



VOICES

Wanted: An end to nuclear nationalism in South Asia

But the public mood for peace needs international support

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Photo by Gudrun Georges. www.gudrungeorges.com

Since their back-to-back nuclear weapon tests in May 1998, Pakistan and India have been rapidly developing and expanding their nuclear arsenals. While the two countries have maintained a moratorium on nuclear testing, they have refused to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). They are both producing highly enriched uranium and plutonium—the key ingredients for nuclear weapons—and increasing their production capacity. They are estimated to have approximately 100 nuclear weapons each and they are also testing and deploying a diverse array of nuclear-capable ballistic and cruise missiles.

UN RESOLUTION CONDEMNED 1998 NUCLEAR TESTS

The headlong pursuit by Pakistan and India of their nuclear weapon ambitions flies in the face of a unanimous UN Security Council resolution calling for restraint in South Asia — Resolution 1172 (6 June 1998). The resolution “condemns the nuclear tests conducted by India on 11 and 13 May 1998 and by Pakistan on

28 and 30 May 1998” and “demands that India and Pakistan refrain from further nuclear tests.” It also:

“Calls upon India and Pakistan immediately to stop their nuclear weapon development programmes, to refrain from weaponization or from the deployment of nuclear weapons, to cease development of ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons and any further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, to confirm their policies not to export equipment, materials or technology that could contribute to weapons of mass destruction or missiles capable of delivering them and to undertake appropriate commitments in that regard.”

GREATER EFFORT NEEDED TO MOVE PAKISTAN AND INDIA TOWARDS NUCLEAR RESTRAINT

Having passed Resolution 1172, the United Nations Security Council and the larger international community has made no substantial effort to move Pakistan and India towards nuclear restraint, to say nothing of nuclear disarmament.

Pakistan and India appear to recognize no international legal obligation to restrain or end their nuclear weapons and missile programmes. They did, however, agree bilaterally in 1999 that: “The two sides shall continue to abide by their respective unilateral moratorium on conducting further nuclear test explosions unless either side, in exercise of its national sovereignty decides that extraordinary events have jeopardised its supreme interests.” They also reached agreement in 2005 on advanced notification of ballistic missile flight tests.

International concern has flared during crises in South Asia. Most notably, during the three month-long India-Pakistan Kargil War in 1999 and the long military crisis of 2001-2002, when the two countries threatened the use of nuclear weapons. For the international community as a whole, in the decade since then the South Asian nuclear arms race has taken a back seat to the opportunities afforded by the emergence of India as a rising economic and strategic power in Asia and the importance

accorded Pakistan since September 2001 in supporting the war against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. These opportunities have included massive arms sales to the two countries. The 2012 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook reports that India was the largest arms importer in the world from 2007-2011 and Pakistan was the third largest importer for this period.

CIVIL SOCIETY: MAKING THE CASE FOR PEACE AND COOPERATION

As Pakistan and India have lurched from crisis to crisis and both governments poured scarce resources into a ruinous conventional and nuclear arms race, a growing number of activists in the two countries have mobilized to make the case for peace and cooperation. One key group is the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy, which began in 1994 as a group of 25 people from the two countries meeting together in Lahore, Pakistan. It organized its first convention in 1995 in New Delhi, which brought together almost a hundred people from each country. Since then, the annual convention has alternated between Pakistan and India – when the respective governments have granted visas.

This effort at people-to-people diplomacy has grown to be the largest regular gathering of citizens of the two countries. The effort now embraces

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thousands of activists working on peace and justice, women's rights, human rights, and labour rights. It includes teachers and students, journalists, former soldiers, scholars, business people, and retired government officials¹. An important focus of this effort has been opposing further India-Pakistan wars, reversing the arms race and promoting a process of South Asian nuclear disarmament.

INDIA AND PAKISTAN SHOULD CONCLUDE THEIR OWN CTBT WITHOUT WAITING FOR A GLOBAL TREATY

A ban on nuclear testing has been a recurring demand of this citizens' diplomacy movement. The first Pakistan-India Peoples' Convention on Peace and Democracy, held in 1995, agreed on a joint resolution that "India and Pakistan should conclude their

[1] These efforts are documented and assessed in Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian eds., *Bridging Partition: People's Initiatives for Peace between India and Pakistan*, Orient Blackswan, 2010.

own Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty without waiting for a global treaty." The Convention also supported the demand that "All states must commit themselves to cease production of additional fissile materials for nuclear weapons and other explosive purposes." An end to the production of fissile material would cap nuclear arsenals and help lay a basis for reducing and eliminating them.

