PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR TESTING

Hasan-Askari Rizvi

South Asia's security profile underwent a major transformation following India's nuclear tests on May 11 and 13, 1998, and Pakistan's matching response on May 28 and 30. These actions brought an end to the policy of nuclear ambiguity–that despite having nuclear weapon capability, weaponization was avoided–the two countries had been pursuing since the mid-1980s. As a result, the tests made "South Asia and the world a more dangerous place."[1] It could be argued that Pakistan's response was predictable after India resorted to nuclear explosions because Pakistan had traditionally tagged its nuclear policy with that of India. However, there were signs in the aftermath of India's nuclear testing that Pakistan might delay but not abandon further nuclear detonations.

In the first flush of the nuclear dawn, the Pakistani government withstood the pressure of the pro-bomb domestic groups, who argued that India's explosions had created a zero-sum situation for Pakistan. The top civil and military leadership summoned the country's leading nuclear scientists within hours of India's nuclear explosions on May 11 for a briefing on Pakistan's preparedness to undertake its own nuclear detonations. The scientists were instructed to begin preparatory work on the already-selected site in Chagai (Balochistan). However, it was not until May 20 that the decisive tilt in favor of testing began to take shape. By May 24–25, the top civil and military leaders made up their minds in favor. The final signal was given in the early hours of May 28.

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Asian Survey, 41:6, pp. 943–955. ISSN: 0004–4687

1. Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Independent Task Force on U.S. Policy Toward India and Pakistan in the Wake of the Tests, *After the Tests: U.S. Policy Toward India and Pakistan* (New York: CFR, 1998), p. 3.

Within this context, in this article I will explain Pakistan's gradual drift toward nuclearization. The article will have specific reference to four interrelated factors: strategic doctrine, India's posture toward Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of its nuclear explosions, reaction of the international community to India's nuclear explosions and especially the non-availability of credible security guarantees and material incentives, and the domestic political context.

Pakistan's Strategic Doctrine

Pakistan pursued a minimal deterrence approach to cope with what the policy makers perceived as an adverse regional security environment. In contrast to the military superiority that India enjoyed in South Asia, Pakistan had to cope with notable geographic and security handicaps, a weak military and civilian industrial base, and resource constraints. Pakistan did not aim at conventional military parity with India, which was neither possible nor desirable. Islamabad's minimal deterrence approach underlined the need to develop conventional military capability–and especially the strike power–sufficient to withstand military pressure from and make an armed conflict costly for India.

Pakistan could not develop and sustain the required deterrence capability without external connections and support. These were necessary not only for procurement of weapons and equipment, but also for the diplomacy that could compensate for the country's military inferiority and build international backing with respect to its problems with India. These were the major reasons that Pakistan developed security ties with the U.S. in the 1950s, when it joined U.S.-sponsored military alliances and entered into bilateral security arrangements with the U.S. Pakistan would again form close security ties with the U.S. in the 1980s against the backdrop of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. The desire to strengthen its security also shaped Pakistan's efforts to both cultivate China since the 1960s and pursue strong diplomatic interactions with the Islamic states.[2]

The same minimal deterrence approach shaped Pakistan's nuclear weapons and missile programs. The underlying consideration was to develop some capability in all types of armament. India was building its strength. A sufficiently strong, credible conventional defense and nuclear weapons capability were considered prerequisites to ward off Indian pressure and enable Pakistan to conduct foreign policy and domestic affairs in an autonomous manner. Pakistan decided in principle to work toward building a nuclear weapon capability in 1972 in the aftermath of the military debacle in the 1971 Indo-Paki-

2. For a detailed study of Pakistan's defense and strategic profile, see Pervez Iqbal Cheema, *Pakistan's Defence Policy, 1947–58* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 105–44; and Hasan-Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 66–68.

stan war, but it did not acquire any new technology for that purpose before India's first nuclear explosion in May 1974.

