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## The Stability of Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: The Clash between State and Anti-state Actors

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. mainland have transformed calculations about the threats posed by non-state actors, especially those who are inspired largely by a global, anti-state ideology such as al-Qaeda's pan-Islamist vision. Post-September 11, the old threat of nuclear holocaust has acquired a new dimension, i.e., the possible possession and use of nuclear weapons by terrorists and extremist movements. In Afghanistan, structural designs for nuclear weapons and other such materials were confiscated from underground hideouts of the al-Qaeda terrorist group. Much has been said about the stability and instability of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan since the late 1980s. The proponents of nuclear deterrence in South Asia, who argue that the introduction of nuclear weapons has prevented the outbreak of a large-scale conflict between India and Pakistan, generally belong to the "state-as-a-rational-actor" school of thought. On the other side are those who worry about the new threat posed by the intrusion of non-state actors, or perhaps, more accurately, "anti-state actors," and their agendas, which are widely perceived as "irrational" in their ideological orientation

(Wahabism today as was Maoism in the 1960s).[1] Since their ultimate stated objective is the destruction of the modern international system based on nation-states, they should, therefore, be described as anti-state actors in nature and purpose.

Why should we pay greater attention to the role and perspective of anti-state actors in our discussion of the stability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia? Non-state or anti-state actors have twice brought nuclear-armed Pakistan and India to the brink of a war since September 11, which could have escalated to the nuclear level. Despite recent efforts at de-escalation, the danger of war remains high as Islamist militants in Kashmir and elsewhere have the potential and reasons to re-ignite tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad by doing something so outrageous and provocative that India would feel compelled to retaliate.[2] Interestingly, India has now appropriated the Bush administration's doctrine of preemption. A number of recent developments—such as the emergence of pro-Taliban Islamic parties as the third-largest force in Pakistan's October 2002 parliamentary elections, Islamabad's seemingly half-hearted efforts to tackle the al-Qaeda menace, revelations of Pakistan-North Korea nuclear/missile proliferation nexus, and last but not least, the Indian government's growing disillusionment with Washington's reluctance to get tough with Pakistan for fear of destabilizing the Musharraf regime—suggest that the conditions surrounding the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff are likely to worsen over the next few years.[3] The two nuclear-armed countries have also embarked upon an arms-buying spree, preparing themselves for the next war.

1. For most Wahabis, the ideal Islamic state was the one in Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban, where women were subjugated, laughter and song forbidden, and only an intolerant, absolutist form of Islam permitted. See Craig S. Smith, "A Movement in Saudi Arabia Pushes toward an Islamic Ideal," *New York Times*, 9 December 2002), 1.

2. In a recent interview with British Broadcasting Corporation's *Hardtalk* program, India's National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra warned that "if something big were to happen…" India would not hesitate to hit back. See "Pak's Done Absolutely Nothing, U.S. Promised More: Mishra Hardtalk," *Indian Express*, 28 November 2002, 1; C. W. Dugger, "India-Pakistani Tensions Subside, but Nuclear Fear Is Far from Over," *New York Times*, 20 June 2002, 1; Rory McCarthy, "Dangerous Game of State-sponsored Terror that Threatens Nuclear Conflict," *The Guardian* (London), 25 May 2002, 1.

3. David W. Jones, "India Hits West on Terror Tactics," *Washington Times*, 14 November 2002, 1; Sudha Ramachandran, "India: US Credibility on the Line," *Asia Times Online*, 27 July 2002, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/archive/7_27_2002.html.

A nuclear war between India and Pakistan would signal not only the
failure of nuclear deterrence but would also mean the victory of anti-
state actors and could result in the collapse of the global nuclear non-
proliferation regime. Indeed, many security specialists have argued
that the main risk of terrorists obtaining deadly weapons comes from
individuals and groups acting outside state control, people such as sci-
entists and technicians with extremist Islamist beliefs in Pakistan or
criminals and traders in the former Soviet Union.[4] There is a growing
consensus that Islamist militants in the region with close ties to
Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network pose a great danger to their
governments, and a credible threat to both regional and global secu-
rity. Operations against al-Qaeda in Pakistan clearly have been less
than successful, and General Musharraf's ability to control *jihadi*
groups is severely limited. An important objective of the global anti-
terrorism campaign is to keep nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive
material out of the hands of anti-state actors such as terrorist organ-
izations, rogue regimes, and violent sub-national groups.[5]

This paper focuses on the linkage between religious radicalism and
nuclear deterrence in South Asia from the perspectives of both state
and anti-state actors. It begins with outlining the conditions of stable
nuclear deterrence and examines the presence or absence of those
conditions by highlighting the growing gulf between the state-centric
perspective and the perspective of anti-state actors, which makes
nuclear deterrence highly unstable in South Asia.

## Definitions and Some Caveats

BEFORE OUTLINING IN DETAIL what this paper is about, it will be use-
ful to state at the outset what it is not about. This paper is not about
the effects of a nuclear war in South Asia, nor will it focus on the
nuclear weapons capabilities of India and Pakistan. Nor does it out-
line different scenarios of a nuclear war in South Asia that have been

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4. Paul Richter, "Pakistan's Nuclear Wild Card," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September
2001, 1; Brad Knickerbocker, "Nuclear Attack a Real, if Remote, Possibility," *Christian
Science Monitor*, 31 October 2001; David C. Isby, "When the Last Taboo Is Broken,"
*Washington Times*, 13 August 2002, 17.
5. Elizabeth Neuffer, "A U.S. Concern: Pakistan's Arsenal," *Boston Globe*, 16 August
2002, 1; Rose Gottemoeller and Thomas Graham Jr., "Dampen Nuclear Dangers in
India and Pakistan," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 November 2001.

extensively discussed elsewhere.[6] However, there will be some discussion of possible scenarios of anti-state actors gaining hold of nuclear weapons in the context of instability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia.

What is an anti-state actor? An anti-state actor is defined as a religious extremist ideology or movement with political objectives that seeks to establish regional and/or global supremacy and advocates the destruction of the modern state system through unconventional warfare, including the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The phenomenon of weak and failing states in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East and the inability of governments in many countries to prevent their territories from serving as sanctuary to terrorists and criminal syndicates, have created a fertile ground for anti-state actors to engage in terrorism, acquisition of WMD, illegal drug trafficking, or other illicit activities across state borders. For the purposes of this paper, the term anti-state actor is preferred because non-state actors might imply benign actors, sometimes also seen as do-gooders. Above all, non-state actors, by and large, accept the primacy and legitimacy of the nation-state actor in the international system. Anti-state actors such as al-Qaeda, on the other hand, do not accept the legitimacy of the international system based on nation-states. Their belief in the sovereignty of Allah and the pre-eminence of the *Ummah* (Islamic community) over the nation-state overrides the primacy of the people's will, the government and the state. The state level is "bypassed and ignored" because, as Olivier Roy argues, "Islamists do not care about the state—they even downgraded Afghanistan by changing the official denomination from an 'Islamic State' to an 'Emirate.' Mollah Omar [did] not care to attend the council of ministers, nor to go to the capital … This new brand of supranational neo-fundamentalism is more a product of contemporary globalization than of the Islamic past."[7]

Furthermore, "Islamists see Islam not as a mere religion, but as a *political ideology* that should be integrated into all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy, etc.). This form

6. For example, see Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "India and Pakistan at the Edge," *Survival* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 69–86; James Manor, "How a War Could Go Nuclear," *International Herald Tribune* [hereafter *IHT*], 27 May 2002.
7. Olivier Roy, *The Changing Patterns of Radical Islamic Movements*, CSNS Policy Paper 2 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, November 2002), 15.

of Islamism is de-territorialized, supranational…[and does] not care about borders and national interests."[8] Arguing that Islam is not only the only true religion but is also the very antithesis of nationalism, Islamists demand the establishment of one universal Islamic Emirate, ruled by a single Caliph.[9] Their rhetoric of universal Islamic brotherhood is one that transcends national boundaries and, indeed, seeks to portray nation-states as un-Islamic.[10] This is so because the ultimate goal of these anti-state actors is to wage *jihad* (holy war) to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate (religious political order) throughout the world by working with allied extremist groups to overthrow governments they deem "non-Islamic" and by expelling non-Muslims from Muslim territories or converting them to Islam. A pan-Islamic Caliphate is supposed to "recreate the golden age of the first decades of Islam and supercede tribal, ethnic and national divides, whose resilience is attributed to the believers' abandonment of the true tenets of Islam or to colonial policy."[11] To Islamists, since "the ummah is one," the present division of the Muslims into many nation-states is unacceptable. Therefore, "armed jihad must continue until Islam, as a way of life, dominates the whole world and until Allah's law is enforced everywhere in the world."[12] Obviously, there is nothing holy about the holy war being waged by anti-state actors such as al-Qaeda, International Islamic Jihad and International Islamic Front.[13] The fact that extremist, totalitarian ideologies have never had much popular appeal does not seem to discourage these groups and movements. That is why Russian President Putin recently dismissed the idea of World Islamic Caliphate as "crazy" as Hitler's idea of global dominance.

