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Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia

S. Paul Kapur

India's and Pakistan's nuclear tests of May 1998 put to rest years of speculation as to whether the two countries, long suspected of developing covert weapons capabilities, would openly exercise their so-called nuclear option. The dust had hardly settled from the tests, however, when a firestorm of debate erupted over nuclear weapons' regional security implications. Some observers argued that nuclearization would stabilize South Asia by making Indo-Pakistani conflict prohibitively risky. Others maintained that, given India and Pakistan's bitter historical rivalry, as well as the possibility of accident and miscalculation, proliferation would make the subcontinent more dangerous.¹ The tenth anniversary of the tests offers scholars an opportunity to revisit this issue with the benefit of a decade of hindsight. What lessons do the intervening years hold regarding nuclear weapons' impact on South Asian security?

Proliferation optimists claim that nuclear weapons had a beneficial effect during this period, helping to stabilize India and Pakistan's historically volatile relations. Sumit Ganguly and Devin Hagerty, for example, argue that in recent years "the Indian and Pakistani governments, despite compelling incentives to attack one another . . . were dissuaded from doing so by fear that war

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1. For optimistic arguments, see Kenneth N. Waltz, "For Better: Nuclear Weapons Preserve an Imperfect Peace," in Scott D. Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), p. 117; K. Subrahmanyam, "India and the International Nuclear Order," in D.R. SarDesai and Raju G.C. Thomas, eds., *Nuclear India in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 83; and John J. Mearsheimer, "Here We Go Again," *New York Times*, May 17, 1998. For pessimistic arguments, see Scott D. Sagan, "For Worse: Till Death Do Us Part," in Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 106–107; P.R. Chari, "Nuclear Restraint, Nuclear Risk Reduction, and the Security-Insecurity Paradox in South Asia," in Michael Krepon and Chris Gagné, eds., *The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia*, Report No. 38 (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, June 2001), p. 16; and

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might escalate to the nuclear level."² It is true that since 1998 South Asian militarized disputes have not reached the point of nuclear confrontation or full-scale conventional conflict.³ Nonetheless, I argue that optimistic analyses of proliferation's regional security impact are mistaken. Nuclear weapons had two destabilizing effects on the South Asian security environment. First, nuclear weapons' ability to shield Pakistan against all-out Indian retaliation, and to attract international attention to Pakistan's dispute with India, encouraged aggressive Pakistani behavior. This provoked forceful Indian responses, ranging from large-scale mobilization to limited war.⁴ Although the resulting Indo-Pakistani crises did not lead to nuclear or full-scale conventional conflict, such fortunate outcomes were not guaranteed and did not result primarily from nuclear deterrence. Second, these crises have triggered aggressive changes in India's conventional military posture. Such developments may lead to future regional instability.

Below, I examine three phases of Indo-Pakistani relations since the nuclear tests. First, I discuss the period 1998 to 2002. I show that during these years Indo-Pakistani tensions reached levels unseen since the early 1970s, resulting in the 1999 Kargil war as well as a major militarized standoff that stretched from 2001 to 2002. An examination of this period reveals that nuclear weapons facilitated Pakistan's adoption of the low-intensity conflict strategy that triggered these confrontations, and that the crises' eventual resolution resulted primarily from nonnuclear factors such as diplomatic calculations and conventional military constraints. In the article's next section I examine the years 2002 to 2008. I argue that although Indo-Pakistani relations became more stable during this period, the improvements were modest and had little to do with nuclear weapons. Instead, they resulted mainly from changes in the international strategic environment, shifting domestic priorities, and nonnuclear security calculations. In addition, this period saw the emergence of strategic trends that could eventually undermine South Asian security. In the article's subsequent section, I discuss these developments' likely impact on future regional stability. I show that past Indo-Pakistani conflict led the Indians to begin formulat-

Kanti Bajpai, "The Fallacy of an Indian Deterrent," in Amitabh Mattoo, ed., *India's Nuclear Deterrent: Pokhran II and Beyond* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1999), pp. 150–188.

2. Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 9.

3. By "full-scale" conventional conflict, I mean a conflict that involves states' regular militaries, crosses official international boundaries, and is great enough to threaten the loser with catastrophic defeat.

4. By "limited" war, I mean a conflict resulting in at least 1,000 battle deaths that involves guerril-

ing a more aggressive conventional military doctrine. This could increase Indo-Pakistani security competition and result in rapid escalation in the event of an actual conflict. Thus nuclear weapons not only destabilized South Asia in the aftermath of the nuclear tests; they may damage the regional security environment in the years to come. In the article's final section, I discuss the implications of my argument.

Nuclear Weapons in South Asia, 1998 to 2002

In 1998 India and Pakistan were enjoying a period of relative stability that had begun in the early 1970s. These years were not wholly tranquil, having been punctuated by periods of considerable tension. For example, a serious disagreement had arisen between the two countries during the mid-1980s over Pakistani support for a Sikh separatist movement in the Indian Punjab.⁵ Also, since 1989 India and Pakistan had been at loggerheads over Pakistan's backing of a bloody insurgency in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.⁶ Nonetheless, the two countries had not fought a war with each other since 1972. This was the longest period without an Indo-Pakistani war since the two countries gained independence from Great Britain in 1947.⁷ Less than a year after the 1998 nuclear tests, however, India and Pakistan were embroiled in their first war in twenty-eight years.

In late 1998, Pakistan Army forces, disguised as local militants, crossed the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Indian from Pakistani Kashmir and seized positions up to 12 kilometers inside Indian territory. The move threatened Indian lines of communication into northern Kashmir. After discovering the incursion in May 1999, India launched a spirited air and ground offensive to oust the intruders. The operation was characterized by intense, close-quarters combat, with Indian infantry and artillery ejecting the Pakistanis from the mountainous terrain peak by peak. Although expanding the war could have facilitated

las, proxy forces, or states' regular militaries, but does not cross official international boundaries on a scale sufficient to threaten the loser with catastrophic defeat.

5. On the Sikh insurgency, see Paul Wallace, "Political Violence and Terrorism in India: The Crisis of Identity," in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995), pp. 352-409.

6. See Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

7. In the twenty-five-year period between independence and the end of the Bangladesh conflict, India and Pakistan fought three wars: in 1948, 1965, and 1971.

their task, the Indians did not cross the LoC, restricting their operations to the Indian side of the boundary. The Pakistanis finally withdrew in mid-July, after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif traveled to Washington and signed a U.S.-prepared agreement to restore the LoC. More than 1,000 Indian and Pakistani forces died in the Kargil fighting.⁸

What impact did nuclear weapons have on the outbreak of the Kargil conflict? The roots of the Kargil operation date back to the late 1980s, when Pakistan was beginning to acquire a nuclear capacity.⁹ Pakistani leaders, long unhappy with the division of Kashmir, had launched two wars for the territory, one in 1948 and another in 1965. Although neither effort was successful, in both cases the Pakistanis managed to fight the Indians to a stalemate. But Pakistan's 1971 defeat in the Bangladesh war, in which India severed East Pakistan from its Western wing, demonstrated that the Pakistanis could no longer confront India without risking catastrophic defeat. After 1971 Pakistan thus stopped challenging India for control of Kashmir.