In 1976, Pakistan signed an agreement with France to procure a reprocessing plant, but this plan soon ran into difficulties mainly due to opposition from the U.S. By the time France backed out of the agreement in 1978, Pakistan had already embarked on a clandestine effort to develop a uranium enrichment facility. This installation became operational in 1980 and started high uranium enrichment activities in 1982. Pakistan carried out first cold tests of weapon design in-between 1983 and 1984. By 1985, Pakistan was capable of hard testing a nuclear device.[3]

In January 1987, Pakistan's leading nuclear scientist, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, told the well-known Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar that Pakistan had acquired nuclear weapons capability.[4] Subsequently, Pakistan's foreign secretary admitted in an interview in February 1992 that his country had the components to fashion a nuclear "device."[5] However, Pakistan's policy makers showed no interest in becoming an overt nuclear power. Although they were opposed to the unilateral surrender of the nuclear weapons option, Pakistan's policy makers continued to work on nuclear and missile development. Nonetheless, they were more or less satisfied with nuclear ambiguity in South Asia; it had established nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan and each country recognized the other's nuclear capabilities. For Pakistan, this compensated for India's advantage in conventional forces and contributed to Pakistan's efforts "to preserve a broad equilibrium with India" and "neutralize Indian nuclear threat or blackmail."[6]

Pakistan's policy makers were upset at the press reports in 1995 and 1996 about the possibility that India would resume nuclear testing, a claim denied by India at the time but later confirmed in May 1998. The potential of Indian nuclearization threatened Pakistan's security parameters, which were based on the principle of ongoing nuclear ambiguity; consequently, the policy makers made a quick review of their nuclear policy and talked of an "appropriate response" should India resume nuclear testing. India's ultimate decision not to do so defused the potentially difficult situation.

The formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in March 1998 revived the specter of a nuclear India. The BJP's election manifesto as

3. *Herald* (Karachi), June 1998, p. 28.

4. Neil Joeck, *Maintaining Nuclear Stability in South Asia*, Adelphi Paper No. 312 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 21–22.

5. Hasan Askari Rizvi, "The Nuclear Freeze Controversy," *Nation* (Lahore), November 27, 1993.

6. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, "Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrine and Command and Control" in *Planning the Unthinkable*, eds. Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 158–81.

well as statements of the party's leaders had given enough indication of their strong desire to replace nuclear ambiguity with an overt nuclear posture. When the BJP-led coalition government spoke of "exercis[ing] the option to induct nuclear weapons," the government of Pakistan took exception. New Delhi qualified its intentions, but Islamabad maintained that the manifesto and subsequent comments nonetheless represented a "dangerous development for South Asia and the whole world. If need arose Islamabad would review its nuclear policy to safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests."[7] Pakistan's prime minister addressed a letter to the leaders of the major powers in April expressing apprehension that India's BJP government would resume nuclear testing.[8] When U.S. Ambassador Bill Richardson and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott went to Islamabad that same month, Pakistani leaders broached the matter with them. However, the American officials, who had also gone to New Delhi that month, told the Pakistanis that the Indian government "had no intention to carry out nuclear tests."[9]

Pakistan thus was shocked by India's nuclear explosions because it did not find any significant change in India's security environment that warranted nuclearization in early May. In response, it was deemed that Islamabad would have to review its conventional and nuclear security strategies for maintaining a minimum and credible deterrence.

India's Posture Toward Pakistan

A section of the Indian elite and some of the country's cabinet members have argued that Pakistan was not a factor in shaping India's decision to go nuclear. They maintained that India decided to become an overt nuclear power in order to cope with the deteriorating security environment of the post-Cold War period. India's nuclearization was also prompted, they said, by the policies of other nuclear weapons states, the threat from China's ever-growing conventional and nuclear arsenal, and especially Beijing's close cooperation with Islamabad in nuclear and missile development. Finally, these elements in India further argued that India wanted to assert its role at the global level in the changed international environment.[10]

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7. *Dawn*, March 20, 1998; and Amit Baruah, "The View from Islamabad," *Frontline*, April 24, 1998, pp. 20–21.

8. *Nation*, May 24, 1998.

9. The statement of Pakistan's ambassador to Belgium, Riaz Mohammad Khan, delivered as part of "South Asia Goes Nuclear: Indian and Pakistani Positions," *Contemporary South Asia* 7:2 (July 1998), p. 197.

10. For a succinct explanation of the factors shaping India's decision to go nuclear, see Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs* 77:5 (September–October 1998), pp. 41–52.

