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## Testing the Role of Nuclear Weapons in Pak-India Strategic Relations in Nuclearised South Asia during Crises from the Brasstacks Crisis (1986-87) to Mumbai Attacks (2008)

MUHAMMAD ASHIQ KHAN

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science  
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur  
Pakistan

Dr. SYED MUSSAWAR HUSSAIN BHUKHARI

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science  
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur  
Pakistan

### Abstract:

*The nuclear weapon experiments in May 1998 by India and Pakistan make them Nuclear weapon states. While studying Pakistan-India's rivalry it is evident that there was a significant role of nuclear weapons in Pakistan-India hostility much more before their nuclear tests in May 1998. In tracing the role of nuclear weapons between Pakistan - India's strategic rivalry, the first incident was the Brasstacks crisis (1986-87) when nuclear weapons role was seen by International community in South Asian region.*

**Key words:** Peaceful Nuclear explosion, Nuclearized South Asia, Strategic rivalry, Defensive deployment, Nuclear encounter, Gibraltar's operation, 'Cold Start' Doctrine.

### Introduction

Pakistan and India had a huge history of confrontation and mistrust. (Sridharan 2002, 59). Pakistan and India had been

engaged in conflict-oriented approach in their relations since their partition in 1947. Military approach dominated in Pakistan-India relations. India and Pakistan could never have had friendly relations instead they always remained involved in conflicts with each other, and it was unfortunate for both the countries (Kumar 2012, 6). Since the division of United India there remained misconceptions, wars, suspicions and disappointments. The two states could not develop mutual understanding and trust as there having many disputes which are still unresolved (Usman 2012, 1). Pakistan-India relations are dominated by distrust. The peace and stability in South Asia are facing a real threat because of the mistrust between Pak-India (Khalid 2012, 9). The relationships between Pakistan and India are always affected by enmity which is rooted in their historical legacy. Both the nations have major concerns of each other foreign and security policies (Kalim 2005, 61). From the very outset since their partition in 1947, Pakistan and India were busy in action and reaction processes. Mainly, it is the Kashmir issue which is the bone of contention between these two nuclear weapon States. In 1974, India went for an experiment called 'Peaceful Nuclear explosion'. In countering Indian threat Pakistan was also busy in acquiring nuclear weapon capability. As from the very outset any Indian threat is Pakistan's number one concern. About Pakistan's Foreign and defense policies Rais Rasul Baksh says that Pakistan has India oriented Foreign and defense policies (Bukhari 2011, 2).

Subsequently in May 1998 both countries openly did nuclear experiments in nuclearising the South Asian region. The experts' opinion about Stability/Instability is divided as some are advocating the view that it was due to nuclear weapons Pakistan and India never went for full scale war in nuclearized South Asia as nuclear weapons were deterring them. But unlike this opinion, some argue that due to the presence of nuclear weapons there is the strong possibility that in any crises Pakistan and India may go for nuclear

confrontation taking into account the irresponsible past of both countries toward each other. Generally speaking for permanent tranquility and peace of region both the nuclear countries must eliminate the differences which take them to the brink of the war.

## **Literature Review**

In South Asia a new shift of security came when the nuclear program reached to its culmination point resulting in the 'peaceful nuclear explosion' in the Rajasthan in 1974. Pakistan perceived the peaceful nuclear explosion an explosion not for peace but as a serious threat to the National Security and integrity of Pakistan. As the fact was that technically there was no difference between peaceful nuclear explosion and a weapon used for mass destruction that is Atom bomb. It is a fact that the Indian nuclear program was started much more before the 1974 experiment. The Pakistan nuclear program was started during Ayub Regime but the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 compelled then Prime Minister to fast its nuclear program. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto held the meeting of scientists in January 1972, very soon after the dismemberment of Pakistan, and knowing the importance of nuclear program in keeping in mind the hostility of India, Bhutto had his famous words "Pakistan would eat grasses if necessary in order to develop the nuclear bomb." (Amin 2010, 80).

The year 1998 has a significant importance for South-Asia in particular and for the World in general (Sridharan 2007, 9), when two hostile neighboring countries went for nuclear experiments openly in South Asia clearing all the doubts whether both countries had nuclear weapons capability in the past. (Javed 2010, 341-342) In May 1998 both Pakistan and India went for nuclear experiments in the same month. (Chakma 2005, 191). The nuclear experiments by two historically hostile countries were action-reaction processes.

