

Nuclearization of South Asia and the Future of Non-Proliferation

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Abstract

The global concerns regarding the dangers posed by nuclear proliferation have aggravated since Pakistan and India joined the nuclear club as de-facto members. The NPT was introduced as a cornerstone to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons, however, it has lost its efficacy because of the super powers interests and priorities. Current status of South Asia, where the nuclear conundrum prevails, is the result of fluctuating US Non-Proliferation policy towards the region. However, NPT is the only effective tool available to contain the aspirations of more states to follow the South Asian example. Therefore, international community should devise a comprehensive strategy for the imposition of true spirit of NPT both vertically and horizontally. This paper covers three areas concerning nuclear proliferation; the evolution of non-proliferation efforts, the implications of South Asian nuclearization and the future of non-proliferation in the wake of South Asian nuclearization.

“I have in mind the spiritual aberration that I call nuclearism, the exaggerated dependence upon, even worship of, nuclear weapons. We embrace the weapons for purpose of safety and security, and seek in them a means of keeping the world going, a form of salvation. Nuclear winter contributes to our imagination by making it clear that the end point of nuclearism is extinction.”¹

Robert J. Lifton

In the contemporary security environment, the most potent challenge to global peace and security is the spread of nuclear weapons. The international security environment remained tense during the 40 years of the Cold War under the fear of a possible nuclear war. The end of the Cold War mitigated the fear of nuclear annihilation but the global concerns were revived by the nuclearization of the South Asia in May 1998 when India conducted its nuclear tests and Pakistan followed suit to maintain the regional balance of power. The instruments of US nuclear non-proliferation policy, sanctions and incentives towards South Asia appeared to have failed.² The US imposed mandatory sanctions and had identified five bench marks for their removal;³

- 1) Curb on further development or deployment of nuclear capable missiles and aircraft
- 2) Accession to Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)
- 3) Participation in Fissile Material Cut off Treaty (FMCT) negotiations
- 4) Curbs on the transfer of nuclear technology and hardware, and
- 5) India and Pakistan dialogue on normalization of relations.

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However, the events of 9/11 put across new considerations regarding nuclear proliferation. On the one hand the concerns regarding further proliferation and fear of possible acquisition of nuclear weapons by terrorists or rogue regimes enhanced.⁴ While on the other hand, in the aftermath of these events the US reversed its non-proliferation policy towards South Asia keeping in view the geopolitical realities. The US disregarded proliferation concerns and entitled India as a “Strategic Partner” and Pakistan as a “Major Non-NATO Ally.”

Acquisition of nuclear weapon by two South Asian rivals has far reaching implications for the NPT and NPR (Non-Proliferation Regime). However, for the time being, nuclearization of South Asia has put forwarded three major challenges that are required to be managed at the earliest, which are prevention of proliferation, spread of nuclear weapons and arms race. Keeping in view these realities, this paper would briefly discuss the evolution of global non-proliferation efforts and future of non-proliferation in the light of South Asian nuclearization.

Evolution of Non-Proliferation Efforts

The harrowing events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki jolted the minds and hearts of the international community. World’s visualization about the dangers posed by possible use of nuclear weapons set the stage to carry out the efforts to avoid such eventualities in the future. As nuclear technology can be used for dual purposes and its peaceful look is even more valuable than destructive, so the major challenge for global efforts was how to manage the balance between civility and incivility in the flow/use of this technology.

To serve such purposes, the US introduced the ‘Atom for Peace’ program in the 1950s, ‘aimed at fostering civil cooperation and gaining control over the inevitable spread of nuclear activities’⁵ but conversely, this arrangement aggravated the situation and set the stage for further proliferation. Resultantly, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) came into being about four decades ago aimed at enhancing civil nuclear cooperation, curtailing further spread of nuclear weapons and with the ultimate objective of comprehensive global disarmament. Despite too many loopholes it covers 190 states and constitutes the only effective check to counter and restrict the further spread of this lethal technology. In the past this treaty proved successful but at present it has lost its efficacy and its future seems dim especially after the Indo-Pakistan nuclear tests of May 1998.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was established in 1957 as a policing authority to regularize and manage the worldwide nuclear activities. But unfortunately it neither has the credibility nor the legal grounds to make sure the implementation of NPT, because almost all the relevant arrangements are in the hands of five Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) recognized by the NPT. However, the UN and IAEA tried to restore the credibility of Non-Proliferation efforts. In 2004, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed resolution 1540, stressing upon the states to formulate norms and laws and tight domestic administrative structure to avoid the proliferation of illicit nuclear technology. Nonetheless, the role of these *de-jure* states in the entire game remained dual and discriminatory and these states always undermine the issue of non-proliferation for the sake of their national interests, as recently transpired by the Indo-US nuclear deal.

