

*Promoting Nuclear Stability in South Asia*

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South Asia continues to be a volatile region marked by political instability, terrorism, and a shortage of democracy. All of the countries in the region – India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Myanmar - have varying degrees of chronic violence, and social and political instability. Although India maintains a solid democratic posture, it is challenged by armed insurgencies in certain parts. Pakistan is in the midst of a transition toward a multi-party democracy. Also, the unresolved Kashmir issue continues to both hamper genuine progress in the development of friendly relations between the two important countries in the subcontinent and to take its toll on human lives and precious resources.

U.S. President Bill Clinton a few years ago described South Asia as the most dangerous place on earth – an allusion primarily to the presence of nuclear weapons in the region during the so-called Kargil crisis in 1999, which followed nuclear weapons tests in 1998 by both India and Pakistan. Fortunately, a catastrophe was avoided and tensions have abated a great deal since then.

In the wake of the tragic earthquake in October 2005 in Muzaffarabad, which was the capital of the Pakistan-controlled region of Kashmir, both countries cooperated in providing humanitarian relief to the thousands of victims – many of whom had close relatives in the Indian part of Kashmir.

There has been progress also in the bilateral dialog between Pakistan and India on nuclear confidence building measures. A significant agreement was reached on a pre-flight notification of ballistic missile launches. The two countries have also negotiated an agreement to reduce the risk of accidents related to nuclear weapons.

However, progress is slow and subject to many external factors. For example, immediately after multiple train bombings in Mumbai in July 2006, which killed scores of people, all such talks were cancelled by India and tensions rose significantly. India accused Pakistan-supported terrorist groups of masterminding the terrorist attacks. Pakistan rejected such claims calling it a “knee-jerk reaction.”

Despite such setbacks, President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India made a joint statement following their meeting at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Havana in September 2006 vowing to carry the peace process forward.

As a sign of further warming of relations, just a few weeks ago, a historic truck route, which was once an ancient trade route, dating back 600 years and linked India to Afghanistan and Central Asia, was reopened for the first time since partition 60 years ago. Trade between the two countries could reportedly reach \$6 billion a year from a paltry \$1 billion or less currently, if both sides ease restrictions.

Such positive developments notwithstanding, both countries have helped in

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increasing tension by embarking on modernization of their armed forces through purchase of advance military aircraft, submarines, radars, and surveillance systems, among others. The two states are also continuing their large missile programs that include cruise missiles. India is considering acquiring missile defense systems such as the U.S. Patriot Advanced Capability and the Israeli Arrow, while at the same time pursuing an indigenous anti ballistic missile (ABM) program. It has recently announced a “successful” test of the system.

In the mean time, the U.S.-India nuclear accord- signed in July 2005 - is in the final stages of negotiations before an up or down vote in the U.S. Senate. While it is experiencing some rough weather in the Indian Parliament, and may also have difficulties in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the chances of its eventual approval seem reasonable. The implications for both the non-proliferation regime and nuclear stability in South Asia, although not clear, are likely to be negative.

Government-to-government dialog between the two countries is subject to the vagaries of geopolitics and has a checkered history. It is essential therefore that other means of communication both direct and indirect remain open between the two countries, especially those involving scientists, arms control experts, policy analysts, and ideally, government officials.

With this perspective, we launched a project calling it “*Promoting Nuclear Stability in South Asia,*” or simply, the “*South Asia Project,*” in September 2005 with our primary focus on finding common ground between Pakistan and India on nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles proliferation. We also recognized the impact of missile defense systems on space security and consequently included in our agenda a discussion about prevention of weaponization of space. Traditionally, both countries have held similar viewpoints on the issue, as expressed in international fora.

While recognizing the centrality of the Kashmir issue toward improving relations between the two countries, we believe the conflict is primarily political in nature. Thus, given our mostly technical background and focus, we were ill equipped to make substantive contributions in this regard. Consequently, we excluded it from our discussions.

The focus of our project so far has been on nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, and cooperation in space. Specifically, we have discussed the impact of the deployment of missile defense system on regional stability. We have also proposed a satellite-based missile launch surveillance system to improve stability by data sharing. Additionally, during our visits to the region, we came to appreciate the growing importance of the debate about the future of nuclear power in South Asia.

Both India and Pakistan have experienced high economic growth rates in the last several years creating huge demands on their energy resources. Both want to grow their respective nuclear power sector significantly in the next two decades – India, from 3 GW to about 30 GW, and Pakistan, from about 0.5 GW to 8 GW by 2030. The anticipated expansion of nuclear power globally has given rise to concerns for proliferation. The Indo-US agreement will allow India access to global nuclear technology, but continues restrictions on Pakistan, which were imposed after the 1998 explosions. We believe this isolates Pakistan further and exacerbates the tensions in the region. In view of this, we have proposed a broad energy dialog between the U.S. and Pakistan, which we hope to expand to include India in the future.