from religious fanaticism to (almost) 'secular' jingoism.

At one level, the change is mere cosmetic rather than substantive and does not signify any fundamental shift. Both are essentially attuned to the task of generation, accentuation and systematic spread of insecurity, paranoia, hatred and aggression. Both are meant to stir primordial and bestial passions up from the darkest recesses at the bottom of human hearts directed against the (carefully constructed) 'other'.

At another, the two are separated not only by passage of time but also by a significant shift in the underlying balance of power, which has taken place in the intervening period. While Jai Shri Ram was the war cry of the emergent (Hindutwavadi) fascism (in opposition), with limited (though not insubstantial) access to the levers of state power ; Bam Bolo is an extremely important milestone in the evolving and unfolding action plan to reset the 'national agenda' by a central government already installed in power, headed by these fascist forces.

Here, it bears recalling that the central agenda of the BJP/RSS (i.e. the Sangh Parivar) is the establishment of a Hindu Rashtra (i.e. a "Hindu" nation state) and this calls for outright negation of the Indian nation state (and its ideological basis) which came into being through the process and as the culmination of India's struggle for independence from the British colonial rule. The 'idea of India' which emerged and evolved over the last 150 years or so during the course of this epic struggle (and also in its aftermath) essentially recognises the legitimacy of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural character of the Indian society and consequently pluralist secular (corporatist) democracy as the only viable basis for the independent Indian state. The project of Hindu Rashtra, on the other hand, calls for mobilising the otherwise amorphous and heterogeneous Hindus by (re)defining , (re)constructing and (partially) homogenising them involving an intricate and elaborate process of identity building mainly through the mechanism of "stigmatisation and emulation" of the "evil, threatening and alien other", which is again ceaselessly being constructed and reconstructed. While religion is put to extensive and intensive instrumentalist use in the task of militant, exclusionist, majoritarian mobilisation, elements of (ultra)nationalism are also put to good use by borrowing and (mis)appropriating the idioms and icons of (widely accepted) mainstream (secular) nationalism, particularly (though not exclusively) of its rightwing variety.

If (at least partial) adoption of 'soft Hinduism' by successive Congress governments at the centre, roughly since the mid-seventies, (against the backdrop of a generalised rightward shift in the (national) political mood caused by the sum total of actual outcome of a 'welfarist' state driven capitalist economic development in the post-independence (parliamentary) democratic India and a worldwide decline of radicalism in the post-Vietnam War era) prepared the ground for the successful emergence of hard Hindutva (i.e. rabid Hindu communalism labeled as 'cultural nationalism'), then the gradual supplanting of the call for "unity in diversity" by the injunction to "join the national mainstream" on the part of the (then) mainstream establishment made the frenzied cry of "one nation, one people, one culture" (or "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan") sound less and less strange and alien.

The Pokhran blast carried out 14 years back, on the 18th of May, 1974, notwithstanding the officially proclaimed peaceful intentions, constituted the first visible turning point in independent India's policy of spirited championing of international peace, disarmament and creation of a nuclear weapon free world. The United Front headed government of India's refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as drafted by the Conference on Disarmament (CD) headquartered at Geneva, which was meant to impose blanket ban on all (except for sub-critical) nuclear explosions

constituted the second turning point. This time the turn was even more radical, not just because the refusal was justified by unjustly equating the (virtually) non-discriminatory CTBT with the grossly discriminatory NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty), which allowed the five acknowledged members of a permanent and exclusive nuclear club to uninhibitedly expand their nuclear arsenals, while disallowing all other states of the world, designated as nuclear have-nots, any such aberration. But because, for the first time, India's national security concern was cited as one of the principal reasons for not signing the treaty, thereby implying that the nuclear weapons, meant to cause indiscriminate mass destruction with long lasting traumatic effect on all life forms, are legitimate means to effectively ensure (India's) national security. This constituted a total reversal of India's official security doctrine being followed till then.

It can be quite justifiably argued that as the opening of the lock of Babri Masjid paved the way for its eventual demolition, similarly Pokhran '74 and CTBT '96 prepared the ground for the test explosions carried out on the 11th and 13th of May, 1998 for demonstratively military purposes. It would, however, be a criminal folly to ignore that as in case of 'lock opening' to 'demolition', 'Pokhran '74' to 'Pokhran '98' as well constitutes a qualitative (just not quantitative) leap conveying portends of imminent doom and thereby calling for the most determined and concerted actions on the part of those who are committed to defend and deepen 'democracy' in India. Here, it needs to be reiterated that the very existence of India will be in serious jeopardy in case 'democracy' does not survive.