By the late 1980s, however, Pakistan's strategic situation had changed, enabling it once more to attempt to undermine the Kashmiri status quo. This change resulted from several factors. First, the Kashmir insurgency threatened Indian control of the region.¹⁰ Second, the anti-Soviet Afghan war offered a model that Pakistan could use to exploit the insurgency.¹¹ Third, Pakistani leaders believed that, with the end of the Cold War, the world community might be more willing to address the Kashmir issue than it had previously been.¹²

Equally important as these factors, however, was Pakistan's acquisition of a nuclear capability, which enabled the Pakistanis to challenge territorial boundaries in Kashmir without fearing catastrophic Indian retaliation. Pakistani

8. See V.P. Malik, *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2006); Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000); Amarinder Singh, *A Ridge Too Far: War in the Kargil Heights, 1999* (New Delhi: Motibagh Palace, 2001); Y.M. Bammi, *Kargil, 1999: The Impregnable Conquered* (Noida, India: Gorkha, 2002); and Ashok Krishna, "The Kargil War," in Krishna and P.R. Chari, eds., *Kargil: The Tables Turned* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), pp. 77–138.

9. The period from the late 1980s until 1998 is often referred to as an "opaque" or "de facto" nuclear period. During these years, India and Pakistan did not possess nuclear weapons, but probably could have produced them if necessary. See S. Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Devin T. Hagerty, *The Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation: Lessons from South Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

10. See Bose, *Kashmir*; and Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir*.

11. Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, p. 104; and Husain Haqqani, "The Role of Islam in Pakistan's Future," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 2004/05), p. 90.

12. Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, pp. 104–105.

leaders have openly acknowledged nuclear weapons' emboldening effects. Benazir Bhutto, who served her first term as Pakistani prime minister from 1988 to 1990, stated, "I doubt that the nuclear capability was [originally] done for Kashmir-specific purposes." She admitted, however, that nuclear weapons quickly "came out" as an important tool in that struggle. "The Kashmiris were determined to win their freedom," and the Pakistani government realized that it could now provide extensive support for "a low-scale insurgency" in Kashmir while insulated from a full-scale Indian response. "Islamabad saw its capability as a deterrence to any future war with India," Bhutto asserted, because "a conventional war could turn nuclear." Thus even in the face of substantial Pakistani support for the Kashmir uprising, "India could not have launched a conventional war, because if it did, it would have meant suicide."¹³

Leading Pakistani strategic analysts agree. According to Shireen Mazari of the Institute of Strategic Studies, with nuclear deterrence "each side knows it cannot cross a particular threshold." Thus "limited warfare in Kashmir becomes a viable option."¹⁴ Even proliferation optimists admit that an emerging nuclear capacity enabled the Pakistanis to adopt a more activist Kashmir policy. Ganguly, for example, acknowledges that one of the "compelling reasons" that "emboldened the Pakistani military to aid the insurgency in Kashmir" in the late 1980s was that "they believed that their incipient nuclear capabilities had effectively neutralized whatever conventional military advantages India possessed."¹⁵

The Kargil operation was originally conceived in this strategic context. Benazir Bhutto claimed that the army presented her with a Kargil-like plan in 1989 and 1996. According to Bhutto, the operation was designed to oust Indian forces from Siachen Glacier in northern Kashmir.¹⁶ The army formulated a plan in which Pakistani and Kashmiri forces would occupy the mountain peaks overlooking the Kargil region. The logic was that "if we scrambled up high enough . . . we could force India to withdraw" by severing its supply lines to Siachen. "To dislodge us," Bhutto recalled, the Indians "would have to resort to conventional war. However, our nuclear capability [gave] the military

13. Benazir Bhutto, interview by author, August 2004.

14. Shireen M. Mazari, interview by author, Islamabad, Pakistan, April 2004; and Shireen M. Mazari, "Kashmir: Looking for Viable Options," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (February–March 1999), <http://defencejournal.com/feb-mar99/kashmir-viable.htm>.

15. Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 92.

16. See V.R. Raghavan, *Siachen: Conflict without End* (New Delhi: Viking, 2002).

confidence that India cannot wage a conventional war against Pakistan." Bhutto claimed that she rejected the proposal because even if it succeeded militarily, Pakistan lacked the political and diplomatic resources to achieve broader strategic success.¹⁷

Like these early plans, Pakistan's actual Kargil operation was designed primarily to threaten India's position in Siachen Glacier. According to Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, "Kargil was fundamentally about Kashmir," where the Indians occupy Pakistani territory, "for example at Siachen." "Emotions run very high here" on this issue. "Siachen is barren wasteland, but it belongs to us," he asserted.¹⁸ Jalil Jilani, former director-general for South Asia in Pakistan's ministry of foreign affairs, described Siachen as "perhaps the most important factor" underlying the Kargil operation. "Without Siachen," he argued, "Kargil would not have taken place."¹⁹

Like the earlier plans, the Kargil operation was facilitated by Pakistan's nuclear capacity. Jilani explained that the nuclear tests increased Pakistani leaders' willingness to challenge India in Kashmir. In the absence of a clear Pakistani nuclear capacity, Jilani argues, "India wouldn't be restrained" in responding to such provocations. An overt Pakistani nuclear capability, however, "brought about deterrence," ensuring that there would be "no major war" between India and Pakistan. In addition, conflict between two openly nuclear states would attract international attention, encouraging outside diplomatic intervention in Kashmir. Thus, as Jilani explained, nuclear weapons played a dual role in Pakistani strategy at Kargil. They "deterred India" from all-out conventional retaliation against Pakistan. And they sent a message to the outside world regarding the seriousness of the Kashmir dispute: "War between nuclear powers is not a picnic. It's a very serious business. One little incident in Kashmir could undermine everything."²⁰

17. Bhutto, interview by author.

18. President Pervez Musharraf, interview by author, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, April 2004. Note that Musharraf maintained that local mujahideen had executed the Kargil operation, with Pakistan Army forces becoming involved only after India began its counterattack.

19. Jalil Jilani, interview by author, Islamabad, Pakistan, April 2004. Unlike Musharraf, Jilani conceded that Pakistan Army troops had launched the Kargil incursions.

20. Ibid. Pakistan's nuclear capacity was not the only factor that emboldened its leaders to undertake the Kargil operation. The Pakistanis believed that retaking the Kargil heights would be prohibitively difficult for India. And they hoped that the international community would accept the Kargil operation, given Pakistan's perilous position vis-à-vis a conventionally powerful, newly nuclear India. On Pakistani tactical considerations, see Sardar F.S. Lodi, "India's Kargil Operations: An Analysis," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (November 1999), pp. 2-3; Shireen M. Mazari, "Re-examining Kargil," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (June 2000), pp. 44-46; Javed Nasir, "Calling

Pakistani analysts also note the emboldening impact of an overt nuclear capability on Pakistan's behavior in Kashmir. Mazari argues that "open testing makes a big difference in the robustness of deterrence," further encouraging the outbreak of limited warfare. She states, "While this scenario was prevalent even when there was only a covert nuclear deterrence . . . overt nuclear capabilities . . . further accentuated this situation."²¹ Proliferation optimists concede that these effects played a central role in facilitating the Kargil operation. Indeed, Ganguly and Hagerty note that "absent nuclear weapons, Pakistan probably would not have undertaken the Kargil misadventure in the first place."²²

Pakistani political leaders and strategic analysts, as well as optimistic South Asian security scholars, thus recognize nuclear weapons' emboldening impact on the Pakistanis' behavior in Kashmir and at Kargil. How, then, do scholars make an optimistic case for nuclear weapons' role in the Kargil conflict? Optimists argue that although nuclear weapons facilitated Kargil's outbreak, they also deterred India from crossing the LoC during the fighting, thereby ensuring that the dispute was resolved without resort to full-scale war.²³ Although it is true that Indian leaders' refusal to cross the Line of Control prevented escalation of the Kargil conflict, the best available evidence indicates that Indian policy was not driven primarily by a fear of Pakistani nuclear weapons.

