

Viewpoint

Security Challenges in South Asia

MALEEHA LODHI

*Serving her second tenure as Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States with the status of Minister of State, Dr. Maleeha Lodhi is a journalist by profession. Most recently, she has been Editor of **The News**, Pakistan's leading English language newspaper. She is a member of the U.N. Secretary General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Affairs and has over 20 years experience in the fields of journalism, academia, and diplomacy. Ambassador Lodhi is the author of two books, **Pakistan's Encounter With Democracy** and **The External Challenge**. She holds a Doctorate in Politics from the London School of Economics and Political Science and has been a Visiting Fellow at the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London.*

Former President Bill Clinton described South Asia as the most dangerous place on earth. We in Pakistan agree with this characterization. It is indeed ironic that the extremely enterprising and hard working people of South Asia, who have achieved such success in their endeavors abroad, have been unable to resolve their mutual differences in order to harness the immense economic potential of their countries and region. The peoples of South Asia urgently need to overcome the bitter legacies of the past in order to create an enabling environment for peace and security, which is critical to unleash the collective creative energies necessary for economic progress.

The twin phenomena of strategic peril and economic promise pose a daunting challenge, one that must be met for South Asia to be in sync with the great global transformations of our times. There can be little doubt about the economic and trade benefits that would accrue to the global economy from a peaceful and stable South Asia, as indeed a promising peace dividend for the people in the region.

Since the nuclear tests by India and then Pakistan in May 1998, the focus on this region has been almost

exclusively on the nuclear dimension of the confrontation between the two states. In reality, security in South Asia is challenged by an interplay of several factors operating at three different levels: domestic; regional or bilateral; and global.

There is, in fact, a symbiotic relationship between these factors and regional security.

INTERNAL FACTORS

Over half a century after independence, the nations of South Asia remain mired in a vicious cycle of poverty, deprivation, and underdevelopment. South Asian countries are at the very bottom of the world league in social and human development indicators. Very few have access to clean drinking water, and fewer have a permanent roof over their heads. Education is available only to the most fortunate. Life in these conditions is nasty, brutish, and short.

Economic deprivation, illiteracy, and unemployment provide a fertile ground for intolerance and extremism, which in turn promotes conflict and violence within our societies. Our region has been racked by intolerance of

virtually every kind—ethnic, communal, religious, and sectarian. Consequently, tensions abound within and between our peoples and frequently reinforce tensions between our countries. South Asian governments have been unable to meet these challenges, not least because they have been preoccupied by perceived external threats to national security, or alternatively by great power ambition pursued through domination over others. As a result, the inherited legacy of conflict persists, constraining each government's ability to fulfill the social contract with its people.

Currently negotiating one of the most critical transitions in its history, Pakistan sees national security—and by extension regional economic security—in the broader sense, encompassing economic and social security. Pakistan regards this broader perspective to be an indispensable component of peace and stability within and outside its borders.

REGIONAL FACTORS

At the regional level, the pursuit of domination by one state over its neighbors is a recipe for insecurity and instability. The prevailing asymmetry—with regard to both strategic objectives and the relationship between military forces—between the largest country in South Asia, India, and its smaller neighbors is a built-in factor for instability and has been exacerbated by India's desire to dominate. Certainly attempts at domination cannot but be destabilizing and thus highly dangerous.

The pursuit of domination underscores the second asymmetry in South Asia, that between the military force levels of India, which maintains the fourth largest military in the world, and its neighbors. Its nuclear explosions in May 1998 were primarily status-driven. In response, Pakistan has been forced to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent of its own to ensure its security against India's nuclear and conventional capabilities.

If the past is any guide, the future is fraught with risk. Within a year of its nuclear explosions, India unveiled an ambitious nuclear doctrine. The fact that it also increased its massive defense budget by 28 percent—an increase larger than Pakistan's entire defense budget—to fuel its indigenous strategic and conventional defense programs as well as its foreign military acquisitions, demonstrates that New Delhi is already working to implement this strategic doctrine.

While ostensibly aimed at acquiring a minimum nuclear deterrent, the Indian nuclear doctrine advocates a triad of land-, air-, and sea-based delivery systems. This large arsenal is justified on the basis of the need to maintain a second-strike capability, which in turn is justified by India's so-called no-first use declaration. The international community should share Pakistan's deep concern about India's nuclear plans.

