

The nuclear option

Pak. def

By M. Asghar Khan

WHEN India exploded its nuclear bomb, Nawaz Sharif, sent one of his ministers to seek my advice whether we should also explode a nuclear device, I advised him not to do so. However the widespread frenzy and a false sense of pride got the better of him and he took the step that was acclaimed in the country as an act of statesmanship.

If Pakistan was a non-nuclear power it would not be necessary for India to attack Pakistan with nuclear weapons even if Pakistan was the aggressor. It makes no sense that India should launch a nuclear attack against Pakistan when it already has three times Pakistan's strength in conventional weapons. It is Pakistan, a smaller military power that may, in desperation, want to use nuclear weapons in its defence.

However if it ever did so, India could retaliate and within minutes destroy three or four of Pakistan's cities and also Pakistan's main command and control capacity. Anything comparable that Pakistan could do may damage India in many ways but it would be nothing compared to the damage that would have been done to Pakistan.

Pakistan would, as a result, be mortally damaged whereas India would be damaged to a much lesser extent and would still survive as a nation. It is also possible that in a state of heightened tension, India could itself explode a bomb or two in one of its lesser populated or vital areas and then within minutes obliterate Pakistan's main strategic centres. India could claim that Pakistan had bombed it first. There would not be many of us left to deny this.

There are other scenarios that are frightening. India and Pakistan are today the only two hostile nuclear powers with a common border. The warning time is less than one minute and in this situation, a misreading of a warning of a nuclear attack could initiate a reaction and the launching of a retaliatory strike. This could initiate a nuclear conflict by miscalculation.

After the second world war there were a number of occasions when the two nuclear powers, the US and the USSR, mis-

read the warning of a possible nuclear strike and ordered their interceptor aircraft to meet the 'hostile' aircraft, assumed to be carrying nuclear weapons. After some time and before the interceptor aircraft had made contact, it was discovered that the warning was false and the interceptor aircraft were called back.

In our situation, we do not have the distance or the time to correct our mistake. The few seconds that we have, will not be enough and it is likely that we will destroy ourselves before the error is recognized. There is also the danger that some madman on either side, might press the button in the belief that it was his national or religious duty to

public should exert its power and influence to ensure that it is not exploited by its government for its narrow political purposes. What is true of the United States or other powerful states applies equally to Pakistan — a country placed in a critical strategic position. Misleading the public, in matters of survival, could have disastrous consequences.

I believe that with the present unsatisfactory international situation with India, Pakistan would be more secure without nuclear weapons. If Pakistan has no nuclear weapons and opened itself to inspection to satisfy world opinion that it could no longer use nuclear weapons, it would have only a conventional threat to its security. India could not use its nuclear power against Pakistan and would have to rely on its conventional weapons alone.

Because of its heavy investment in maintaining a large nuclear capability, India's capacity to maintain a large conventional force at the same time would be limited. That itself would give greater security to Pakistan which should review its concept of defence.

In this situation, with the knowledge that India could not launch a nuclear strike against Pakistan, it should prepare only for a conventional war. Pakistan should maintain an effective air force with reasonable armoured strength and should cut down drastically, the defence expenditure on its regular land forces.

With a large reserve of trained manpower it should have a large territorial reserve force organized in geographical sectors called up for periodical refresher training and capable of deployment at 24 hours' notice. Their weapons should be kept at suitable locations for rapid issue.

Not only would Pakistan's defence thus be strengthened but what is equally important, the defence budget could be cut down drastically. If other wasteful and totally unnecessary expenditures are cut down and the fat reduced, our defence would be greatly strengthened at far lesser cost. It is however sad but true that few in power or those aspiring to get into power, will have the courage to face facts and accept reality. It is more likely that they will continue to misguide the people and lead the country towards greater misery and possible destruction.

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do so. The possibilities are frightening and only fools can disregard this real danger.

It has been true throughout history that an enemy has been created to infuse unity in a country and indeed sometimes desirable for it to make progress. The dissolution of the Soviet Union posed a problem for the United States and it had been faced for over a decade with the need to invent threats for its progress and stability.

The attack on the twin towers on September 1, 2001, tragic as it was, has given the United States the enemy that it had begun to miss. Iraq and other countries that may follow are required to mobilize the American public to strengthen the government of the time. This has been true throughout history but the nuclear bomb has changed the world in the last half century.

It is now necessary that the