8. Ibid., 2.

9. It should be added, however, that their opposition to nationalism does not stop the Islamists from creating more Islamic states. If anything, they see the creation of more Islamic states as a prelude to a grand unity of all Muslims that will eventually lead to the establishment of a global Islamic Caliphate.

10. "Democratic System versus Islamic Polity," http://www.dawacenter.com/magazinevoiceofislam/feb00/democracyvsislam.html, cited in Yoginder Sikand, "Islamist Militancy in Kashmir: The Case of the Lashkar-I-Tayyeba." Unpublished Paper, 2002, 7.

11. Roy, *The Changing Patterns,* 2.

12. *Jihad: The Foreign Policy of the Islamic State,* http://www.dawacenter.magazines/voiceofislam/sept99/jihad.html, cited in Sikand, "Islamist Militancy in Kashmir."

13. See Robert G. Wirsing, "Political Islam and 'Unholy War' in Asia" (paper presented at the Conference on Growth & Governance in Asia, sponsored by the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 12–14 March 2002).

Yet another reason for the usage of the term anti-state actors is that "non-state actor" implies that the actor is either independent or outside the control of the state. The so-called non-state actors in South Asia have long enjoyed the direct or indirect support of the governments of the day and military establishments. As so often happens in such cases, many of these non-state actors gradually developed their own agendas and eventually turned against their own mentors, thereby assuming the character of anti-state actors. It is worth remembering that unprecedented terrorist attacks on the U.S. military and economic citadels on September 11 would not have occurred if Pakistan's government had shown zero tolerance for bin Laden and al-Qaeda's activities on Pakistani soil and from Afghanistan. The multinational *Mujahideen* force, which the United States had supported against the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, has now transformed itself into a multinational hydra-headed Islamist fundamentalist monster. The successive Pakistani governments—civilian as well as military—created, nourished, maintained and encouraged the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, *Jaish-e-Muhammed*, *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*, Markazdawa, *Dawat-ul-Irshad*, *Taliban*, *al-Qaeda*'s International Islamic Front, and a dozen other terrorist outfits on its soil to wage proxy wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir.[14] Pakistan military's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is widely believed to have helped engineer the unholy alliance of pro-Taliban, pro-al-Qaeda Islamic radicals during the October 2002 elections who now control two provinces bordering and half the seats in the Pakistani Senate.[15] These radical organizations have played a destructive role in Pakistan's nation- and state-building process. They simultaneously pursue anti-state or transnational activity on behalf of Islam, activity that "blurs the identity and the frontiers of the nation-state."[16] Whether one calls them an anti-state actor or transnational actor or supranational actor or a virtual state, the nature of the threat they pose to two nuclear-armed belligerents with disputed histories and disputed borders cannot be underestimated.

14. As one senior Pakistani bureaucrat had observed in 1999: "Unfortunately our policy towards Afghanistan has become intimately linked to our policy to Kashmir. It's difficult to see how we can disengage from one without harming the other." Cited in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 November 1999.

15 See Stanley A. Weiss, "Which Islam? Reformers Need the Military," *IHT*, 19 December 2002.

16. Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 145.

An important caveat is that the followers of Islam live in a world
of independent but increasingly interdependent states with compet-
ing global and domestic interests, as well as religious and cultural
diversity. It is acknowledged that the foreign policies of Islamic states
are influenced more by geopolitics than by their religion. Even
Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran had emphasized that interests of the
state precede the interests of Islam. A pan-Islamist movement has
never taken root nor is it likely to do so in an increasingly intercon-
nected and interdependent world. The notion of monolithic Islam is
oxymoronic. The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) is a
divided house, more often at war within than without. The world
Islamic community (the Ummah) is neither monolithic nor a cohe-
sive political force. The overwhelming majority of Muslims are mod-
erate, peace-loving, and law-abiding and they do not support the rad-
ical Wahabi/Salafi/Deobandi/Barelvi version of intolerant/
absolutist/totalitarian/obscurantist/anti-modern Islam. Nor is there
a single interpretation of the Quranic teachings. More and more
Muslims are criticizing radical Islamic groups such as the Taliban
and al-Qaeda and accusing them of "hijacking" their religion in
order to further destructive political goals. Arguing that "the genius
of early Muslim-Arab civilization was its multi-cultural, multi-reli-
gious and multi-ethnic diversity," a prominent scholar Ahmed
Rashid attributes "the stunning and numerous state failures … in
the Muslim world today" to the abandonment of "that original path,
that intention and inspiration … either in favor of brute dictator-
ship or a narrow interpretation of theology."[17] Unfortunately, the
moderates in the last half-century have been progressively relegated
to the intellectual and political margins of Islamic society by Wahabi
Islam. The Wahabis are crude literalists in matters of religious inter-
pretation and promote a simplistic and utopian vision of Islam as
"authentic," and perceive most of the political and social values of
modernity to be antithetical to Islam. It is a well-known fact that
poor governance, autocratic rule, denial of fundamental freedoms
and lack of education and employment opportunities in the Islamic
societies with growing populations are being exploited by radical
movements offering their perverted version of "Islam as the only

17. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*
(London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 212.

solution."[18] If we are to avoid a real clash between civilizations as prophesied by Samuel Huntington, it is important that the clash within Islamic civilization that has pitted fundamentalists, theocrats, exclusivist and mono-cultural radicals, obscurantists, traditionalists, clerics and political fanatics on the one hand and progressives, democrats, secular, inclusivist, multi-cultural and pluralist Islamic forces and modernizers on the other hand, is won by the latter. Unlike Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism, Islam has never undergone any update, reformation or enlightenment from within since its inception in the seventh century.[19] Since the main source of Islamist extremism is the ideological and financial support provided by the House of Sauds and other Gulf Sheikhdoms, socio-political reform and liberalization of political culture would be a harbinger of growth and prosperity in the Middle East and South Asia.

And finally, while looking at the impact of Islamist extremist forces on the stability of nuclear deterrence in the Indian subcontinent, it is very difficult to ignore related developments in the Middle East and Central Asia. In fact, the links among these areas have become so strong in recent years that limiting our discussion to South Asia alone

18. Nearly all Muslim societies without exception have undemocratic, totalitarian and fascist regimes representing various shades of social, cultural and intellectual deprivation. Militants are using the language of Islam to challenge the state. The weakness of the state in responding to the challenges posed by radical movements has led to the hollowing out of institutions. Even countries that claim to be "moderate Muslim countries" have serious fundamentalist problems (e.g., Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh). The phrase "moderate Muslim countries" says it all. There is no parallel with "moderate Christian country" or "moderate Hindu country" or "moderate Buddhist country." Those who oppose the Islamists argue that there is a cultural precondition for democracy, including individualism, civility, tolerance, and willingness to compromise in the interest of harmony, and that Islamists lack these basic essential qualifications. Eric A. Vas, "The Muslim World and Globalisation," *Journal of the United Services Institution of India* 130, no. 539 (January–March 2000): 138–41.