In order to work out a set of appropriate and effective responses to this latest development, arguably of momentous import, it is required to examine the validity of the rationale being put forward in support of these blasts, identify the actual source(s) of inspiration, explore the real motivations and comprehend/anticipate the range of future possibilities.

As regards the claim that the blasts are meant to counter the heightened threats to India's security from China and Pakistan and actually have helped India to emerge far more 'powerful' and 'secure', this is evidently false. As has been pointed out in the editorial of The Economic Times (15.05.98), "[t]his is an illusion. India's strategic position [in the aftermath of the blasts] has not improved, and may just have deteriorated." The editorial has also rightly pointed out that a nuclear war is unwinnable as it assures mutual destruction. What, however, needs to be further clarified that a nuclear weapon, quite contrary to popular perceptions, is very much unusable as well. Nothing illustrates the point better than the well-demonstrated inability of the American war machinery to use the dreaded 'bomb' even while suffering a long drawn out, humiliating and bloody defeat in Vietnam. Incidentally the 'bomb' could not be used against the recalcitrant Iraq (or for that matter Libya, Cuba, North Korea or Iran either). The fact that the mighty USSR, the owner of second largest nuclear (and conventional) arsenal had to suffer disintegration at the beginning of the present decade should be enough to blow up the myth that the 'bomb' accords greater security, if not to the 'people', at least to the 'state'. What is, however, most interesting to note that in the aftermath of the blasts, instead of emerging 'more powerful', with more and more countries rallying behind India, it stands very much isolated in the international arena. Even non-nuclear Japan, Germany, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand have either actually taken punitive measures or are publicly threatening to do so against nuclear India. Not only that, immediately after the blasts, the level of personal security for the Prime Minister had to be raised and the Home Minister predicted that now Pakistan would step up its hostile activities in Kashmir. In effect, the blasts have caused radical deterioration of India's 'security' environment and very substantial erosion of its political clout and 'power' in the international arena.

A section of the Left (and centrist parties) have claimed that the blasts (and the anti-Chinese tirade of the Indian Defence Minister that preceded these) have been occasioned by American promptings from behind the scene and this is a part of imperialist grand design to encircle and corner China. This proposition is evidently a product of a fossilised mindset, pathologically disinterested in and

incapable of comprehending the ambient reality. Interestingly, the official Chinese response itself has quite clearly pinpointed India's internal political compulsions, and not any external stimulus, as the cause of these blasts. In fact, as of now, the American establishment does not have any policy for aggressive containment of the People's Republic of China, notwithstanding the fact that there are some voices (e.g. former Senator Larry Pressler or the House Speaker Newt Gingrich) within it, who by no means represent the mainstream, clamouring for building up of India to counter the potential Chinese challenge. The fact that America has taken leading initiative to ensure imposition of collective sanctions against India clearly reveals the hollowness of this theory. As a matter of fact, it is the BJP/RSS led government of India, which is trying to hard sell the idea that the "Hindu" India is keen to play the role of American gendarme in South Asia (as the Zionist state of Israel is doing in the Middle East) provided the Clinton administration concurs with their project of making India "Hindu" and in the process winks at their nuclear adventurism and such other aberrations. It is precisely with this intention they have opened the floodgate of concessions to the American multinationals ready to do business in and with India, so that they are enticed to lobby on their behalf together with the American politicians appreciative of this proposition. If, in spite of all this and some initial softness, the Clinton administration has toughened its stand, without completely closing the channels of communication, it is because of its serious and determined efforts to get the CTBT ratified by the American legislators in the teeth of dogged Republican opposition and eventually implemented by the international community.

In a broadly similar manner, any suggestion that the blasts were prompted essentially by the Indian owning classes, notwithstanding the BJP/RSS led central government's likely attempts to appease the business and the industry through some 'tough' anti-working class and pro-liberalisation measures taken under the cover of ultra-nationalist frenzy generated by the blasts, would be quite out of tune with the actual reality. The blasts by themselves do not reflect and further the interests of the Indian owning classes, large sections of which are too keen to integrate with the world economy, in any fundamental sense. The realisation that this adventurist act on the part of the Sangh Combine may inflict heavy damage on the Indian economy (and the polity as well), made easier by the sanctions imposed by the various developed countries, has already made a section of this class quite jittery about all this (as exemplified by the ET editorial quoted above). This fact needs to be clearly recognised as it admits of the possibility (though not inevitability) of building up of a 'national' front against the fascists, broadly in line with what had happened during the authoritarian Bonapartist Emergency Raj of Indira Gandhi in the late seventies.