India indeed may have to compete with China in the long run for political clout in the international system. However, the argument that India did not have Pakistan under consideration is not sustainable. This conclusion can be drawn if one looks at several statements coming from the Indian government and government officials at the time of the nuclear tests. The May 11, 1998, press statement announcing nuclear testing spoke of the Indian government's deep concerns about the "nuclear environment in India's neighborhood," pointedly without specifically naming China or Pakistan. That same day, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee sent a letter to President Clinton that focused on Pakistan more than on China. Documents submitted to the Lok Sabha on May 27 entitled "Evolution of India's Nuclear Policy" contained disparaging comments about Pakistan, while a speech Vaypayee made to that body the same day also clearly was delivered with Pakistan in mind. Taken as a whole, such words coming from the government and government officials make it clear that Indian contentions of a threat from China and unnamed extra-region powers as the sole reason for India's nuclearization are unsupported by the evidence.[11]

Consequently, Pakistan's official and unofficial circles rejected India's China-threat explanation. They attributed the nuclearization decision to a host of factors, namely India's desire to be treated as a major power at the global level, an uncertain security environment in the post-Cold War period, and the narrow nationalist worldview of the BJP as well as the domestic political gains the party perceived to be for the taking. A sizable number of people in Pakistan believed that India would use its nuclear status to pressure Pakistan to accept India's perspectives on the regional issues and especially on India-Pakistan disputes.

These apprehensions were strengthened by the anti-Pakistan statements made by BJP leaders in the immediate aftermath of India's nuclear explosions. L. K. Advani, India's home minister, called on Pakistan to "roll-back its anti-India policy" and especially its support of insurgency in Kashmir. He spoke of "pro-active measures against Kashmiri militancy" and hinted that India could resort to hot pursuit military raids into Pakistan-administered Kashmir.[12] Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Madan Lal Khurana asked Pakistan to understand that India was now a nuclear weapon power and declared that "if Pakistan wanted to fight another war with us, they should tell

11. For the text of the statements, see Embassy of India in the U.S.'s publication *India News*, May 16–June 15, 1998, pp. 1–6, 8. See also the statement of India's ambassador to Belgium, Chandrasekhar Dasgupta, outlining how Pakistan (along with China) was responsible for deterioration of India's security environment, delivered as part of "South Asia Goes Nuclear: Indian and Pakistani Positions," pp. 193–94.

12. *Dawn*, May 19, 1998; and Stephen Kinzer, "Restraint by Pakistan Is Eroding, Leader Says," *New York Times* (*NYT*), May 24, 1998.

us the place and time, as we are ready for that."[13] Finally, the BJP's spokesman, K. L. Sharma, issued an equally strident statement, warning that Pakistan would have to face "India's wrath" if Pakistan continued with its "anti-India policy."[14]

These belligerent statements were coupled with an intensification of clashes between Indian and Pakistani troops on the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir around May 20 and Prime Minister Vajpayee's decision to assign Kashmir affairs to Advani. These developments created a strong impression in Pakistan that, having declared itself a nuclear power, India now intended to adopt a more forceful approach toward Kashmir and might even be tempted to take military action across the LOC. Indian television talk shows (which could be seen in parts of Pakistan) further clouded the political environment as many of the discussants adopted a harsh and anti-Pakistan tone in making their comments.

The hawkish statements could possibly have been part of Indian strategy to induce Pakistan to go for nuclear tests. India's senior leaders may have felt that Pakistani testing would deflect international criticism of India's nuclear explosions; the international community would then target both countries. The statements coming from India may also have reflected mixed Indian motives: a desire to induce Pakistan to test and the traditionally anti-Pakistan disposition of the BJP leadership, which found strong expression in the wake of India's demonstration of its nuclear weapons capability. In Pakistan, these statements were generally interpreted as a manifestation of the arrogance of Indian leaders due to the recently acquired nuclear power status. The hawkish and pro-bomb elements played these up to the hilt.