19. Thomas L. Friedman, "An Islamic Reformation," *New York Times*, 4 December 2002. A powerful antidote to Islamist Wahabism could be Islamic Protestantism, which would rescue Islam from mullahs, mosque and madrassas. "Like Christianity, Islam is a universal faith that envisions the ultimate transformation of the world in its image. But unlike large parts of Christianity in our time, Islam has yet to consider the option of religious pluralism based on the equality of faiths. For Islam, only two options exist: to dominate or be dominated. Islam's challenge is to balance its vision of itself as a faith that dominates the world with humility that concedes the need for religious restraint in a world threatened with nuclear destruction," writes Yossi Klein Halevi, "Islam's Outdated Domination Theology," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December 2002.

may not be appropriate and we need to find new terms to describe
them. However, what distinguishes South Asia from the Middle East is
the presence of nuclear weapons by *both* the combatants: Pakistan and
India. The nuclear weapons capabilities of India and Pakistan invariably
have an impact on the security environment of the Middle East and
Asia, and are, in turn, influenced by the developments in the secret-and-
not-so-secret WMD programs of Israel, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.[20]

That said, the objective of this paper is a fairly modest one, that is,
explaining the key arguments of those who doubt the stability of
nuclear deterrence in South Asia primarily due to the emergence and
intrusion of anti-state actors whose survival depends on the destruc-
tion of states to establish a global Islamic Caliphate based on their
pan-Islamist vision.

## The Conditions of Stable Nuclear Deterrence

IN A STUDY PUBLISHED at the end of the Cold War, Lewis Dunn iden-
tified a set of conditions, broadly divided into political, technical and
situational conditions, which contributed to the non-use of nuclear
weapons and stable deterrence between the United States and the
Soviet Union during the Cold War era.[21] He compared the situation
prevailing in conflict-prone regions such as South Asia and the Middle
East, and pronounced his verdict: the proliferation of nuclear
weapons in Asia will not lead to stable deterrence between combat-
ants. (See Table 1 on the following page.)

Let us take the *political conditions* first. If the stakes are limited,
nuclear deterrence can work. If the stakes are too high, for example,
if the survival of the nation-state is at stake, as, for example, in Israel's
case, then nuclear deterrence cannot work. As for political accounta-
bility and stable leadership, in a democracy nuclear weapons remain
under the control of the civilian leadership but nuclear decision mak-
ing still takes place in a closed circle. However, in dictatorial, military-
dominated regimes, military leaders sometimes have a tendency to
link their personal well-being or regime survival with national survival
and could sometimes be prepared to "go down with their state" rather

20. See, for example, Anwar Iqbal, "U.S. Studies Pakistan, Saudi N-ties: Report,"
*Dawn* (Karachi), 2 August 2002, 1.
21. Lewis A. Dunn, *Controlling Nuclear Proliferation* (London: IISS, Adelphi Paper no.
263, winter 1991). Discussion in this section is based on this study.

**Table 1.** Conditions of stable nuclear deterrence

| | USA | USSR/ Russia | South Asia |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Political* | | | |
| Limited stakes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Political accountability | Yes | Yes | Yes/No |
| Institutional restraints | Yes | Yes | Yes/No |
| Stable leaders | Yes | Yes | Yes/No |
| Predictability | Yes | Yes | No |
| Low risk taking | Yes | Yes | ? |
| *Technical* | | | |
| Stable peacetime operations | Yes | Yes | ? |
| Survivable force | Yes | Yes | Yes/No |
| High accident proofing | Yes | Yes | ? |
| Effective command and control | Yes | Yes | ? |
| Operational effectiveness | Yes | Yes | ? |
| Less provocative alert/exercise procedures | Yes | Yes | Yes/No |
| *Situational* | | | |
| Bipolarity | Yes | Yes | No |
| No common borders | Yes | Yes | No |
| Gradual deployment | Yes | Yes | ? |
| Nuclear learning | Yes | Yes | ? |

*Source:* Adapted from Lewis A. Dunn, *Controlling Nuclear Proliferation* (London: IISS, Adelphi Paper no. 263, Winter 1991), 24.

than accept the loss of power and military defeat. Predictability of opponent's capabilities, intentions and policies is more difficult and open to misinterpretation in newly emerging nuclear powers. Long histories of confrontation, lack of communication, hatred and dislike at the leadership level, desire for revenge and dangerous notions of religious/racial superiority could lead to misunderstandings, misperceptions and miscalculations.

Second are *technical requirements*. There are many questions regarding
the new nuclear powers' ability to meet the technical requirements of
stable nuclear deterrence. Lack of technical skills, effective command
and control, survivability, safety, untested procedures and plans, and
lack of financial resources could be problematic in achieving stable
nuclear deterrence.

And finally, the *situational context*. Nuclear deterrence during the
Cold War worked in a bilateral setting. The future of nuclear con-
frontations in South Asia or the Korean Peninsula may not be limited
to just two parties and would certainly involve China. Managing a tri-
lateral nuclear power balance could be very complex and potentially
unstable. In other respects also, the situational context in the case of
India and Pakistan differs sharply from that between the two nuclear
superpowers. With common (and disputed) borders, limited crises
have the potential to escalate to threaten national survival. The new
nuclear powers also may not share the view of the old nuclear states
that nuclear weapons are of little use in wresting political or military
concessions from others or in changing the territorial status quo.

Though Lewis Dunn did not take into account the role of anti-state
actors such as al-Qaeda or the freelance factor of terrorism when he
outlined his conditions of stable nuclear deterrence in 1991, he
nonetheless provides a sound theoretical framework and a useful
benchmark against which to measure the stability and instability of
nuclear deterrence in South Asia from the perspectives of both
nation-state and anti-state actors.

## The State-centric Perspective: Nuclear Peace

THE PAST BEHAVIOR of India and Pakistan shows that there is little or
no danger of either side firing a nuclear weapon in anger or because
of miscalculation. Past Indo-Pakistani wars have been described as
"gentlemanly wars." In all the three wars, both sides avoided wars of
attrition or deliberate targeting of population and industrial centers.
Despite their penchant for inflammatory and bellicose rhetoric, no
sane leader would willingly commit national suicide. The leaders in
both capitals insist that nuclear weapons are only for deterrence and
are not weapons of war. Besides, history shows that nuclear weapons
are usable only against an opponent that does not have the ability to

retaliate in kind (e.g., the United States against Japan in 1945). The only exception to this rule might be the case of a state that faced total, imminent destruction. It is conceivable that Pakistan could use nuclear weapons if faced with total defeat by India. But Indians argue that they have no interest in destroying the Pakistani state and incorporating another 140 million Muslims into the Indian state. One Indian analyst argues that, "since the 1980s, Indian military doctrine has moved away from the seizure of Pakistani territory in recognition of the less significant role played by landmass in modern estimates of strategic strength. Not only does India not have any territorial ambitions on Pakistan, [India is] prepared to permanently concede Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to Islamabad, and would accept the 'line of control' in Kashmir as the international boundary."[22] And if New Delhi goes to war with Islamabad, the war will be over Kashmir, not over the existence of Pakistan. In short, it is claimed that the stakes are limited and the political conditions are conducive to the maintenance of stable nuclear deterrence in South Asia. Many Indians claim the West has consistently and deliberately promoted the idea of a nuclear flashpoint to get India and Pakistan to establish a nuclear risk reduction regime while beginning a sustained dialogue on Kashmir as well as meeting their non-proliferation agenda. Pakistan has long subscribed to this idea and publicly articulated its intention of using nuclear weapons in case India were to launch a conventional attack across the Line of Control in Pakistani Kashmir.

