

GEO-POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Accommodating The Asian Bombs



Columnist Wing Comd (Retd) Muhammad Irshad makes a dispassionate study of the new ground reality in the world after the Indian and Pakistani nuclear explosions

Last May's Indian detonation in Pokhran desert , was a part of the Indian desire to prove themselves the successors of the British Empire in the sub-continent. The exhibited capability was an instrument of power to be projected beyond its frontiers to gain recognition as a global power. Pakistan was forced for a 'matching response' to display nuclear capability in self-defence, to neutralise India's threat, and after about a year of Ras Koh mountains of Baluchistan's changing colour, by words or deeds, Pakistan has not sought nuclear leadership of the Muslim world or unlike India, tried to intimidate any of its neighbours, in other words, Pakistan has adhered to the norms of nuclear proliferation discipline.

In moving to rely on nuclear weapons for their security, thus emulating the five declared nuclear-weapon states (NWS), India and Pakistan served up a major challenge to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, for which the international community still lacks an appropriate diplomatic tool box. Early on, the Security Council and the Group of Eight Industrialized Nations (G-8) were unable to reach consensus on sanctions, however their later pronouncements, while containing calls for nuclear restraint by India and Pakistan, were replete with hypocrisy regarding the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), nuclear disarmament obligations of the five NWS. Furthermore, the howls of outrage from

Western countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, and Japan among others were equally bereft in credibility or moral force as all of these countries continue to benefit from extended nuclear deterrence (provided by the United States).

The United States, our god-father for the supply of money, wheat and other essentials, moved to establish the non-proliferation benchmarks set out by the Security Council (Resolution 1172 of June 6) and the G-8, for India and Pakistan to move back from the nuclear brink by:

- ⌘ Signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty;
- ⌘ Halting all further production of weapon-usable fissile material and joining the negotiation on a fissile material treaty at the Conference on Disarmament;
- ⌘ Limiting development and deployment of delivery vehicles for weapons of mass destruction (WMD);
- ⌘ Implementing strict export controls on sensitive materials and technologies for WMD; and
- ⌘ Resuming bilateral dialogue on resolving long-standing tensions and disputes, including Jammu and Kashmir.

In the past, Washington's South Asia policy has been a failure, mainly due to successive generations of policy-makers regarding the region as beset with intractable conflict and war, frustration emanating from ill-conceived or poorly executed regional initiatives, trying to choose between Pakistan or India, and the absence of South Asia from the U.S. geo-strategic policy map except in cases of acute crisis. However, since May 1998, the U.S. approach has tended to be uncharacteristically pragmatic though limited, focusing on the art of the possible. It is based on the principle that while neither India nor Pakistan can ever be recognized as nuclear weapon states under the NPT, since both countries have overtly demonstrated their nuclear weapon capabilities—what has been tested cannot be untested—the United States must now reach a deal under which India and Pakistan would commit to accepting the benchmarks noted above.

After eight rounds of diplomatic talks, Americans have realised that the only Super Power on God's earth is not without serious limitations, mostly stemming out of its own double standards and double talks, and thus they are slowly getting close to the idea that best results could only be achieved without much of sanctions and sticks. This welcome change is much in contrast to the initial reaction shown by the western world led by the United States of America. In their negotiations with the United States, both India and Pakistan have engaged in hard-nosed bargaining. It appears that Washington has decided to opt for a strategy of accommodation in a nuclear South Asia, rather than one of appeasement or confrontation as some of its critics have charged. As such, Washington has remained

unusually tight-lipped about the status of its dealings with India and Pakistan, to the extent of keeping even its close allies in the dark. The U.S. accommodation strategy calls for a recognition that neither India nor Pakistan will give up its nuclear weapon or ballistic missile capabilities in the short-to-medium term, hence the practical possibilities are to be sympathetic to their respective security dilemmas, to aim for restraint in the development and deployment of nuclear weapons, to promote strategic dialogue between Pakistan and India as well as between India and China, to demonstrate flexibility in sanctions by waiving restrictions on economic assistance and military-to-military contacts, to provide expertise in implementation of export controls on WMD materials and technologies, and to engage in technical discussions on restraints on nuclear weapons including safety, security, and chain of custody.

Although the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan have spoken openly about their commitment to the adherence of CTBT spirit, ironically, United States, which is at the moment so aggressively advocating the signing of the CTBT, may find itself at the crossroads because of its own Senate refusing to even consider the said ratification. The arguments against ratification in US Senate have a resonance with many arguments forwarded in Islamabad by the strong anti-CTBT lobby. One of these arguments is that by signing the treaty, Pakistan forecloses, its path to nuclear expansion through open tests. Even now that the anti-CTBT lobby has been cornered by a state level consensus decision in principle to abide by CTBT guidelines, Islamabad's wait and see posture on treaty signatures and ratification is driven in parts by the view that Washington itself is yet to become a full member of the treaty, Pakistan can afford to delay its final decision.