V.P. Malik, Indian Army chief of staff during the Kargil operation, explains that the Indians avoided crossing the Line of Control mainly out of concern for world opinion: "The political leaders felt that India needed to make its case and get international support" for its position in the conflict. The Indian government believed that it could best do so by exercising restraint even in the face of clear Pakistani provocations.²⁴ G. Parthasarathy, India's high commis-

the Indian Army Chief's Bluff," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (February–March 1999), p. 25; Mirza Aslam Beg, "Kargil Withdrawal and 'Rogue' Army Image," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (September 1999), pp. 8–11; Ayaz Ahmed Khan, "Indian Offensive in the Kargil Sector," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (June 1999), pp. 7–8; and Shaukat Qadir, "An Analysis of the Kargil Conflict, 1999," *Royal United Service Institution Journal*, Vol. 147, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 2–3. On international opinion, see Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, p. 122; Ashley J. Tellis, C. Christine Fair, and Jamison Jo Medby, *Limited Conflicts under the Nuclear Umbrella: Indian and Pakistani Lessons from the Kargil Crisis* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2001), p. 38; Mirza Aslam Beg, "Deterrence, Defence, and Development," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (July 1999), pp. 4–6; and Ejaz Haider, *Friday Times* editor, interview by author, Lahore, Pakistan, April 2004.

21. Mazari, interview by author; Mazari, "Kashmir: Looking for Viable Options," p. 64; and Shireen M. Mazari, "Low-Intensity Conflicts: The New War in South Asia," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (July 1999), p. 41.

22. Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 191.

23. Rajesh M. Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 73–74; and Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, pp. 160–162.

24. V.P. Malik, interview by author, New Delhi, India, April 2004. On India's battle for interna-

sioner to Pakistan during the Kargil conflict, agrees. Indian leaders refrained from crossing the LoC, he explains, because they believed that doing so would yield “political gains with the world community.” “We had to get the world to accept that this was Pakistan’s fault,” he maintains. Staying on its side of the LoC enabled India to “keep the moral high ground.”²⁵

Despite these concerns, Indian leaders would probably have allowed the military to cross the Line of Control if doing so had proved necessary. According to Malik, the civilian leadership’s “overriding political goal . . . was to eject the intruders.” The government thus made clear that it would revisit its policy if India’s military leaders ever felt the need to cross the LoC. This did not occur because the Indians quickly began winning at Kargil, and by early June were confident of victory. Malik maintains, however, that “if the tactical situation had not gone well, India would have crossed the LoC,” regardless of Pakistan’s nuclear capacity. Pakistan had just shown that attacks across the Line of Control need not trigger nuclear escalation. Thus the Indians believed that Kargil could also be “done the other way.”²⁶

Former Indian National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra offers a similar analysis: “The army never pushed the government to cross the LoC.” “If the army had wanted,” he argues, “the government would have considered crossing.” Mishra maintains that Pakistan’s nuclear capacity would not have deterred the cabinet from granting the army’s request, because Pakistan would have been unlikely to use nuclear weapons in that scenario. “Pakistan can be finished by a few bombs,” Mishra argues. “Anyone with a small degree of sanity,” he asserts, “would know that [nuclear war] would have disastrous consequences for Pakistan.”²⁷

Former Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes supports these claims. According to Fernandes, India did not need to violate the Line of Control. Once the Indian counteroffensive got under way, the government was convinced that “India was in control” and “did not believe that the tactical situation was going to deteriorate.” Simultaneously, the Pakistanis were suffering an international backlash, with “the United States . . . pressuring Pakistan” to undo the Kargil incursions.²⁸

tional opinion, see also Maleeha Lodhi, “The Kargil Crisis: Anatomy of a Debacle,” *Newsline* (Karachi), July 1999, pp. 30–36; Tellis, Fair, and Medby, *Limited Conflicts under the Nuclear Umbrella*, pp. 21–28; and Irfan Husain, “Kargil: The Morning After,” *Dawn* (Karachi), April 29, 2000.

25. Gopalaswami Parthasarathy, interviews by author, New Delhi, India, August 2004 and December 2007.

26. Malik, interview by author.

27. Brajesh Mishra, interview by author, New Delhi, India, May 2005.

28. George Fernandes, interview by author, New Delhi, India, August 2004.

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee concurs with these assessments. "There was no need to cross the LoC," he explains, "because militarily India was successful. But nothing was ruled out. If ground realities had required military operations beyond the LoC, we would have seriously considered it. We never thought atomic weapons would be used, even if we had decided to cross the LoC."²⁹

Tactical and diplomatic calculations, then, rather than Pakistani nuclear weapons, were primarily responsible for the Indian refusal to cross the LoC during the Kargil conflict. This does not mean that Pakistan's nuclear capacity was entirely irrelevant to India's decisionmaking. Malik concedes that Pakistani nuclear weapons led the Indians to rule out full-scale conventional war with Pakistan. As he explains, however, nuclear weapons were "not decisive" in India's refusal to violate the LoC, because the Indians did not believe that crossing the line would trigger nuclear escalation.³⁰ Nuclear weapons thus did have a stabilizing effect on the conduct of the Kargil conflict, but one must not exaggerate their impact. The danger of a Pakistani nuclear response would have prevented India from deliberately launching a full-scale war against Pakistan. Pakistani nuclear deterrence, however, did not prevent India from violating the Line of Control. Indian leaders' decision against crossing the LoC turned mainly on nonnuclear considerations.³¹ And, as noted above, Pakistan's nuclear weapons facilitated the outbreak of the Kargil conflict in the first place.

Although India and Pakistan managed to avoid a nuclear or an all-out conventional confrontation at Kargil, such an outcome was hardly a foregone conclusion. Had the Indians not prevailed from behind the LoC, they probably would have crossed the line and escalated the conflict. It is impossible to know where such actions would have led. Although the Indians would not have deliberately threatened Pakistan with catastrophic defeat, the Pakistanis could have perceived rapid Indian conventional gains as an existential threat, particularly if they endangered Pakistan's nuclear command and control capabili-

29. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, interview by author, New Delhi, India, June 2006.

30. Malik, interview by author.

31. Although Indian leaders' accounts could be seen as self-serving, it would be equally beneficial for them to claim that they never considered crossing the LoC during the Kargil operation. This would insulate them from the charge that they were deterred from horizontal escalation by Pakistan's nuclear capacity and would help to promote the reputation for restraint that the Indians desire. Also, Indian leaders do not completely dismiss the deterrent effects of Pakistani nuclear weapons; they admit to having ruled out full-scale war during the Kargil conflict because of Pakistan's nuclear capacity. Thus it is likely that if they had been similarly deterred from crossing the LoC, Indian leaders would be willing to acknowledge it.

ties. The Pakistanis could have responded with a large-scale conventional or even a nuclear attack.³² Kargil's relatively restrained outcome thus belies the conflict's considerable danger.