Nuclearization of South Asia: Ramifications

Since the enforcement of Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1971 and Indian 'Peaceful Nuclear Explosion' in 1974 up to May 1998 Indo-Pakistan nuclear tests, South Asia was the focal point of Non-Proliferation efforts. The events of May 1998 further aggravated the situation and turned the region into as President Bill Clinton once said "the most dangerous place on earth." As a result of these nuclear tests, global non-proliferation efforts received a serious set back. The resultant chain reaction, the undeclared arms race and the likelihood of nuclear weapons being used in war, immensely increased the global non-proliferation concerns.

In the South Asian context we can not rule out the possibility of these weapons being used during the war, however, diverging views are being forwarded on the issue. For some, nuclearization of South Asia has built up the deterrence, possibility of conflict has been reduced in the region and peace has become a strategic compulsion. For others, the nuclearization has increased the possibilities of entirely destructive conflicts. People from the second school of thought explain four such possible scenarios in which nuclear weapon can be used; 'First would be the situation in which one country with the intention to destroy the other initiates a nuclear war. In the second scenario, the two countries can drift into such a war without intentions. In the third, one adversary can start a nuclear war due to an inaccurate information and miscalculation about the intention of the other. And finally, it can occur accidentally due to the failure of some technical device.'⁶ Following are some of the ramifications of South Asian nuclearization;⁷

- Serious setback to Non-Proliferation Regime (NPR)
- Regional security has been jeopardized and it has become the most dangerous place
- The quest of other threshold nuclear countries for nuclear weapons has been enhanced
- Peace and stability in the world has been negatively affected

Future of Non-Proliferation

Future of non-proliferation depends on the efficacy of Non-Proliferation Treaty and the strength of Non-Proliferation Regime. In the wake of South Asian nuclearization, the efficacy of NPT has been seriously eroded, as the confidence of member states has been shattered. The situation has been further deteriorated because of the double standards of the US nuclear non-proliferation policies and discrimination in the implementation of NPT. Recent conclusion of Indo-US nuclear deal could prove a last blow to the Non-Proliferation efforts, as the very nation that created the NPR is itself violating its values and norms. The US policy is dual; on the one hand it has adopted preemptive doctrine to curtail the nuclear efforts of some states such as Iran and North Korea; the NPT signatories, and on the other hand it has turned blind eyes over the acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Israel; the non NPT signatories. As recently US has lifted thirty years bar on the sale of civil nuclear technology to India by describing it as "a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology".⁸ Presently, the only potential threat to the credibility of NPR is the US nuclear policies. In words of Jimmy Carter;

“The United State is the major culprit in the erosion of the NPT. While claiming to be protecting the world from proliferation threats in Iraq, Libya, Iran and North Korea... they also have abandoned past pledges and now threaten first use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states.”⁹

The US is the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons and presently spending \$40 billion per annum on the maintenance and modernization of nuclear forces, and has 10,000 warheads of which 2000 are on the red alert.¹⁰ Now, the small counties began to justify their right of nuclear weapons under the super power principle, ‘without nuclear power there is no security’.¹¹ There is an important question in the minds of policy makers of these countries that want to acquire nuclear weapons that if the US and other powers have the right to develop nuclear weapons to ensure its security, why don’t they have? As according to McNamara, “I would characterize current US Nuclear Weapons Policy as immoral, illegal, militarily unnecessary and dreadfully dangerous.”¹² John Burroughs, the Executive Director of the Lawyer’s Committee on Nuclear Policies rightly concluded;