(Dhanda 2009, 90) It was based on perception of historical rivalry between them. The nuclear experiments by two hostile neighbors proved that there came a new shift in security, that is a new security paradigm entered into the South Asia security environment (Khan & Shabir 2012, 421).

In tracing the role of nuclear weapons between Pakistan - India's strategic rivalry, the first incident was the Brasstacks crisis (1986-87) when nuclear weapons role was seen by International community in South Asian region. The Indian military exercise was perceived as a serious threat on Pakistani side perceiving the possibility that Indian military may try to divide Pakistan into South and Northern parts (Ghani 2012, 138). In May 1990 Pakistan and India again came close to the possibility of nuclear encounter. Reportedly Pakistan was also looking towards nuclear weapon capability option. (Cheema 2005, 6). It was also notable to check the role of nuclear weapons in Kargill episode. During the crisis of Kargill conflict, the role of nuclear weapons remained alarming. (Muhammad 2010, 56). The December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament was a shocking incident not only for India but also for Pakistan. The mentality of Indian government parliament attack was that the unsuccessful terrorist attacks on Indian parliament on December 13 were initiated by the elements of Lashkar e Tayyaba and Jaish e Muhammad which were based in Pakistan. This situation is alarming because Pakistan was giving financial aids for the last 20 years to the terrorists holding their activities in India. That time they tried to destroy the whole leadership of India with the help of their Pakistani masters. The question aroused was why Pakistan would try to do such a drastic thing and the only satisfactory answer lies in the defenseless two nation theory of Pakistan on which Pakistan was established. Pakistan had an awful history of democracy and it is hard for Pakistan to agree with the fact that India was a secular and self-confidant state and it has made its worth in the international community which is

unbearable for Pakistan. (Ministry of External Affairs Report 2002, 9).

The situation was further deteriorated between Pakistan and India when there was an attack in Indian Army camp in May 2002 in Kashmir. It is notable that these crises were in post 9/11 era. The Indian government fully utilizes its capabilities to show that Pakistan was the cause of state sponsor terrorism and thus getting sympathy of the International community while isolating Pakistan in International community. The adventures of terrorists, whatever their aims, were basically bringing the two neighbors of South Asia to the brink of the war. In response to the crises, the Pakistani government responded in appropriate and more responsible way. General Pervez Mushraf response was twofold because he said that India must provide evidence if Pakistan was directly engaged in those terrorists' attacks. He refused the direct involvement of Pakistan in those attacks. He further made it clear that if India tried to do any aggressive activity, she would have to face retaliation from Pakistan (Jones 2002, 301). After the 2001-2002 military standoff there came another incident when non-state actors were busy in attacks in Mumbai in November 2008. (Umbarin & Marium 2013, 29).

After the Mumbai attacks Indian prime minister indirectly warned Islamabad that India respect all her neighbours but if their territory was used for any terrorism, it would never be tolerated by India. He further warned that they would have to pay the price if they did not take any serious actions against all those terrorists (Jaspal 2008, 9).

## **Phase I (India-Pakistan Strategic Relations in Pre 9/11 Era)**

The nuclear weapon experiments in May 1998 by India and Pakistan make them Nuclear weapon states. While studying Pakistan- India's rivalry it is evident that there was a

significant role of nuclear weapons in Pakistan-India hostility much more before their nuclear tests in May 1998. In tracing the role of nuclear weapons between Pakistan - India's strategic rivalry, the first incident was the Brasstacks crisis (1986-87) when nuclear weapons' role was seen by International community in South Asian region.

### **The Brasstacks Crisis (1986-87)**

Brasstacks was an Indian military adventure near Sind province of Pakistani border having approximately 250,00 troops with mobile RAPID division. The Indian military exercise was perceived as a serious threat on Pakistani side perceiving the possibility that Indian military may try to divide Pakistan into South and Northern parts. In response to such serious adventure by Indian military Pakistani government responded in the same course in January 1987 while sending military to the borders in countering the Indian threat. The Indian side did defensive deployment in Punjab in January 23, which escalated the crises between Pakistan and India (Ghani 2012, 138).