An ambitious Indian nuclear program, coupled with augmentation and an upgrade of its conventional capability, evokes concern and negative reactions throughout the region. While Indian efforts proceed apace, Pakistan's modest efforts to replace and modernize its exhausted conventional weapons inventory have been seriously affected by U.S. sanctions, as the United States has historically been the traditional source of Pakistan's arms supply. In view of this growing asymmetry, Pakistan is increasingly forced to rely on its strategic capabilities.

Meanwhile, the Kashmir dispute remains a flash-point of tension between the world's newest nuclear powers. Pakistani and Indian troops continue to confront each other on the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir and along the Siachen glacier. Repression in occupied Kashmir continues to provoke violence and retribution. Both sides recognize the dangers of nuclear confrontation arising from the Kashmir dispute, but the risks of escalation through accident or miscalculation cannot be discounted.

The Kargil crisis of 1999 was but the latest example of escalatory exchange along the LoC, which began with the Indian occupation of the Siachen glacier in the mid-1980s and has continued with New Delhi's incursions into border areas such as Qamar, Chorbat-la, and the Neelam Valley. The Kargil crisis followed nuclear saber-rattling over Kashmir by senior Indian leaders who, immediately after the nuclear tests, demanded that Pakistan accept "new realities" in Kashmir. One lesson of Kargil is that nuclear deterrence ultimately compelled restraint, de-escalation, and disengagement on both sides. However, another lesson is that there is little reason to be sanguine about the future in a nuclearized environment characterized not by a cold peace, but by a "hot front" in South Asia's long running cold war. This danger is dramatized by recent Indian pronouncements about a limited conventional war—a possibility voiced by none other than India's army chief. Such statements are dangerous brinkmanship: how

a spiral of escalation could be controlled if such hostilities erupt remains an unanswered question.

This uncertainty underscores the urgency of finding a peaceful resolution to the Kashmir conflict, where no military solution is possible. The Indian approach to a dialogue with Pakistan on Kashmir has been aimed at formalizing the status quo, instead of ascertaining the wishes of the Kashmiri people. The status quo is the problem; therefore, it cannot be the solution. Moreover, any solution based on the status quo will not be durable, as it must be acceptable to the Kashmiri people. The Kashmiri struggle cannot be designated as a terrorist movement, as India has sought to portray it. On the contrary, the Kashmiris are engaged in a legitimate freedom struggle to exercise the right of self-determination promised to them by resolutions of the U.N. Security Council. They have the right to defend themselves against Indian repression. In November 2000, when India first announced the cessation of offensive military operations in Kashmir, Pakistan declared a policy of maximum restraint. We believe this is a promising backdrop for the upcoming talks between our leaders.

INTERNATIONAL FACTORS

The state of play in South Asia, described above, has an obvious bearing on the international environment, including security in adjacent regions. The reverse also holds true. The pursuit of a lopsided approach in South Asia by the world's primary power, the United States, could undermine security and compound regional tension. For instance, the suggestion made by some to build up India as a counterweight to China could prove to be destabilizing and counterproductive for the region, and indeed for U.S. interests globally. Instead of pursuing an outdated balance of power approach, American interests would be better served by a partnership with South Asia as a whole.

A new challenge is posed by decisions being made in Washington about the development and deployment of national missile defense (NMD) and theater missile defense (TMD) systems. A ricochet effect on South Asia will become apparent if such systems spark a renewed nuclear and missile race between the major powers. It would also justify and perhaps encourage India's ambition to acquire a large nuclear and missile arsenal in accordance with its nuclear doctrine. This, in turn, would evoke a response by Pakistan. Such developments at the international level could, therefore, further complicate and

exacerbate the security environment in South Asia, while undermining any effort to contain the nuclear arms race and build a regional restraint regime.

Another dynamic affecting South Asian security is determined by the interaction of the regional states with external powers or adjacent regions. In this regard, three factors are important:

- *Afghanistan*. Stabilizing Afghanistan should be seen to be in the long-term economic and strategic interest of both Pakistan and India, as it provides the best route for access to Central Asia's energy, along with other resources and markets for exports.
- *Persian Gulf/Middle East region*. Regional stability in South Asia and the success of modernist and moderate forces in Pakistan is of vital importance for the adjacent Gulf/Middle East region, which is once again facing a period of turbulence and violence.
- *Sino-Indian relations*. China and India are seeking to normalize relations, but any setback in this process could greatly destabilize the security environment in South Asia and indirectly accelerate the nuclear and conventional arms race between India and Pakistan.