The presence of nuclear weapons certainly makes states exceedingly cautious; notable examples are China and Pakistan's post-nuclear behavior. The consequences of a nuclear war are too horrendous to contemplate. That policymakers in New Delhi and Islamabad have a sound understanding of each other's capabilities, intentions and policies—and more importantly, red lines, and are careful not to cross them—has been repeatedly demonstrated since the late 1980s. Despite the 1999 Kargil War and the post-September 11 brinkmanship, both of which illustrate the "stability-instability" paradox that nuclear weapons have introduced to the equation in South Asia,[23] the

22. M. D. Nalapat, "Outside View: Indo-Pakistan Nuclear Myth," *Washington Times*, 1 September 2002.
23. For details on the stability-instability paradox and new nuclear states, see Peter Lavoy, "The Strategic Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation," *Security Studies* 4, no. 4 (summer 1995): 739–40.

proponents of nuclear deterrence in Islamabad and New Delhi believe that nuclear deterrence is working to prevent war in the region. They point to the fact that neither the 1999 Kargil conflict nor the post-September 11 military standoff escalated beyond a limited conventional engagement due to the threat of nuclear war. So the stability argument is based on the reasonable conclusion that nuclear weapons have served an important purpose in the sense that India and Pakistan have not gone to an all-out war since 1971.[24] It is pointed out that just as nuclear deterrence maintained stability between the United States and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War, it can induce similar stabilizing effects in South Asia as well.

With regard to the technical requirements of stable deterrence, questions about command and control and safety procedures continue to be raised. However, both Pakistan and India claim to have maintained tighter controls over their arsenal. More importantly, it is not in their own interests to see anti-state actors gaining control of nuclear technology. Finally, both countries have publicly declared moratoriums on further nuclear tests, and India's adherence to No-First-Use (NFU) posture and confidence-building measures (such as pre-notification of missile tests and an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear installations) promotes crisis stability. Devin Hegarty argues that this is responsible behavior that is in stark contrast to U.S.-Soviet nuclear options, including "deployment of tens of thousands of nuclear warheads, bombers flying on 24-hour alert status, and the nuclear safety lapses that characterized the superpower arms race."[25] Post-September 11 measures to promote greater security and control over nuclear weapons and materials have been accorded the topmost priority. India's nuclear arsenal is firmly under the control of civilian leadership while the Pakistani army has always retained the real authority over the nuclear weapons, regardless of who is head of state. Pakistan's military chain of command appears intact despite internal turmoil and reshuffling at the top of the government.[26] The United States is reportedly considering offering assistance to assure

24. Martin J. Wojtysiak, *Preventing Catastrophe*, Maxwell Paper no. 25, Air War College (Alabama: Maxwell Air Force Base, August 2001), 19–20.

25. Devin Hagarty, "South Asia's Nuclear Balance," *Current History* 95, no. 600 (April 1996): 169.

26. Steven Mufson, "U.S. Worries about Pakistan Nuclear Arms," *Washington Post*, 4 November 2001, 27.

the physical protection of nuclear assets, such as vaults, sensors, alarms, tamper-proof seals and labels, and other means of protecting sensitive assets, ensuring personnel reliability, and secure transport of sensitive items.[27]

As for the situational context, a slow but steady process of de-Talibanization of Pakistani state and society is now underway with the banning of extremist organizations and somewhat greater control over the *madrassas* (religious schools) that had proliferated during the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The proponents of the "Pakistani-state-as-a-rational-actor" point out that Pakistan's nuclear chain of command is imbedded within the higher levels of the military—which tend to be well-educated, moderate, and secu-lar—and involves rigid and stringent controls. As George Perkovich observes: "The weapons are their crown jewels, after all. It would take more than a couple of bad actors to upset that process."[28] One of the four reasons given by General Musharraf to explain his U-turn on the Taliban after the September 11 attacks was his desire to protect Pakistan's "strategic assets." Seemingly bellicose rhetoric notwith-standing, there is absolutely no wisdom in sacrificing the well-being of Pakistan's 140 million Muslims for the sake of three million Muslims in Kashmir, claim the Pakistanis.

In short, Indian and Pakistani policymakers and strategic analysts see nuclear weapons as essential to maintaining state security and ensuring state survival. From their perspective, nuclear deterrence prevents conventional wars, keeps peace and brings warring parties to the negotiating table. (The Lahore [1999] and Agra [2001] summits are good examples.) The history of post-World War II international relations is a testimony to the fact that every state that has ever cre-ated a nuclear arsenal has come to a sobering realization of what it possesses, and has established extraordinary levels of security to pro-tect those weapons and India and Pakistan are no exception to this rule.[29] Long-time South Asia-watchers believe the risk of a nuclear

27. Nayan Chanda, "Urgent Worries about Pakistani Nuclear Material," *International Herald Tribune*, 2 November 2001, 1.

28. Cited in John J. Fialka and Scott Neuman, "Weapons Experts Agree Nuclear Arsenal in Unstable Pakistan Is a Major Concern," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 2001, 1.

29. See James Kitfield, "Nuclear Nightmares," *National Journal*, 15 December 2001.

holocaust is deliberately overstated in some quarters, partly to induce
Islamabad and New Delhi to reach a negotiated settlement on the
Kashmir issue. So it is argued that there is no reason to believe that
Indian and Pakistani leaders are less rational and responsible with
their nuclear weapons than are their American, Russian and Chinese
counterparts.

## The Perspective of Anti-state Actors: Nuclear Jihad

HOWEVER, IN SHARP CONTRAST with the optimism and confidence of
the "Indian-and-Pakistani-states-as-rational-actors" proponents, the
anti-state actors could care less if nuclear deterrence breaks down and
results in large-scale and unprecedented death and destruction. To
understand their perspective in its proper context, a brief historical
overview is in order before we examine the views and impact of anti-
state actors on nuclear deterrence in South Asia.

Much like other global ideologies, Islam and its followers also divide
the world into two regions: the world of believers, *Dar-ul-Islam*, or the
House of Islam, and *Dar-ul-Harb*, or the House of Infidels and non-
believers containing all territories ruled by non-Muslims, against
whom no-holds-barred jihad is to be waged by the believers (true fol-
lowers of Islam) who are destined to dominate and rule over the non-
believers.[30] Such concepts promote ideas of "us versus them" and
generate hatred, hostility, enmity and a permanent state of war.
Interestingly, this concept of continuous struggle (holy war against
non-believers) bears remarkable resemblance to Mao's concept of
permanent revolution against his perceived enemies—rightists and
capitalists—during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution
(1967–76) in China. The division of the world into two blocs is also
similar to the one made by the followers of other totalitarian ideolo-
gies—Fascism and Communism—which ruled out peaceful coexis-
tence with other belief systems. As Cathy Young observes: "Perhaps
every belief system that lays claim to the ultimate truth carries the
seeds of violent fanaticism and intolerance. This is true not only of
religions but of secular ideologies such as Communism."[31] The

30. Yossi Klein Halevi, "Islam Must Challenge Its Dark Doctrines," *Los Angeles
Times*, 13 September 2001. Discussion in this section is based on informal conversa-
tions and discussions with Pakistani and Indian scholars and policymakers since 1998.
31. Cathy Young, "Does Islam Foster Extremism?" *Boston Globe*, 19 August 2002, 11.

Islamists see the growing economic interdependence, globalization, Western cultural penetration, and the notions of liberty (freedom of speech, expression, and movement) and equality (especially equality of religions and sexes) as posing a serious threat to the basic tenets of Islam.

