

DIPLOMACY AVERTS 1990'S CRISIS BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

There are many contagious issues between India and Pakistan, which create hurdles in the way of permanent peace in South Asia. Kashmir dispute, border disputes at Siachen and Sir Creek areas and water dispute are the major issues between the two countries. These two states have fought three major wars and one limited war with each other. There were many crises when India and Pakistan came to the edge of war with each other. The crises occurring between the two states after getting nuclear capabilities were of greater anxiety in the international community. The crisis between the two states in 1990 was the first one with a nuclear dimension. Both states seemed to be at the edge of a conventional war when India decided to go for a war against Pakistan to lower Kashmir insurgency. Pakistan perceiving a threat of a conventional war from Indian side decided to go for all options including the use of nuclear weapons to maintain its integrity and sovereignty. The objective is to know the variable which averted Indo-Pak 1990 crisis, whether it

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was nuclear deterrence or diplomacy. The qualitative methodology is used to get the results with secondary data analysis. The article finds that it was the diplomacy and not the nuclear weapons which averted war between India and Pakistan during the 1990 crisis.

Key words: *Nuclear Deterrence, Diplomacy, India, Pakistan, War, Crisis, Peace*

1. Introduction

India and Pakistan have been indulged into rivalry with each other since the very first day of their independence. Both states have fought three major in 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 wars and a limited war with each other at Kargil in 1999. There were many times in the history of India and Pakistan when these two powers were almost at the edge of the war. The Indian nuclear program was based on the two factors. First, one was the security and the second one was prestige. India was perceiving threat from China and that was the first reason for developing its nuclear program. Secondly, India wanted to get the status of a major power in the world. While Pakistan's nuclear program was solely based on security concerns. Pakistan perceived an Indian threat since its independence and the sense of insecurity led Pakistan to initiate a nuclear weapons program. Both states became successful in manufacturing nuclear weapons during 1980s.

India and Pakistan have experienced many confrontations after getting nuclear capabilities. One of the major crises occurred between India and Pakistan was 1990 crisis when these two powers almost came at the brink of war. This crisis occurred when there was an insurgency at height in Kashmir and India had decided to take action against Pakistan to end this wave of insurgency. India alleged Pakistan of its backing to insurgents in Kashmir. India brought its forces on the border and prepared itself for war against its main rival state. Pakistan perceiving an Indian threat also responded in a same way by mobilizing its forces on the border. The situation seemed to be worsening with the passage of time. There seemed to be a greater possibility of war between the two countries. Pakistan perceiving itself weak in conventional military capability against India decided to mobilize its nuclear weapons. The circumstances seemed to be very serious and the war seems to be a real possibility.

The international community perceived a threat of war between the two countries and it started efforts to avert crisis between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states. The United States played a very important role in reducing the tension between the two. The US President asked Robert Gates to visit South Asia and convince the leaders of India and Pakistan not to pursue the path of war. Robert Gates held meetings with the leaders on the two sides and convinced them that the war between the two states is not going to benefit any side. The diplomacy became successful in averting war between India and Pakistan.

2. Methodology

This research uses qualitative methodology. It uses secondary data peer reviewed research articles. The descriptive and interpretative methods are used in this research. This research uses two variables. The independent variables used in this research are, diplomacy and the nuclear deterrence whereas the dependent variable used in this research is conventional war.

3. Theoretical Framework

The nuclear arms race started soon after the World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union had led to the increased number of nuclear weapons to almost fifty thousand warheads, enough to destroy the planet and the civilization for number of times. (McCoy, 1999) For example the US (the first nuclear weapon state) failed to deter the Soviet Union from pursuing its adventurous policies, especially in the Eastern Europe. The assured retaliation posture against a nuclear adversary may fail to deter limited or intense conventional conflicts. (Narang, 2009-10: 43) Similarly in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the US seems undeterred to opt for nuclear option to stop the encroachment of the Soviet Union in the American continent. Only at the eleventh-hour, it was the rational decision of the US leadership that averted a nuclear catastrophe. Despite the claim of the proponents of the nuclear deterrence theory that it succeeded in averting war between the two major powers in the bipolar world, both the United States and Soviet Union were embroiled in continuous rivalry during the Cold War era. These major powers confronted each other on many issues and had interventions in Europe, Asia and Africa – as they tried hard to damage each other's interests. Likewise, in case of India and Pakistan, after

acquiring nuclear capabilities, both states were enough lucky to escape full-ledged wars in five crises between 1986-87 and 2008.

