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India's Nuclear Build-Up**

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India's nuclear build-up, which culminated in the 1998 nuclear tests and India's subsequent self-declaration as a nuclear power, bears several puzzles for academic research in the field of strategic studies, as it appears difficult to identify clear strategic motives behind it. In its relations to arch rival Pakistan, the introduction of nuclear weapons was strategically rather counter productive for India, as the equalising effects of these weapons diminished much of India's overwhelming superiority in conventional weaponry. Many academics therefore stress the so-called 'China factor', that is, the threat to Indian security posed by the nuclear-armed neighbour in the north, as the reason for India's acquisition of nuclear weapons. This argument, however, appears to be not sound enough to solely explain the course of India's nuclearisation, as the conflicting interests at stake are of too little relevance to justify the substantial financial and political sacrifice involved. Thus, a majority of studies on the nuclear build-up in South Asia concludes that a significant, if not dominating part of the explanatory variables lies outside of the classical strategic realm. However, stringent explanatory models which account for the key role of non-strategic motives behind India's nuclear build-up are largely missing. Prime objective of the present paper is to reduce this gap by sketching a possible model to explain how the interplay of several contradicting national interests at stake, being either strategic or non-strategic in nature, contributed to India's decision to pass the nuclear threshold.

Within the applied model, the structure of the international system in South Asia clearly sets the framework for India's international action. Structural conditions, however, are not transformed directly into India's strategic policy formulation, but rather distorted by intervening factors at the national level. The

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strong threat perception emerging from Pakistan among India's elite, and, at the same time, the remarkable indifference of the elite as well as public at large towards China, does not correspond to the actual relative power capabilities within the system, nor do these threat perceptions sufficiently explain India's nuclear course.

The present model, which is itself based on the paradigms of Neo-classical Realism, departs from conventional explanatory models in two fundamental aspects: First, state interaction is not exclusively explained by the structure of the international system, but rather by the interplay between systemic variables such as the states' relative power capabilities, and intervening variables at the unit-level. Second, state interests are not defined exclusively in terms of security maximisation. The emphasis of the present paper on an in-depth analysis of the particular interests at stake appears justified considering the non-security motives behind India's self-declaration as nuclear weapon state.

The paper starts with a general description of the South Asian context within the field of International Relations, and the particularities of this region in regard to the applicability of the conventional IR models. Then, the international system which sets the framework for India's strategic policy-making is outlined.

The central part of the paper is an evaluation of intervening factors on the national level. Several domestic dynamics within India's policy decision-making process regularly overlap structural conditions in shaping India's national interest formulation. The most striking interests at stake are India's aversion to the existing international non-proliferation regime, as well as domestic factors, such as India's ad hoc, non-institutionalised nuclear decision-making process, dynamics emerging from India's democratic structure, and the key role of certain pressure groups like the defence scientists and the strategic analysts.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY: THE SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

Structural theories of International Relations such as Neorealism try to explain the outcomes of state interaction by focusing on its systemic, or structural causes. State behaviour is determined by its respective power relative to the power capabilities of other states within the international system. As such, only broad assumptions on unit-level variations in state behaviour as intervening variables are made.

Much of the debate on Neorealism focuses on the nature of the international system². Liberal critics usually question the validity of the anarchy assumption, which they found particularly difficult to uphold in an increasingly globalised world and the emergence of international non-state actors³. When it comes to the South Asian arena, however, this criticism falls somehow short. In fact, the South

² For an overview on this debate see: Keohane: 1986; and Buzan: 1993.

³ Constructivists reject the realist anarchy assumption by claiming that the interrelation between states is generally constructed by people's identity and socialization. See: Alexander Wendt: 1992. For Constructivism and Indo-Pakistani relations see: Subrata K. Mitra: 2001.

Asian strategic set-up can truly be described as being anarchic. A broad security architecture as well as substantive regional security agreements are missing. Neither India nor Pakistan are members of the main international nuclear regimes, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The UN is largely discredited due to its clumsy mediation attempts in the Kashmir question. The agenda of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) as the only institutionalised platform for regional co-operation explicitly excludes bilateral security issues. Intra-regional trade so far remains minimal, mainly due to the similarly structured, non-complementary economies of the South Asian countries.

According to Neorealist theory, states place security maximising at the top of the lexicographic preference system, trying to improve their security through relative power gains vis-à-vis their counterparts within the international anarchic self-help system (Van Evera: 1999). Interaction between states is determined by their relative power capabilities as well as their mutual threat perceptions. Applying this assumption to the nuclear relations between India and Pakistan would neglect the existence of non-security state interests, and it would fail to explain India's acceptance to actually lose in relative power capabilities vis-à-vis Pakistan when it decided to spark off the chain of mutual testing and deploying of nuclear devices.

While the Realist paradigms are generally well suited to explain much of the long term course of nuclear proliferation in South Asia, the abstract limitation to structural factors by its mainstream Neorealist variant, i.e. the assumption that only security maximising determines state action in the international arena, appears rather inadequate, as it veils more than it reveals in the South Asian case. Assuming that security considerations explain much but not all of the nuclear build-up in South Asia, any explanatory model would have to incorporate a set of different factors within the national interest composition. These factors are either structural, or unit-level based.

Theories which are termed as 'Neo-classical Realist' theories generally accept the supremacy of structural factors, i.e. the distribution of relative power, over domestic factors as the main determinants of state action within the international system. However,

“the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. (...) Neo-classical realists argue that relative power establishes the basic parameters of a country's foreign policy; they note, in Thucydides' formula, that 'the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must'. Yet they point out that there is no immediate or perfect transmission belt linking material capabilities to foreign policy behaviour” (Rose: 1998, pp. 146,147).

In short, the structure of the international system sets the framework of a state's long-term international goals, whereas unit-level variations in state behaviour

display as interfering variables responsible for short-term changes in foreign policy. The incentives which guide the state's foreign policy formulation are termed state (or national) interests. Key question is thereby whether the existing international system is accommodative towards the particular state's interests, or whether the interests drive the state to pursue a policy of system change.

The initiation of a (nuclear) arms race is explained by the dissatisfaction of one state with the status quo, which is perceived as unfavourable to its varied national interests. The interaction between a dissatisfied state and its security-seeking opponent is thereby one-sided in the sense that the security seeker is reacting to preserve its security, whereas the dissatisfied state is building up arms independently from the opponents' reaction to it. In this scenario, the action-reaction model of state behaviour leading to security dilemma as described in the Balance-of-Power Theory does not apply.

According to Hans J. Morgenthau, a state whose policy is to seek a change in its actual power status, pursues a policy of imperialism, whereas the state whose policy is to keep power pursues a policy of status quo (Morgenthau: revised edition 1993; pp. 29-34). Similarly, Randall L. Schweller states that "revisionist states seek to undermine the established order for the purpose of increasing their power and prestige in the system; that is, they seek to increase, not just to maintain, their resources.. . Revisionist powers are typically those states which lost the last major-power war and / or have increased their power after the international order was established and the benefits were allocated" (Schweller, in: Feaver, Peter D.: 2000; p.177). Instead of using the terms 'imperialist' or 'revisionist', this study refers to the term 'dissatisfied power' to describe those states which consider the status quo as sub-optimal to their national interests, and to 'status-quo power' to those states which seek to preserve the current international system as matching best their national interests. As Schweller quite rightly notes, the incentives for dissatisfied powers to seek a revision of the international order are not necessarily predatory. Rather, a revision might be regarded as necessary to enhance a state's defensive goals within its strategic environment (Schweller 2000; p.177). The composition of a state's national interest determines the strength of revisionist or status quo oriented incentives of state behaviour. If those interests which favour a change in the international system outweigh the interests satisfied by the status quo, the state acts as dissatisfied power.