During the 1998 to 2002 period, South Asia not only experienced its first war in twenty-eight years; between December 2001 and October 2002, it also experienced the largest-ever Indo-Pakistani militarized standoff. The standoff's size made its potential consequences even greater than those of the Kargil conflict. Because the crisis did not escalate to the level of combat, proliferation optimists argue that it demonstrates the stabilizing effects of nuclear weapons on the subcontinent. A close examination, however, reveals that nuclear weapons had much the same effect on the 2001–02 crisis that they did on Kargil; they helped to facilitate the confrontation and played only a limited role in resolving it.

The 2001–02 crisis occurred in two phases. The first phase began on December 13, 2001, when militants attacked the Indian parliament while it was in session. No members were killed, although several security personnel died in a gun battle with the terrorists. The Indian government determined that two Pakistan-backed militant groups, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed, had carried out the assault. In response, India launched Operation Parakram, mobilizing 500,000 troops along the Line of Control and the international border. The Indians simultaneously demanded that Pakistan surrender twenty criminals believed to be located in Pakistan, renounce terrorism, shut down terrorist training camps in Pakistani territory, and stanch the flow of militant infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir. If Pakistan did not comply, the Indians planned to strike terrorist training camps and seize territory in Pakistani Kashmir. Pakistan responded with large-scale deployments of its own, and soon roughly 1 million troops were facing each other across the LoC and international border.³³

In January 2002 President Musharraf took two important steps toward de-

32. See S. Paul Kapur, "Nuclear Proliferation, the Kargil Conflict, and South Asian Security," *Security Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Autumn 2003), p. 99. Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai, director of the Pakistan Army's Strategic Plans Division, specified loss of "a large part of [Pakistani] territory" as grounds for the use of nuclear weapons. See Paolo Cotta-Ramusino and Maurizio Martellini, "Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Stability, and Nuclear Strategy in Pakistan," *Laundau Network*, <http://www.mi.infn.it/~landnet/Doc/pakistan.pdf> (updated February 11, 2002).

33. For detailed discussions of the 2001–02 crisis, see V.K. Sood and Pravin Sawhney, *Operation Parakram: The War Unfinished* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003); Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, "U.S. Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis," Report No. 57 (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, September 2006); and Sumit Ganguly and Michael R. Kraig, "The 2001–2002 Indo-Pakistani Crisis: Exposing the Limits of Coercive Diplomacy," *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2005).

escalating the initial phase of the crisis. First, he outlawed Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Then, in a nationally televised speech on January 12, he pledged to prevent Pakistani territory from being used to foment terrorism in Kashmir. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, visiting New Delhi after stopping in Islamabad, subsequently assured Indian leaders that Musharraf was working to reduce terrorism, and was actively contemplating the extradition of non-Pakistani suspects on India's list of twenty fugitives.³⁴ The evident success of India's coercive diplomacy, as well as a loss of strategic surprise and the resulting fear of high casualties, led the Indians not to attack Pakistan in January 2002.³⁵ Indian forces, however, remained deployed along the LoC and international border.

The second phase of the 2001–02 crisis erupted on May 14, 2002, when terrorists killed thirty-two people at an Indian Army camp at Kaluchak in Jammu.³⁶ Outraged Indian leaders formulated a military response considerably more ambitious than the plans adopted in January. Now, rather than simply attacking across the LoC, the Indians planned to drive three strike corps from Rajasthan into Pakistan, engaging and destroying Pakistani forces and seizing territory in the Thar Desert. Before the Indians could act, however, the United States once again intervened. In early June, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage extracted a promise from President Musharraf not just to reduce militant infiltration into Indian Kashmir, but to end infiltration "permanently."³⁷ Armitage conveyed Musharraf's pledge to Indian officials. According to Brajesh Mishra, Musharraf's promise, U.S. assurances that Musharraf would honor his commitment, and a notable decrease in terrorist infiltration into Indian Kashmir led Indian leaders to conclude that "coercive pressure was working."³⁸

34. See "President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf's Address to the Nation," Islamabad, January 12, 2002, <http://www.millat.com/president/1020200475758AMword%20file.pdf>; Alan Sipress and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Powell 'Encouraged' by India Visit," *Washington Post*, January 19, 2002; Robert Marquand, "Powell Tiptoes Indo-Pak Divide," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 18, 2002; and Susan Milligan, "India-Pakistan Standoff Easing, Powell Says," *Boston Globe*, January 18, 2002.

35. Mishra, interview by author; and Sood and Sawhney, *Operation Parakram*, p. 80.

36. The victims were mostly women and children, the family members of Indian military personnel. See Raj Chengappa and Shishir Gupta, "The Mood to Hit Back," *India Today*, May 27, 2002, pp. 27–30.

37. Celia W. Dugger and Thom Shanker, "India Sees Hope as Pakistan Halts Kashmir Militants," *New York Times*, June 9, 2002.

38. Mishra, interview by author. See also Rahul Bedi and Anton La Guardia, "India Ready for 'Decisive Battle,'" *Daily Telegraph*, May 23, 2002; Fahren Bokhari and Edward Luce, "Western Pressure Brings Easing of Kashmir Tension," *Financial Times*, June 8, 2002; C. Raja Mohan, "Musharraf Vows to Stop Infiltration: Armitage," *Hindu*, June 7, 2002; Sood and Sawhney, *Operation Parakram*, pp. 95,

India ultimately did not strike Pakistan, and Indian forces began withdrawing from the international border and LoC in October. Why did India demobilize without attacking? It did so primarily because top officials viewed the Parakram deployment as having been successful. No further terrorism on the scale of the parliament attack had occurred during the crisis. And the Indians had secured a Pakistani pledge, backed by U.S. promises, to prevent such violence in the future. Vajpayee explains that “America gave us the assurance that something will be done by Pakistan about cross-border terrorism. America gave us a clear assurance. That was an important factor” in the Indian decision to demobilize.³⁹ Fernandes maintains that India had “no reason to attack.” The Indians had “stayed mobilized to make the point that another [terrorist] attack would result in an immediate response. No further attacks happened.”⁴⁰ According to Mishra, Operation Parakram’s “national goal was to curb terrorism emanating from Pakistan. That national goal . . . was achieved.”⁴¹ Additional reasons for India’s failure to attack Pakistan in mid-2002 were the loss of the element of surprise; concern with the costs of a large-scale Indo-Pakistani conflict, including the possibility of nuclear escalation; and a desire to avoid angering the United States by attacking its key ally in the Afghan war.⁴²

What role did nuclear weapons play in defusing the 2001–02 crisis? Proliferation optimists claim that the confrontation’s resolution was primarily the result of nuclear deterrence.⁴³ The truth is more complicated than the optimists suggest, however. Nuclear weapons did not play a major role in dissuading Indian leaders from attacking Pakistan during the first phase of the crisis in January 2002. As noted above, Indian restraint resulted primarily from the belief that India’s coercive diplomacy was succeeding against Pakistan, as well as from concern that, in the absence of strategic surprise, the costs of a conventional confrontation with Pakistan would be excessively high.

Pakistan’s nuclear capability did play a role in stabilizing the second phase

98–99; “India: Fernandes Says Forward Mobilization of Troops Achieved Objectives,” World News Connection, November 21, 2002; and “Government Carrying Out Strategic Relocation of Army,” Press Trust of India, November 20, 2002.

39. Vajpayee, interview by author.

40. Fernandes, interview by author.

41. Mishra, interview by author. Note that Pakistan did not return the twenty fugitives that India had earlier demanded.

42. Sood and Sawhney, *Operation Parakram*, pp. 80, 82, 87; V. Sudarshan and Ajith Pillai, “Game of Patience,” *Outlook* (Mumbai), May 27, 2002; and retired Indian generals, interviews by author, New Delhi, India, August 2004.