While tracing the logic for which the Brasstacks adventure was initiated, Pervez Iqbal Cheema describes that the experts of Pakistan observed that probably India was trying to alleviate tension in her East Punjab province by waging war against Pakistan. The think tanks of India believed that the so called interference of Pakistan in her East Punjab must be crushed by indulging Pakistan into war in its local trouble place in Sind. It has been currently exposed that India intentionally endeavored to wage war against Pakistan to destabilize its national integrity and threaten its self confidence. Those threats were eased by Pakistan by deploying its armed forces and threatening India of its nuclear weapon capability (Cheema 2005, 4).

The Pakistani government mixed both aspects that are

both conventional forces capability and nuclear Weapon capability to answer the Indian threat.

In January 28, 1987 while giving interview to Kuldip Nayyar, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan's words worked for Brasstacks crisis that Pakistan must not be taken for granted by anyone. Pakistan made it clear to all and sundry that Pakistan may use its nuclear power if any threat is imposed to its integrity (Ghani 2012, 138-139).

The statements by the Pakistani side well affected the crisis. The crises ended without taking India and Pakistan to the full scale war.

### **1990 Crises between Pakistan and India**

In May 1990 Pakistan and India again came close to the possibility of nuclear encounter. The Kashmir issue was once again taking the two countries to the brink of the war. India was advocating that Pakistan was responsible for arming and training the local Kashmir rebels struggling for their independence. The Indian side deployed its forces on the border and then the Indian Prime Minister threatened that it was the dream for Pakistan to get away with Kashmir without fighting a war (Ghani 2012, 139).

In countering the Indian threat, the Pakistani army was also sent to border. Reportedly Pakistan was also looking towards nuclear weapon capability option. In *Sunday Times* the report of Adames described that it was picturised by the spy satellite of the USA that a large number of armed groups left the most confidential nuclear weapon complex of Kahuta and headed for military airfields (Cheema 2005, 6).

The nuclear weapon's role was again significant in the 1990 crises between Pakistan and India. As former defense official of India Subrahmanyam described, after Gibralters' operation of Pakistan in 1965 the war of 65 was fought. A similar action was not followed by India in 1990 (Cheema 2005,

8).

General Sundarji, former Army Chief of India, also described the same feelings that due to nuclear deterrence, the set of choices of Indian responses to Pakistani aggravation in Indian held Kashmir no longer includes initiating a bold odious push across the Punjab border (Cheema 2005, 8).

Generally speaking the nuclear weapon capability had a significant role during 1990 crises. At length, the crises of 1990 came to an end without taking the two countries to the brink of war.

### **Kargill War between Pakistan and India**

In May 1998, there came a new shift of security in South Asia. When India went for nuclear experiment, Pakistan, which always perceived India as number one enemy, also retaliated in the same fashion. Kargill war was fought between Pakistan and India under nuclear umbrella.

The Kargill war started between Pakistan and India when militants crossed the line of control in going on the other side of LOC. The Pakistani side cleared that Pakistani army was not with Mujahidin by saying that they were Kashmiris struggling for their independence but, on the contrary, the International community was not accepting Pakistani stance and was pressuring Pakistan to withdraw the fighters (Mian & Ramana 2003, 3).

The crises were severe ones, as Rawana and Zia mainly pointed that after the war and creation of Bangladesh in 1971, India used air force to initiate attacks against Pakistan. Pakistan, getting the sensitivity of the issue, put its air force on high alert and tested its air raid flights in capital city, Islamabad (Mian & Ramana 2003, 3).

When Indian forces had a strong position in the battle field and International pressure was troubling Pakistan diplomatically, the then prime minister of Pakistan, Mian

Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, went to USA where the president of America, Bill Clinton, told Nawaz Sharif that Pakistan should withdraw its forces or must be ready to total war with India. In addition Bill Clinton while having intelligence information also told Nawaz Sharif that the military of Pakistan was mobilizing their nuclear tipped missiles (Mian & Ramana 2003, 3).

In response to the American pressure, Nawaz Sharif ordered the Pakistani army to withdraw from fighting. During the crisis of Kargill conflict the role of nuclear weapons remained alarming. According to the British foreign minister Peter both the countries were on the brink of nuclear exchange in the time of severe crises (Muhammad 2010, 56). Discussing the possibility of nuclear escalation during Kargill crises, Shafiq-ur-Rehman described that during Kargill war both the countries threatened each other of nuclear explosion for 13 times in 35 days (Muhammad 2010, 56).