Historically, jihad in the Indian subcontinent was primarily waged against Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists and later against the Christians during and after the British rule. In the nineteenth century, Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi took the struggle one step further and launched an "eternal jihad" against *kafirs* (infidels) with his call to Muslims: "Fill the uttermost ends of India with Islam, so that no sounds may be heard but Allah Allah Allah!" The long-term objective of Islamists is to spread the frontiers of Islam eastward to the whole continent of Asia and beyond. During the 1980s and 1990s, Afghanistan and Pakistan became the jihadis' destination of choice, as Islamist warriors coalesced in the two countries to battle the enemies of the faith (first the Soviet Union, then the United States, Israel, and India). As noted earlier, Saudi Arabia, in its self-appointed mission to protect and promote Islam, especially the puritanical Wahabi version, has been providing much of the financial and ideological support to religious schools, charities and organizations around the world at which students are taught to develop their hatred for non-believers such as Christians, Jews and Hindus. They are taught that Islam cannot co-exist with other religions and that to kill in the interests of Islam and the Shariat is a religious obligation and not a sin, even if the killing involves the use of WMD.[32] Verse 191, Sura 2, of the Holy Quran explicitly enjoins upon the Ummah to punish enemies of the faith in this fashion: "And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out." Coupled with "the Medina Syndrome" (the perception that Islam is perennially in danger from powerful enemies), the only answer for pious Muslims in despair is "unity, faith and war." To put it simply, solidarity for jihad and jihad for solidarity. As Therese Delpech observes:

32. B. Raman, "Why Must Kashmir and India Bleed?" *The Pioneer*, 16 August 2002; Ehsan Ahrari, "Whither Saudi Arabia?" *Asia Times Online*, 6 August 2002, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/DH06Ak02.html.

> Their declared ambition is to annihilate not just religions
> other than Islam (the destruction of the ancient Bamiyan's
> Buddhist statutes in February 2001 is an eloquent testimony),
> but also anyone who does not accept its perverse version of
> Islam (bin Laden's people have burnt Shi'ites alive in
> Afghanistan)…No concession, however great, would be
> enough to end [their] "mission" because, unlike many previ-
> ous terrorist organizations, *it does not intend to create a state nor
> does it wish to introduce political reforms. Its objective is metaphysical:
> a titanic struggle between "good" and "evil" forces, in which any means
> can be used to achieve the end.*[33]

In the India-Pakistan context, the Islamists argue that Kashmir is a
symbol, not the root cause of the India-Pakistan conflict. They point
to General Parvez Musharraf's[34] statement made as the Chief of
Army Staff in April 1999: "Even a settlement of the Kashmir issue
will not usher in peace in the region. Low intensity conflict against
India will continue because India is a large hegemonic power."[35] This
reinforces the view that the India-Pakistan conflict is rooted in his-
tory, religion, culture, and the politics of revenge, epitomizing clash-
ing worldviews and a divide along religious, civilizational fault lines.
Many Islamists are convinced that India, like its erstwhile friends, the
Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, is doomed to further partition and
Balkanization.[36] In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse in the early

33. Therese Delpech, "The Imbalance of Terror," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 1
(winter 2002): 31. Italics mine.

34. Interestingly, a secular and moderate General Musharraf is a veteran of the
Afghan conflict and was to a great deal responsible not only for the establishment of
close links between the al-Qaeda/Taliban militia and the Pakistani army but also for
the Afghanization of the Kashmir dispute and the Talibanization of Pakistan. Also
see Isabel Hilton, "The General in His Labyrinth," *New Yorker*, 12 August 2002, 42.

35. *Dawn*, 10 April 1999, 1. Arguing that "Kashmir is not the central issue in Indo-
Pakistan relations—it is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," a noted Indian columnist
agrees, "Kashmir is no longer the cause of Indo-Pak problems, but its pretext.
Pakistani support to terrorism did not begin with Kashmir and does not end there. It
began with Punjab in the early eighties and is now an all-India effort to break up India
into a 'manageable' size." Manoj Joshi, "Agra Flawed from Start: Pakistan Is the Real
Core Issue," *The Times of India*, 26 July 2002, 1. Also see Hafiz Muhammed Sa'eed,
"No More Dialogue on Kashmir," *Voice of Islam* (Lahore), September 1999.

36. "Sadly, there are elements within Pakistan's military and intelligence circles who
subscribe to the devilish theory that once Kashmir is wrested away, the whole edifice
of multi-ethnic, multi-religious India will collapse into a chaos of warring fiefdoms
over which Pakistan will somehow prevail," writes Christopher Kremmer, "Sub-con-
tinent Fights Forces of Darkness," *The Age* (Melbourne), 29 December 2001, 1.

1990s, there was great optimism in Pakistan about "the coming collapse of India," which would enable the creation of a large Islamic state in Central and South Asia with Pakistan as its core. The leader of *Jamaat-i-Islami* Pakistan, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, speaking in Rawalpindi in February 1992, declared, "a great Islamic State spreading from Kashmir to Central Asia would emerge after the independence of Kashmir."[37] Islamists contend that Prophet Muhammed is said to have singled out India as a special target for jihad—the land of idol worshippers: "Slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them" (Sura 9:5). "Whosoever will take part in jihad against India," *Markaz* leader Muhammad Ibrahim Salafi claims that the Prophet had declared, "Allah will set him free from the pyre of hell."[38] Interestingly, notwithstanding their conflicting perspectives and interests, both Hindu and Islamist fundamentalists seem to have an identical interpretation of Indian history: that the ultimate game plan is not limited to "liberating Kashmir" but to subsume "Hindu India" into Islamic civilization. In this context, they point out that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's threat in 1971 of a thousand-year war with Hindustan (repeated by his daughter at the height of the 1990 crisis) was not hyperbole.[39] Since the beginning of the second millennium, Hindu India has been subjected to repeated invasions by the armies of Islamic faith. As a result of Islam's eastward march over the last one thousand years, ancient India has already been successfully broken up into four states—Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Hopefully in another one thousand years, so the argument goes, the objective of either an Islamic India or the creation of more Islamic states will be achieved by the end of the third millennium.

37. See Rashid, *Taliban*, especially chapter 14: "Master or Victim: Pakistan's Afghan War," 183–95. Pakistan's military ruler General Zia-ul Haq "had dreamed like a Mogul emperor of 'recreating a Sunni Muslim space between infidel 'Hindustan,' 'heretic' [because Shia] Iran and 'Christian' Russia. He believed that the message of Afghan Mujaheddin would spread into Central Asia, revive Islam and create a new Pakistan-led Islamic bloc of nations," writes Rashid, *Taliban,* 195.

38. http://www.dawacenter.com/ijtimah/Isalaf-e.html, 1, cited in Sikand, "Islamist Militancy in Kashmir," 10.

39. See Mohan Malik, "Pakistan: Frontline, Faultline," *The World Today* 56 (London), no. 2 (February 2000): 14–17; and "Dynamics of Pak Hostility," *The Hindustan Times*, 21 September 1999, 13. "In Lashkar discourse, the conflict in Kashmir…is portrayed as only one chapter in a long struggle between the two that is said to have characterized the history of Hindu-Muslim relations for the last 1,400 years ever since the advent of the Prophet Mohammed." Sikand, "Islamist Militancy in Kashmir," 10.

Indians counter this by saying that their country, one of the oldest
civilizations in the world, has not only survived but thrived during
millennia of invasions, whereas Pakistan could not survive the first
twenty-five years of its existence and is unlikely to survive over the
next twenty-five years if it continues with its self-destructive policies.
The Islamists respond by saying that Ghauri and Ghaznavi may have
lost war several times but they won eventually to subjugate Hindu
India. Likewise, Pakistan may have lost to India in 1971 and 1999 but
that does not mean the end of their attempts to expand Islam's fron-
tiers eastwards. Islam, *if not Pakistan*, will eventually prevail. To this
end, "pro-*jihadi* cells" armed with weapons are being established
throughout India's minority regions ready to unleash terror and com-
munal bloodbath at an appropriate time in the future when India is
faced with a series of domestic crises and/or external aggression and
is headed by a weak leader (in the mold of Indonesia's B. J. Habibie)
unable to resist international pressure. Islamists also note that
Pakistan still draws inspiration from the medieval period when
Muslim warriors from Afghanistan used to invade ancient India, evi-
dent by the fact that all of its nuclear-capable ballistic missiles—
Ghauri, Ghaznavi and Abdali—are named after the three prominent
Afghan warlords who attacked India frequently between the eleventh
and eighteenth centuries in an attempt to expand their empires.[40] As
Zaffar Abbas notes: "[T]he symbolism highlights the official mindset
in the country. For Islamabad, the present conflict with India is a con-
tinuation of the battles of the past, wars that are described in
Pakistani history books as the just causes of Muslim invaders against
infidels."[41]

From the perspective of Hindu nationalists, nothing could be more
provocative than Pakistanis (including Bhattys, Chaudharys, Dhillons,
Khokars, Naiks, Ranas, Shahs, Sethis, among others) seeing them-
selves as "direct descendants" of Muslim invaders and plunderers
(such as Ghauris, Ghaznavis, Abdalis and Babbars who looted
Lahore, Multan, and laid waste to the cities in Sindh—all now in
Pakistan) and wanting to wage a no-holds-barred holy war. In

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40. This would be like Japan naming its China-specific ballistic missiles after
General Tojo and Germany developing Israel-specific missiles and naming them after
Hitler and Goebbels.
41. Zaffar Abbas, "What's in a Name?" *The Herald* (Karachi), June 2002, 25.