Response of the International Community: The Sanctions Issue

Strong international sanctions against India could have contributed to dissuading Pakistan from going nuclear. It became clear to Pakistan's policymakers within a week of India's nuclear explosions that the international community would not impose strict sanctions against India and that whatever measures they adopted in the initial stages would lose their sting over time.[15] It was felt that commercial interests in whatever countries might impose sanctions would work toward diluting any such restrictions, for India was too big a market to be lost to others who were willing to do business. Though the

13. *Nation*, May 22, 1998.

14. Ibid., May 23, 1998.

15. For review of international reaction to India's nuclear explosions, see Hilary Synnott, *The Causes and Consequences of South Asia's Nuclear Tests*, Adelphi Paper No. 332 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 27–37.

U.S. did impose economic sanctions on India within a day of the first nuclear test under the terms of the Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act of 1994, other major powers were not keen on taking similar action. The summit conference of the G-8 nations, held at Birmingham, England, did not go beyond criticizing India's nuclear testing, prompting Islamabad to express "deep disappointment at the[ir] muted response."[16] Furthermore, Pakistan could not be oblivious to Russia's opposition to sanctions of any kind against India; it felt that Russia's support of India would result in a further dilution of the sanctions put into place.[17]

Attempts were made to discourage Pakistan from testing nuclear devices by offering incentives. These failed because the offers of economic rewards were not categorical or convincing. The attempts were numerous. Between May 12 and May 27, 1998, President Clinton phoned Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif four times to advise restraint. The British prime minister also advised abstinence, while a special envoy of the Japanese prime minister visited Pakistan with similar advice. Senior American officials, including Strobe Talbott, deputy secretary of state; General Anthony Zinni, commander of U.S. central command; and Karl Inderfurth, assistant secretary of state for South Asia, visited Pakistan within four days of the Indian tests and offered economic and military assistance. These actions were described by U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Thomas Simons as something his country had never offered before to "a non-ally like Pakistan."[18]

American officials also offered to initiate legislation for the release of F-16 aircraft ordered by Pakistan for which it had already paid. The officials also promised to pressure Congress to repeal the Pressler Amendment. This amendement to the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, passed in 1985, linked the grant of economic assistance and military sales to Pakistan with the need for the certification from the U.S. president that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device. President George H. W. Bush had declined certification in 1990, discontinuing all bilateral economic assistance and military sales to Pakistan. In addition to the proposed attempt to repeal the Pressler Amendment, efforts were also made to get bilateral economic assistance and military sales resumed and facilitate the processing of loans through international financial institutions.

However, Pakistan had strong reservations about the viability of the U.S. offers as they only outlined the general direction of assistance rather than a specific package. The offers were contingent on the repeal of the Pressler Amendment. Islamabad was not sure that the Clinton administration would

16. *Nation*, May 19, 1998.

17. Michael R. Gordon, "Kremlin Soft-Pedals Its Rebuke to India, and Opposes Sanctions," *NYT*, May 14, 1998.

18. *Dawn*, July 19, 1998.

be able to remove this obstacle quickly. Moreover, Pakistan would have liked to be relieved of repayment of some loans, but no such offer was forthcoming. Unofficial sources in Pakistan speculated that Islamabad had demanded a package of economic and military assistance worth $5 billion.[19] However, the view in Islamabad was that even if the Pressler Amendment was revoked, a host of American political groups offer strong opposition to the supply of sophisticated weapons. Furthermore, the legacy of serious problems in bilateral security relations in the past haunted the dialogue. Pakistan felt bitter that the U.S. administration wanted to use the F-16 aircraft issue as a bargaining chip given that Pakistan had already paid for the aircraft and a procedure had been laid down in a 1996 U.S. law for resolving this matter.

In addition, Pakistan was looking for concrete security guarantees from the major powers vis-à-vis India's nuclear weapons capability.[20] The U.S. was not willing to make such a commitment because of logistical and political problems in its operationalization. Commenting on Pakistan's decision to resort to nuclear testing, Stephen P. Cohen, a renowed expert on South Asian affairs, remarked that the U.S. did not offer "any real incentives not to test." Noting that the price "we offered was not close to what we offered North Korea," Cohen pointed out that

> Pyongyang got $4 billion in American assistance to cap its nuclear program; Pakistan was given vague promises that it might finally be given the 28 F-16 aircraft it bought and paid for almost a decade ago. And we and the Chinese were unwilling to offer the Pakistanis security guarantees that would have made them feel comfortable.[21]