A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FOR SOUTH ASIA

Pakistan has a vision of a security architecture for South Asia that seeks to address the sources of insecurity at all three interdependent levels that have been identified above. This proposed security architecture consists of four main pillars:

1. nuclear and missile restraint by Pakistan and India;
2. an agreement for conventional arms control in South Asia;
3. peaceful resolution of all outstanding disputes and sources of tension, especially Kashmir; and
4. economic and social revival of South Asia through regional cooperation and global integration, in order to address problems of poverty and deprivation.

Each pillar, in turn, is discussed below.

A Strategic Restraint Regime

While the acquisition of nuclear capabilities by Pakistan and India cannot be reversed, it is imperative to ensure stable and credible deterrence at the lowest possible level. Accordingly, in October 1998, Pakistan proposed to India the development of a strategic restraint regime. Even though New Delhi rejected this proposal, Pakistan

remains committed to it as the best guarantor of security in South Asia.

Pakistan's proposal for a strategic restraint regime in South Asia is not only relevant to, but also essential for, nuclear stability in the region. Indeed, India and Pakistan do not need massive nuclear arsenals, since even "existential deterrence" effectively worked between the two countries before May 1998. Both states are publicly committed to keep their respective nuclear deterrents at the minimum possible level. This commitment should be formalized in a strategic restraint regime, the purpose of which would be threefold:

- to prevent the use of nuclear weapons by accident, miscalculation, or design;
- to ensure the lowest possible level—both qualitative and quantitative—of nuclear weapon arsenals and delivery systems; and
- to ensure that the capabilities for nuclear weapons and their delivery systems do not spread from India or Pakistan to other states.

To promote these objectives, Pakistan believes that the following five measures, if pursued by both India and Pakistan, would be worthwhile:

- *A commitment to observe a moratorium on nuclear testing.* India is known to be considering the development and construction of thermonuclear weapons, in order to implement its ambitious nuclear doctrine. The promise to observe a moratorium on further nuclear testing or to sign a regional test ban treaty, as proposed by Pakistan in 1987, would remove apprehensions surrounding India's nuclear program. This would also assuage international concerns over Pakistan's and India's nuclear programs and help them move forward on the question of adherence to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- *Implementation of a non-weaponization/non-deployment agreement.* Before May 1998, "existential deterrence" was maintained between the two countries; therefore, weaponization and deployment of nuclear weapons seem unnecessary. Additionally, the deployment of nuclear weapons would require elaborate command and control structures to prevent unauthorized or accidental use. At this stage, both India and Pakistan lack the technological capabilities and experience to put in place such structures. Thus, by undertaking not to weaponize or deploy nuclear weapons, the two countries will ensure that they do not increase the danger of nuclear use and that they avoid the heavy

expenditures involved in nuclear weapons deployment, including the development of elaborate command and control structures.

- *A moratorium on operational deployment of nuclear-capable missiles.* Even if missiles are not overtly equipped with nuclear warheads, the perceived threat of a preemptive strike can be best addressed by an agreement prohibiting missile deployment. Such an agreement would entail the following: (1) a declaration of "non-deployment" of nuclear-capable missiles; (2) a declaration of the numbers and operating status of aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons; and (3) possible verification measures.

- *A moratorium on the development, deployment, and acquisition of ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems.* As has been argued in the context of U.S. plans for NMD and TMD, the acquisition and deployment of BMD in South Asia is also likely to enhance fears that an offensive preemptive strike, nuclear or conventional, could be undertaken behind the "shield" of BMD. One consequence of such a development would be an increase in the incentive to multiply the numbers of offensive missiles, and also to enhance operational readiness to avoid the destruction of these assets in a preemptive strike. Thus, the acquisition or deployment of BMD systems such as the S-300 and S-400—reportedly being procured by India from the Russian Federation—would be entirely incompatible with the concept of minimum nuclear deterrence, which both India and Pakistan have declared to be their nuclear posture. Moreover, foregoing the acquisition, development, or deployment of BMD could avoid costly expenditures that both sides would incur in acquiring the systems and/or by enlarging offensive nuclear capabilities.