On the question of fissile materials, Pakistan finds itself in a difficult situation, on the very philosophy and methodology of the treaty. The Indian nuclear programme has more than three decade's lead over Pakistan's programme, this gives them a big plus in terms of stocking the fissile materials. Also it is a known fact that India has amassed a large quantity of unlawful plutonium given to it under 'Atom for peace' programme which the Western countries deliberately did not pursue. (Washington Post, June 15, 1998). Thus Indian fissile material stocks are much more in quantity, and immediate desired freeze would mean giving Indians a bigger leverage for threatening Pakistan. India also has a continuous supply through its civilian controlled nuclear power stations. While the United States is one of those countries which have stopped further production of fissile material, its stockpiles already being formidable and considered much more than country's future requirements. Moscow, like Washington is also having problems of 'too much' fissile material. Out of a plutonium inventory of 99.9 metric tons, US has declared 50.0% as excess and the rest is preserved for national security. In case of Moscow, out of an inventory of 191.4 metric tons, 50.0 is considered as excess and the rest is non-excess or essential. (These inventories do not include fissile material obtained from commercial

nuclear power operations).

It is from this point of fissile material excess that Washington is pushing others for an immediate production cut-off. However because of Washington's policy of retaining a large portion of its fissile material for meeting national security needs, its push for a fissile material interim cut-off. Interim moratorium lacks sincerity of purpose. Islamabad and Delhi can both argue that they have to add to their stocks of fissile material to bring these to what they perceive is what they feel is their national security needs. Just as Washington and Moscow have done, and only then they can begin to talk about an interim fissile material moratorium arrangement.

But it is not only the production of fissile material for stocks, it is the methodology of determining the level of stock where Pakistan finds itself placed at odds with US and India. In mid-1998, Pakistan supported the initiation of negotiation on the treaty on the condition that the existing stockpile of fissile material will be included in the purview of the treaty. The basic idea behind the insistence on the retrospective application of the treaty was to bring relatively large Indian stockpiles of fissile materials in the spotlight. The chief of United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), John Holum, said in the plenary session of the Conference of Disarmament that his country would not agree to any restrictions on existing stockpiles of fissile material in the cut-off treaty. 'FMCT should ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons after the treaty's cut-off date', said John Holum. He also suggested that the issue of reduction of existing stockpiles should be dealt with at regional level or bi-lateral level as it could not become 'an element of the fissile material treaty globally'. India shares the American view, which in a way does not really put a ban on the stock, except as having a nuisance value for the super-powers. Also is the question of defining what is fissile material and the verification procedures, both of which still remain undefined.

On the missile front, the feeling is even stronger that there is a big chasm in Washington's preaching and practice. Pakistan's missile programme is a dwarf in comparison to Indian missile programme, but even this little thing is not liked by the Americans. The US is persistent in calling for a halt to missile production, and tells Islamabad that the missile race is creating regional instability, which is not helping the cause of Pakistan's security. However, with Russia no more a super power, and fighting against an imaginary enemy, the Americans themselves have recently given an upward boost to their military budget, in part for the research and development of the missile programme, which already, without any doubts is the best in the world. If this planned programme develops, it would throw a protective shield over the United States and would and will allow it the capability to shoot down missiles which are directed at its territory. This is the same kind of Star War idea which was espoused by the Reagan administration but was abandoned after the fall of USSR.

After the fall of USSR, it is difficult to comprehend the enemy for which the Americans are making the grand preparations. NATO which was basically to contain the WARSA pact forces, after the demise of WARSA forces, has been enhanced in size and capabilities. Why all the grand scale military preparations? The (US) national missile defence programme offers an interesting perspective on how the US perceives its own security needs. Explaining the rationale behind the new proposal which has thrown American Arms reduction talks with Russia in a tail spin, American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, said in an interview on Russia TV: 'What we see now are different kinds of either non-state actors, or countries that are not part of the (arms control) system. Who are acquiring weapons that we think are dangerous long range missiles or even with the potential of delivering chemical or biological weapons. So we believe it is essential for the United States to think about how to defend ourselves against that.'

American National Missile Programme is just a small part of the preparations being done against this 'non-existent enemy'. Here are some more facts of the past, present and future American nuclear preparations.