As noted, Islamabad also did not get categorical security guarantees from China, although China reiterated its traditional support for Pakistan. Pakistan's foreign secretary visited China soon after India's nuclear test but did not receive any categorical offer of security in light of India's nuclear capability. Pakistan-based U.S. diplomats engaged in subtle lobbying with public opinion leaders to mobilize support against testing. They approached Benazir Bhutto, then-leader of the opposition, to get her support for restraining Pakistan from nuclear testing. She did not oblige. Some U.S. embassy officials in Islamabad also approached Akhtar Mengal, chief minister of Balochistan, in an attempt to persuade him to take up the nonproliferation cause and op-

19. Shahid-ur-Rehman, *Long Road to Chagai* (Islamabad: Shahid-ur-Rehman, 1999), p. 116. See also Zafar Abbas, "The Hardest Choice," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 54:4 (July–August 1998).

20. Zalmay Khalilzad, "The Nuclear Sub-continent," *Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 1998; and Robert C. McFarlane, "Pakistan's Catch-22," *NYT*, May 30, 1998.

21. Barbara Crossette, "South Asian Arms Race: Reviving Dormant Fears of Nuclear War," *NYT*, May 29, 1998.

pose the use of Balochistan territory for the impending test. In response, the federal government bypassed the provincial government over the making of arrangements for the nuclear explosion in the Chagai area.

Islamabad's Domestic Considerations

India's nuclear testing generated an intense debate in Pakistan on its options. Newspapers and magazines offered editorials and published articles, comments, and letters from readers on the topic. In addition, various nongovernmental organizations, political forums, and political parties held seminars and meetings on this issue and the leading political leaders issued statements, all of which were widely reported in the press.

A small group of pacifists wanted Pakistan not to undertake any nuclear tests, urging instead that Pakistan denuclearize.[22] This perspective did not attract broad popular support. A more widely shared view was that Pakistan should continue its policy of nuclear ambiguity by holding back on nuclear testing. People of this view, it should be noted, did not advocate abandoning the nuclear option or program altogether. A number of articles that appeared in Pakistan's print media called for a careful weighing of costs and benefits of nuclear testing. Some argued that Pakistan should delay testing to take advantage of the offers of economic assistance and diplomatic support, while others urged restraint because they believed Pakistan's troubled political economy could not withstand the diplomatic pressures and economic sanctions sure to come in the post-explosion period. Pakistan's security depended more on economic development and the easing of tension in the region rather than the setting off of nuclear devices to match Indian detonations.[23] A delay would, it was argued, win much-needed diplomatic support and financial gains for Pakistan. One prominent analyst, Abdul Sattar, acutely observed that "[P]akistan, with reserves of only a little above one billion dollars, heavy repayments obligations on a huge debt mountain and an economy teetering on the brink, is hardly in a position to emulate India's dare-devil posture. Living on thin margins, it has to weigh its options with much greater care and calculation."[24]

Nevertheless, Islamabad's decision to go nuclear enjoyed widespread support in Pakistan. The Islamic elements (mainly but not exclusively Islamic political parties) and ultra-nationalists were in the forefront of the demand to follow through. Several political parties, including the ruling Muslim League and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and a large proportion of intellectuals

22. Samina Ahmed, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Points and Nuclear Choices," *International Security* 23:4 (Spring 1999), pp. 178–204.

23. See editorial entitled "It Is Not Now or Never," *Friday Times* (Lahore), May 29–June 4, 1998, pp. 1, 5.

24. Abdul Sattar, "Restablising Nuclear Deterrence," *Nation*, May 16, 1998.

and journalists advocated an immediate and firm response to Indian explosions because they felt that to delay would adversely affect Pakistan's security. The issues of prestige and the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear program also affected Islamabad's decision. Most supporters of the bomb argued that any delay in explosion would raise serious doubts about Pakistan's ability to explode nuclear devices. The former chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, Munir Ahmad Khan, argued that a failure to do so would strengthen the perception that Pakistan nuclear capability was "overplayed [and] over-rated" and that "Pakistan might be just bluffing."[25]

Pakistani public opinion leaders viewed India's explosions as part of the latter's quest for great-power status and regional domination. They noted India's call to the international community in the aftermath of the tests to admit India into the exclusive nuclear weapons state club. Pakistan could neither counter the ramifications of India's regional or global aspirations nor make a claim to the membership of that exclusive club without demonstrating its own capabilities. The opinion leaders therefore claimed that Pakistan's survival as a self-respecting nation was contingent on an immediate and matching move to overt nuclearization in order to restore regional strategic balance and deter India from engaging in military adventurism in Kashmir.