In addition, while discussing the nature of Kargill conflict, Shafiq-ur-Rehman says that it happened in almost 30 years that two of the nuclear rival states were engaged in military conflict. In 1960s and 1970s, China and USSR did not involve in air strikes and they did not have such rising potential at that time. India estimated 1300 lives and Pakistan 1700 lives in the conflict of Kargill (Muhammad 2010, 56).

Both India and Pakistan learned different lessons from the Kargill war. According to Pakistan it was nuclear weapon which was stopping India in showing a massive military attack. But on the other hand in nuclearised South Asia, India would be looking towards 'limited war option' in future without allowing a full scale nuclear war (Mian & Ramana 2003, 4).

In comparing the strategic position of India and Pakistan, Pakistan is compelled to see towards nuclear options in any crises with India. The actual outcome which Kargill war showed is that any future conflict between the two hostile countries may result in nuclear escalation.

## **Phase II (Post 9/11 developments and Pak-India's Strategic Relations)**

There came a new development in South Asian security environment when there were severe attacks on the twin towers of United States. The American Government was claiming that Al-Qaeda was behind the attacks, as there was a strong link between Al-Qaeda and Talibans. So, in waging war against militants in Afghanistan, the American Government needed Pakistani support. The Pakistani government which had strong links with the Talibans was in severe dilemma as India was already promising America for their support on 'war on Terror'. So, Pakistan made a right decision in this regard. It was seen that in Post 9/11 developments between Pakistan and India, the Indian side was busy in showing Pakistan's bad image by associating Pakistan with Terrorism Sponsoring entities, without acknowledging the fact that Pakistan is also a victim of Terrorism.

### **Military Standoff in 2001-2002 between Pakistan and India**

In December, 2001 the attack on the Indian parliament disturbed Pak-India relations. The Indian government clearly stated that Pakistani based Islamic organization Laskar-e-Taiba was responsible for attacking the Indian parliament. In addition, the Indian government also demanded that militant organizations, Lasker-e-Taiba and Jaesh-Muhammad, should immediately be banned by Pakistan, otherwise Pakistan would face the music. The Indian side, soon after the attack, cut off communication with Pakistan by recalling their Ambassador back to India. The troops were sent to the border. According to Fernandesthe, the Indian army was raring to leave (Mian & Ramana 2003, 5).

In 2002 in the month of May there were two attacks in Kashmir in a short time of two weeks. The Indian government once again stated that terrorists came from the Pakistan. In supporting their claim, India was saying that there was a Pakistani made chocolate bar in the pocket of one terrorist (Mian & Ramana 2003, 5).

The serious acts by terrorists made the possibility of nuclear escalation. In an address to the nation in March 2002, the president of Pakistan stated that Pakistan has got a strong military possession by the grace of Allah Almighty and Pakistani military is ready to crush any threat and aggression against it. Pakistan would teach an unforgettable lesson to all those who try to challenge the security and integrity of Pakistan (Cheema 2005, 12-13).

The statement of General Pervez Musharaf had significant importance as 'crushing reply' was possible by using nuclear option. During the crises of 2001-2002 there was a strong test of nuclear weapons role. Shafiq-ur-Rehman well described the situation that Pakistan and India came very close to a drastic conflict in January and May-June 2002. Pakistan was pressurized by India for a small traditional strike on terrorist training camps across LOC. Pakistan warned India that even a small conventional attack would lead to fuel the fires on all the confrontations with a nuclear potential. (Muhammad 2010, 57-58).

At length the danger of nuclear escalation was averted as International community intervened. In particular, the US role was prominent in averting nuclear escalation in South Asia. (Muhammad 2010, 58).

Learning lessons from military standoff of 2001-2002, the Indian side came up with new strategy that is the 'cold start strategy'. According to Pervez Iqbal Cheema, the cold start strategy may be understood on the basis that the neighbours with nuclear powers and bilateral interventions do not permit the gathering of troops and military adventures. Navy and IAF

may strike hard against the enemy but it would not be enough confrontation to provoke nuclear war (Cheema 2005, 13).