The proponents of the nuclear deterrence claim that nuclear weapons have assisted in averting major crises and maintained durable peace during the Cold War era. They seem to make the same claims pertaining to the role of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan. However, such claims appear to be unjustified, since history has witnessed about 120 proxy wars during the Cold War era which claimed about two million lives. This may imply that, in reality nuclear deterrence didn't really work. (McCoy, 1999)

In the debate regarding the deterrence capacity of nuclear weapons suggest two opposing views –such as Kenneth Waltz, who has argued that war is not possible among the nuclear weapon states while his opponents such as Scott D. Sagan argues that nuclear deterrence is not the only determining factor for durable peace between nuclear weapon states.

Theory of Realism will be used in this research. The two concepts of the Realist Theory including nuclear deterrence and diplomacy will be in focus while testing the dependent variable conventional war. The basic purpose of this research is to have a better understanding of the South Asian security situation during 1990 crisis keeping in view the concept of nuclear deterrence and diplomacy.

4. India And Pakistan's Security Relations

States acquire lethal weapons when they are faced with acute security dilemma and it is the case that India and Pakistan has opted for nuclear weapons as the two states face acute security threat from their strategic adversaries. (Chakma, 2005: 189-190) As China modernized its nuclear weapons and Pakistan emerged as a nuclear factor in the 1970s a tripartite nuclear security dilemma eventually led India to continue its clandestine nuclear weapons programs and finally India ended its nuclear ambiguity with conducting series of nuclear tests in 1998. (Chakma, 2005: 235) Multiple factors have contributed to states' nuclear ambitions such as security concerns, prestige, technological imperatives and domestic politics. (Chakma, 2005: 189) Indian nuclear program was motivated by aspiration to make India a great power and HomiBhabha's influence in its first phase from 1947-1964 but these factors diluted in the second phase from 1964-1974 due to the rise of Chinese threat and finally the third phase from 1974-1998

was influenced by tripartite nuclear security dilemma involving China, India and Pakistan. (Chakma, 2005: 234) Chakma (2002) states that Indian nuclear program was more focused on the prestige factor than the security concern. While India's nuclear program was based on prestige and security factors, Pakistan's nuclear program was solely based on only security concerns. Nizamani (1997) states that the nuclear ambitions for India and Pakistan were so high that the two states were not in a position to change their routes.

Cheema (2004) states that the employment of a nuclear weapons capability figured first time between India and Pakistan in 1986-87, though various descriptions of it differ profoundly. It is believed that the regime of General Zia-Ul-Haq in Pakistan (1977-1988) feared a dilemma of two front war at the climax of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan: one with the Soviet or Afghan forces in the west and other with India in the east. The perception of such a threat accentuated when India mobilized a quarter of a million troops just twenty miles from the border in the winter months of 1986-87, opposite Pakistan's province of Sindh, in a military exercise code-named *Brasstacks*. This threat was blocked by Pakistan's counter-deployment of its armed forces and issuance of veiled nuclear threats. To cope with the dilemma of two-front war, Zia regime relied on diplomacy, conventional force posture and nuclear weapons capability. During the height of the *Brasstacks* crisis in 1987, Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan told prominent Indian Journalist Kuldeep Nayar that what the CIA and western newspapers are saying about Pakistan's nuclear bomb is correct, they doubted my capabilities, nobody can take Pakistan for granted and let it be clear that we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened. (Chakma, 2005: 225) The basic objective of Dr. A.Q Khan's interview was to communicate a nuclear deterrent signal to New Delhi in the height of the crisis which was also confirmed by Mushahid Hussain, Pakistani Daily the Muslim's editor who was accompanied by Kuldeep Nayar during the interview. (Chakma, 2005: 225)

5. Detailed Overview of Crisis

India has been suffering insurgency in its different parts since long. Kashmir was also having the same fate. The conditions were worsening in 1980s era. The insurgency reached at its height in 1990. India accused Pakistan of its involvement in Kashmir. It decided to take action against Pakistan and hit the militant camps in Azad Kashmir where the militants were trained. India wanted to

release the tension of increased insurgency in Kashmir. It started a military buildup on Pakistan's border. Indian military mobilization alarmed Pakistan and it also prepared itself for the response.