If the 'soft Hinduism' of the Congress variety did actually legitimise and consequently help promote the 'hard Hindutva' of the Sangh Combine, instead of combating it, the 'soft (and competitive) nationalism' of the anti-BJP parties, in response to the Combine's carefully orchestrated plan to stir up national jingoism from the vantage position of the seat of central power, is also not destined to meet with any different fate. The sinister design of the Sangh Combine, the two(!) installment blasts (coinciding with the release of a special commemorative issue of the RSS organ Organiser on Nuclear India) being only the tip of the proverbial iceberg, can be combated only through determined and principled adherence to and championing of the cause of pluralism, secularism, egalitarianism and democracy, at least on the part of those who look upon themselves as the potential vanguards in this battle. In the instant case, in order to stall the rising and menacing tide of national jingoism, which is being deliberately caused as a part of the fascist agenda, there is absolutely no alternative to militant pacifism with serious and principled commitment to the cause of international peace and disarmament.

By their latest action, the Sangh Parivar has yet again demonstrated that they would not desist from even the most extreme form of adventurism, as and when the opportunity arises or is engineered. No amount of 'multi speak' or tactical zigzag on their part can obliterate this simple truth. Under the

present circumstances, even partial surrender to the passions of national chauvinism will prove disastrous as it would ideologically and politically disarm even the hard core followers of the anti-BJP parties, not to speak of the larger masses, and make them extremely vulnerable against the further onslaughts of the fascist Combine. The initial dithering on the part of the various opposition parties has already made things quite a bit difficult. But all is not yet lost. A number of protest demonstrations organised by numerous small groups and eminent intellectuals/activists all across the country has shaken, if not shattered, the myth of 'national consensus'. This must be built upon by standing firm, resolute, determined and speaking up clearly and loudly urging the 'nation' to get united against the unfolding sinister anti-India conspiracy of installing a "Hindu" fascist regime. There is no other option left.

* From <http://www.proxsa.org/politics/nonuke/sen.html>

[Also carried in the Economic and Political Weekly, May 30, 1998.]

IV. Ten dilemmas of nuclear deterrence

Achin Vanaik

Four and a half years after Pokharan II, where do we stand? One sensible way of assessing this is to look at the basic predictions that were made by the pro-bomb lobby which welcomed those tests and justified the new path which India was embarking upon. Not all our pro-bomb experts made each and every one of the following predictions and judgements, but each and every one of these experts did, in the public domain, make at least one, and usually several, of these predictions:

- It is good that India and Pakistan are now open, self-declared nuclear powers. This will lead to greater regional peace and security.

Since 1998, relations between the two countries have reached their nadir, with at least three major crises and a period that saw the most sustained and largest full-scale mobilisation of troops between any two countries in peacetime anywhere in the world since 1945.

- The chances of a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan will become even more remote. Both countries want nuclear weapons not to raise nuclear tensions through, for example, a politics of 'nuclear brinkmanship', but to reduce greatly such tensions and to avoid brinkmanship politics.

Since 1998, nuclear tensions have risen sharply, with the governments and armed forces personnel of both countries exchanging nuclear threats and counter-threats. Both countries have hailed the 'virtues' of nuclear brinkmanship, especially during the mid-2002 crisis. Today, the Indian government is also raising the spectre of Pakistan's nuclear weapons falling into terrorist hands. And a new layer of tension has been added by the recent nuclear sabre-rattling by both the Musharraf and Vajpayee governments.

- A conventional war between India and Pakistan will be deterred.

There was the Kargil conflict in 1999 and at least one near-miss (mid-2002). The first was brought to a halt and the second averted, not by the logic of nuclear deterrence, but primarily by US

intervention and pressure.

- There will be no competitive nuclear arms race between the two countries.

Both countries are a) accumulating stocks of fissile materials, b) busy weaponising and mating warheads to missiles, c) enhancing the range and accuracy of their missiles, d) putting in place ambitious command and control systems and e) aiming to develop extensive nuclear doctrines and policies.

- No one in the government is prepared to say how much the minimum is or that this minimum position will be fixed and stable. This minimum cannot be stable or fixed but is always a moving position dependent on the changing quantity and quality of the nuclear arsenals of its presumed rivals which, in the eyes of India's nuclear strategists and experts, include not just Pakistan, but China as well.

- The acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan, by increasing their bargaining power, will actually promote the prospects of global nuclear disarmament.

This argument can be translated as follows: the best way for the world to nuclearly disarm is for more countries to nuclearly arm. This is as silly as it sounds. Since 1998, we have had the US moving forward with its Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) project as well as with preparations to build new kinds of smaller tactical and battlefield nuclear weapons (bunker-busters), taking the global nuclear problem to newer, more dangerous and insane levels. The less said about the above absurd argument of the Indian pro-bomb lobby, the better.