Initially, the civilian government kept its options open. The views voiced by the cabinet members reflected divergent opinions. A number of federal ministers spoke of caution while others, like Gohar Ayub Khan, the then-foreign minister, maintained that the question was "not of if but of when."[26] Khan, under pressure from both sides, spoke of the security predicament but did not publicly commit himself one way or the other. The top brass of the military, who have traditionally played a decisive role in policy making on key nuclear issues, favored testing but were uncertain about the timing.[27]

But the moderates who advised caution began to lose ground to the nuclear hawks as India's BJP leadership issued threatening statements (mainly on the subject of Kashmir). Indian television programming sent equally terse signals across the border. As noted earlier, tension escalated on the LOC around May 20, 1998, with Indian and Pakistani troops beginning to exchange fire more frequently. It was difficult to determine who fired the first shot; regardless, the two sides were determined to show that they could respond effectively. The fear that an Indian military move was impending in Kashmir began to sink deep in Pakistani minds. Pakistan's army chief, General Jehangir Karamat, visited forward positions in Kashmir on May 23 and May 25; he returned with the strong impression that the troops and officers were

25. Munir Ahmad Khan, "Nuclearization of South Asia and Its Regional and Global Implications," *Regional Studies* (Islamabad) 26:4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 3–58.

26. *Nation*, May 20, 1998.

27. Zafar Abbas, "Future Shock?" *Herald*, June 1998, pp. 22–25.

shaken by India's post-test posture. Emphasizing the need for vigilance and readiness, the chief reassured his troops that any Indian military activity along the LOC "would trigger a response from Pakistan" and that "no sacrifice was too great to ensure a balance critically."[28]

These developments had a dramatic impact on Pakistan's political leaders and opinion makers; they began to urge the government to adopt firm countermeasures. The editors of major newspapers had a meeting with the prime minister on May 21 during which they asked him to conduct a nuclear test to rectify the strategic imbalance in South Asia. They argued that Pakistan could not depend on the security guarantees of the international community and that it was imperative for Pakistan to take steps to ensure its security in view of the "increasing threats and nuclear blackmail from India."[29]

In the political world, one can first note the two All Parties Conferences (APCs) held on May 21 and 24. One was convened by the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the other by the major PPP-dominated opposition alliance, the Pakistan Awami Ittehad (Pakistan People's Alliance); both asked for nuclear tests to be conducted without any further delay. The JI-led APC additionally threatened to engage in street agitation if nuclear tests were not carried out by May 30. The APCs were not alone. The Kashmir Action Committee and several retired civil and military officials, including former army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg, called on the government to undertake testing as well. Finally, the press comments, articles and statements of many other political leaders also tilted heavily in favor of nuclear tests.

On May 25, a survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan was published showing that about 70% of the people favored nuclear testing, versus 30% who advised restraint. The support for restraint increased to 40% when the issue of strict sanctions against Pakistan was raised. This support rose to 48% on the offer of incentives like the writing off loans.[30] Another survey, published in the prominent Pakistani magazine *Newsline*, also showed strong public support for the proposed explosions: 64% wanted an immediate explosion, 15% supported a delay, while 21% opposed any explosion. Unlike the Gallup poll, however, only 23% supported the acceptance of economic and military aid from the U.S. in return for abandoning the nuclear program.[31] In either case, the balance of public support was tilted decisively in favor of nuclear testing.