43. See, for example, Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 170; and Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence*, pp. 94–99.

of the crisis, in May and June 2002. The existence of Pakistan's nuclear weapons prevented the Indian government from planning an all-out attack against Pakistan. As former Indian Army Vice Chief of Staff V.K. Sood explains, "India could sever Punjab and Sindh with its conventional forces." He goes on, however, "Pakistan would use nuclear weapons in that scenario." The Indians therefore sought "not to fight for real estate," but rather to "draw Pakistani forces into battle . . . and inflict damage from which Pakistan would take a long time to recover."⁴⁴ Thus Pakistan's nuclear weapons did not prevent India from planning for a significant attack against Pakistan proper, but they did ensure that the attack's projected scope would be limited, so as not to threaten Pakistan with catastrophic defeat. In addition, the possibility of nuclear escalation encouraged resolution of the dispute in June and the eventual demobilization of Indian forces, though it was one of several factors contributing to this outcome. As noted above, by exercising restraint the Indians also sought to avoid antagonizing the United States, and incurring high costs in a conventional conflict. And most important, Indian officials believed that their coercive diplomacy had been successful, and that large-scale military pressure on Pakistan was no longer necessary. Thus nuclear weapons' role in limiting the 2001–02 crisis is mixed. In one instance nuclear weapons had little effect, and in another they did help to ameliorate the dispute, though they were not the principal stabilizing factor.

In evaluating nuclear weapons' impact on the 2001–02 crisis, however, one must not overlook their role in fomenting the standoff. The Parakram confrontation resulted from India's large-scale mobilization and associated coercive diplomacy, which in turn was a reaction to an attack on the Indian parliament and an Indian Army installation by Pakistan-backed Kashmiri terrorist groups. The parliament and Kaluchak attacks were part of a broad pattern of Pakistani low-intensity conflict, which, as explained earlier, was promoted by Pakistan's nuclear weapons capacity.⁴⁵ Regardless of any stabilizing effects that they may have had later in the 2001–02 dispute, then, nuclear weapons played a central role in instigating the crisis.

44. V.K. Sood, interview by author, New Delhi, India, August 2004.

45. This is not to argue that Islamabad was directly involved in the parliament and Kaluchak operations. My point, rather, is that Pakistan nurtured the militant groups behind these and other anti-Indian attacks as part of its strategy of low-intensity conflict in Kashmir. This strategy, in turn, was facilitated by Pakistani nuclear weapons, which insulated Pakistan from all-out Indian retaliation and attracted international attention. Thus the 2001–02 attacks fit a broad pattern of violence stretching back to the late 1980s and were closely linked to Pakistan's nuclear capacity.

Nuclear proliferation thus had a destabilizing effect on South Asia during the period from 1998 to 2002. By encouraging provocative Pakistani behavior and forceful Indian responses, nuclear weapons facilitated the outbreak of the first Indo-Pakistani war in twenty-eight years and the largest-ever South Asian militarized standoff. And although nuclear deterrence did inject a measure of caution into Indian decisionmaking, it was not critical to stabilizing either dispute. Rather, the Kargil war and the 2001–02 crisis failed to escalate primarily as the result of India's concern with international opinion, faith in the success of its coercive diplomacy, and conventional military limitations.

In the next section, I discuss the years 2002 to 2008. This period witnessed an improvement in Indo-Pakistani relations, with a reduction in confrontations and a warming of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Some commentators attribute these developments in part to the pacifying effects of nuclear deterrence. I show, however, that security improvements during this period were modest and that nuclear weapons were not responsible for them. In fact, nuclear weapons triggered strategic developments that could destabilize the subcontinent in the future.

Nuclear Weapons in South Asia, 2002 to 2008

Since the 2001–02 crisis, South Asia has not experienced a large-scale militarized dispute; militant violence in Kashmir has declined; and India and Pakistan have begun a peace dialogue to resolve the Kashmir dispute. Some observers suggest that the pacifying effects of nuclear deterrence have facilitated these changes.⁴⁶ Two facts must be kept in mind, however, when evaluating nuclear weapons' role in the recent Indo-Pakistani rapprochement.

First, improvements in Indo-Pakistani relations, though real, have been modest. To reduce tensions in the region, the two sides have adopted a series of confidence-building measures, such as a cross-LoC cease-fire and the restoration of transportation and trade links between Indian and Pakistani Kash-

46. See, for example, V.R. Raghavan, "Nuclear Deterrence: An Indian Perspective," presentation at "The Future of Nuclear Deterrence in the North Atlantic Alliance" conference, West Sussex, United Kingdom, October 2006, <http://www.delhipolicygroup.com/bulletin26.htm>; Lawrence Freedman, "Nuclear Deterrence May Still Have a Role to Play," *Financial Times*, December 1, 2006; Russell J. Leng, "Realpolitik and Learning in the India-Pakistan Rivalry," in T.V. Paul, ed., *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 126–127; and Praveen Swami, "A War to End a War: The Causes and Outcomes of the 2001–2002 India-Pakistan Crisis," in Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behaviour and the Bomb* (London: Routledge, 2008).

mir.⁴⁷ According to the Indian government, violence in Kashmir has declined; terrorist-related incidents fell by 22 percent from 2004 to 2005, with civilian deaths falling 21 percent and security personnel deaths falling 33 percent. In 2006, terrorist incidents declined an additional 16 percent, killing 30 percent fewer civilians and 20 percent fewer security forces than during the previous year. Despite this progress, the Kashmiri security situation remains tense. One thousand six hundred sixty-seven terrorist incidents occurred in 2006, killing 540 civilians and security personnel. And estimated instances of militant infiltration into Indian territory from Pakistani Kashmir declined only 4 percent from 2005.⁴⁸ As a result, hundreds of thousands of Indian security forces remain stationed in Kashmir. According to a senior Indian diplomat closely involved with the Kashmir peace process, "It is difficult to say" how much the Indo-Pakistani security environment has improved. "The Kashmir evidence is mixed," he notes. "Cross-border [militant] traffic reports are not very positive." Meanwhile, the militants have shifted their geographical focus, and are "now coming through Bangladesh with the help of Pakistani agencies. There has been a change in tactics but not a change in attitude."⁴⁹ As Indian defense analyst Raj Chengappa puts it, "We are not in a hair-trigger environment anymore. But the situation is still serious."⁵⁰

Second, improvements in Indo-Pakistani relations have not resulted primarily from nuclear deterrence. The Pakistanis reduced their support for anti-Indian militancy for two main reasons. First, in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government realized that Islamic terrorism was a global problem with direct implications for the United States' own security. The Americans also decided that they needed Pakistan to serve as a leading partner in their new antiterror coalition. Thus, although the United States had previously turned a blind eye toward Pakistani support for militancy in South Asia, it was no longer willing to do so. To serve as an ally in the U.S. antiterrorism effort—thereby avoiding the United States' wrath and enjoying its

47. See Sumit Ganguly, "Will Kashmir Stop India's Rise?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (July/August 2006), p. 48; and "India, Pakistan Agree on Opening of New Bus Link, Trade Routes," Press Trust of India, January 18, 2006.

48. Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report, 2006–2007*, pp. 6, 143.