Hindutva's discourse, Islamic religion and civilization are portrayed as intolerant, hostile to Hindu values, proselytizing, expansionist, repressive, and violent. The Indian response is articulated by a former chief of the Indian Army: "If a nuclear war can bring an end to the thousand years of invasions of India by the armies of Islamic faith, so be it. Let's fight a nuclear war and destroy Pakistan once and for all."[42] Apparently, both countries have become infected with the virus of religious-based nationalism, increasing the "death or glory" spirit within their armed forces. For their part, right-wing Hindu nationalists have also not given up their dream of regaining the "lost territories" ("the sacred lands of Hinduism and Buddhism lost to Islam during the second millennium," as the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* or World Hindu Council puts it) and restoring the Hindu supremacy over the entire *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided India). The growing ascendancy of Hindutva forces in Indian politics is an indication of the radicalization of Indian society as a result of a two-decade long, Pakistan-backed proxy war.

Meanwhile, Islamist extremism continues to haunt Pakistani state and society. Pakistan is, in the words of former Italian foreign minister Gianni De Michelis, "the fuse of the world."[43] The provinces close to the Afghan border and home to the U.S. military bases are now controlled by Islamist parties that created the Taliban and are openly sympathetic to the aims and ideals of al-Qaeda. The concern is that the radical Islamist worldview of groups like the *Jamiat Ulema Islam*, which is supportive of both the Taliban and al-Qaeda, could become the country's leitmotif. Violence levels in Indian Kashmir also continue to rise. Many observers believe that Washington may have to rethink its strategy vis-à-vis Islamabad if the war on terrorism is to be won decisively.[44] The complete dismantling of the al-Qaeda terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan seems unlikely because of the apprehension within Pakistani military that doing so would devalue Pakistan's importance in the U.S. security strategy and once again make the

42. See the websites of extremist organizations, notably http://www.taliban-news.com.
43. Cited in Francesco Sisci, "Mega-NATO: China out in the Cold," *Asia Times Online*, 24 May 2002, http://www.atimes.com/china/DE24Ad01.html.
44. George Bruno, "Post-Election Pakistan Unreformed, Unstable," *Baltimore Sun*, 13 December 2002, 10; "Pakistan is the new Afghanistan, a privileged sanctuary for hundreds of al-Qaeda fighters and Taliban operatives," writes A. de Borchgrave, "The New Afghanistan," *Washington Times*, 2 September 2002, 1.

United States turn its back on the country and make the country vul-
nerable to Western pressure and sanctions over Islamabad's WMD
proliferation activities. It would also deprive Pakistan of invaluable
Western aid and leverage vis-à-vis Washington and New Delhi.[45]

As long as anti-state actors subscribe to the "Islamic Caliphate" and
Pakistan to the two-nation theory, and as long as political power in
Pakistan is exercised by the army, the mullahs, and the feudal lords in
the name of jihad, Islam, and Kashmir, there cannot be peace in the
region. A noted author and commentator, M.J. Akbar, in his book, *The
Shade of Swords*, concedes that Pakistan's anger against India is larger
than the problem over Kashmir, but contends that the anger of the
"Muslim Street" is not merely socio-economic, as some are positing.[46]
Muslim anguish is essentially about departed glory, contrasted to
Hindu resurgence after one thousand years and Jewish revival after
two thousand years backed by the secular, but Christian, West.[47] As
has often happened in the past, Muslim radicals have latched on to
certain enemies to explain the current decay because they need some-
one to blame, apart from themselves. This partly explains why and
how Pakistan, a homeland for Muslims, "turned jihad into an instru-
ment of state policy from its inception and became the breeding
ground for the first international Islamic brigade in the modern
era."[48] The fall of the Taliban has transformed the frontline state of
Pakistan in the war on terrorism into its next battlefield, as fleeing al-
Qaeda/Taliban jihadis and their supporters take refuge in Pakistan's
Wild West with many slipping down into the cities, using networks of
associated groups and sympathizers to reorganize to fight another
battle another day.[49] The Islamist fundamentalist groups have repeat-
edly demonstrated their power with a series of terrorist attacks in

45. For Pakistan, the jihadi network represents an invaluable "fifth column" able to
tie down hundreds of thousands of Indian security forces in Kashmir.

46. M. J. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords: Jihad and the Conflict between Islam and Christianity*
(London: Routledge, 2002), 162.

47. Charles Krauthammer agrees: "Underlying most of the grievances is a sense
that Islam has lost its rightful place of dominance, the place it enjoyed half a millen-
nium ago. This feeling of a civilization in decline—and the adoption of terror and
intimidation as the road to restoration—is echoed in a recent United Nations report
that spoke frankly of the abject Arab failure to modernize." See Charles
Krauthammer, "Violence and Islam," *Washington Post*, 6 December 2002, 45.

48. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords*, 198.

49. Ralph Joseph, "Pakistan Acknowledges Presence of al-Qaeda Fugitives,"
*Washington Times*, 12 August 2002, 1.

India and Pakistan seen as warnings to Musharraf that abandoning militants in Kashmir and siding with the infidel West would have disastrous consequences. In the worst-case scenario, radical Islamic extremists, especially those who sympathize with al-Qaeda in the military establishment, could gain control of the nuclear weapons and delivery systems and launch nuclear strikes. The threatened use of nuclear weapons by irrational anti-state actors will carry greater credibility than the threatened use of nuclear weapons by nation-states. India's nuclear deterrent can deter neither nuclear attacks nor cross-border terrorism conducted by anti-state actors. Interestingly, one perceptive commentator has argued that in Pakistan's destruction lies al-Qaeda's salvation because anti-state actors can survive and thrive only in failed, collapsed and war-torn states:[50]

> [Since] al-Qaeda has long used Pakistan as an ongoing base for its command and control and training functions, it has a deep interest in Pakistan's future. Paradoxically, al-Qaeda's and Pakistan's national security interests are not at all the same. From al-Qaeda's point of view, a war with India—even one that led to the destruction of an independent Pakistan—would be highly desirable for three reasons:

1. As al-Qaeda sees it, the government of President Pervez Musharraf has become a tool of the United States, supporting U.S. efforts to destroy al-Qaeda in Pakistan. While Musharraf's support has been far from wholehearted, al-Qaeda is aware that Musharraf cannot be relied upon to protect the network, particularly while under heavy pressure from the United States and India.

2. A stable Pakistan with a strong central government poses a threat to al-Qaeda's security [because] a strong government is less manipulable …[and] less predictable. It can turn its power against al-Qaeda quite easily. *A Pakistan whose military has been smashed and whose government ceases to function creates a situation in which al-Qaeda can stake out* and defend remote areas of the

    50. Stratfor, "The Al Qaeda Threat and the Indo-Pakistani War," *Stratfor.com*, 3 June 2002, http://www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_view.php?ID=204684.

country from encroachment. From a geographic point of view, India has the ability to smash Pakistan. Occupying and pacifying the country, particularly the regions that al-Qaeda uses for its bases, is far more difficult…With an Indian army stretched to the limit and no meaningful Pakistani force to face, al-Qaeda becomes more secure. Even U.S. operations against al-Qaeda in remote areas without Pakistani collaboration would become extremely difficult.