The same day that the results of the polls were released, the first of two important meetings of Pakistan's leaders took place. This one was between General Jehangir Karamat and Prime Minister Sharif. Although this was not

28. *Nation*, May 24. 1998; *Dawn*, May 26, 1998.
29. Ibid., May 22, 1998.
30. Ibid., May 28, 1998.
31. Mehtab S. Karim, "Figuring It Out," *Newsline*, June 1998, pp. 34A–36.

the first meeting of its type, the May 25 engagement took place against the backdrop of Karamat's visit to the Pakistani troops along the LOC. During this meeting, Karamat and Sharif decided that Pakistan should go for nuclear tests. The following day, Nawaz Sharif met with Pakistan's president, Muhammad Rafiq Tarar. Following this came a final review of the decision to go nuclear in another meeting held that same day. This decisive gathering included the prime minister, the army chief, the foreign minister, and the foreign secretary.

After these fateful meetings took place, two intelligence reports appeared that caused much panic among Pakistan's policy makers. First, intelligence service and Army authorities reported the sighting of an unidentified F-16 aircraft in Pakistan's airspace on May 27 (it should be noted here that India does not have F-16 aircraft; Pakistani military authorities were suggesting the presence of an Israeli aircraft in the area). The country's Ghauri missiles were deployed that same day. The second report came shortly after midnight of May 27–28. The Pakistani military was put on maximum alert when the country's intelligence agencies reported an unusual movement of aircraft in India just across the border, hinting at a possible preventive air strike against nuclear installations. The Pakistani press began to talk about the possibility of an Indian air strike on Pakistan's nuclear installations a couple of days before the security alert.

At any rate, faced with these new pieces of information, another important meeting was held on May 27. This one involved the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief, Lt. General Naseem Rana, who briefed the prime minister and other top officials on the overall security situation. The briefing specifically highlighted intelligence reports of a possible Indian attack on Pakistan's nuclear installations. The army chief recommended proceeding with nuclear tests in view of what the top brass perceived as a deteriorating security situation in Kashmir. However, he followed this recommendation up with a promise to support any decision made by the prime minister.

Islamabad decided to issue a report to be sent to New Delhi, warning it against undertaking an air strike against Pakistan's nuclear installations. The information contained in the report was later communicated to the major powers and the U.N. secretary-general. In the meantime, within a few hours of having issued the report Islamabad made its final decision to conduct its first set of tests. Responding to the report, India denied the allegations of preventive air strikes being planned and no independent source could confirm any such planning, either. Several non-official circles in Pakistan also doubt the credibility of the government's report, describing it as either evidence of a military strategy to guard against any possibility that the civilian government would defect from the decision to go nuclear or a means of providing an additional justification for engaging in nuclear testing.

Aside from the report and the implications of its contents, another factor that contributed to the decision to go nuclear was the government's inability to make a mature and dispassionate assessment of the implication of testing on the economy. Either the prime minster's economic and financial advisors did not do their homework to fully assess and understand the negative implications of the sanctions on the faltering Pakistani economy or they deliberately downplayed them, giving the impression that the sanctions would have little, if any, impact on Pakistan. Regardless, the warnings of independent and non-official economists and political analysts were rejected as being false alarms.

Conclusion

Pakistani domestic politics were significantly altered by the decision to test. Policy makers believed that the national euphoria generated by these explosions would enable the government to tide over economic difficulties. The government imposed a state of emergency in the country and seized foreign currency accounts in the banks in the immediate aftermath of the first series of tests on May 28. However, later developments showed that the enthusiasm generated by the explosions had dissipated within a few weeks and the country was left facing its plunge into a major economic crisis.

The record of events prior to the tests shows that Pakistan could restrain itself. However, neither India nor the international community was prepared to assuage Pakistan's security concerns. After having set off its nuclear devices, India was unable or unwilling to understand the security problems it created for Pakistan. If India felt threatened by a powerful state like China, India should have recognized that, by the same logic, Pakistan felt equally threatened by a stronger India against the backdrop of an unfortunate history of troubled bilateral relations marked by distrust, conflict, and war.

Similarly, the international community's inability to reassure Pakistan with concrete security guarantees and its failure to offer attractive material incentives led Pakistan's policy makers to conclude that restraint did not necessarily offer a secure and attractive choice. If Pakistan was to face hardships and uncertainties anyway, nuclear testing offered an opportunity to rectify strategic imbalance in the region and restore minimal deterrence, which it viewed as critical to its security.