The interrelation between power capabilities (structure) and state interests (agency) and their link to policy decisions of the respective South Asian states as well as the way these states interact are modelled along the Theory of Balance of Interests⁴. "The concept of balance of interests has a dual meaning, one at the unit level, the other at the systemic level. At the unit level, it refers to the costs a state is willing to pay to defend the status quo relative to the costs it is willing to pay to modify it. At the systemic level, it refers to the relative strength of status-quo and revisionist states" (Schweller 1998; pp. 83,84).

⁴ The term 'Balance-of-Interest Theory' was first introduced by Randall L. Schweller (Schweller: 1998).

Along this concept, India clearly qualifies as a dissatisfied power in terms of its nuclear build-up, wanting to improve its position within the system. The international nuclear order established in the 1960s is perceived by India as neither serving its interests nor reflecting its increased economic as well as power resources and depriving it of its appropriate status, while at the same time granting this status to both former South Asian colonial powers, Britain and France, as well as to China.

In the case of Pakistan, determining revisionist incentives for its nuclear proliferation is a more complex task. Pakistan's irredentist goals towards territory in Kashmir have been one of the major factors in Indo-Pakistani antagonism since independence. Until 1965, Pakistan considered the existing order, in which India occupies most of Kashmir, as highly intolerable, and it was willing to take a great risk to improve it. After the war of 1965, and further after the secession of Bangladesh in 1971, Pakistan, although still being a dissatisfied power in Kashmir, became too weak to push its irredentist goals through by military means. At this stage, a clear methodological distinction has to be made between the national interests determining the acquisition of conventional power capabilities, and those determining the build-up of nuclear power capabilities. While the Pakistani conventional arms build-up appears to be mainly caused by its dissatisfaction with the status quo in Kashmir, its nuclear proliferation is not. Nuclear weapons are of no use in limited territorial disputes. Rather, Pakistan's military planners consider nuclear devices as defensive weapons in order to deter the superior Indian military force from a large-scale attack, being either nuclear or conventional. Thus, in contrast to its conventional arms build-up, within the nuclear arms race Pakistan qualifies as status-quo power.

By clearly marking India as dissatisfied, and Pakistan as satisfied power in the nuclear competition, India is seen as the prime actor, while Pakistan as a reacting power plays only a secondary role in determining the course of the nuclear arms race in South Asia. Therefore, the further analysis will focus on the Indian case. It is done by first looking at the structural causes, and, in a second step, addressing the intervening, unit-level dynamics behind the nuclear arms race.

THE SOUTH ASIAN STRATEGIC ARENA

Deterrence in Indo-Pakistan Relations

Prior to the introduction of nuclear weapons, the conflict over Kashmir was the crucial factor determining the course of the bilateral relations. In 1998, the breakthrough of the South Asian nuclear arms race after the tests had a significant impact on the bilateral strategic interaction between India and Pakistan. As Kenneth Waltz argues, "big changes in means of transportation, communication, and war fighting, for example, strongly affect how states and other agents interact. Such changes occur at the unit level. In modern history, or perhaps in all of history,

the introduction of nuclear weaponry was the greatest of such changes” (Waltz: 2000; p.5).

The most significant change in the relationship between India and Pakistan is the emergence of deterrence as dominant feature of bilateral interaction. Deterrence threats are meant to reduce the expected utility for the adversary of going to war by increasing the potential costs of doing so. Another objective of deterrence is to prevent the adversary from forcing maximum demands upon the state in the course of bilateral bargaining.

In contrast to conventional deterrence, nuclear deterrence plays only an indirect role in regional territorial disputes. It is not primarily directed at preventing a limited military attack to seize the disputed territory, but to prevent a large-scale military attack to occupy the disputed territory only after decisively defeating the opponent’s military forces.

The fundamental paradigm shift in the course of the revelation of both countries’ nuclear arsenals was neither guided by a new doctrine nor by any new assessment of India’s broad strategic environment. Rather, soon after the tests several strategic analysts and government officials began to design possible new doctrines in a post hoc fashion. Central to India’s newly formulated deterrence posture is a no-first-use doctrine and emphasis on the ‘China Factor’. The explicit renunciation of the nuclear first-use option by India is a reassuring move towards China, but it failed to have any effect on Indo-Pakistani relations. Due to the overwhelming superiority in conventional forces, a nuclear first strike towards Pakistan has never been a serious option for India’s military planners anyway. For Pakistan, on the other hand, the nuclear first-strike option is crucial due to its geo-strategic proximity and the inferiority of its conventional forces. Several Pakistani officials already indicated that Pakistan could counter a large-scale conventional attack by India with nuclear weapons (Carranza:1999; p.15).

The minimum nuclear deterrence posture adopted by India and Pakistan implies the deployment of “the minimum number of nuclear weapons necessary to inflict unacceptable damage on its adversary even after suffering a nuclear attack” (Nicholas Wheeler, cited in Carranza: 1999; p.14) and generally suggests a countervalue instead of a counterforce doctrine (Bowen/Wolvén. 1999). Nevertheless, both states have failed so far to outline how many they actually consider as being the minimum number of devices.

Due to the geographic proximity and the extremely short warning times, aircraft are of little use as secure second-strike delivery vehicles, rather contributing to deterrence instability by increasing the dangers of pre-emptive strikes. Both states therefore foster the development of mobile land-based ballistic missiles. The Indian programme of developing submarines as the potentially best delivery system to secure a second-strike capability is decades away from completion.

In its strategic relationship with Pakistan, the introduction of an overt nuclear arsenal appeared rather disadvantageous for India. It obviously neither deters the insurgents in Kashmir nor the alleged Pakistani assistance to them. While India’s concern of the Pakistani nuclear build-up might explain in parts its course of

opaque nuclear proliferation until 1998, it fails to explain India's decision to drop this concept and to take the initiative in pulling the regional nuclear arms race into the light by testing first and declaring itself a nuclear weapon state. If India would not have tested in 1998 and signed the CTBT instead without testing, it would have been impossible for Pakistan to resist international pressures and not to have followed suit, thus freezing both countries' nuclear programme and cementing India's then held superiority.

Generally, empirical evidence suggests that the nuclear capabilities of India and Pakistan before and after the 1998 tests might have deterred full-scale war, but obviously failed to deter minor skirmishes and low profile war between these two rivals along their disputed Kashmir border. However, any conclusion about if and how deterrence worked remains vague. "Since successful deterrence results in non-events, i.e. continued peace, it is logically impossible to prove that nuclear deterrence has worked in any given situation" (Hagerty: 1998; p.37). Undisputed are the non-strategic dangers of 'loose nukes' resulting from the crude nature of the nuclear arsenals among newly emerging nuclear powers.