So why are pro-bomb Indian experts and strategists today not shamefaced and apologetic about their revealed ineptitude? There are several reasons for this, among which personal ego and a relatively supine Indian media, which does little or nothing to confront such experts with evidence of their failures of judgement, count for a great deal. But the main reason has to do with these experts' unshakeable faith in the supposedly wondrous and almost magical powers of nuclear deterrence. Nuclear weapons, it is claimed, because of their 'threat power', deter the nuclearly armed opponent, thus preventing nuclear war and bringing about greater nuclear security. Such an argument is called 'counterfactual'. It is a claim that can neither be decisively refuted nor confirmed because it claims to explain something that has not happened — which is much more difficult than explaining something that has happened — and whose not happening can also be explained by a host of other non-nuclear factors.

This counterfactuality allows both pro- and anti-nuclear thinkers to remain where they are with no decisive refutation of each other. But the issue does not end here. The side whose arguments are more plausible, logically structured and compatible with the historical evidence about the relationship between security/insecurity and nuclear weapons is the side that should be favoured. Here, the anti-nuclear side wins hands down. The pro-nuclear side cannot escape two huge problems — one historical, the other logical — that lie at the heart of its case for nuclear weapons. No sensible notion of the efficacy of nuclear deterrence can justify the existence of the enormous overkill capacities that the US and Russia, in particular, have accumulated and retain to this day — enough to blow up the world many times over! This is explainable once one recognises what is called the degenerative logic of security thinking and behaviour based on the principle of nuclear deterrence. Thus, the historical evidence of overkill capacities and the continuing search (through the BMD) by the US for further reassurances of security through the qualitative extension of the nuclear arms arsenal is powerful testimony to how nuclear weapons, far from resolving the problem of security, only promote greater insecurity. Whatever their formal diplomatic positions about the BMD, given their need to avoid antagonising today's all-powerful US, you can be sure that Russia and China also

feel quite insecure about where all this is heading and what 'benefits' the US might have, or think it has, if it succeeds in building the BMD.

The second problem lies in the very nature of the process that is initiated when one seeks security through nuclear deterrence. We shall investigate here what can be called the 'Ten Dilemmas of Nuclear Deterrence':

1. No guarantees: The possession of nuclear weapons by rival countries cannot guarantee the prevention of nuclear exchange or war. It is always a gamble, and it is a gamble that can always fail at some time, in some place. The claim that nuclear deterrence 'works', at least to such an extent that you can safely rely upon it, is untenable. It is untenable because the conditions that must be established for assured safety to arise from the workings of nuclear deterrence are so restrictive that these are impossible to establish in practice in the real world in which we live. This defect becomes clear when we understand what nuclear deterrence is: it is simply a psychological state of mind! It is a state of mind that must exist in one's nuclear opponents, i.e., among those who decide on whether or not to push the nuclear button. And it is a state of mind that you (who are relying on nuclear deterrence for your country's security) must ensure will always exist in your opponent, although you can never guarantee or ensure that it will always so hold.

To put it another way, nuclear deterrence is nothing but the irrational hope that a terrible fear of the consequences of nuclear war will continuously promote wise decisions by fallible human beings operating under intense pressure in changing circumstances that neither they nor you can fully control.

2. The vulnerability paradox: If you need the threat power of nuclear weapons to become more secure, then you are trying to establish your security by making the other side vulnerable and more insecure, because they are afraid of what your nuclear weapons can do to them. Similarly, the other side must try to make itself more secure by making you more vulnerable and insecure with respect to its own nuclear arsenal. This situation is often called the 'security-insecurity paradox'. Your own security is supposed to rest on making the other side more fearful and insecure, so that it behaves the way you want it to. Then the other side seeks to overcome its insecurity and to make itself more secure by promoting greater insecurity and vulnerability in its opponent. Thus we have what can also be called the 'vulnerability paradox'. The way out of this would seem to lie in both sides accepting mutual vulnerability and a mutual 'balance of terror'. This, then, should be a form of stability in the nuclear equation.

Unfortunately, no such stability arises and, instead, we have a constant and powerful incentive to continuous nuclear arms racing. To appreciate why this is so, we first need to understand the basic conditions that have to be met if there is to be nuclear security, even by the logic of nuclear deterrence thinking. According to this 'logic', a country must have what is called 'an assured second-strike capacity'. Between two countries with nuclear weapons, there is always the possibility (and the temptation) that the country that uses its nuclear weapons in a properly targeted fashion first can hope or expect to finish off all or most of the opponent's nuclear capacity to retaliate after such a first strike. Therefore, a country must be able to 'absorb' a first strike and have enough left over to devastate the opponent so that the opponent is not tempted to strike first.