- *Implementation of confidence-building and risk-reduction measures.* These measures could build upon the steps envisaged in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in Lahore, Pakistan, in February 1999. As a first step, Pakistan and India could finalize an agreement to provide prior and adequate notification of missile flight tests. Some degree of information sharing (transparency) on aspects of the deployment status of strategic assets may also enhance mutual confidence. However, in case India moves ahead with deployment, Pakistan will be obliged to follow suit. In that event, risk reduction mechanisms will be required to prevent unauthorized or accidental use of nuclear weapons. Such measures could

involve setting up a nuclear command authority, nuclear risk reduction centers, and a host of other steps, some of which were envisaged in the Lahore MoU.

These five specific measures to promote nuclear restraint offer more effective ways to prevent any possible use of nuclear weapons than a mere declaration of no first-use, which has only rhetorical or propagandist value and can be revoked anytime. Nuclear restraint agreements between India and Pakistan could be accompanied by other confidence-building measures (CBMs) as well. Bilateral or technical arrangements could be devised to ensure the credibility and confirmation of mutual nuclear restraint measures, including agreed monitoring mechanisms. Such arrangements could also include enhancing the effectiveness of the command and control systems in each state as well as establishing round-the-clock communications between designated authorities, with a view to crisis stability and management.

Conventional Arms Control in South Asia

Conventional arms control is also essential to preserving the stability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia and reducing wasteful defense expenditures. Pakistan has made specific proposals to promote these objectives, including: (1) a mutually agreed ratio of forces between India and Pakistan; (2) measures to increase mutual confidence; and (3) measures to eliminate the threat of surprise or preemptive strikes by either country. These proposals seek to promote regional stability and should be considered by India and Pakistan in the context of bilateral talks or in multilateral mechanisms created to explore a new security framework for South Asia.

It is, however, unfortunate that India, instead of responding to the needs of stability in nuclear South Asia, is further compounding the security environment in the region. During the last three years, India has increased its defense budget by more than 55 percent, spending on average \$15 billion per year. It maintains the fourth largest army in the world and continues to purchase all types of conventional weaponry, ranging from main battle tanks to fighter aircraft procured from different foreign sources, particularly the Russian Federation. India seeks to justify its huge defense outlays by invoking its long borders; but this argument is misleading. The fact is that virtually all of India's military assets are deployed against Pakistan.

Pakistan's conventional capabilities, on the other hand, are being seriously eroded owing to unjustified and discriminatory sanctions. One ineluctable consequence of this

growing conventional imbalance is Pakistan's increasing reliance on non-conventional means. This "asymmetric deterrence" raises the need for Pakistan to increase numbers of missiles and enhance operational readiness. Such a hair-trigger environment, in turn, diminishes the possibilities for the resolution of Kashmir and other disputes, thus perpetually locking the two states in a conflictual relationship. Consequently, each will be compelled to continue incurring huge defense expenditures from meager resources, eroding the economic goals of Pakistan and perhaps those of India as well. Given India's limited oil and gas resources, and the fact that it is facing a severe shortage of energy to power its economy, the possibilities of an Indian threat to neighboring regions, especially the oil-rich Persian Gulf, will grow accordingly.

Peaceful Resolution of Outstanding Disputes

The third pillar of the proposed security architecture is the peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes. To attain this objective, Pakistan's chief executive, General Pervez Musharraf, proposed a "No War Pact" at the U.N. Millennium Summit in October 2000 and offered to engage in dialogue with India "any time, at any level and any place." Pakistan is committed to an eight point agenda for dialogue with India, aimed at addressing all outstanding issues between the two countries.

On December 2, 2000, Pakistan initiated a proposal to implement maximum restraint along the LoC, a partial withdrawal of troops from the LoC, and dialogue involving Pakistan, India, and the Kashmiris, aimed at moving forward after India's announcement that it would cease the initiation of combat operations against Kashmiri freedom fighters. A first step could be for India to allow Kashmiri representatives to participate in the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and its leaders to visit Pakistan. This would prepare the ground for trilateral or parallel talks involving all three parties to the dispute. The fact that India has so far prevented Kashmiri leaders from visiting Pakistan has raised doubts about New Delhi's true intentions.