Strategic Incentives for India's Nuclear Build-up

Most studies on the strategic dynamics of South Asia explain India's nuclear weapons build-up as reaction to the threats posed by Pakistan and China, or both⁵. In fact, much of India's impetus to proliferate nuclear weapons can be traced to prior proliferation dynamics in these two rival countries. The first broader debate on the nuclear issue within the Indian polity emerged in the mid-1960s, just after China had conducted its first nuclear test in 1964, and only two years after India's defeat by China in the border war of 1962. After a period of nuclear standstill, the Indian nuclear programme was revived in the early 1980s after rumours spread that Pakistan took strong efforts in fostering its nuclear capabilities. The Indian nuclear tests in 1998 were again interpreted by many as reaction to prior proliferation dynamics within Pakistan, as it followed Pakistani test firing of the medium-range Ghauri ballistic missile, capable of targeting main cities in India. Improvements in power capabilities by Pakistan and China often triggered a debate in India, causing an increased threat perception. While most of the Indian public saw the nuclear tests in 1998 as one step forward towards technological and strategic superiority vis-à-vis arch rival Pakistan, most members of the strategic enclave were very well aware of the inadequacy of such weapons to gain strategic superiority in its bilateral rivalry. In their academic back up, these Pundits rather focus on the threat posed by the Chinese nuclear arsenal, and on the rival nature of the national interests of these two major Asian powers. According to K. Subrahmanyam, India should "adopt a policy of directly befriending China and, at the same time" pursue the establishment of "an Asian and global balance of power system" (K. Subrahmanyam, cited in Perkovich: 1999; p. 385), i.e. create equally strong

⁵ Chinese military assistance to Pakistan heightened Indian perception of a threatening axis surrounding India in the north.

(nuclear) power capabilities to balance China, just as the Balance-of-Power theory suggests.

This course or argumentation, however, does not hold closer scrutiny. First of all, a credible nuclear deterrent towards China would have necessitated secure second strike capabilities as well as appropriate ballistic missile delivery vehicles to reach key strategic targets, which are located at long distance on China's east coast. Both were far from combat-ready in 1998 and, according to official statements, not on top of India's priority list. Secondly, the tests of 1998 came after a period of significant rapprochement between India and China, which was initiated by Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988, and culminated in two border agreements signed in 1993 and 1996. Prior to the tests, the Chinese government sent out signals that its strategic interests were limited to the Taiwan issue and the South China Sea, and that it had a strong interest in preserving the status quo at its southwestern border with India. Thus, China acts as dissatisfied power at its eastern border, while it clearly qualifies as status quo power towards India, both, in conventional as well as in nuclear terms.

The Chinese move to overcome old rivalries and to fundamentally improve its relationship with India was not caused by perceived pressures emerging from India's growing military capabilities, but rather due to the growing economic attractiveness of the Indian market for Chinese goods and services. In this light, K. Subrahmanyam's view of the natural rivalry of India and China can be seen as one more piece in the long record of Indian misperception and misjudgement of Chinese moves, signals and intentions. In fact, the only persistent conflict of bilateral interests is the still unresolved demarcation of their border. However, the two border agreements and the mutual understanding to solve this problem peacefully made the repetition of a border war similar to 1962 highly unlikely, and a scenario in which such potential open conflict escalates into a nuclear war appears unthinkable. Strong improvements of India's conventional military capabilities at its border to China would have foreclosed a repetition of the nightmarish events of 1962 anyway, as the potential costs of such open conflict would outweigh its potential benefits, considering the rather minor Chinese interests at stake.

Finally, those who consider a nuclear deterrent as an appropriate tool to match the Chinese threat still fail to explain the timing of the nuclear tests, as well as the necessity to reveal India's nuclear programme at all, as the concept of existential nuclear deterrence which dominated India's strategy prior to the tests would have done the job⁶. Continued opacity would have further avoided the risks of pre-emptive strikes and an unleashed nuclear arms race.

In sum, despite many efforts to explain India's strategic need for nuclear weapons, systemic incentives alone are not sound enough to exclusively explain the nuclear dynamics within South Asia.

⁶ For an introduction in the concept of 'existential deterrence' see: Bundy, MacGeorge: *Existential Deterrence and its Consequences*. In: MacLean, Douglas (ed.): *The Security Gamble: Deterrence Dilemmas in the Nuclear Age*. Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld 1984.

A comprehensive explanation of the dynamics behind India's acquisition of the bomb would have to go beyond the trivial dimension of nuclear bombs as military-strategic devices, and further include the normative dimension of nuclear weapons as the world's strongest symbols of abstract power. India's quest for such symbolic power gains is driven by its dissatisfaction with the existing international regime. Its dissatisfaction is not defined in terms of territory or military capability, but rather in terms of international standing and prestige.

ELITE PERCEPTION AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The following section evaluates the way in which the structural pressures are perceived by India's elite. It will show that the elite's response to structural incentives is less based on the perception of military insecurity, but on considerations of international standing, which is sought to be achieved through the build-up of power capabilities in general, and nuclear power capabilities in particular. The status orientation of India's foreign policy oscillates between the quest for status through power on one side, and India's pretension of moral superiority in the international system on the other. This ambivalence between these two contrasting features in India's normative interest composition became most apparent in its often inconsistent position towards the international non-proliferation regime.

India and the International Non-Proliferation Regime

One of the motives behind its nuclear build-up has been India's dissatisfaction with the existing discriminatory nuclear regime, which emerged in 1968 after concluding the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). When negotiations on the extension of the NPT ended in 1995 with a vast majority of states favouring its indefinite extension⁷, India emerged as its only outspoken opponent⁸. India's almost complete international isolation on this issue, which was further deepened by its constant blocking and protracting of the negotiation process in Geneva, is even more astonishing considering its long tradition of moral commitment for global (nuclear) disarmament. Many, if not most, of the non-nuclear weapon states share India's displeasure about the genuinely discriminatory treaty, which allows the five recognised nuclear weapon states⁹ to maintain their arsenals, while at the same time denying the right to possess these weapons to the rest of the community of states. The treaty is nevertheless regarded as one (imperfect but indispensable) step forward to avoid the global spread of these deadly weapons. Analysts usually tend to explain India's stance by the advanced state of its nuclear programme. Signing the treaty in 1995 would have ruined India's nuclear achievements just

⁷ 179 countries agreed to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, and until 2000, 187 had signed it.

⁸ Next to India, only Pakistan, Israel and Cuba rejected the treaty. Pakistan explicitly declared to sign the NPT as soon as India would sign.

⁹ The five recognized nuclear weapon states are the United States, Russia, China, France, Great Britain.

short before it could cross the finishing line, i.e. develop a full-fledged nuclear arsenal. This explanation appears reasonable regarding the strong lobbying efforts of the scientific community to avoid any agreement which would put restrictions on their work. However, it overlooks the general anti-colonialist and nationalist dynamics behind India's policy. Paradoxically, the first NPT negotiations in the late 1960s and the negotiations on its indefinite extension in the mid-1990s gave impetus to India's nuclear programme, rather than averting nuclear proliferation. Similar dynamics were in place during negotiations on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)¹⁰ in 1996, and during continued bilateral negotiations on non-proliferation issues with the USA. According to many analysts, the increasing isolation and the emerging pressures to finally join the international non-proliferation regime account for India's decision to not further delay its nuclear programme, to conduct nuclear tests in 1998 and subsequently declare itself a nuclear weapon state. This argument would have suggested that India - followed by Pakistan - signs both NPT and CTBT soon after the events of 1998. However, India did not. Instead, the Indian government followed the line which had already determined its policy of 'keeping the nuclear option open' since the beginning: It tried to satisfy the domestic audience by resisting international pressure and refusing formal acceptance of NPT and CTBT, which were perceived unjust and neo-colonialist. To calm the international audience, the Indian government declared its will not to violate the treaties even without any formal signature.

At the end of the day, the nuclear tests did not fundamentally change India's and Pakistan's stance on the international non-proliferation regime. India continues to formally reject NPT and CTBT as discriminatory, and continues to avoid the implementation of any restrictions on its nuclear programme. Due to its perceived strategic position, Pakistan continues to demand India to sign first before it would join the regime.