Pakistan perceiving an Indian threat suffered from conventional military inferiority against India. It decided to mobilize its nuclear weapons for its defense against India. Pakistan's military leaders had decided to go for a nuclear strike against India in case of country's stake at risk. It knew that its conventional capabilities are not in a position to counter an Indian aggression and this belief was based on the past experience when Pakistan failed to counter India with its conventional weapons. According to a report by James Adams in the *Sunday Times*, London: "*American spy satellites photographed heavily armed convoys leaving the top-secret Pakistani nuclear weapons complex at Kahuta, near Islamabad and heading for military airfields.*" (Cheema, 2004)

The United States traced the information about Pakistan's decision to use nuclear weapons in case of war with India. Pakistan's decision to use nuclear weapons in a war was of great concern for the international community. The United States, the United Kingdom and many other states started taking their efforts to reduce the tension between India and Pakistan. The role of the United States was very prominent in reducing the tension and averting war between the two countries.

The US expert states in its analysis about Indo-Pak 1990 crisis in this way, India and Pakistan were capable of deploying small nuclear forces comprised of atomic bombs that could have been delivered by advanced fighter-bombers, with India's capabilities being considerably greater than those of Pakistan. (Hagerty, 1995-1996)

Hersh (1993) claimed that Pakistan pre-positioned F-16s on high alert, ready to launch on command, and sent a message to India that Pakistan would go for nuclear strikes if it faced a war from Indian side. Hersh (1993) further stated that General Aslam Beg authorized the technicians at Kahuta to assemble nuclear weapons, evacuate Kahuta and transport nuclear weapons from the storage facility in Baluchistan to the nearby air base. Sagan (1994, 2001) states that Pakistan's military had a tight control on Pakistan's nuclear program that even Benazir Bhutto, the then prime minister of Pakistan didn't even know about Pakistan's nuclear thresh hold before her visit to the United States in June, 1989 where she

was informed about the developments of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. She was not even consulted when the military ordered to assemble Pakistan's first nuclear weapon during 1990 crisis. Richard Kerr, the former CIA Deputy Director stated: *"There is no question in my mind that we were right on the edge. This period was very tense. The intelligence community believed that without some intervention the two parties could miscalculate, and miscalculation could lead to a nuclear exchange."* (Wieninger, 2004) Giving analysis on 1990 Indo-Pak crisis, Robert Gates, the US deputy national security advisor also stated: *"There was a view that both sides were blundering towards a war, and we were afraid that it would go nuclear."* (Wieninger, 2004)

The United States closely looked at the developments occurring during the crisis. The US President George Bush asked his Deputy National Security Advisor, Robert Gates, to visit India and Pakistan to defuse tension between the two states. Robert Gates briefed Pakistani and Indian leaders that war is not going to give benefit to any side. (Wieninger, 2004) The crisis in 1990 became a major focus point in the world. There was a greater anxiety in the world that South Asia has become a hot spot and any war between India and Pakistan could lead to a nuclear conflict as these two powers were having the nuclear capabilities and the United States, Russian, Japanese and European analysts agreed on that point. (Chari, Cheema and Cohen, 2009) Therefore, it seemed clear that the nuclear deterrence could not play any role in averting war between India and Pakistan and it was the diplomacy which reduced the tension between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states.

6. Critical Analysis

Waltz (1981) addresses the question "what will the spread of nuclear weapons do to the world?" and reaches the conclusion that the number of the nuclear weapon states is going to be increased in the coming years as the proliferation is going to take place horizontally. He concludes that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is going to work as the nuclear deterrence will be averting wars between the new emerging nuclear weapon states as it has worked in the past among five nuclear weapon states. In response, Sagan (1994/2001) criticizes Waltz's view point and states that the proliferation is not going to create stability. The nuclear deterrence failed to avert wars and provide eternal peace to the nuclear weapon states in the second half of the 20th century. The United States and Soviet Union were at the

edge of the war in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. He further adds that the soldiers are always being trained to have war with the enemy state. Therefore, the military has a mindset of war and he quotes the example of the United States that the U.S military wanted to attack and destroy the Soviet nuclear capability in 1950s. Sagan further states that the military's influence in decision making affairs of the new nuclear weapon states is on the increase especially in case of Pakistan. He also opposes Waltz and states that the nuclear deterrence is not going to work among the new nuclear weapon states especially in case of India and Pakistan as their command and control system is not so strong one as that was of the United States and Soviet Union. He emphasizes the U.S role in helping these smaller nuclear weapon states to strengthen their command and control system.