3. Al-Qaeda has, as its core argument, the idea that Islam is under attack from other religions. *If India were to attack Pakistan, al-Qaeda would be able to make the argument—convincingly in the Islamic world—that the Jews, the Christian West and the Hindus have allied to strangle Islam.* The plausibility of this argument would, al-Qaeda hopes, galvanize the Islamic world into united resistance. That unification is al-Qaeda's goal.

   From al-Qaeda's viewpoint, an Indian attack on Pakistan would be highly desirable. *Even an attack involving nuclear weapons would be acceptable…That is why Pakistani-based Islamic militants aligned with al-Qaeda have persistently exacerbated the crisis between the two countries. In the long run, they see a war, even one that is ruinous to Pakistan, as an acceptable price to pay for their ultimate goals.* What is unacceptable is a settlement between India and Pakistan that would leave the United States in a dominant position in both countries as broker and arbiter. Islamic militants have done everything possible to foment a conflict.[51]

As shown in Table 2 (below), there exists a wide gulf between the perspectives and interests of state and anti-state actors and this, in turn, makes India-Pakistan nuclear deterrence highly unstable. In fact, the two frameworks are so markedly different that mere institution of confidence-building measures alone will not address the problem. None of the political, technical or situational conditions identified by Lewis Dunn apply to anti-state actors. Thus, the entry of anti-state actors makes the situational context vastly different from that of the Cold War era. Undoubtedly, the greatest disruption to the equilibrium

51. Ibid. Italics mine.

**Table 2.** State versus the anti-state: Divergent perspectives on nukes

| Statist Perspective | Anti-state Actor's Perspective |
| --- | --- |
| State security and survival is paramount. One of the main prerogatives of state actors is to ensure the maintenance and preservation of their territorial integrity. | Islam's spread and survival are of paramount importance. The state security or national survival is irrelevant because the very idea of separate nation-states is an anathema to anti-state actors. |
| Nuclear weapons are meant to ensure territorial integrity and national independence. | The nation-state is not indispensable. The destruction of the modern state system may well be a pre-requisite to the creation of *Dar-ul-Islam*. |
| Nuclear weapons are to be acquired when the very survival of the nation-state is seen as at stake. | "It is the religious duty of all Muslims to acquire nuclear, biological and chemical weapons to terrorize the enemies of God" —*al-Qaeda* |
| Nuclear weapons are weapons of deterrence, not weapons of war. | All weapons, including WMD, are useable weapons to achieve victory over non-believers and enemies of the faith. |
| Nuclearization brings an end to map-making exercise and freezes the territorial status quo. Nuclear weapons may be of little use in wresting politico-military concessions from others. | Nuclearization paves the way for waging low-cost, low-intensity conflict without fear of retaliation and can help in settling territorial disputes on favorable terms via coercion, subversion and blackmail. |
| The resolution of the Kashmir dispute will lead to peace, prosperity and stability in South Asia. | The Kashmir dispute is not about territory; it's about religion and history and its separation from India will bolster the cause of Islamist forces in the region and eventually lead to the unraveling of the Indian state and pave the way for the creation of a pan-Islamic Caliphate. |
| Pakistan's nuclear weapons are India-specific only and are designed to act as a force equalizer to overcome con-ventional weaknesses vis-à-vis India. | Pakistan's "Islamic bomb" should be used to defend the broader interests of the entire Muslim world. |
| Nuclear weapons are the "crown jewels" and symbols of a strong state. | Anti-state movements and actors such as al-Qaeda are not concerned with the status symbols of nuclear weapons; they need weak, failing and war-torn states to thrive and accomplish their objectives. |
| A nuclear war must never be fought. The taboo on the non-use of nukes must not be broken. | There is absolutely nothing to fear from a nuclear war. |

of the nuclear balance of terror emanates from anti-state actors that
may come to acquire "a level of power and technological sophistica-
tion once associated only with nation-states."[52] The multinational
mercenary terror network that al-Qaeda and others have assembled
could be regarded as a malignant and mutated form of the "virtual
state" that requires a reconsideration of conventional strategies of
deterrence based on retaliation.[53] The traditional theories of deter-
rence may apply to other states but certainly do not apply to anti-state
actors and rogue regimes. Nuclear weapons were never meant to deter
transnational terrorists. Religious zealots bent on martyrdom have
turned on its head a nuclear doctrine that was based on the deterrent
value of mutually assured destruction.

## Why Nuclear Deterrence May Not Work in South Asia: Ten Reasons

THE PRECEDING ANALYSIS of the perspectives of anti-state actors
shows that deterrence in South Asia may not work in the context of
asymmetric and unrestricted warfare based as it is on surprise, shock
and deception and waged by those who have little or nothing to lose,
particularly when suicide is used as a weapon.[54] The instability argu-
ment points to the following reasons:

1. The history of four wars, and the intensity, duration and complex-
   ity of the animosity, coupled with growing domestic pressures in
   each country for action against the other, make nuclear deterrence
   unstable. The war on terrorism has encouraged brinkmanship on
   both sides with both seeing the U.S. presence in the region as a
   safety net. The next nuclear confrontation could be even more
   dangerous if the two sides follow the Cold War-era U.S.-Soviet
   standoff model—with nuclear missiles on alert, aimed at each
   other and ready to launch on warning. As Lee Butler, former head
   of the U.S. Strategic Command, has said, it was "no thanks to
   deterrence, but only by the grace of God" that the United States

52. James Kitfield, "Nuclear Nightmares," *National Journal*, 15 December 2001.
53. See Philip Bobbitt, "The Front Line: The First Terrorist War of the World,"
*Financial Times* (London), 13 July 2002, 2.
54. Delpech, "The Imbalance of Terror," 34.

and the Soviet Union survived their crises.[55] India and Pakistan may not be lucky next time.

2. Whereas the Cold War was ideological, the India-Pakistan conflict is historical and religious. More than disputed borders, India and Pakistan share disputed histories. The United States and the Soviet Union never engaged in direct military conflict with each other. Nor did they have a history of military conflict or animosity prior to the 1940s. Nonetheless, they still came close to war more than once.

3. Territorial disputes and the sharing of a border are rooted in the deep religious divide going back one thousand years, for example, to the desire to re-establish Islamic or Hindu supremacy over the entire subcontinent. Indians and Pakistanis have bitter memories and highly emotional issues too long to list: invasions, partition, three wars, religious and border disputes, volatile political cultures, inflammatory media, and two decades of low-intensity conflict. In contrast, none of these factors existed as potential fuses to light the nuclear powder keg during the U.S.-Soviet nuclear standoff. The United States and Soviet Union never shared common or disputed borders. The geographical proximity also means lack of adequate time to rectify a mistake or for early warning of an accidental missile launch.

4. Neither India nor Pakistan possesses accurate intelligence or warning systems, nor do they have the ability to assure a second strike. The fear of a decisive first strike "use it or lose it" option, with short distances, poor warning systems, and small stockpiles amidst the talk of "nuclear jihad," makes deterrence very unstable. As a result, the possibility of a nuclear conflict in South Asia—by design or accident—cannot be entirely ruled out. Their weak, untested command and control systems and relative inexperience in managing nuclear weapons, plus a lack of knowledge about each other's military processes, means the "line in the sand" could be crossed unintentionally. For example, Islamabad has made it clear that it will use nukes first and in the early stages of conflict, hoping this threat will prevent an Indian attack across the Kashmiri

55. Cited in Zia Mian, R. Rajaraman and Frank von Hippel, "Nuclear Role Models," *Washington Post*, 6 August 2002, 15.

Line of Control. While India follows a no-first-use policy, a num-
ber of strategic analysts during the recent military standoff called
for a reconsideration of the NFU policy in the context of
Pakistan.[56] Others claim that India's armed forces are "prepared to
try to destroy Pakistan's nuclear capability before it is used, and
seek their own capability to launch a nuclear attack if they believe
that enemy nuclear missiles are armed and ready for launch or
already on the launch pads or are in booster phase. Pakistan, in
turn, may seek to preempt such a situation by using its nukes even
earlier in a conflict rather than losing them."[57] There are also seri-
ous concerns over lax security controls in that part of the world.