“The US reliance on the nuclear weapons as a core element of its national security has always created serious tension within the non-proliferation regime, because it reinforced the double standards; some countries can have nuclear weapons, other can not. But the Bush Administration antagonism to multilateralism, articulation of an aggressive doctrine of preventive war and the aggressive statements about possible use of nuclear weapons have placed enormous strain on non-proliferation negotiations, so much so that many fear for its survival.”¹³

In the past NPT produced significant results in restricting the spread of lethal nuclear technology. Although, there is divergent views regarding the efficacy of NPT but there is greater consensus on the evenhanded success of NPT. Those who believe on the success of NPT forward the rationale that the rate of proliferation has declined with the implementation of NPT, only few countries became member of the nuclear club, and only few countries now are interested in acquiring nuclear weapons.¹⁴ There is a common perception that if there had been no NPT, the total number of nuclear weapons states (NWS) might have reached 30 or 40 by now. Today we have only eight, with one or two still trying to reach nuclear weapons status.¹⁵

However, the future of NPT is highly uncertain because of its inherent flaws. The most important is that since its enforcement 37 years have gone but its obligation regarding the disarmament is still not implemented. And secondly, NPT has too many dual clauses such as its exit clause reveals the right of states that they can withdraw from the treaty if extraordinary events jeopardize their supreme interests. This reflects that all states have a right to develop nuclear weapons to ensure their security.¹⁶ This is also accepted by the US;

“After the NPT, many nations can be expected to take advantage of the terms of the treaty to produce quantities of fissionable material...In this way; various nations will attain a well developed option on a bomb. A number of nations will be able to detonate a

bomb within a year following withdrawal from the treaty; other may even shorten this period.”¹⁷

Whereas the future of non-proliferation is concerned, it seems highly uncertain and we cannot forecast successes or failure of non-proliferation efforts. However, day by day the situation is getting worse due to irresponsible and dual behavior of P-5s. According to Ronald Trimberbaev, “we have been witnessing increased international cooperation in combating the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the spread of dangerous material. However, one has to admit that this continuous struggle is becoming more and more complex and demanding.”¹⁸ In this regard one UN report also indicated that “we are approaching a point at which the erosion of the non-proliferation regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation.”¹⁹

Nuclear weapons, which are millions time more powerful than the same mass of conventional explosives, can kill thousand or more people in blinking of an eye, can ruin a large city and with a spillover ramifications of contaminated radioactive waves that can turn even the generations into sufferers.²⁰ The only solution to restrain such obliteration is the abolition of nuclear weapons from the earth. In this regard Robert McNamara rightly said that “human fallibility means that a nuclear war, which could destroy the present civilization, was ultimately inevitable unless the goal of universal nuclear disarmament was pursued to its logical end.”²¹ Andrei Sakhrov said that

“A very large nuclear war would be a calamity of indescribable proportion and absolutely unpredictable consequences, with the uncertainties tending towards the worst... all out nuclear war would mean the destruction of contemporary civilization, throw man back centuries, cause death of hundreds of millions or billions of people, and with a certain degree of probability, would cause man to be destroyed as a biological species.”²²

Conclusion

The international community has failed to manage the issue of non-proliferation in an appropriate manner. As NPT is the only tool available to control the spread of nuclear weapons, therefore it is essential to implement it in a comprehensive manners. NPT has two objectives to achieve; Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. There is a need to give equal preference to both and the ultimate objective should be the elimination of nuclear weapons rather than limiting their possession.

Nuclearization of the South Asia coupled with the rise of terrorism has given a new foresight to the issue and now it requires comprehensive and multilateral approach for settlement. The issue requires new approach by the P-5s, especially the US, who is exploiting the condition rather than containing it. These countries should revise their present nuclear policies.

The NPR is passing through the most critical time because the priorities of super powers have changed significantly in the aftermath of 9/11. The US refusal to sign CTBT and its encouragement of nuclear hegemonic states like India and Israel compelled many other states to follow the South Asian example. However, in the case

of South Asia, nuclearization of the region would unlikely result in the growth of more states aspiring to have nuclear weapons in the near future but the recent developments within the region and elsewhere have serious impact on the global non-proliferation regime. This is both in terms of other states contemplating the acquisition of nuclear weapons and increased risks of their use during the wars and conflicts.

End Notes

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