Hersh (1993) states that the 1990 between India and Pakistan was very severe one as the two states were almost at the edge of a war. Both states mobilized their forces. Pakistan's military chief Mirza Aslam Beg decided to use nuclear weapons if India attacks Pakistan. He ordered the scientists to evacuate Kahuta Research Laboratory, shifted nuclear weapons to the launching site. Hagerty (1995-96) opposes Hersh's view point as he looks at 1990 crisis occurred between India and Pakistan. He finds that the nuclear deterrence worked to avert war between India and Pakistan. The two nuclear weapon states were almost on the edge of the war but they didn't opt for that option and the nuclear deterrence was successful in averting war between these two states. Ganguly and Biringer (2001) focus on the confidence building measures. They state that the cooperation is possible in the anarchic structure of the society. They state that India and Pakistan can cooperate with each other even in an anarchic structure of their relationship and avert the chances of any war. Further, they state that the United States should play its role to bring peace between these two South Asian nuclear weapon states and it is only possible when the United States and the international community admit the nuclear status of these two South Asian powers and help them to strengthen their command and control system.

Kapur (2005) opposes the view point of proliferation optimists. He states that India and Pakistan have failed to get peace after their nuclearization. He further states that the proliferation optimists' as Davin Hagerty and Summit Ganguly claim that nuclear deterrence has provided peace to India and Pakistan, but he opposes their view point and adds that a significant degree of strategic instability

has facilitated Indo-Pakistani violence, in contrast to Cold war example where the strategic stability between the United States and Soviet Union allowed lower level violence.

The crisis between India and Pakistan in 1990 highlighted some serious concerns to the world. First, it became quite clear that the situation in South Asia is something different from the cold war Europe. India and Pakistan didn't show any maturity in dealing with crisis and seemed to be ready to wage a conventional war against each other even though they knew about each other nuclear capabilities.

Second, it became clear that Pakistan had no other option but to rely on its nuclear posture to defend its territorial integrity as it couldn't balance India in conventional capabilities. Third, the nuclear deterrence failed to avert crisis between India and Pakistan in 1990. These two South Asian nuclear weapon states were following clandestine nuclear doctrines and therefore were not clear about each other's nuclear capabilities. Fourth, the democratic governments in the two states also failed to avert 1990 crisis between the two states. India is the largest democracy of the world, but its democratic government couldn't do anything as it was in constant pressure from its people due to continuous Pakistani adventurous policies to change status-quo in the region. Pakistan had some sort of different fate and the democratic government was not so strong that it could take its strategic decisions with military interference. The military is the most powerful institution of Pakistan. It influences all the strategic decisions and it seemed clear when Pakistan military ordered to assemble first nuclear weapon during the 1990 crisis and decided to use nuclear weapons in case of an India war against Pakistan. It is embarrassing that the then Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto didn't even know about the whole episode. Finally, the United States played a very important in reducing the tension between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states. Therefore, the greater responsibility lied on the US shoulders to avert any war between India and Pakistan in this region.

If India and Pakistan are serious to find solutions to their disputes and really want to search for peace in the region, they need to take some important measures to end trust deficit present between the two nuclear weapon states. India and Pakistan need to depend on stakes such as inter-state diplomacy, democracy, trade, people to people contact and cultural ties with each as these are only options which can lead them to peace. And if these two states fail to have such

stakes then these two will be more prone to war and no one can prevent war between these two nuclear weapon states and any conventional war between the two nuclear weapon states will surely lead to a nuclear exchange and would result in a major catastrophe.

7. Conclusion

The crisis between India and Pakistan in 1990 was so severe that the two states slightly missed a major war which could also result in the nuclear catastrophe. Pakistan less confident of its conventional capabilities found no other option but to go for a nuclear strike if it faced any Indian aggression. The nuclear deterrence was not successful in deterring the two sides from pursuing their war oriented policies. The democracy also failed to avert war between India and Pakistan. The credit only goes to diplomacy which averted war between these two South Asian nuclear weapon states.

The United States became the most successful state to influence the two South Asian nuclear powers not to pursue the path of war. It convinced the two sides that war is not going to benefit any side and will result in major catastrophe. The US assurances to the two sides played a major role to reduce the tension during the times of the crisis. The crisis in 1990 clearly indicated that nuclear deterrence was not workable between the two South Asian nuclear powers. It also portrayed a message to the both sides to have their dependence on other stakes and not the nuclear deterrence. Therefore, the diplomacy became more successful in reducing tension between India and Pakistan during 1990 crisis. The nuclear deterrence didn't work to avert war between India and Pakistan. The crisis of 1990 also portrayed two messages that there is greater role for the United States to play in the future as it has done in the past to avert war between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states and these two states should depend on other stakes such as trade, inter-state diplomacy, democracy, people to people contact and cultural as these stakes will prove helpful in reducing the chances of any war and will lead them to peace.

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