

US concern over nuclear strategy

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THE US defence department is of the view that India and Pakistan could be making nuclear weapons at a more accelerated pace than before. The information which is contained in a policy paper recently commissioned by the department cannot but be of utmost concern not only to the people of the two countries but to the region as a whole.

The CIA director, alarmed by the findings, has warned the relevant Senate select committee, that both countries are engaged in adding to their stockpiles and working on programmes aimed at the production of more advanced nuclear weapons and fissile materials. The programmes are further supplemented by plans "to develop long-range nuclear-capable missiles and cruise missiles with a land attack-capability."

The findings to be made public soon will make Washington wary of Pakistan's strategic aims and may even place the US aid plans for this country in jeopardy. At the same time the US may not be concerned much about New Delhi's intentions to the same extent as it looks upon India virtually as a partner in its own strategic plans. India has frequently indicated its ambition to be a strategic competitor of China and is continually engaged in upgrading its missile and nuclear weapons capability. This may suit the American long term plans for isolating China.

With the history of having been embroiled in wars with India repeatedly, Pakistan cannot look upon the Indian plans with any sense of equanimity. In any case, the hostile perception of the South Asian neighbours of one another has made the region "the most dangerous place" in the world. Saner elements in both countries as well as outside make no secret of

and the Hindutva ideology. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee therefore cannot be expected to bring about any radical change in his nuclear weapons policy for the present. According to all indications he is determined to maintain India's lead over Pakistan in this field. This is also evident from the policy paper developed for the benefit of the US defence department.

Indian leader Jaswant Singh, who was India's foreign minister at the time of New Delhi's 1998 blasts wrote in the journal *Foreign Affairs*: "Nuclear weapons remain a key indicator of state power. Since this currency is operational in large parts of the globe, India was left with no choice but to validate and update the capability that had been demonstrated 24 years ago in the nuclear test of 1974."

India's view of its place in world politics has not changed in any way since these words were written.

On its part, Pakistan maintains that in view of India's nuclear weapons capability it is constrained to retain its "minimum nuclear deterrence." As such whichever way it is viewed, the outlook for peace and stability in the region in the foreseeable future appears to be dim, if not actually bleak. In his book *The Cost of Conflict & The Benefits of Peace*, Maj-Gen Mahmud Ali Durrani of the Pakistan Army, maintains that since the cost of nuclearization to any country is shrouded in mystery there can be no reliable estimate (in rupees or dollars) of what India and Pakistan have spent on their nuclear programmes. However, to help make a rough estimate, he has quoted an American author, Steven Schwartz, on the amounts that the US has been

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It is both unfortunate and ominous that immediately following India's offer of a package of mutual confidence-building measures to Pakistan, the verbal exchanges between India and Pakistan should have degenerated into the talk of war. The perpetually abrasive Indian defence minister, George Fernandes, has observed that Pakistan has to choose between dialogue and war. His statement could not have been more ill-timed and callous. The Pakistan information minister Shaikh Rashid Ahmad's response has been similarly abrasive. He has said that Pakistan is prepared both for war and talks.

It is sincerely hoped that the chances of peace, however slim, arising out of India's offer would not be lost in the dust kicked up by this talk of war. As it is, the people on both sides of the divide have had to contend with the spectre of war for long decades. The Washington Post report that both India and Pakistan are engaged in upgrading their nuclear arsenals has made the need for peace in the region more urgent than ever.

Paradoxically, large sections of people in both countries also recognize that there is a strong and dynamic constituency for peace on both sides of the divide. However, for reasons of political expediency, the leadership in both countries has ensured that this constituency should not make the impact that it potentially can. Even more unfortunately, domestic political pressures in both countries have prevented India and Pakistan from getting out of what has come to be recognized as the nuclear trap.

Since India's decision to go overtly nuclear was rooted in its ambition of becoming a global power, it is difficult to visualize that it would take the initiative to denuclearize in the circumstances. Pakistan's policy of pursuing nuclear restraint unilaterally appears unrealistic. Even Indian specialists of nuclear weapons technology concede that virtually from the time of its birth, the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS), of which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), now in power in New Delhi, is a direct offshoot, has been committed to the ideal of "Unite Hindus and militarize Hinduism." This is what prompted the BJP-led government to carry out the nuclear blasts in 1998 shortly after it came to power and provoked Pakistan into a tit-for-tat response.

With the national elections due next year BJP cannot afford to abandon its link with the RSS

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spending. It appears that the total estimated cost of the nuclear weapons programme in the US between 1940 and 1996 was "an astronomical \$821.0 billion dollars."

Durrani also says that the current (2001) annual expenditure by India on its nuclear and allied programmes is one to seven billion dollars while the parallel figure for Pakistan is 0.3 to 0.4 billion dollars. However, there is no way to verify the accuracy of these figures. The bigger and vastly more unacceptable cost resulting from the proliferation of nuclear weapons is in terms of the lives which would be lost, the number of people destined to be maimed and the havoc likely to be wrought on city centres such as Karachi and Mumbai in the event of a nuclear strike.

Indian nuclear specialist, Praful Bidwai and Achin Vinayak, estimate that the destruction in any city in the subcontinent would be significantly worse than what Hiroshima suffered (140,000 people perished) in 1945.

According to another eminent Indian M.V. Ramana, formerly of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the number of people likely to be killed if a bomb was dropped over Mumbai would be as high as two to six million. Moreover, exposure to intense radiation would be liable to lead to leukemia, thyroid cancer and lung cancer, in addition to birth defects, cataracts, mental retardation, etc.

Even to a layman it should be clear that the continuation of their nuclear weapons programmes by India and Pakistan would mean assured destruction — destruction on an unprecedented and perhaps incalculable scale. Even a casual reflection on the horrifying prospect should make the ruling elites in the two countries sit up and revisit the wisdom of adhering to their nuclear weapons programmes.