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The Nuclear Policy of India and Pakistan: Implications for Deterrence

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Title: The Nuclear Policy of India and Pakistan: Implications for Deterrence

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Abstract. This article analyzes the implications of India's and Pakistan's decisions to "go nuclear" in 1998.

As described in a previous IBPP article (May 15, 1998, 4(19)), much of "world opinion" focused on the alleged negative aspects of the 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan. This "world opinion" seemed to reject, discount, or ignore the positive aspects of balances of terror--the same types of balances that may have founded nuclear deterrence between the United States (US) and Soviet Union and among the two superpowers and the People's Republic of China, the United Kingdom, and France. The presence and efficacy of these positive aspects seem to be supported by the most significant political event between India and Pakistan since May 1998: the bus trip of India's Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee from Amritsar, India to Wagha, Pakistan ending in meetings with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The topic and theme? Not an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation within the crisis atmosphere of an imminent nuclear war but a joint paean to peace, cooperation, and the resolution of conflict in Kashmir.

What are the positive aspects of last May's tests--viz., the positive aspects of deterrence? They largely depend on a rational actor perspective that is founded on the desire to live and to avoid violence in all but the most extreme threats to one's life and way of life. The tests intensified images of the death and destruction that could occur in a full-scale confrontation between India and Pakistan. They also induced a more severe calculus of the actual consequences of such a confrontation. This intensification and induction would likely decrease the probability of military and politico-military posturing being effected to achieve political objectives and then getting out of hand. In fact, the closer each country approaches a massive retaliation or mutual assured destruction capability, the closer peace would be held to a decision-maker's bosom. (Here Pakistan's 1998 decision to test after India's testing made eminent sense even as it occurred in the face of significant US pressure to desist.)

As well, the political, trade, investment, and aid needs of India and Pakistan would now be more seriously entertained by other political entities after the nuclear tests. Now, not having these needs met would be more likely perceived as an invitation to disaster. Thus, combinations of foreign nations' altruism and egoism within the crucible of interdependence and cooperation increase the probability that India's and Pakistan's myriad needs can be addressed. In a time-honored tradition going back well before the nuclear era, increased military nuclear capabilities are being spontaneously and even unwittingly leveraged by India and Pakistan to secure assets to meet their many needs. And as these needs are met, the threat of nuclear weapons employment decreases.

There are also the serendipitous positive aspects of an irrational actor perspective. Psychotic delusional systems may actually engender acts that reinforce peace and militate against war--an unlikely possibility, however.

Yet there are also negative aspects of rational and irrational actor perspectives. Negative aspects of the rational actor are exemplified by having an additional source from which proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can occur subject to the short-term calculus of financial gain--and the weapons ending

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up with the irrational political actor alluded to below. Here the very concept of deterrence may be depended on to perceptually minimize increased risk--but wrongly.

Negative aspects of the irrational actor are exemplified by grandiosity and needs for effectance that engender nuclear weapons employment impervious to deterrence. Why is this? Massive retaliation, mutually assured destruction, parity, and all the rest are irrelevant to a political actor that does not care about living or dying or whether others do--or actually seeks death. (It is at times not easy to separate the rational from the irrational in such matters--or, indeed, what "rational" and "irrational" denote and connote.)

At least as far as the positive aspects of rational and irrational actors go, the 1998 nuclear tests of India and Pakistan seem to promise less political violence not more. As far as the ratio of positive to negative aspects of rational and irrational actors, there should be less optimism. Unfortunately, even a very high ratio of positive to negative aspects across the board does not yield much room for comfort. In the grim nuclear world--of low frequency, high-impact events--even thinking the unthinkable of a non-catastrophic nuclear employment quickly reaches its rational limits. (See Bearak, B. (February 21, 1999). India leader pays visit to Pakistan. *The New York Times*, pp. 1; 10; Harkavy, R.E. (1998). Triangular or indirect deterrence/compellence: Something new in deterrence theory. *Comparative Strategy*, 17, 63-81; Heisbourg, F. (Autumn, 1998). Inde-Pakistan: L'heure de l'atome. *Politique Internationale*, 441-452; Nuclear tests in India: Is the Buddha smiling? (May 15, 1998). *IBPP*, 4(19); Singh, J. (1998). Against nuclear apartheid. *Foreign Affairs*, 77, 41-52; Slocombe, W. (1997). Is there still a role for nuclear deterrence? *NATO Review*, 45, 23-26.) (Keywords: Deterrence, India, Nuclear Weapons, Pakistan, Proliferation .)