The anti-colonialist reflex triggered by the negotiations on NPT and CTBT prevented India's elite to discern the potential benefits of those treaties to India's security. First of all, if India had joined the NPT without testing, it would have been impossible for Pakistan to resist international pressure and refrain from signing. The technical advantage India had over Pakistan in the nuclear field prior to the tests would have been preserved. A second and more important aspect of the international nuclear regime, which has been widely ignored in the Indian debate, is the strong pressure on the existing nuclear weapon states not to exercise any form of nuclear threat to non-nuclear weapon states. Any nuclear threat in a potential conflict with a non-nuclearised India would have been prohibitive to China as it would have caused enormous international damage. By openly acquiring a (however imperfect) nuclear deterrent device, India lost this strategic benefit.

¹⁰ To come into force, CTBT regularities require the signature of 44 key states with nuclear potential. Among these, only India, Pakistan, and Israel refused to sign. Similar to the NPT negotiations, Pakistan signalled that it would sign the CTBT as soon as India does. India initially was in favour of the treaty, but finally rejected it.

In sum, the heated domestic debate on the non-proliferation issue foreclosed any pragmatic, more beneficial policy, and made India insist on its stubborn position. Unfortunately, India's position was further hardened by the attitudes of the recognised nuclear weapon states, which themselves derive much of their international standing and power from their arsenals. As Devin T. Hagerty wrote: "Paradoxically, it is mainly Washington's attitude, not New Delhi's or Islamabad's, that ensures the continuing legitimacy of nuclear weapons. . . . The dictum 'do as we say, not as we do' is hypocritical" (Hagerty 1998; p.195). Reactions to the tests in Western capitals, such as the U.S. Senate's call on the Clinton administration to pressurise New Delhi to reverse its policy and give up nuclear weapons completely, caused immediate objection by India and deepened its anti-colonialist sentiments.

*Nehruvian Tradition, Anti-colonialism, and Nationalism
in India's Foreign Policy*

Since Independence, India's foreign and security policy has been decisively determined by the Prime Minister. His or her moral beliefs and personal identity shaped the Indian nuclear policy more than informed strategic analyses. The concept of 'keeping the nuclear option open', which determined India's course of nuclear proliferation until 1998, was the result of two contradicting ideas about India's role within the community of states, on which India's Prime Ministers were agonising since the nuclear question emerged in the early 1950s. "Two vital norms coexist uneasily within this identity: one, India should achieve major power status in the international system and, two, India should demonstrate moral superiority over the world's dominant states, which have been perceived as exploitative, overly militarised, and insensitive to the needs and aspirations of the world's majority of poor people. These two norms have clashed in the nuclear policy arena" (Perkovich: 1999; p.448). The difficulty to accommodate both norms became apparent in Nehru's speeches in the early 1960s, in which he explicitly announced India's goal to achieve the necessary skills to manufacture nuclear weapons, while, at the same time, categorically declaring that India would never build the bomb. This stance has often been misunderstood by Western listeners as somehow hypocritical rhetoric. It was nevertheless India's attempt to uphold its moral stance, and, at the same time, find its place in the international system, in which the possession of such unusable weapons greatly determine a state's standing and power. After Nehru's death in 1964, his successors Lal Bahadur Shastri (1964-1966) and Indira Gandhi (1966-77, 1980-1984) initially tried to continue this ambiguous policy. However, external pressures emerging from the first Chinese nuclear test in 1964, and continued negotiations on the NPT, as well as domestic pressures emerging from government instability, made the government prone to populist considerations and it started to pursue a more vigorous nuclear policy. After the so called 'peaceful nuclear explosion' in 1974, the nuclear programme in India came to a temporary end. Two reasons mainly account for this policy shift: First, the nuclear issue failed to pay its hoped-for dividends in terms of

domestic popularity. Second, the firm international reaction causing severe political and economic damage took the Indian government by surprise. Indira Gandhi's successor as Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, felt more than any other Prime Minister before and after committed to the high moral standards of Indian foreign policy, and fiercely opposed the development of nuclear weapons. India's nuclear programme was not revived before Indira Gandhi's return to power in 1980. It was resumed after rumours spread about Pakistan's increasing efforts in the nuclear field. This was somehow ironic: Pakistan's nuclear programme was triggered by India's nuclear explosion in 1974, and grew rapidly since the mid-1970s just at the time when India's programme was halted. Then, in 1980, India resumed its programme under the impression of an increased nuclear threat by Pakistan. This episode shows the fatal action-reaction dynamics which were set in motion once the Pandora's box of nuclear proliferation had been opened.

When Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980, she was confronted with widespread social unrest, and secessionist movements in Punjab and in the Northeast threatened India's integrity. In this context, the widely perceived threat from Pakistan was welcomed by Indira to gather public support behind her troubled central government. However, similar to 1974 and 1998, this strategy failed to have much effect. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, and succeeded by her son Rajiv, who continued his mother's nuclear policy with few changes.

The downfall of the Rajiv Gandhi government (1984-1989) not only put a end to the rule of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty in Indian politics, but also marked the transformation of the single-party dominated political landscape into a multi-party system. In the following decade, changing coalitions ruled the country in quick succession. This system change had significant implications on India's foreign and security policy. In contrast to earlier governments, the coalition governments since 1989 felt less committed to the Nehruvian vision of an international system based on moral standards, not power. The struggle between the two contradicting norms of India's foreign policy was now decided in favour of power politics. Apparently, governments only disagreed in how India should achieve greater international power and leverage. While Prime Minister Narasimha Rao (1991-1996) sought India to gain power first of all through economic growth, the succeeding BJP-governments under Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (1996; since 1998) sought to raise India's standing and prestige in the world first and foremost through military strength.

Rao's economy-first policy slowed down but did not stop the nuclear programme. The scientists proceeded with the development of missiles as delivery vehicles and concluded preparations to conduct further nuclear tests, which were considered necessary to optimise the atomic chain reaction in order to make nuclear warheads suitable for missile delivery. Rao appeared to have authorised these preparations personally, but restrained from actually authorising the detonations (Perkovich: 1999; p.365). After the downfall of the Rao government, his successor Vajpayee authorised nuclear tests immediately, but he withdrew his authorisation as soon as it became apparent that his government would not survive

the upcoming vote of confidence. The following governments led by Deve Gowda (1996-1997) and Inder Kumar Gujral (1997-1998) marked an exception in India's foreign policy. During Gowda's term, for the first time ever, foreign policy was not made primarily in the Prime Minister's office, but within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Then-Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, who would become Prime Minister himself in 1997, developed a new doctrine for India's foreign policy based on regional co-operation and unilateral confidence building efforts. His careful diplomacy increased India's stature within and outside the South Asian region. Towards Pakistan, his policy had the potential of breaking the vicious circle of mutual provocations, allegations, and misperceptions. Further, he enjoyed increasing respect for his new foreign policy among the domestic audience, disproving conventional belief among the Indian political class that only an intransigent stance towards arch rival Pakistan could win domestic approval. As head of an increasingly unstable coalition government, and with fierce opposition from the scientists and the hawks among the opinion leaders, Gujral was soon forced to revise his restrained policy. While rejecting nuclear tests publicly, he was not able or willing to stop or significantly slow down the scientists' work on the nuclear programme. When Gujral left office in 1998, preparations on the nuclear tests were completed. There was nothing left to do for his successor but to push the button.