Developing more nuclear weapons in this way may seem, to the side doing it, a reasonable thing to do in order to protect itself. But to the other side this means your opponent is making itself stronger in the name of developing second-strike capacities, but can also make an even more massive first strike (regardless of whether or not it declares a policy of No First Use), and therefore spur the threatened side to also develop more nuclear weapons in the name of strengthening and ensuring the survival of its own second-strike capacity.

3. The predictability issue: Since deterrence is a state of mind in your opponent, you are always tempted to try ways of making that opponent's behaviour more predictable, i.e., in accordance with what you want. Rather than simply hope that fear of your nuclear arsenal will make the opponent behave the way you want it to, you try and replace hope with some form of compulsion. To demand a high degree of predictability about an opponent's behaviour means to demand repeated, regular, institutionalised predictability and symmetry by each nuclear player vis-à-vis the other. In reality, this is not possible. But as long as one nuclear player or the other seeks to establish what it thinks can be the conditions in which such assured and predictable behaviour by the other side will be forthcoming, then this slides easily into a strategy of not just simple deterrence but aggressive compellence.

This strategy of compellence involves certain kinds of nuclear preparations and their associated political implications and signals, whereby the other side is supposedly 'compelled' to follow the pattern set by, and more 'controlled' by, the first nuclear player. Not only is nuclear arms escalation written into this 'compellence' script, but nuclear tensions are even more heightened than otherwise. The 'certainties' of compellence are substituted for the 'uncertain certainties' of 'normal' deterrence. Something like this happened with the US pursuing such a compellence strategy as part of its efforts to 'stabilise' and 'control' to its own 'advantage' the nuclear arms race of the late Seventies and Eighties. It is also a script written into the BMD, which represents the US ambition, nuclearly and militarily, to dominate the world via domination of space itself. Compellence is a more aggressive form of seeking 'political advantage' through nuclear weapons and there is no natural firebreak between the dangerous instability of deterrence-based nuclear behaviour and the more dangerous instability of compellence-based nuclear behaviour.

4. The credibility conundrum: It is not enough just to have nuclear weapons or to claim that they are never going to be used and that their purpose is only to prevent a nuclear conflict. Your nuclear threat must be credible. Indeed, an opponent will not be deterred if it believes that the deterrer will never use his nuclear weapons. Thus the 'capability' and the 'will' of the deterring country must not be doubted. The 'enemy' should be convinced that its nuclear opponent will use nuclear weapons if pushed to the brink, or at least be uncertain whether or not they will be used, but never certain or confident that they will not be used. However, any second-use of nuclear weapons is not, and cannot be, an act of security retrieval or enhancement. Once an opponent has launched a first strike against you, your security is gone. By using your nuclear weapons second, all you are doing is engaging in an act of revenge — to make the other country suffer too. This is also a senseless act of revenge because it only sets off a chain of further launches and counter-launches, which further devastates both countries. This being so, the side using nuclear weapons first can entertain ideas that a second strike is not credible.

Thus the question of 'credibility' or willingness to use nuclear weapons becomes very important. So governments that have nuclear weapons, despite occasional pronouncements that these will never be used, do not actually want the public or other governments to seriously believe them. This would undermine that country's credibility. In the face of all kinds of challenges and uncertainties — technological, military, etc. — the capability to use nuclear weapons must be constantly updated and fine-tuned and available for showing in a variety of circumstances. Also, the political will to use nuclear weapons (presumably in the last resort) must be periodically displayed. Thus the requirements of making one's nuclear deterrence credible creates powerful pressure for the generation and sustenance of both an enduring politics of nuclear-related hostility — including nuclear brandishing and brinkmanship — and of arms racing between rivals.

5. Shifting equations: Nuclear perspectives and behaviour are the prisoner of and subordinated to the more fundamental and overarching framework and context of political hostility between nuclear-political rivals. Nuclearisation and militarisation are themselves the symptoms or results or

expressions of this prior hostility. They are not their primary causes and, therefore, cannot be the solutions undoing this hostility. Indeed, they exacerbate such tensions and hostilities because nuclearisation is itself the announcement that one is willing to inflict the utmost devastation on the opponent country and its society. It was not the supposed deterrent qualities of the US-Soviet nuclear standoff that eroded political hostilities but the other way around. It was the Gorbachev-initiated unravelling of Cold War politics that paved the way for the erosion of nuclear tensions. The same principle of the prior importance of politics applies to the India-Pakistan situation. And nuclear weapons, including the presumed powers of nuclear deterrence, operate within this wider and more determining political context. The rhythms of deterrence behaviour are subordinated to the more powerful rhythms of political behaviour between mutually hostile countries.