Indian 'Cold Start' Doctrine in the strategic environment of South Asia where Pakistan is much weaker than India in conventional force capability is a challenging task, as a limited war may be unlimited in nuclearised South Asia.

## **Mumbai attack and Pakistan-India Relations**

Pak -India relations were once again in trouble when militants from LeT by hijacking Indian trawler in Indian waters entered into Mumbai in November 2008. The terrorist's targets were Nariman House, Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus, TajMahal Hotel, Trident-Oberoi hotel and Leopold café. Nine terrorists were killed and one came under police custody (Black 2011, 50).

India government made Pakistan responsible for the Mumbai attack. The Indian mentality about Mumbai attack was that the government hardly takes responsibility of the country affairs when it is weak. The behaviour of Pakistan is an example which it had showed on different occasions. Some of the terrorist organizations in Pakistan are sending the terrorists in India to aggravate the situation. The terrorists are being sent to India via Nepal and Bangladesh, the route of LOC is also a way for Pakistan to send terrorists in India. They claimed that Pakistan is also using sea route to infiltrate terrorists in India. India claimed that a few activities have been done by sea but they also mentioned that India could not catch the 10 terrorists who were sent to India from Karachi on November 26. It is clear from the investigations that the Mumbai Attacks were carried out by Lashkar-e-Tayyab. It was made sure by India that the investigations are authentic because the investigations were carried out by all those countries whose citizens were killed in Mumbai attacks. India claimed that there was no doubt that the terrorists were having direct support of some Pakistani agencies (Scott 2011, 64).

During the crises, a person claiming to be Parnab Mukharje threatened President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari by a phone call on 18th of November. But few days later Pranab denied such a threat in a press conference (Black 2011, 50).

Indian stance was clear that Pakistan was responsible for the attacks. The president of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, replied in an appropriate fashion to such Indian claim by saying words to Manmohan Singh that he was stunned with that activity and expressed that the non-state actors must not get enough strength to impose upon government their own stance (Black 2011, 50).

The terrorist's attacks on Mumbai deteriorated Pak-India relations. Indian government thought limited war including air strikes on the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) centers in Pakistan (Ghani 2012, 144).

On December 19, 2008 Pranab Mukherjee threatened Pakistan by saying that Pakistan is forcing them to consider all the options by completely neglecting their stance. (Abdullah 2012, 10).

Pakistani information minister Sherry Rehman on 14<sup>th</sup> of December was claiming that the Pakistani air space has been violated by Indian air force fighters' jets one day earlier (Black 2011, 52).

There were two significant incidents on December 22. Firstly, Pakistani air force was doing exercises over Kashmir, Rawalpindi, Islamabad and Lahore. Secondly in the same day the Indian minister for external affairs Mukherjee, while talking to an Indian diplomat group, stated that any possible response to the attack has not been ignored by India attack (Black 2011, 52-53).

When there were Pakistani air force exercises, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, the Army chief of Pakistan, told Admiral Mullen that Pakistan is in complete favour of having friendly relations with India and Pakistan wants peace in the region. But any sort of aggression from India will be given an

equal response (Black 2011, 53).

Air Marshal P.K. Barbora, the head of western air command of India, on December 24, while talking to local press, stated that 5000 targets in Pakistan for aircrafts had been allocated by India (Black 2011, 53).

Pakistani side in late December sent infantry unit to eastern side of the border. The *New York Times* reported that the Pakistan force was made red alert (Black 2011, 53).

However, learning the lesson from 2001-2002 military standoff Indian Side was clear that under Nuclear umbrella full scale war was not feasible (Ghani 2012, 144).

The role of nuclear weapons was significant during Mumbai crises. According to Roy Chaudhury, the former Indian army chief of staff that India restrained herself to impose a military attack on Pakistan due to the nuclear weapons which Pakistan possesses. It was due to the nuclear weapons' possession of Pakistan that India did not retaliate after the attacks on parliament in 2001 (Ghani 2012, 144).

## **Conclusion**

While examining Pak-India crises from Brasstacks to Mumbai it is evident that there was a strong role of nuclear weapons during crises. Apparently it stopped Pakistan-India in going to the war, but while knowing the bad historical observations between Pakistan-India relations, any limited conflict may be unlimited and uncontrollable in nuclearized South Asia.

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