In the wake of the May 1998 nuclear tests, civil society groups began to focus more strongly on nuclear issues and the importance of banning further testing. Sometimes this opposition to further nuclear testing came at great cost. On 3 June 1998, at a press conference organized in Islamabad by the Pakistan-India People's Forum, leading Pakistani public intellectual Eqbal Ahmad and prominent physicist and peace activist Abdul Hameed Nayyar were fiercely denounced as traitors for speaking against the nuclear tests by some of the journalists there to cover the event. They were then physically attacked by a mob of activists from an Islamist political party.

In marked contrast, the governments in both Pakistan and India offered nuclear testing as a symbol of national achievement. In both countries the nuclear tests were announced on television by the respective prime ministers. The scientists responsible for carrying out the nuclear tests were publicly feted as national heroes. In Pakistan, the scientists



People speaking out against nuclear testing at a press conference in Islamabad in June 1998 were abused and then assaulted. Photo courtesy of Isa Daudpota.

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were shown returning from the test site in Balochistan and speaking at a live press conference on national television. In India, there were glossy photos of scientists with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at the test site in Rajasthan.

On the first anniversary of the 1998 nuclear tests, dubbed the “Day of Deliverance,” Pakistan’s government ordered 10 days of national celebrations. National television and radio networks all carried programmes lauding the nuclear tests. Cities and towns were decorated with banners and posters of leading nuclear weapons scientists and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif against a backdrop of mushroom clouds. Giant glowing models of the mountain where the tests were carried out were erected in several cities.

PAKISTAN SHOULD SIGN THE CTBT IMMEDIATELY

Civil society remained undaunted. A national network of peace and justice groups came together in Karachi to establish the Pakistan Peace Coalition in January 1999. Its founding statement called on Pakistan’s people and government to:

“Recognise that nuclear war is not just an abstract possibility but something very real. Pakistan and India must enter into negotiations on nuclear issues, initially with the aim of creating confidence-building measures to decrease the chances of the accidental use, but with complete denuclearisation as the ultimate goal. Pakistan should sign the CTBT immediately.”

India’s national Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace, founded in 2000, which brings together over 200 grass roots groups, called for the “halt and roll back [of] India’s nuclear weapons-related preparations and activities.” This included

a demand for “No explosive testing, sub-critical testing, or production or acquisition of fissile materials and tritium, for nuclear weapons purposes” by India.

This is only a small part of a largely hidden history of local opposition to the nuclear future in South Asia². This history is being made by people far removed from the corridors of national power and invisible in the great halls where States meet to talk about arms control and disarmament, war and peace. The sites of struggle are nuclear facilities, from uranium mines to nuclear power plants, at the nuclear weapon test sites and the missile testing sites. Here local communities have fought back, trying to defend their livelihoods and community rights, resisting displacement and destruction of the environment, and demanding the basic rights of citizenship: the rights to know and to be heard. They have marched, fasted, blockaded, occupied, gone to court, and they have protested to survive.

PUBLIC MOOD FOR PEACE

The public mood has shifted. Despite the wars and the hostility, and the decades of being taught that the other was a mortal enemy, the people of India and Pakistan say they are ready for peace. A 2012 public opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center found that more than 60 percent of people in Pakistan and India want better relations between the two countries, with 67 percent in Pakistan and 58 percent in India supporting peace talks. About 80 percent in Pakistan and 60 percent in India think it is “very important” for the two countries to resolve their differences over Kashmir.

[2] see Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian eds., *Out of the Nuclear Shadow*, Zed Press, 2001.

Despite the public mood for peace between their countries, and the obvious and pressing need to direct greater resources to meet the basic social needs of their people, there is no sign that governments in Pakistan and India are ready to curb their nuclear build ups. As India seeks the capacity to put multiple nuclear warheads on missiles that can threaten China, and Pakistan seeks compact nuclear weapons for use on the battlefield to counter Indian conventional forces, there will be resistance in particular from the respective nuclear weapon complexes to sign the CTBT. The votes by both Pakistan and India at the United Nations General Assembly in support of the CTBT are clearly at odds with these policies to develop their nuclear arsenals. But few other countries seem to care.

It is hard to see civil society in Pakistan and India alone being able to overcome the entrenched power of the nuclear weapons complexes and the political forces that foster nuclear nationalism in the two countries. Their efforts would benefit greatly from determined efforts by the international community to confront Pakistan and India over their nuclear weapons programmes. This task would of course be made much easier if the United States and other powers that have not yet ratified the CTBT were to do so and if they were to take more seriously their long evaded obligation to nuclear disarmament.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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