This gives rise to a classic paradox in the search for stable deterrence: the conditions that are thought to make it necessary to apply deterrence guarantee that it will not be stable. The extent to which deterrence is genuinely stable is the extent to which it is unnecessary! India and Pakistan cannot have a stable deterrence equation, and nor did the US and the Soviet Union. But Britain and France can have a stable deterrent equation with each other precisely because it is unnecessary for them to have such a nuclear equation.

6. Technological advances: Constant technology advances in the development of nuclear warheads and in the designing of the range and accuracy of delivery systems is also a major input in ensuring the degenerative logic of deterrence-based thinking and behaviour. The more inaccurate and relatively invulnerable or undetectable nuclear missiles are, the more 'stabilising' they are. That is to say, if the missiles are not very accurate then they can be used to attack cities but not specific military targets. This makes them less useful as first-strike weapons aiming to, or capable of, knocking out an opponent's military installations (including its nuclear missile installations and airbases) and more useful as second-strike weapons able to devastate cities. In the jargon, this is called the difference between counter-value targets (e.g. cities) and counter-force ones (e.g. military/nuclear infrastructure). Moreover, the best second-strike nuclear weapons are considered to be those that combine low accuracy with relative invulnerability to a first strike. Thus, submarine-based nuclear-tipped missiles are seen as the best guarantors of second-strike capacity.

What happens, however, when land missile systems become more mobile (always being moved around on rail or road systems rather than being stationed in fixed silos), when there is 24-hour rotation of airplanes carrying nuclear weapons, and when submarine-launched missiles become ever more accurate (which is happening), and when efforts at detection of submarines and anti-submarine warfare make steady technical advances? What all this means is that technology advances are themselves undermining the distinction between 'stabilising' second-strike weapons and 'destabilising' first-strike weapons, since the former can increasingly double up to do the job of the latter. In short, this undermines hopes of stabilising the nuclear equation. What is more, new technological breakthroughs, like a developed Star Wars project of the kind envisaged by the US, are profoundly destabilising. One would need a separate essay to explain this complexity fully. In short, because technology does not stand still, neither does nuclear arms development. This is not just a matter of replacing the old with the new, but also of creating new problems, difficulties and dangers.

7. To centralise or not: The fear of a first strike leads to the search for what are called 'survivability-enhancing practices'. These are measures aiming to ensure that one's second-strike capacity, even after a first strike, is relatively unimpaired. But these very practices themselves undermine the stability of the deterrence equation. The two most important such measures are a) to disperse one's nuclear arsenal as widely as possible, and b) to adopt what is in effect a 'launch-on-warning' posture for one's missiles. Both give rise to grave problems. The first involves a centralisation-decentralisation dilemma. It is not enough to disperse the locations of nuclear delivery

systems. There is also the problem of decentralising command and control over such systems. This is because there is always the danger of what is called a 'decapitating first strike'. That is to say, an opponent can not only strike first, but also seek to decapitate the command and control system of the opponent by finishing off the key decision-makers at the apex of the chain of command over the nuclear arsenal. Even the establishment of 'redundant' or multiple chains of command which become operative in wartime may not prove equal to the impact of an effective decapitating first strike.

To avoid this dilemma, one has to greatly decentralise command and control to junior levels and more localised personnel at much lower rungs of the chain of command, so that they can carry out a second strike. But any such decentralisation greatly enhances the possibility of an accidental launch or a miscalculation (especially in wartime situations) that leads to a launch on the presumption that an enemy nuclear attack is taking place or is about to take place. We now know from recently disclosed official documents how close a Russian submarine was to launching a nuclear attack on a US ship during the Cuban Missile crisis on the basis of just such decentralised authority, because it thought the ship was torpedoing it (This event is now to be enshrined in a Hollywood movie). Pakistan, as a much smaller country fearful of a possible decapitating first strike by India, will have to face a particularly acute dilemma of centralisation-decentralisation. But the problem is acute enough for India as well.

As for adopting a 'launch-on-warning' posture to ensure second-strike capacity, this was the dominant form taken by the stationing of land-based missiles of both the USSR and the US during most of the Cold War. What this means, of course, is that there is an inescapable trade-off between the requirements of nuclear safety and guarding against the risks of a launch by accident or miscalculation, and the requirements of deterrence efficacy. During the Cold War period (and even afterwards) there were various false alarms and in some of those cases, matters came close to a head with the near-launch of missiles (The best study in the area is *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War* by Bruce Blair, Brookings Institution, 1993.). But another rarely noticed point is that launch-on-warning raised a fundamental question about nuclear deterrence. This question is not about whether or not deterrence actually worked, but whether it ever existed!