In the election campaigns in 1996 and in 1998, the BJP's manifesto heavily appealed to emotions of national pride and prestige. India's self-respect, international status and military prowess was connected to the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Once in power, this instrumentalisation of the atomic bomb foreclosed any room to manoeuvre on the nuclear issue. As he did in 1996, Prime Minister Vajpayee authorised nuclear tests immediately after he assumed office in 1998. Work on a review of strategic policy and the elaboration of a nuclear doctrine by his government began only after the tests were executed.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY

The following section deals with the complex system of domestic factors and decision-making processes within the Indian polity as intervening variables to India's international behaviour. These variables appear to be of particular importance in India considering the substantive record of decisions in the strategic and nuclear realm, which were detrimental to India's security, but nevertheless popular among various pressure groups and the public.

The centrality of the unit-level variations of state interests in the applied model is addressed by an analytic narrative of India's domestic political dynamics as well as a clear identification of the main actors within the process of interest formulation.

Policy-making within the nuclear realm has been traditionally made in an ad hoc, personalised manner by India's Prime Minister. His or her decisions were based on the advice of few political advisers and the leaders of the nuclear scientific community. The almost complete exclusion of the military from nuclear

decision-making puts India into an exceptional position within the community of nuclear weapon states. Since the nuclear issue entered the broader Indian polity in the late 1960s, pressures emerging from the public debate and partisan considerations of political actors have a growing effect on the policy-making process.

Nuclear Decision-Making

According to the Indian Constitution, Part V, Art. 53 (2), “.. the supreme command of the Defence Forces of the Union shall be vested in the President and the exercise thereof shall be regulated by law”¹¹. In practical terms, however, the authoritative position of the Prime Minister in nuclear policy-making has never been in question.

The most important advisory body to the Prime Minister is the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, consisting of four key cabinet ministers. After the nuclear tests of 1998, the National Security Council was established in an effort to further institutionalise the decision-making process in the strategic realm.

The legislative branch of the government has only little formal power in the state’s strategic policy-making. Since the mid-1960s, only few plenary sessions on this issue took place, and the parliament proved rather ineffective in checking and balancing government decisions.

The institutional framework of the nuclear program was laid down in the Atomic Energy Act of 1948. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) is designed as the main body responsible for the development of the nuclear energy sector.

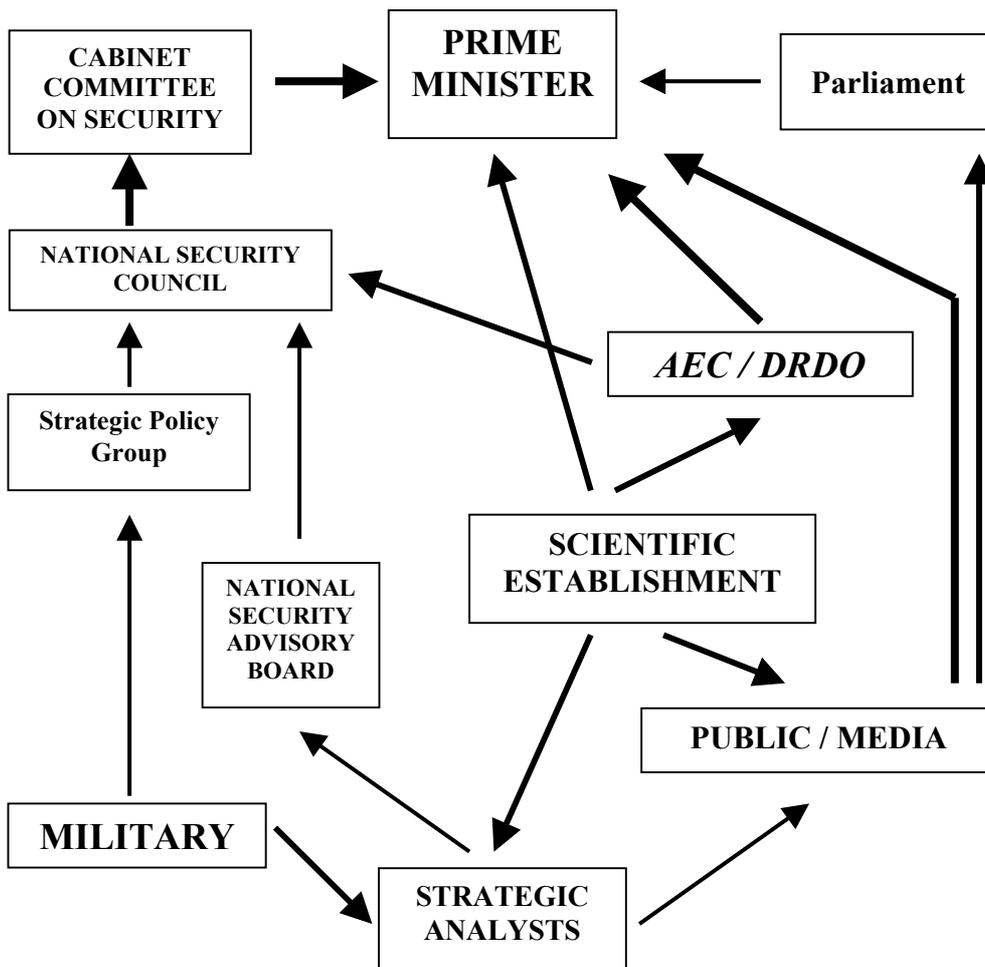
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs never had much influence on nuclear decision-making, but it played a crucial role in presenting India’s nuclear policy to the international public, as well as representing India in international non-proliferation and arms control bodies. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is allocated to the Defence Ministry and mainly responsible for India’s missile programme. In both, DRDO and Defence Ministry, all key positions are strictly in civilian hands.

The most remarkable feature of Indian nuclear decision-making is the almost complete exclusion of the military. Similar to most democratic countries, the Indian constitutional framework puts the military under tight civilian control. Many scholars regard these rigid constitutional provisions as one of the reasons why India was able to maintain its democratic order since independence, in contrast to most other post-colonial states. However, the exclusion of the military from Indian strategic affairs goes far beyond the normal democratic constraints. Until 1998, no effective, institutionalised advisory body to the policy makers involving military experts existed. Strategic thinking was mainly done by bureaucrats of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), and by the community of scientists and engineers involved in the development of arms. This institutional structure partly explains why India’s nuclear programme was primarily designed to simply ‘build the bomb’, and only few thoughts were spent on how to actually use it.

¹¹ The Constitution of India, 1950, as amended, Part V, Art. 53 (2).

In 1999 the BJP government created the Strategic Policy Group, in which all three service chiefs were included. Its main task was to assist the newly created National Security Council in developing strategic doctrines and deployment postures.

Table: Informal Nuclear Decision Making in India



Until 1998, nuclear decision-making was done ad hoc by the Prime Minister, who took advice from key Cabinet Ministers, the leaders of the defence scientist community, and strategic analysts. The chain of decision-making was basically non-institutionalised, and remained prone to personal motives and perceptions. The weaknesses of this kind of policy-making became obvious before and after several occasions of nuclear and missile testing, when India's corps diplomatique, members of parliament and even members of the Cabinet were regularly caught

uninformed and unprepared. Their often false and fallacious statements caused substantive displeasure in other capitals. Particularly the irritating public appearance of the Indian government after the nuclear tests in 1998 made the need of reforms in those institutions concerned with the nuclear issue become apparent.