49. Senior Indian diplomat, interview by author, New Delhi, India, December 2007.

50. Raj Chengappa, interview by author, New Delhi, India, December 2007. Chengappa is also the managing editor of *India Today*. See also Ganguly, "Will Kashmir Stop India's Rise?" pp. 48–50; Robert G. Wirsing, "Precarious Partnership: Pakistan's Response to U.S. Security Policies," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Summer 2003), p. 74; and Stephen Philip Cohen, "The Jihadist Threat to Pakistan," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Summer 2003), p. 14.

financial largesse—the Pakistanis were forced to reduce their support for Islamic insurgents in Kashmir, in some cases going so far as to outlaw militant groups.⁵¹ Second, Pakistani cooperation with the United States alienated Islamic militant organizations, which branded Musharraf a traitor. These groups subsequently turned against the Pakistani government and attempted on multiple occasions to assassinate Musharraf.⁵² This led the government to take further measures against the militants, as a matter of self-preservation. Pakistan's reduced support for anti-Indian militancy, then, is not the product of nuclear deterrence. Rather, this policy shift resulted primarily from changes in the international strategic environment after the September 11 terrorist attacks.⁵³

The Indians, for their part, have pursued improved relations with Pakistan for two principal reasons, neither of which stems from nuclear deterrence. First, India's main national priority has become continued economic growth, which Indian leaders believe is essential if the country is to reduce poverty, shed its "third-world" status, and join the first rank of nations.⁵⁴ Greater prosperity, in turn, has led to rising economic aspirations among the Indian electorate. Indians increasingly expect, as Chengappa puts it, "better jobs, the American dream." Therefore the government seeks "to focus on growth and to keep the peace," rather than squander resources on continued Indo-Pakistani conflict.⁵⁵ Second, recent anti-Indian terrorism, such as the 2005 Diwali bomb-

51. Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 201–204; Stephen Philip Cohen, "The Nation and the State of Pakistan," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Summer 2002), pp. 115–116; Samina Yasmeen, "Pakistan's Kashmir Policy: Voices of Moderation?" *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 2003), p. 12; Jessie Lloyd and Nathan Nankivell, "India, Pakistan, and the Legacy of September 11," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (July 2002), p. 281; and Wirsing, "Precarious Partnership," pp. 71–72. Since 2002 Pakistan has received \$1.9 billion in U.S. security assistance and \$2.4 billion in U.S. economic aid. See Richard A. Boucher, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Pakistan*, testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Development, Foreign Economic Affairs and International Environmental Protection, 110th Cong., 1st sess., December 6, 2007.

52. Yasmeen, "Pakistan's Kashmir Policy," pp. 12, 15; and Katherine Butler, "Toppling Musharraf: Heat Rises on Pakistani Leader," *Independent*, February 20, 2006. On the assassination attempts, see Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, pp. 244–262.

53. Vali Nasr, "Military Rule, Islamism, and Democracy in Pakistan," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Spring 2004), p. 202.

54. Indian gross domestic product growth jumped from 5.6 percent to 8.4 percent between 1990 and 2005, and is likely to continue above 8 percent in 2008. See S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Transformation of U.S.-India Relations: An Explanation for the Rapprochement and Prospects for the Future," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (July/August 2007), pp. 648–649.

55. Chengappa, interview by author. See also "India-Pakistan: Understanding the Conflict Dynamics," speech by Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon at Jamia Millia Islamia, April 11, 2007; "Pranab for Peace with Pak," *Statesman*, October 26, 2006; and "Terror Threatens S. Asia: Growth Undermined and Health Care and Education Robbed of Funds, Says PM Singh," *Straits Times* (Singapore), August 16, 2006.

ings in New Delhi and the 2006 train bombings in Mumbai, has been less provocative than previous attacks, such as the parliament assault.⁵⁶ The Indians therefore have opted for restraint despite ongoing violence. If a provocation on the scale of the parliament attack were to occur, however, India might well launch a major militarized response, regardless of Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons.⁵⁷ Indeed, Indian leaders continue to believe, as they did during the Kargil conflict and the 2001–02 crisis, that India could engage Pakistan in large-scale conventional combat without starting a nuclear war. Like Pakistan, then, India's pursuit of improved Indo-Pakistani relations has not resulted from nuclear deterrence. Rather, it is the product primarily of shifting domestic priorities and nonnuclear strategic calculations.

Although the 2002–08 period has not seen terrorism on the scale of the parliament attack, Indian strategists, deeply affected by the Parakram experience, are preparing for the possibility of such an occurrence. As I explain below, these preparations may exacerbate regional security-dilemma dynamics, increasing the likelihood of conflict. Thus not only have nuclear weapons had little to do with the current Indo-Pakistani rapprochement; by facilitating past disputes, nuclear weapons have unleashed strategic developments that may destabilize South Asia well into the future.

Nuclear Weapons and Future Instability

As noted above, nuclear weapons facilitated provocative Pakistani behavior in the wake of the 1998 tests, thereby triggering major Indo-Pakistani crises such as the Kargil conflict and the 2001–02 standoff. Significantly, the effect of these

56. The Diwali bombings killed approximately 60 people on the eve of a major Hindu religious festival. Indian authorities blamed the attacks on the Pakistan-backed militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba. See Amelia Gentleman, "Delhi Police Say Suspect Was Attack Mastermind," *International Herald Tribune*, November 13, 2005. The Mumbai bombings killed approximately 180 people in railway stations and aboard commuter trains. Indian authorities blamed the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, as well as the Students Islamic Movement of India, for the attacks. See "LeT, JeM, SIMI Helped Execute Terror Plan," *Times of India*, October 1, 2006. Although the Delhi and Mumbai bombings were more deadly, the parliament and Kaluchak attacks were widely viewed as a greater national affront, as they targeted the foremost symbol of the Indian state as well as the family members of Indian military personnel.

57. Senior Indian diplomat closely involved with the Indo-Pakistani peace process, interview by author, December 2007; senior U.S. military officials, interviews by author, New Delhi, India, December 2007 and May 2005; Michael Krepon, "The Meaning of the Mumbai Blasts" (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, August 7, 2006); Walter Andersen, "The Indo-Pakistani Powder Keg," *Globe and Mail*, July 19, 2006; and John H. Gill, "India and Pakistan: A Shift in the Military Calculus?" in Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia, 2005–2006: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty* (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005), p. 266.

crises has not been limited to the past; they have had a profound effect on current Indian strategic thinking, inspiring an aggressive shift in India's conventional military posture. This could increase the likelihood of serious Indo-Pakistani conflict in years to come.

India has long enjoyed conventional military superiority over Pakistan.⁵⁸ This advantage has been mitigated, however, by India's peacetime deployment of offensive forces deep in the interior of the country, far from the Indo-Pakistani border. As a result, Indian forces were slow to mobilize against the Pakistanis, requiring several weeks before launching a large-scale offensive.⁵⁹ This gave Pakistan time to prepare its defenses and ward off any impending Indian attack. It also allowed the international community to bring diplomatic pressure to bear on India's civilian leadership, thereby preventing it from launching military action.