A launch-on-warning posture meant that the US had less than 25 minutes before a Soviet missile could hit it and, therefore, a maximum of only that much time to decide whether the alarm was a false one or not. Since the US had submarines much more closely positioned to the Soviet mainland, the latter had only around 10 minutes before a hit — that much less time to decide on its response. In the case of the US, from the time the alarm is raised about a possible Soviet launch, ten to twelve minutes would have to elapse for the missile to be identified, its path tracked and the necessary information relayed to the top command. Another two to three minutes would elapse before this could be communicated to the President. Any decision (whether this was a false alarm or a real one calling for the order to launch) taken by the President, if it was to be communicated to all necessary stations so as to be carried out, would require another eight to ten minutes. In short, out of the roughly 25 minutes in which a decision by the President has to be made — even if the President was in direct telephonic communication with key aides — he has literally only one or two minutes in which to take a truly momentous decision. When the space and time allowed for human decision is so shortened by adopting the posture of launch-on-warning, what is one to make of the claim that deterrence is in operation when there can never be any foolproof check on an accidental launch by an opponent or a false alarm by one's own system?

In the case of India, the best survivability practice would be for both sides to move towards a launch-on-warning posture, which is something they may well do in the future. But the missile flight time between the two countries of five to eight minutes is so much shorter than even in the Cold War case for the US. There is no way there can be even the illusion of being able to maintain a proper check

on preventing launches by accident or miscalculation. The trade-off between wanting greater nuclear safety and deterrence efficacy in South Asia is an even starker one than was the case between the great Cold War rivals.

The US ended up targeting over 16,000 locations in the USSR with ready delivery systems, but could still never be sure that they could have an 'adequate' second-strike capacity to cause 'unacceptable damage'. Butler revealed that he was himself so shaken, when he took over supreme command, by the revelation of the insane logic that was operating in US nuclear preparations in the name of deterrence efficacy, that he began to systematically question the basic assumptions of such thinking and the security paradigm based on it

8. Defining 'unacceptable damage': According to the logic of nuclear deterrence thinking, it is not enough to have a second-strike capacity that survives a possible first strike. This capacity must be able to inflict what is called 'unacceptable damage' on the opponent. If after a first strike you only have a few weapons left over, then your opponent may be prepared to take the risk of a first strike and 'absorb' the second strike. But what is 'unacceptable damage'? And how do you ensure that you have it after a devastating first strike? The simple answer is that the concept is inescapably vague and impossible to quantify and there is no assurance that you can retain the ability to inflict such 'unacceptable damage' after an enemy first strike on you, or that the damage you might be able to inflict would be unacceptable to the opponent. All that happens is that both sides have to embark on the escalator of making more and better nuclear weapons in the futile search for such second-strike capacity. George Lee Butler, who for 12 years headed the US Strategic Air Command (the service that has overall control of the US nuclear arsenal) and who, between 1992, and 1995 was the key Presidential adviser (the one person the President must consult before pressing the nuclear button) and subsequently turned nuclear disarmer, said quite correctly in regard to the 'unacceptable damage' issue that this was impossible to quantify or operationalise. The US ended up targeting over 16,000 locations in the USSR with ready delivery systems, but could still never be sure that they could have an 'adequate' second-strike capacity to cause 'unacceptable damage'. Butler revealed that he was himself so shaken, when he took over supreme command, by the revelation of the insane logic that was operating in US nuclear preparations in the name of deterrence efficacy, that he began to systematically question the basic assumptions of such thinking and the security paradigm based on it.

9. Real vs. Surreal: Seeking security through nuclear weapons and the supposedly wondrous powers of deterrence is itself reflective of a particular political approach to matters of security for a country. This approach has a name — it is called Realism or Realist thinking in international relations. This approach gives prime importance in politics to military power (even more than to economic power) and believes that great military power provides the leverage for getting great political advantages. It is this kind of thinking that lies behind the belief in the efficacy of nuclear weapons through its 'threat power'. Given this mental-intellectual predilection, invariably the justifications for the importance of nuclear weapons go beyond the simple claim that they provide, through deterrence, security against a nuclear attack. Since nuclear weapons are the supreme form of military threat power, and since military threat power is considered to provide so many other potential political advantages, even greater value is attributed to nuclear arsenals and it comes to be seen as the means for pursuing many more political goals.