Unless India and Pakistan resume a genuine dialogue, it is simply not feasible to pick up from where the two left off in Lahore. From Pakistan's perspective, the involvement of a third party—be it the United Nations or the United States—would be preferable, with a view to achieving concrete results. Nevertheless, Pakistan is prepared to approach dialogue with an open mind. It is important, however, that all bilateral arrangements related

to security be adequately verifiable. In this regard, it is relevant to recall that, while both India and Pakistan committed not to produce chemical weapons under a joint declaration in August 1992, India continued to manufacture chemical weapons in violation of this declaration. This was disclosed only in early 1997, months after India's ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in September 1996. If the meeting between President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is successful, our two countries should immediately resume foreign secretary-level talks, following which a bilateral standing committee of experts could be set up to explore further steps and measures towards stabilizing the nuclear environment in South Asia.

Economic Progress as a Means to Achieve Peace

The realization of durable peace will not be possible without simultaneous and sustained economic progress. The persistence of economic and social deprivation serves only to intensify the forces of chauvinism, religious extremism, and ethnic particularism in South Asia. It is important that Pakistan and India create an environment that facilitates mutually beneficial economic and trade relations. Only through shared economic and social development will we be able to address the domestic sources of tension and instability in our countries, and at the same time address our long-standing differences.

Pakistan has repeatedly called for cooperation among the countries of South Asia on matters relating to economic development and social progress, particularly through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Economic expansion and liberalization of our economies can be mutually beneficial, especially if SAARC becomes a genuinely free trading area, and the South Asian economies are linked to those of Central and West Asia.

The possibilities for economic growth and prosperity in South Asia can be enhanced by innovative measures of support from the international community. These could include:

- effective poverty reduction strategies for South Asian countries, sponsored and supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-World Bank and the OECD countries;
- trade and transit arrangements, to be concluded and implemented without delay, linking Central and South

Asia by a five dimensional corridor (oil, gas, electricity, roads, and railways) through Afghanistan and Pakistan. This process should be pursued simultaneously with an Afghan peace process; and

- the conclusion of preferential trading arrangements between SAARC and the European Union, the North American Free Trade Association, and Japan. Such arrangements would neutralize the disadvantages South Asian countries currently suffer due to their exclusion from all present regional trading arrangements. A preferential trading relationship between China and SAARC could be also pursued after the latter's entry into the World Trade Organization.

A ROLE FOR THE UNITED STATES

Notwithstanding the humility with which President George W. Bush wishes to conduct foreign policy, the United States, as the world's primary power, has the capacity and responsibility to play an effective role in promoting the construction of a security architecture for South Asia. In Pakistan's view, U.S. relations with our region should not be characterized by a zero-sum outlook. At the same time, these relations ought not to be pursued or built with one state at the expense of another. The improvement in relations between Washington and New Delhi can be instrumental in encouraging responsible Indian behavior and in constructing an effective security architecture in the region.

The United States can assist the region by broadening and balancing the scope of its economic engagement with all South Asian countries, in order to promote overall economic growth and prosperity in the entire region. With regard to Pakistan, such engagement can ensure the success of its ongoing critical efforts for economic revival and national reconstruction. This, in turn, would enhance Islamabad's ability to construct a viable and durable security architecture to promote future security in South Asia as well as to overcome its domestic difficulties.

The new U.S. administration should take a longer term strategic view of American interests in South Asia and its adjacent regions. Both U.S. national security and economic and trade interests are dependent primarily on promoting and preserving structures of peace and stability at the global and regional levels. The Bush administration can and should play an active role in promoting durable peace and stability in the world's major crisis areas, including South Asia. In doing so, it could move

from the past approach of crisis management to effective and timely preventive diplomacy. A new U.S. policy paradigm towards Pakistan should be evolved within the framework of broad U.S. objectives and priorities, not only in South Asia but also Central Asia and the Persian Gulf—three regions in which Pakistan can play an influential role given its geopolitical location.

The nub of the matter is that peace and stability in South Asia will remain elusive unless addressed comprehensively.

India and Pakistan must develop some sort of strategic restraint regime, eliminate the conventional imbalance, and resolve the core conflict over Kashmir. Economic and trade innovations will work to solidify progress in these areas. The need for U.S. leadership in bringing the two countries closer to such a comprehensive solution cannot be overemphasized.