Past

- ⌘ In 1945, there were 3 atomic weapons in the world.
- ⌘ Over the last 50 years, the US has squandered more than \$4 trillion on nuclear weapons - an amount roughly equal to the national debt.
- ⌘ Last year (1995) the US spent over \$33 billion to service and clean up its nuclear weapons.
- ⌘ The amount of space used by nuclear complexes for research, development, and testing is bigger than Delaware, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia combined.
- ⌘ In 1986, there were nearly 70,000 nuclear weapons.
- ⌘ In 1951, the US deliberately chose to explode weapons near populated areas in Nevada to get better data on the after effects of fallout. Officials at Los Alamos decided to go ahead with nuclear testing despite their determination that it was probably not a safe choice.
- ⌘ For 30 years after WWII, top medical scientists in the US's nuclear weapons industry injected patients with dangerous radioactive substances, such as plutonium or exposed them to powerful beams of radiation. Energy Department officials said many patients did not know this.

Present

- ⌘ The Department of Energy in the US requested \$3.7 billion dollars from Congress for 1997 to continue its 'Stockpile Stewardship and Management Programme' Ñ a deceptive new phrase for maintaining existing weapons and creating the next generation of nuclear weapons.
- ⌘ Today there are 36,000 nuclear weapons with an explosive yield equal to 650,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs.
- ⌘ Despite the alleged end of the Cold War, the US points nuclear weapons at 2,500 sites in the former Soviet Union daily.
- ⌘ Even if the Start II Treaty passes, Secretary of State Warren Christopher conceded: 'The US will have the capacity to destroy civilization as we know it several times over.'

Future

- ⌘ Contrary to the ideas discussed in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the US plans to spend \$40 billion over the next decade on the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Programme (maintain present capabilities and develop the next generation of nuclear weapons).
- ⌘ The Department of Energy in the US awarded a 5- year \$1.5 billion contract to Bechtel Corporation to make sure it's possible to perform full scale underground tests in Nevada.
- ⌘ The US intends to maintain an arsenal of 8,500 nuclear weapons Ñ with 80 times more destructive power than the bomb that devastated Hiroshima.
- ⌘ The US Department of Energy estimates that our government will spend at least \$230 billion over the next 75 years to clean up the pollution at nuclear facilities in the United States.
- ⌘ Another US Department. of Energy document reveals that more nuclear waste will be generated over the next 20 years than the past 50 years.
- ⌘ This year the Pentagon budgeted enough money to purchase 6 new Trident II missiles for its submarine fleet.
- ⌘ In the year 2002, the single largest military programme ever planned will be installed at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in northern California. The project consists of the world's biggest laser, intended to produce small thermonuclear explosions to 'advance' nuclear weapons science.

Pakistan is in no position of comparing and matching the American military advancements, but the driving logic behind the military preparation by both can be compared. Both are borne out of fear of an enemy; both are means considered by the respective countries as best suited to their defence needs, and both anticipate, although for different reasons and from different sources, future military challenges and draw the conclusion that they must be prepared in whatever way they can and at

whatever cost, to meet these challenges. In case of Pakistan, the perceived threat to it is much more palpable and solid than the threat of 'non-state actors and some rouge countries' which the Clinton administration has furnished as a justification for national missile programme. We are faced with an enemy which has already attacked us thrice, in first it succeeded in occupying the best part of Kashmir, and in the last it managed to slice us into two. Besides that they have never spared any occasion to humiliate us or put us militarily in troubles. Occupation of Siachin, Junagarh, Mangrol and Manavadr are some such examples. No slicing into two, or direct attack by enemy has ever been faced by Americans. Since creation, Pakistan has lived under the lengthening shadow of a menacing enemy, now armed to teeth with nuclear weapons and a delivery system with capabilities to take out major targets in Pakistan.

If US the world's strongest military power, thinks it needs the protective shield of the national missile defence system, and feels the need so badly that it wants to amend the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia and is willing to pay the price of further complications in an already trouble prone global arms reduction process, doesn't Islamabad have the right to undertake measures to protect itself against an enemy which is not fictional or imaginary but real? I hope the American planners remember this little point when they come armed to ask Pakistan for reduction and stoppage in all kinds of our military programmes. The Indian conventional and nuclear arms are much more in size and strength, their capability of indigenous production is much more, their intentions against all neighbours are on record to be aggressive, their treatment to Pakistan is particularly very special (Probably every gun and rocket in India is facing towards Pakistan. The whole purpose of Indian military budget, which is bigger than the total budget of Pakistan is designed to make Pakistan crawl on its knees). Under these circumstances, is it fair for the American policy makers to put pressure on Pakistan? Could our Prime Minister afford, not to show a 'matching response' ? Is it not time for Americans to be realistic about our security requirements against a real enemy? While accommodating the Asian bombs, please America, understand our historical and geographical problems of being located next to a bully !