Nuclear weapons are then seen as not just preventing nuclear war but as helping to achieve crisis-stability, to prevent even conventional war, to provide general foreign policy support, to provide global status and prestige, to help secure arms control and even to secure eventual nuclear disarmament. Now if one thing — nuclear weapons — can help give us all these advantages, then how on earth can one oppose having them? Alternatively, one can see this ridiculous expansion of the qualities attributed to the possession of nuclear weapons as reflecting a profound inability to

think through the complexities of the notion of power, the inability to perceive its different forms and the specific limitations of each. What we have here is a set of God-worshippers for whom nuclear weapons have become the new God that can magically deliver all kinds of political goodies. This unwarranted expansion of the 'value' of nuclear weapons, then, makes it even more difficult to want to, or work to, get rid of them.

10. What if? Finally, there is the 'What if?' question. What if nuclear deterrence breaks down and there is a nuclear exchange? In fact, those involved in running a nuclear weapons system, for all their publicly pronounced assurances, know that neither they nor anyone else can ever guarantee that someone, somewhere, including their enemies, will not use such weapons. All countries with nuclear weapons must think about, and have some plans for, what to do if deterrence breaks down. That is to say, they have to make some kind of preparations to actually fight a nuclear war. This itself mocks their claim that since one has nuclear weapons, there is less danger of having a nuclear exchange or war. India, for all its pretentious claims about the efficacy of deterrence after Pokharan II, had to subsequently launch Operation Purnima Vijay with General Padmanabhan, the first Chief of Army Staff of a nuclear India, publicly declaring that these were exercises to help equip the Indian forces to fight in actual nuclear warfare conditions. But these very war-fighting preparations themselves undermine confidence in deterrence postures and the claim that one can rely on the efficacy of deterrence.

Has the world become more nuclearly safe over all these decades? If nuclear deterrence is efficacious, then its spread to more countries should logically make the world safer. If it works to make India and Pakistan more secure, then surely the same logic applies to other countries striving to make themselves more nuclearly secure? Does anybody in his or her right mind think this is actually the case? That their spread to Iran, Iraq (Israel already has them) and elsewhere, or their possession by non-State actors, will mean greater safety?

At the end of it all, one can still imagine Indian nuclear hawks resorting to the counterfactual and saying, "Look, deterrence works because after 1945, there has still been no nuclear exchange between nuclear weapons powers." This is not a serious form of reassurance. Indeed, no one who has studied the record of the nuclear age since 1945 would ever try to pass off this absence of nuclear war as a source of reassurance. There have been some very close misses, with the Cuban Missile crisis bringing the world to within a hair's breadth of a nuclear holocaust. On a number of occasions, there were key people advocating the use of such weapons but, fortunately, each time those who opposed them got the better of the decision, if not always the argument. There is never any guarantee that such a situation will always prevail in the future. Indeed, some of the key former believers in the efficacy of nuclear deterrence have turned against their earlier beliefs, and many like George Lee Butler have said that it was only "by the grace of God" that a nuclear disaster was averted during the Cold War era. Today, the danger of a nuclear conflict has taken a more regional turn. If the chances of a global nuclear holocaust have receded due to the end of the Cold War, the chances of a regional nuclear exchange (with South Asia the current frontrunner for fulfilling this possibility) have become greater.

Moreover, the test for whether nuclear weapons bring about greater security is not established simply by asking whether or not deterrence has broken down completely through the eruption of a nuclear war. There is another, more routine, test question for assessing whether or not nuclear deterrence works. And that question is simply whether the countries that have such weapons are or feel more nuclearly secure from their rivals or enemies, actual or potential! Has the world become more nuclearly safe over all these decades? If nuclear deterrence is efficacious, then its spread to more countries should logically make the world safer. If it works to make India and Pakistan more secure, then surely the same logic applies to other countries striving to make themselves more nuclearly secure? Does anybody in his or her right mind think this is actually the case? That their

spread to Iran, Iraq (Israel already has them) and elsewhere, or their possession by non-State actors, will mean greater safety?

Why is it so difficult for people, especially our bomb-supporters, to see what is staring them in the face — that the world is in a deep nuclear mess? The single biggest culprit for helping to create this mess is the mindset of those who believe in the efficacy of nuclear deterrence. This is the mindset that must be delegitimised, undermined and exposed for the bankrupt politics that it leads to, if we are ever to secure a truly nuclear-safe world. This can only be in a nuclear-free world.

* *From Bloodsport , Vol III : issue 5&6:*

<http://www.littlemag.com/bloodsport/achinvanaik.html>