5. Crisis stability based on deterrence does not apply to South Asia,
   where brinkmanship and one-upmanship is part of political life.
   The United States and the Soviet Union painstakingly avoided
   issuing either open or veiled threats over nuclear weapons—even
   though the U.S. nuclear doctrine implied a willingness to do so.
   (The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 was the sole exception.) In con-
   trast, Pakistan has publicly flexed its nuclear muscles on four occa-
   sions in recent history—in 1987, 1990, 1999, and again in 2002.
   Likewise, India has repeatedly warned that it would survive a
   nuclear war but Pakistani would surely disappear from the world
   map. (The world has not heard such a threat since the 1950s when
   Mao Zedong argued that enough Chinese would survive a nuclear
   confrontation with the United States to usher in a communist rev-
   olution.) In short, neither periodic threats of nuclear annihilation
   nor nuclear blackmail bode well for stable nuclear deterrence.

6. The conventional military imbalance, or the lack of prospects for
   victory, did not seem to deter Pakistan from initiating three wars,
   all of which resulted in clear and quick Indian victories. While
   India is a *status quoist* power, Pakistan is the revisionist power,
   extremely dissatisfied with the territorial status quo and frustrated

56. Major General (retd.) Ashok K. Mehta, "Beyond the Lull," Rediff.com, 1
August 2002, http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/01ashok.htm; Brahma
Chellaney, "Need for Flexible No-first-use," *The Hindustan Times*, 25 May 2002.
57. M. McKinzie, Zia Mian, M. V. Ramana, and A. H. Nayyar, "Nuclear War in
South Asia," *Foreign Policy in Focus Report*, June 2002, http://www.fpif.org/papers/
nuclearsasia_body.htm1.

and resentful for lacking the means to overturn it. Emboldened by its nuclear deterrent since the late 1980s, Pakistan believes it can undertake such confrontations without risking severe Indian punishment. Besides, there is a view in military circles that India no longer enjoys a decisive military edge that it did a decade or two ago. The idea of a limited nuclear war may be embedded in Pakistani nuclear thinking but not in Indian strategic planning. If Pakistan's military keeps multiplying provocations as in the past, a weak and unpopular regime may well stumble into a war that neither wants.

7. There is no greater fallacy than the hope that Pakistan can continue to engage in low-intensity conflict while relying on its nuclear capabilities to deter the Indian retaliation. Post-September 11, India believes that it has every right to launch pre-emptive strikes—much like the United States—against the terrorist bases and jihadi infrastructure. But many in the Pakistani military are convinced that "Hindu India" would continue to bark but never bite. This could lead to miscalculation and misperception resulting in a catastrophe. A "failing state" or a collapsing regime may not behave like a responsible, rational nuclear weapon state—an essential prerequisite for successful nuclear deterrence. One can imagine a scenario in which the so-called "Kashmiri freedom fighters," armed with a couple of nuclear weapons provided by disgruntled Pakistani army officers, threaten to nuke New Delhi if Indian security forces are not withdrawn within forty-eight hours, and set off a nuclear device in the Himalayas for demonstration effect. The nightmare scenario that we must consider is a collapsing Pakistani state that might have someone with a finger on the nuclear trigger and a fanatical desire to destroy its enemies. A loss of control of either Pakistani or Indian nuclear weapons could be a potential trigger of a wider nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan. Alternatively, "clashes between security forces and hostile groups at nuclear installations might even result in release of nuclear material or even conceivably a partial nuclear detonation."[58]

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58. Lewis A. Dunn, "The South Asian Nuclear Conundrum: U.S. Interests and Choices" (paper presented at Strategies for Regional Security conference, organized by the Stanley Foundation, Virginia, 25–27 October 2001). Also see PTI, "India May Militarily Intervene if Islamists Gain Pak N-Weapons," *The Hindustan Times*, 18 October 2002, 1.

8. At the "anti-state actor" level, individuals or groups may violate security rules for reasons of profit, settling a grudge or religious and ideological motives. They may try to transfer sensitive items to some anti-state actors. Two retired Pakistani nuclear scientists with alleged al-Qaeda connections are currently under custody.[59] The possibility of a civil war fought with nuclear weapons in the Indian subcontinent cannot be completely ruled out. Another concern is the possibility of yet another coup in Pakistan. In conditions of civil war and internal chaos in a nuclear weapon state, nuclear materials could conceivably be used as bargaining chips in a struggle for internal power, or as negotiating leverage with external powers. If there were two rival claimants to the government in Islamabad, for example, we would be inclined to support the side that claims to control that country's nuclear forces. The scenario of Pakistan in splinters, with one piece becoming a radical Muslim state in possession of a nuclear weapon, is a concern, should al-Qaeda/Taliban declare jihad against Pakistan—the weakest ally in the U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition. Furthermore, the breakup of states creates the danger of WMD falling into the hands of separatists and religious fanatics. In short, power struggle and instability in Pakistan also could lead to attacks on the Pakistani military's nuclear arsenal by anti-state actors and the theft of nuclear weapons.

9. The freelance factor of terrorism changes the situational context completely in the sense that anti-state actors may have vested interest in provoking a war between India and Pakistan. With relatively little radioactive material, obtained from low-level waste from a power plant or medical facility, terrorists could easily construct a "dirty bomb" using simple explosives. Such devices, hidden in a truck or ship-borne cargo container headed for Karachi or Bombay, could inflict considerable casualties followed by widespread radiation poisoning.

10. Finally, the China factor further adds to unpredictability, complexity, and instability in the subcontinental nuclear power balance. China has long been the most important player in the India-Pakistan-China triangular relationship. The Sino-Pakistan military

59. Douglas Frantz, James Risen and David E. Sanger, "Nuclear Experts in Pakistan May Have Links to Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, 9 December 2001, 1.

alliance (in particular, the nuclear and missile nexus) is aimed at ensuring that the South Asian military balance of power is neither pro-India nor pro-Pakistan but pro-China. Most war-gaming exercises on the next India-Pakistan nuclear war end in a Chinese military intervention to prevent the collapse of Beijing's most allied ally in Asia.[60] For Beijing, the most worrisome scenario would be one which brings the United States and Pakistan on a collision course, with or without India acting as a U.S. partner.

## Concluding Observations

THIS PAPER HAS HIGHLIGHTED THE DANGERS posed by anti-state actors (primarily religious extremist organizations with political agendas) to the stability of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan. It demonstrates that conditions of the Indo-Pakistani conflict are qualitatively different from those that existed during the Cold War. The risk of a nuclear war remains high because of miscalculation and misperception owing to growing religious radicalism in both countries. Should the India-Pakistani conflict escalate into a nuclear one, neither the geopolitical nor the radioactive fallout will remain limited to Southern Asia. Once the nuclear taboo is broken either by state or anti-state actors, it will no longer be business as usual. There is an urgent need to think about the ways and means of countering the possible use of WMD by anti-state actors (acting with or without the support of state actors) primarily because established theories of deterrence do not apply to them. While one can be confident in the Indian and Pakistani states' capacity to maintain stable nuclear deterrence, the challenge posed by anti-state actors falls in an entirely different category and should be a matter of concern to all. An appropriate politico-military strategy that deals with the challenge of religious radicalism will go a long way in promoting crisis stability and in preventing the use of nuclear weapons. In a sense, the task before the international community in the twenty-first century is the same as it was in the twentieth century: that is, to thoroughly defeat totalitarian ideologies, such as Wahabi/Salafi/Deobandi militant Islam, and consign them to the dustbin of history as were the other two totalitarian ideologies of Fascism and Communism.

60. For details, see Mohan Malik, "China, Pakistan and India: Nervous Neighbours," *The World Today* 58 (London), no. 10 (October 2002): 20–23.