These post hoc reforms started in 1998 by the creation of a National Security Council, and the National Security Advisory Board. The board, consisting of prominent members of the strategic community, soon elaborated a Draft Report on Indian Nuclear Doctrine¹², which became the basis of India's strategic policy. The creation of these bodies contributed to an increased transparency in India's strategic discourse. Further, it increased the strategic expertise on which policy decisions are made. But the general weaknesses of India's nuclear policy making remain largely untackled: Its proneness to populist considerations, and the unfavourable role of certain pressure groups, particularly the community of defence scientists.

NUCLEAR DECISION-MAKING AND DOMESTIC PRESSURE GROUPS

On January 25th, 2002, India tested a shorter version of its Agni medium-range ballistic missile. The main technical purpose of the launch was to test a newly developed solid-fuel propellant which would make India's missile arsenal more durable and employable in the field. In military-technical terms, the test flight was a rather minor step forward in India's missile development, and as such would not justify a more detailed analysis at this place. A closer look at the circumstances and political statements around the event nevertheless reveals much of the dynamics of Indian security policy-making.

The timing of the missile test coincided with India's Republic Day on January 26th, on which mobile Agni-missile launchers were part of a large military parade in New Delhi. Despite the relatively minor significance of the event, five Cabinet Ministers, among them Defence Minister George Fernandes, and all leaders of the scientific and strategic community were present at the launch site at Chandipur on Wheeler Island off the coast of the Indian state of Orissa.

In an official press statement, India's President K.R. Narayanan stated: "The outstanding achievement of our scientists, as represented by this success, will go a long way in ensuring self-reliance and indigenisation of our defence production capacity"¹³. This statement shows two main features of India's nuclear dynamics: First, the outstanding position of the defence scientists symbolising India's modernity and technological prowess; and second, the importance of self-reliance and indigenisation in the strategic realm.

¹² "Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine", http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/CTBT/nuclear_doctrine_aug_17_1999.html sighted on 5 April 2002.

¹³ Cited from Aneja, Atul / Sandeep Dikshit: "Short-range Agni test-fired", *The Hindu*; January 26th 2002.

In his statement, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee first of all emphasised the relevance of the test to India's security: "We are taking several steps for the nation's security and protection and Agni is one of them"¹⁴. He went on by congratulating the defence scientists, and, in a move to soften the expected international repercussions, declaring that the missile launch was planned long time ago, and that all relevant foreign governments, including the Pakistani, had been notified in advance. While a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson explicitly declared that "(w)e are not sending any message to anyone. Test-firing of Agni is a part of the ongoing missile development programme of India to develop its defence"¹⁵, Home Minister L.K. Advani welcomed the launch and linked it to the ongoing Indo-Pakistani tensions along the Kashmir border. He "ruled out any immediate military de-escalation along the border and said it would take a 'couple of months' for India to judge whether there is any reduction in Pak-sponsored terrorism"¹⁶. Minister for Science and Technology Murlī Manohar Joshi indicated that one reason for testing was to demonstrate India's military prowess vis-à-vis Pakistan, as "considering the current geo-political scenario the nation could not be left unguarded and testfiring of the Agni is an example of India's firepower"¹⁷. In a rare occasion, the opposition Congress Party joined the ruling BJP government in congratulating the scientists involved.

The comments by the main Indian English speaking daily newspapers¹⁸ concurrently describe the event as a "demonstration of its military capability"¹⁹ in the eve of India's Republic Day. "New Delhi shut out shuttle diplomacy for a day and flexed its military muscle..."²⁰. Despite the government's official claim that it were not directed against any other country, the test is seen by all newspapers in the context of the Kashmir dispute, as well as a reaction to reported improvements in Pakistan's missile arsenal.

All reviewed front page articles emphasise on technical details of the missile programme, such as data on range and payload. These data were provided by the involved scientists, particularly the DRDO officials in charge of the test, who did not miss the opportunity to stress the superiority of the Indian missile systems Prithvi and Agni, as compared to the Pakistani Ghauri and Shaheen missiles. Further, the scientists distributed information on upcoming missile developments,

¹⁴ Cited from "Agni test a step for nation's security: PM", The Times of India; January 26th 2002.

¹⁵ Minister of State for External Affairs Omar Abdullah, cited from "Agni test part of missile programme: Omar", The Times of India, January 26th 2002.

¹⁶ Sawant, Gaurav C.: "R-Day march gets a 700-km missile salute", Indian Express, January 26th 2002.

¹⁷ cited from "Short-range Agni missile testfired", Deccan Herald, January 26th 2002.

¹⁸ Reviewed are the following five daily newspapers: The Hindu, Indian Express, Hindustan Times, Deccan Herald, and The Times of India.

¹⁹ cited from Aneja, Atul / Sandeep Dikshit: "Short-range Agni test-fired", The Hindu; January 26th 2002.

²⁰ Sawant, Gaurav C.: "R-Day march gets a 700-km missile salute", Indian Express, January 26th 2002.

such as the introduction of cruise missiles, and the near completion of submarine-based ballistic missiles²¹.

Throughout the newspaper coverage, strategic experts were cited anonymously²². Their analyses focus on India's strategic need for such missile systems to create a credible deterrence against regional threats, as "today's test could not be seen outside the South Asian ambit involving Pakistan and China - two neighbouring countries that have impressive missile capabilities of their own"²³. In a commentary on the British view of the missile test, Rashmee Z. Ahmed agrees that the purely technical reasoning for the timing of the test is untenable, and he shares British concerns about its escalating effects on the Kashmir dispute. He ends by claiming that "...Britain's rebuke to India might be read as hypocritical, because the British appeared to want India to exercise restraint while they kept firm hold of their own delivery system"²⁴.

In sum, the test-firing of the Agni missile was – in technical terms - one of several steps forward in India's missile build-up. As such, in a different national context it probably would have been announced in not more than a communiqué of the Defence Ministry. In the Indian domestic context, however, this event was played up to a major happening, on which the who-is-who of India's political, scientific, and publicist elite took part, and which was enthusiastically celebrated by most of the media and the public at large.

As this brief outline of the event shows, "(t)he process of building nuclear weapon capabilities has created interests, bureaucratic actors, beliefs, perspectives, and expectations within the state and society. That is, proliferation qualitatively changes the state that engages in it, altering the array of interests that must be addressed before unproliferation can occur." (Perkovich 1998; p.7).

In the following, the role of two key pressure groups is further examined, namely the defence scientific community, and the strategic analysts.

The Defence Scientists

The unique position of the defence scientists in India's strategic policy-making has its origins in the congenial relationship between India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the founder of the Indian nuclear programme, Homi Bhabha. The scientists' outstanding role benefits from several favourable features of India's institutional set-up. First of all, all Indian Prime Ministers, with the exception of Inder Kumar Gujral, were novices in the field of foreign policy and diplomacy at the time they took office. Their ad hoc decisions heavily relied on advice from experts. As an institutionalised advisory body was non-existent, and the strategic

²¹ So far, India does not have appropriate submarines capable of carrying ballistic missile launchers.

²² The only exception being quotations from Defence Studies and Analyses director K Santhanam (in Panjit, Rajat: "India tests nuke capable Agni missile", Times of India, January 26th 2002.).

²³ cited from Aneja, Atul / Sandeep Dikshit: "Short-range Agni test-fired", The Hindu; January 26th 2002.

²⁴ Ahmed, Rashmee Z.: "UK blasts Agni test-launch", Times of India, January 26th 2002.

expertise of the military personnel was widely excluded from decision-making institutions, this gap was filled by the defence scientists and engineers, who themselves had only limited expertise in strategy and international affairs. The scientists enjoyed enormous respect and authority among the political elite and the public. Their image fitted perfectly to the anti-colonialist and status oriented principles of India's foreign policy. Their role as single source of information was further strengthened by the complexity of the issue, and the general indifference of India's political elite towards international issues.