Many Indian military leaders believe that this mobilization problem prevented India from acting decisively during the 2001–02 crisis. By the time Indian forces were prepared to move against Pakistan, the Pakistanis were able to ready their defenses, making a potential Indian attack far more costly. Most important, the Indians' slowness enabled the United States to pressure the Indian government, convincing it to abandon plans to strike Pakistan. Thus, in the words of a prominent Indian defense writer, Operation Parakram demonstrated that India's "mobilization strategy was completely flawed."⁶⁰ In addition, the government's restraint caused rancor within the armed forces. Senior officers believed that civilian leaders misused the military, ordering it to undertake a long and costly deployment and then opting for retreat, leaving the Pakistanis unpunished. As a senior U.S. defense official stationed in New Delhi puts it, Indian commanders "were frustrated. . . . They really wanted to go after Pakistan but couldn't."⁶¹

To prevent a recurrence of Parakram's failures, the Indians began to formulate a new "Cold Start" military doctrine, which will enable India to rapidly

58. See Anthony H. Cordesman, *The India-Pakistan Military Balance* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2002); Ashley J. Tellis, *Stability in South Asia* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1997); and Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, pp. 50–53.

59. Tellis, *Stability in South Asia*, pp. 20–21; and Gurmeet Kanwal, director, Center for Land Warfare Studies, interview by author, New Delhi, India, December 2007.

60. Sundeep Unnithan, assistant editor of *India Today*, interview by author, New Delhi, India, December 2007.

61. Senior U.S. defense official, interview by author, U.S. embassy, New Delhi, India, December 2007. For critical analyses of Parakram, see, for example, Sood and Sawhney, *Operation Parakram*; and Praveen Swami, "Beating the Retreat," *Frontline*, Vol. 19, No. 22 (October 26–November 8, 2002), <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/f11922/stories/20021108007101200.htm>.

launch a large-scale attack against Pakistan. The doctrine will augment the offensive capabilities of India's traditionally defensive holding formations located close to the Indo-Pakistani border. It also will eventually shift offensive forces from their current locations in the Indian hinterland to bases closer to Pakistan. Within 72 to 96 hours of a mobilization order, Cold Start would send three to five division-sized integrated battle groups (IBGs) consisting of armor, mechanized infantry, and artillery roughly 20–80 kilometers into Pakistan along the breadth of the Indo-Pakistani border. The IBGs would aggressively engage Pakistani forces and seize a long, shallow swath of Pakistani territory. Cold Start seeks to achieve three goals: to inflict significant attrition on enemy forces; to retain Pakistani territory for use as a postconflict bargaining chip; and, by limiting the depth of Indian incursions, to avoid triggering a Pakistani strategic nuclear response. Indian military planners hope that these doctrinal changes, coupled with India's growing conventional military capabilities,⁶² will result in a more nimble force that is able to prevent a repetition of Operation Parakram's shortcomings.⁶³

Cold Start is currently in its nascent stages.⁶⁴ The doctrine's continued development and implementation, however, will likely have two major ef-

62. From 2001 to 2006, the Indian defense budget increased by 60 percent, from \$13.81 billion to \$22.1 billion. In the coming five years, India is forecast to spend up to \$40 billion on weapons procurement, including fighter aircraft, artillery, submarines, and armor. See Jane's World Defense Industry, "JWDI Briefing: India's Defence Industry" (Surrey, U.K.: Jane's Information Group, September 18, 2007); and Heather Timmons and Somini Sengupta, "Building a Modern Arsenal in India," *New York Times*, August 31, 2007. See also Rodney W. Jones, "Conventional Military and Strategic Stability in South Asia," South Asian Strategic Stability Unit, Research Paper, No. 1 (London: South Asian Strategic Stability Institute, March 2005).

63. This brief overview does not purport fully to explain the complexities of India's Cold Start doctrine. It draws on the following sources: interviews by author in New Delhi in December 2007 with several of Cold Start's intellectual architects, including Vijay Oberoi, former army training command director and army vice chief of staff; Arun Sahgal, head of the Center for Strategic Studies and Simulation, United Service Institution of India, and member of Indian National Security Council Task Force on Net Assessment and Simulation; Gurmeet Kanwal, director of the Center for Land Warfare Studies; and senior U.S. defense officials. See also Col. Amarjit Singh, "Strategy and Doctrine: A Case for Convergence," presentation at the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation, United Service Institution of India, New Delhi, 2007; Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? An Assessment of the Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter 2007/08), pp. 158–190; Subhash Kapila, "India's New 'Cold Start' War Doctrine Strategically Reviewed: Parts I and II," No. 991 and No. 1013 (Noida, India: South Asia Analysis Group Papers, May 4, 2004, and June 1, 2004); and Tariq M. Ashraf, "Doctrinal Reawakening of the Indian Armed Forces," *Military Review*, November–December 2004, pp. 53–62.

64. Indian planners will have to overcome a number of organizational and resource-related obstacles before they can fully implement Cold Start. See Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?" pp. 159, 175–190.

fects. First, it will probably exacerbate regional security-dilemma dynamics. Pakistan has always been a deeply insecure state, militarily outmatched by India, lacking strategic depth, and suffering from domestic instability. The Pakistanis could previously expect India's lengthy mobilization schedule to mitigate its military advantages. In the future, however, this may not be the case. As a result, Pakistan will have to maintain a higher state of readiness,⁶⁵ and will face incentives to offset Indian strategic advances through increased arms racing and asymmetric warfare. Such behavior could trigger aggressive Indian responses, which would further heighten Pakistani insecurity. These dynamics could undermine recent improvements in Indo-Pakistani relations and increase the probability of crises between the two countries.

Second, Indian doctrinal changes increase the likelihood that Indo-Pakistani crises will escalate rapidly, both within the conventional sphere and from the conventional to the nuclear level. In the conventional realm, Cold Start will enable Indian forces to attack Pakistan quickly, pushing an Indo-Pakistani dispute from the level of political crisis to outright conflict before the Indian government can be deterred from launching an offensive. Vijay Oberoi explains that the decision to attack Pakistan would require "a certain amount of political will. But [Cold Start] makes that political will more likely to be there, since now we can mobilize before world opinion comes down on political leaders and prevents them from acting."⁶⁶

In the nuclear realm, India's Cold Start doctrine would likely force Pakistan to rely more heavily on its strategic deterrent. Brig. Gen. Khawar Hanif, Pakistan's defense attaché to the United States, argues that Cold Start will create a "greater justification for Pakistani nuclear weapons" and may increase the danger of nuclear use. "The wider the conventional asymmetry," he maintains, "the lower the nuclear threshold between India and Pakistan. To the extent that India widens the conventional asymmetry through military spending and aggressive doctrinal changes, the nuclear threshold will get lower." Maj. Gen. Muhammad Mustafa Khan, director-general (analysis) of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, similarly argues that Cold Start "is destabilizing; it is meant to circumvent nuclear deterrence and warning time," and "it is entirely Pakistan-specific." "This will force us to undertake countermeasures," he continues, "and if it becomes too threatening we will have to rely on

65. Ashraf, "Doctrinal Reawakening," p. 59.

66. Oberoi, interview by author. See also "Cold Start to New Doctrine," *Times of India*, April 14, 2004.

our nuclear capability."⁶⁷ Thus Cold Start may erode the firebreak between conventional and nuclear conflict on the subcontinent.