Defence scientists based the nuclear programme on self-reliance and indigenous development of key technology. The course of the programme was shaped along the scientists' own ideas, and was often detached from practical military applicability. For instance, in 1998 the scientists tested a thermonuclear device, despite the unanimous understanding of the strategic analysts that India has absolutely no security need for the H-Bomb.

The leading scientists were regularly overwhelmed with enthusiastic lauds from the political elite and the media. They received India's highest civilian honours. This admired position became most apparent in July 2002, when the chief responsible scientist for India's nuclear tests, Abdul Kalam, was elected new President of India with an overwhelming majority.

Since the 1990s, the weaponeers made increasing efforts to gain support from the military for their ambitious goals. The main reason therefore was their realisation that Rao's policy of scrutinising government spending in the course of economic reforms, would make it much more difficult to legitimise nuclear spending without clear military applicability.

The increasing militarisation of the Indian nuclear programme was further related to the ongoing decline of the civilian use of nuclear energy, which proved not to be economically efficient. The reasons for the decline of the nuclear energy sector were manifold. First of all, the expected opportunities and benefits of nuclear energy were highly unrealistic right from the beginning. A second reason was its strong emphasis on indigenous development, which proved to be more cost intensive and constantly caused delays and shutdowns. Self-reliance was further coerced by the increasing reluctance of western suppliers to transfer their knowledge due to India's refusal to co-operate in international safeguards and control regimes. In 1981 the actual nuclear power capacity was less than one tenth of the target originally envisaged by the ten-year plan in 1971; and by the mid-1990s, the output of India's nuclear power plants met the 1981 targets by only less than one fourth²⁵.

In sum, the scientific community is a major force behind Indian's nuclear build-up. As Perkovich predicts: "History suggests that even if India signs the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Indian weaponeers will continue to press for unending programs to refine nuclear warheads and, more important, extend the range and diversity of missile systems" (Perkovich 1999; p.447). This perpetuated arms development, which continues widely detached from military-strategic

²⁵ Jones, Rodney W. et.al.: Tracking Nuclear Proliferation: A Guide in Maps and Charts, 1998. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 1998; p.113.

considerations, has been channelled in recent years by efforts to institutionalise the nuclear decision-making process. Stopping it, however, would require a fundamental shift in media and public perception on the nature, duties and responsibilities of the group of defence scientists.

The Strategic Analysts

The absence of the military in Indian strategic policy-making created space for a group of strategic specialists, who exercised strong influence on the elite's understanding of strategic affairs. The most influential group of strategic specialists are gathered in the government-funded Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in Delhi, whose published expert reports often reflect in a sense a semi-official assessment of the current state of strategic affairs in India²⁶. Being sceptical about the strategic benefits of a nuclear deterrent throughout the 1960s and 1970s, IDSA reports since the 1980s were most prominent in developing India's strategic doctrine of minimal nuclear deterrence, which was officially adopted in 1998. The experts' call for clear and effective deployment and targeting strategies often collided with the rather status-oriented policy of the political leaders, who tended to see nuclear weapons less as strategic, but rather as political and symbolic devices. The analysts' stance further conflicted with the much more ambitious interests of the nuclear scientists²⁷.

Government Instability and Mass Politics

The pros and cons of nuclear weapons have been subject to public debate in India more than in any other nuclear weapon state. This exceptional feature explains the strong emotionalisation of the debate, but also its lack of strategic profundity. It further explains much of the course of 'keeping the nuclear option open' followed by policy makers until 1998.

Since a broader public debate on the nuclear issue emerged in the mid-1960s, public opinion proved to be highly suggestible by self declared experts and opinion leaders. As such, this issue was a tempting device for political leaders to exploit for populist purposes. Nehru's vision of a morally superior foreign policy was supported by a vast majority of the public, just as Indira's course of developing nuclear devices 'for peaceful purposes', and Morarji Desai's renewed turn towards total rejection of the nuclear option. Prime Minister I.K. Gujral earned much domestic approval for his policy of reconciliation towards Pakistan, while his successor A.B. Vajpayee gained heavy support from India's masses for his irreconcilable rhetoric on the Kashmir issue and his pro-bomb stance. Public support was generated by the BJP through simple slogans propagating weapon

²⁶ Interestingly, current Director of IDSA K. Santhanam, is not a retired high ranking military official like most of his predecessors, but himself a former nuclear scientist, who made much of his career at BARC and in the DRDO.

²⁷ This conflict became apparent in the testing of a hydrogen bomb in 1998, which was unnecessary in terms of security needs according to the strategists of IDSA.

capabilities as indispensable tool to create a strong and proud nation. Questions about which strategy to apply, what doctrine to follow, or how much resources to allocate were not asked.

The volatile public opinion was nevertheless guided by several constants: First of all, the Indian public is generally inward looking. Domestic issues always dominate over issues of foreign policy. Gains in public support for the government after the nuclear tests in 1974 and in 1998, as well as during international crises such as the Brasstacks crisis of 1987, the Kashmir crisis of 1990, the Kargil imbroglio in 1998, and the deployment of troops along the Kashmir border in 2001/2002 were short-lived, and regularly dismissed by domestic problems within few weeks or months.

A second fixed variable to the dynamics of public opinion is the glorification of the weaponeers, symbolising India's modernity and prowess. Finally, India's public has always been primarily concerned with the perceived threat from Pakistan, despite the strategists' understanding that nuclear weapons are of little strategic use in the Indo-Pakistani rivalry, and rather directed against a potential Chinese threat. As a survey poll in 1999 showed, 64.2% of the Indian electorate consider Pakistan as an enemy state, while only 13.0% perceive China as enemy²⁸.

Economic constraints

In the course of the public debate on the nuclear issue, the main argument of those advocating a rather down-to-earth approach was the enormous financial burden which the programme would be for the government's limited budget, and particularly for its foreign currency reserves. The economic argument further entered the broader, emotionally heated debate as the opponents of nuclear weapons were decrying the immorality of high spending considering the widespread poverty in India. Proponents of nuclear weapons countered by claiming that it is a state's top responsibility to provide security as a precondition for economic progress. This debate was based on calculations provided by the nuclear scientists, who themselves took advantage of their monopoly position as the only respected source of information. Their cost estimates were regularly understated, as they rarely included costs for command, control and communication, as well as for delivery vehicles, which are actually several times higher than the costs for the nuclear warhead as such. The political decision-makers had little incentives to question the figures provided by the scientists.

Economic considerations appeared to be the key argument against the development of open nuclear capabilities as response to the Chinese tests of 1964. Further, Rajiv Gandhi's decision to delay the deployment of nuclear-capable

²⁸ Survey conducted by the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, cited from Subrata K. Mitra: *Emerging Major Powers and the International System: Significance of the Indian View*. Paper presented at the 2002 RAAF Aerospace Conference on 'Conflict, the State and Aerospace Power: New Perspectives for the Third Millennium', Canberra, May 2002. Astonishingly, the same survey reveals that more than one third of the Indian electorate (35.7%) even claim to have never heard about China.

Prithvi missiles in the late 1980s due to cost calculations prevented the nuclear issue from playing a significant role in the Brasstacks Crisis of 1987 and the Kashmir Crisis of 1990. The economy-first policy introduced by Narasima Rao in 1991 again slowed down the nuclear programme. It nevertheless accelerated again after the government became increasingly unstable in the mid-1990s.

Paradoxically, since 1998, economic difficulties and the struggle between pro-liberalisation and protectionist forces within the BJP government increased the attractiveness of nuclear arms. "India's domestic weaknesses made the economic route to international power and status seem less attractive to the BJP than the nuclear weapons route. . . . If an economic grand strategy to achieve global power and status appeared fraught with severe domestic political difficulties and delays, nuclear weapons offered a very simple shortcut" (Perkovich 1999; p.442).

CONCLUSION

In the past decade, a large amount of literature in the field of International Relations tried to accommodate major changes in the world order, i.e. the end of the Cold War, into new theoretical concepts. The by then dominating features of bi-polarity, deterrence, and nuclear arms race were pushed into the background, and innovative theoretical concepts, such as Constructivism, tried to capture the complexity of the newly emerging international system.

In this light, research on the Indo-Pakistani antagonism in general, and on the introduction of nuclear weapons as deterrence devices into bilateral interaction in particular, appears somehow anachronistic.

The academic appreciation of the South Asian nuclear arms race is nevertheless rewarding in several terms: First of all, it reveals the general weakness of the theoretical concepts which deal with problems of nuclear arms races, that is, their subjectivity to the Cold War context. These Western - or better: American - theoretical approaches once allowed policy makers in the United States and in the Soviet Union to acquire several thousand nuclear weapons under the pretext of security maximising, and labelled such rather bizarre concepts like 'Mutually Assured Destruction' (MAD) as rational behaviour. When India decided to openly declare itself a nuclear weapon state, it explicitly adapted this kind of Western strategic thought to justify its action. After the nuclear tests of 1998, Kenneth Waltz was as much cited by Indian strategic analysts to express India's need for such weapons, as he was cited by their American counterparts at the heights of the Cold War. In both, the South Asian and the Cold War context, the borderline between theoretical modelling of nuclear dynamics and ideological backing of governmental action became blurred.

The Indian case nonetheless shows some important deviations from what IR theory, particularly Neorealism, would have predicted. Since the first Chinese nuclear tests in 1964, theory predicted that India would soon follow suit in order to balance Chinese (nuclear) power capabilities. However, India waited some 34 more years.

Correspondingly, in 1998 the academic back-up of the nuclear tests described the open acquisition of nuclear weapons by India as necessary to counter the Chinese threat. In this view, the tests of 1998 were necessary for India to achieve deterrence stability in its relationship towards China just before the growing pressures emerging from the international non-proliferation regime would increase the costs of overtly going nuclear to a prohibitive extent. This explanation purely along strategic arguments bears one main puzzle: It must have been clear to the proponents of India's nuclearisation that the alleged gains in security vis-à-vis China were achieved at the costs of giving up India's strategic advantage towards Pakistan. India traded a rather small – if at all existent – increase in its relative power capabilities towards China against a tremendous loss of strategic superiority in its relation to Pakistan. As Gwynne Dyer brings it to the point: “..the Vajpayee government's decision four years ago to test Indian nuclear weapons, forcing Pakistan to follow suit, was a strategic imbecility: the only war with Pakistan that India might not win is a nuclear war”²⁹.

Beyond strategic arguments, the policy makers' statements to the domestic audience reveal a very different, contradicting motive for India's nuclear build-up. Herein, China was only of lower concern. Nuclear weapons were regarded as show of prowess against arch rival Pakistan, and above all as a symbol of status and prestige within the community of states in general. Similarly, opinion polls regularly show a remarkable indifference among the Indian public towards the Chinese threat, whereas the relation to Pakistan appears at the top of public concern.

Many conventional theoretical approaches to the issue limit their scope to military-strategic considerations and dismiss the great symbolic value of nuclear capabilities as being irrational. Closer analyses of the motives and interests behind the South Asian nuclear build-up not only weaken such notion, but in turn might give impetus to a re-evaluation of the general nature of nuclear arms. In this context, India's understanding of the nuclear bomb as a symbolic and unusable device might be regarded in a certain way as a post-modern approach to strategy.

While being based on the basic Realist paradigms, the model applied in the current study questions the validity of the orthodox systemic orientation of Neorealist mainstream. Rather than explaining international outcomes through relative power distribution among security-maximising states in the international system, it tries to accommodate deviations from security-maximising state behaviour by introducing interfering variables at the national level. These variables determine the composition of a state's interests, and the degree to which this complex compound of interests is either satisfied by the status quo of the international system, or drive the state to pursue its revision.

Several intervening domestic factors within India's state interest composition - above all the role of certain pressure groups and the peculiarities of the nuclear decision-making process - are not accommodated by the existing international regime. The most exposed pressure groups behind India's prestige-oriented pro-bomb policy are the defence scientists, and circles among opinion leaders and the

²⁹ Gwynne Dyer: 'The Next Nuclear War'. Express, May 30th 2002.

political elite. The personalised, ad hoc fashion of decision-making strongly favours these groups, which themselves have only limited expertise in strategic and international affairs. On the other hand, the military as the main security-oriented group within the Indian domestic arena continues to be largely excluded from policy-making.

The international non-proliferation treaties have been fiercely condemned by India as instruments to further consolidate the unfavourable international regime. By seeking a revision of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, India explicitly accepted the risk that the tentative system change might be disadvantageous to its genuine security interests, as it bears the risk of uncontrolled spread of nuclear weapons.

The long period of uncertainty about whether to acquire nuclear weapons or not can be explained to a great extent by the dynamics of the Indian democratic process. Accordingly, the final decision to openly go nuclear coincided with governmental instability and changing majorities within parliament. The short-term motive behind the BJP's decision to conduct the tests in 1998 might be interpreted as an attempt to gain public support by populist decisions in order to survive the impending vote of confidence. However, a generalisation about the negative effect of the democratic process on nuclear build-up cannot be made. In fact, the only comparable case of an emerging regional nuclear build-up, i.e. the rivalry between Argentina and Brazil, contradicts the South Asian case, as its early termination prior to the acquisition of a full-fledged arsenal is commonly explained by public pressures emerging after the return of both countries from military to civilian rule in the mid-1980s. Both regional cases have in common that the usefulness of nuclear weapons was hardly debated along strategic considerations, but rather looked at in terms of their role as prestigious symbols of prowess. In the South American case, nuclear weapons shifted in public perception from positive symbols of national pride and prowess to negative symbols of authoritarian misuse of power within a relatively short range of time. In India, it was the political elite which played the nuclear card for the purpose of generating public support, while the military leadership was rather lavish with the acquisition of such an expensive weapon system. Similarly, the Pakistani nuclear programme was initiated by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto during his short civilian interregnum from 1971 to 1978, and fostered during the next period of civilian rule from 1988 to 1999, in which the permanently challenged democratic leaders, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, tried to exploit public sentiments in favour of the bomb for electoral purposes. However, in contrast to the Indian case, within Pakistan security considerations always remained paramount, as the main purpose of its nuclear build-up has always been the quest for strategic parity vis-à-vis India.

As the present analysis has shown, intervening domestic factors within India's state interest composition make India act as dissatisfied power, seeking a system change in order to satisfy its increasing aspirations. In this context, the acquisition of these greatly symbolic devices and India's self-declaration as nuclear weapon state has been the most powerful manifestation of its dissatisfaction with the current international regime. Thereby, security considerations appeared to be only

of secondary relevance, as nuclear weapons were above all meant to serve India's non-security interests.

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