The Indians reportedly anticipate such an outcome at the tactical level and are preparing to fight through Pakistani battlefield nuclear strikes.⁶⁸ Indian strategists dismiss the possibility of a Pakistani nuclear response against India proper, however. Rather, they maintain that India can calibrate its attack, stopping short of Pakistan's strategic nuclear thresholds and waiting for international diplomatic intervention to end the conflict. As Gurmeet Kanwal explains, "We war-game this all the time, and we do not trip their [strategic] red lines." According to Arun Sahgal, Cold Start "will give Pakistan no option but to bring down its nuclear thresholds. But this shouldn't really worry us. We don't think Pakistan will cross the nuclear Rubicon."⁶⁹

Given the uncertainties that would be inherent in a large-scale Indo-Pakistani conflict, however, such a benign outcome is not guaranteed. For example, an unexpectedly rapid and extensive Indian victory, or failure to achieve a quick diplomatic resolution to the conflict, could result in a far more extreme Pakistani response than the Indians currently anticipate. Thus India's planning for a carefully controlled limited war with Pakistan could prove to be overly optimistic. As a senior U.S. defense official familiar with Cold Start worries, the Indians "think that they can fight three or four days, and the international community will stop it. And they believe that they can fight through a nuclear exchange. But there are unintended consequences. Calibrate a conventional war and nuclear exchange with Pakistan? It doesn't work that way."⁷⁰

Significantly, a large-scale Indo-Pakistani crisis could erupt even without a deliberate decision by the Pakistani government to provoke India. The Islamist forces that the Pakistanis have nurtured in recent decades have taken on a life of their own and do not always act at Islamabad's behest. Indeed, they often behave in ways inimical to Pakistani interests, such as launching attacks on Pakistani security forces, government officials, and political figures.⁷¹ If these

67. Brig. Gen. Khawar Hanif and Maj. Gen. Muhammad Mustafa Khan, interviews by author, Monterey, California, June 2007. See also Shaukat Qadir, "Cold Start: The Nuclear Side," *Daily Times* (Lahore), May 16, 2004; and Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?" p. 10.

68. Unnithan and senior U.S. defense official, interviews by author; and Kapila, "India's New 'Cold Start' War Doctrine Strategically Reviewed."

69. Kanwal and Sahgal, interviews by author.

70. Senior U.S. defense official, interview by author. See also Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?" pp. 10–14; Gill, "India and Pakistan," p. 266; and Cohen, "The Jihadist Threat to Pakistan," p. 12.

71. Benazir Bhutto's December 2007 assassination is a case in point. See Mark Mazzetti, "C.I.A. Sees Qaeda Link in the Death of Bhutto," *New York Times*, January 19, 2008.

entities were to stage an operation similar to the 2001 parliament attack, India could hold the Pakistani government responsible, whether or not Islamabad was behind the operation.⁷² And with a doctrine that would enable rapid mobilization, India's military response could be far more extensive, and more dangerous, than it was during the 2001–02 crisis.

By facilitating the outbreak of serious Indo-Pakistani crises in the past, then, nuclear weapons have inspired strategic developments that will make the outbreak and rapid escalation of regional crises more likely in the future. Thus nuclear weapons proliferation not only destabilized South Asia in the first decade since the 1998 tests; proliferation is also likely to increase dangers on the subcontinent in years to come.

Conclusion

In the first decade after the Indo-Pakistani nuclear tests, South Asia managed to avoid a nuclear or full-scale conventional war. This does not mean, however, that nuclear proliferation has stabilized the region. In fact, nuclear weapons have played an important role in destabilizing the subcontinent. Nuclear proliferation encouraged the outbreak of the first Indo-Pakistani war in twenty-eight years as well as the eruption of South Asia's largest-ever militarized standoff, and played only a minor role in these crises' resolution. It has little to do with the current thaw in Indo-Pakistani relations. And it has triggered strategic developments that could threaten the region's stability well into the future.

Although I have argued in this article against the claims of proliferation optimists, my findings suggest that both optimistic and pessimistic scholars largely ignore one of nuclear weapons proliferation's most pressing dangers. Proliferation optimists downplay proliferation risks by maintaining that the leaders of new nuclear states are neither irrational nor suicidal. Therefore, these scholars argue, new nuclear states will behave responsibly, avoiding overly provocative actions for fear of triggering a devastating response.⁷³ Pessimists, by contrast, emphasize problems such as organizational pathologies,

72. See Yasmeen, "Pakistan's Kashmir Policy," p. 15; Gill, "India and Pakistan," p. 266; and "Jihad and the State of Pakistan," *Friday Times* (Lahore), March 2, 2007. See also Steve Coll, "The Stand-off: How Jihadi Groups Helped Provoke the Twenty-first Century's First Nuclear Crisis," *New Yorker*, February 13, 2006, pp. 126–139.

73. See, for example, Kenneth N. Waltz, "Waltz Responds to Sagan," in Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 131–132.

arguing that these factors will result in suboptimal decisionmaking and dangerous behavior by new nuclear states.⁷⁴

The decade since the South Asian nuclear tests, however, suggests that a principal risk of nuclear proliferation is not that the leaders of new nuclear states will be irrational or suicidal, or even that organizational and other pathologies will result in suboptimal policy formulation. The danger, rather, is that leaders may weigh their strategic options and reasonably conclude that risky behavior best serves their interests. Nuclear weapons do enable Pakistan, as a conventionally weak, dissatisfied power, to challenge the territorial status quo with less fear of an all-out Indian military response. Ensuing crises do attract international attention potentially useful to the Pakistanis' cause. And forceful retaliation does enable India to defeat specific Pakistani challenges, while offering it a possible means of deterring future Pakistani adventurism. Thus, given their military capabilities and territorial preferences, India's and Pakistan's recent behavior has not been unreasonable. But even if these policies make sense from the two countries' own strategic perspectives, they are nonetheless dangerous, creating a significant risk of catastrophic escalation. Thus nuclear proliferation could have dire consequences even if new nuclear states behave in a largely rational manner.

This finding has implications not just in South Asia but also beyond the region, including for potential proliferators such as Iran. According to the optimists' logic, because the Iranians are neither irrational nor bent on suicide, the international community should not be inordinately fearful of an Iranian nuclear capability. One need not believe that Iranian leaders seek their own country's destruction, however, to worry that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons could pose significant dangers. If the Iranians decided to use their nuclear capability in a manner similar to the Pakistanis, they could increase their support for terrorism, or even engage in outright conventional aggression, to challenge objectionable territorial or political arrangements while insulated from large-scale U.S. or Israeli retaliation. Such behavior would not be irrational if a state were committed to destabilizing its adversaries, extending its influence, and undermining the territorial status quo. But it would be extremely dangerous and detrimental to the interests of the international community.⁷⁵

Nuclear optimists such as Barry Posen, "judging from cold war history," ar-

74. See, for example, Scott D. Sagan, "Sagan Responds to Waltz," in Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 157–158.

75. Scott D. Sagan voices similar concerns about a nuclear Iran. They are, however, based more on organizational shortcomings such as weak state control over military, intelligence, and scientific

gue that “while it’s possible that Iranian leaders would think this way, it’s equally possible that they would be more cautious.” Thus, they conclude, the world “can live with a nuclear Iran.”⁷⁶ Judging from the vantage point of recent South Asian history, however, the situation could be considerably more dangerous than optimistic scholars suggest. If the Iranians assess their strategic interests in a manner similar to the Pakistanis, they are unlikely to behave cautiously upon acquiring nuclear weapons. Instead they will adopt risky policies that have destabilizing effects similar to those in South Asia. As I have argued, although India and Pakistan have so far managed to resolve resulting crises without catastrophe, this outcome has in no way been guaranteed. Nor, unfortunately, will benign outcomes be guaranteed in future confrontations—either in South Asia or among newly nuclear states elsewhere in the world.

establishments than on states’ rational calculations of their strategic interest. See Sagan, “How to Keep the Bomb from Iran,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 5 (September/October 2006), pp. 45–59.
76. Barry R. Posen, “We Can Live with a Nuclear Iran,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2006.