India's Nuclear Policy: Case against the Bomb
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India’s Nuclear Policy: Case Against the Bomb

WIDE CONCERN is felt among Indian people at the news appearing from time to time that Pakistan is manufacturing a nuclear bomb. The paper seeks to analyse the political factors that led to the emergence of the atom bomb in the international arena and eventual pursuit for it in the Indo-Pak subcontinent which can be related to the policies pursued by the aggressive forces in the United States. The policy of nuclear deterrent for India is examined in this context.

The production of nuclear bomb was a part of the global strategy of the U.S. and British Governments led by the monopoly capital to stall the growth of the socialist forces led by the Soviet Union, a policy that continued unabated since the success of the October revolution.

Contrary to the view widely held, the nuclear bomb was not used against Japan to shorten the Second World War. The bombs were dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki to wrest the initiative of the war against Japan from the Soviet Union which had just entered the war against her. Japan was already on the verge of collapse and the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were dropped with the full knowledge of the U.S. Government that Japan was desperately sending signals for armistice.

The dates for dropping of atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9 in 1945 respectively, were chosen with particular care. It was already known to the U.S. Government that Soviet Union was expected to declare war against Japan on August 8. For, Stalin gave the assurance in the Yalta Conference in February 1945 that the Soviet Union would do so within three months from the day of cessation of war in Europe. The European war ended on May 8 and the Soviet Union was to enter the war with Japan on August 8, 1945. PMS Blackett showed in his widely quoted book how political, rather than military considerations, were uppermost in the minds of the U.S. strategists in manufacturing the nuclear bomb. Blackett cites from an article by Norman Cousins and Thomas K Finletter in the Saturday Review of Literature on June 15, 1946 where the authors sought to explain why the suggestion offered by sixty four leading U.S. scientists to hold a demonstration blast to bring Japan to surrender could not be pursued:

“. . . . No, any test would have been impossible if the purpose was to knock Japan out before Russians came in—or at least before Russia could
make anything more than a token of participation prior to a Japanese collapse... Unless we came out of the war with a decisive balance of power over Russia, we could be in no position to checkmate Russian expansion".2

Indeed, the manner in which Truman, accompanied by Churchill tried to intimidate Stalin with the information on the newly acquired atom bomb at Postdam in August 1945, only betrayed their intention. Marshal Zhukov narrated in his Reminiscences and Reflections what took place between them. He had to say the following after Truman informed Stalin that the United States possessed a bomb of exceptional power:

"As was later reported abroad, at that moment, Churchill pinned his eyes on Stalin's face, eager to observe his reaction. However, Stalin did not betray his feelings and pretended he saw nothing special in what Truman had said. Both Churchill and many other British and American commentators subsequently surmized that Stalin had probably failed to fathom the significance of the information received".3

Stalin fully understood what had been talked about. After relating the conversation to Molotov, he contacted Soviet physicist Kurchatov and asked him to speed up the Soviet exercise on atom bomb. Zhukov continues:

"It was clear already that the U.S. Government was going to use the atomic bomb for reaching its imperialist goals from a position of strength. This was corroborated on August 6 and 9. Without any military need whatsoever, the Americans dropped two atomic bombs on the peaceful and densely-populated Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima".4

A more forthright statement made by the General entrusted with the direction of the renowned physicists engaged in the Manhattan project for manufacture of the nuclear bomb, reflected the mind of an influential section of the U.S. army. Joseph Rotblat was among the distinguished scientists working on the Manhattan project. Recounting his experiences with the project, Rotblat states:

"In March 1944, I experienced a disagreeable shock. In a casual conversation, General Leslie Groves, the head of the Manhattan project, said: 'You realize, of course, that the real purpose of making the bomb is to subdue our chief enemy, the Russians. Until then I had thought that our work was to prevent a Nazi victory. Now I was told that the weapon we were preparing was really against Russia".5

Rotblat left the project by the end of 1944 when it had became evident that the Germans had abandoned the move to secure the bomb for themselves.

That the nuclear weapon could become instrumental in creating tension between the two countries in the postwar world was foreseen in the perceptive minds of Einstein, Leo Szilard, Niels Bohr and a number of physicists and statesmen. Even before the bomb was actually deployed, they had tried to persuade Roosevelt to come to an agreement with Soviet Union to share its
The US policy of hostility towards Soviet Union only intensified under successive Presidents. This policy of hostility eventually got extended to one of pressurising all countries with whom Soviet Union had friendly relations. The non-aligned countries which received direct assistance from the Soviet Union for developing their economies and had friendly relations with her have earned the opprobrium of US suspicion. India's friendly relations with Soviet Union has long been regarded by the US as an act of indiscretion. Her criticism of U.S. policies damaging the interest of the third world countries is considered motivated. The U.S. Government finds it advantageous, under the circumstances, to befriend Pakistan in her disputes with India and equip the military forces of the former to keep India under pressure. It is in this context that the paradoxes in the US policy where it concerns Pakistan can be analysed meaningfully. The U.S. professes encouragement to democratic practices but provides support to a dictatorial government in Pakistan. The US professes non-proliferation of nuclear weapons but turns a blind eye to Pakistan's efforts to manufacture nuclear bomb.

The military rulers of Pakistan make the most of the contradictions and weaknesses in the US policy. The feudal bourgeois combine in the ruling group is incapable of building up a self-reliant economy in Pakistan. Bereft of an adequate industrial base, its comprador character is reflected in the arms deals with the United States which confer economic benefits on the influential section advocating a military stance in Indo-Pak relations. The continuance of military dictatorship in the country is to the advantage of this group. The religious fervour with which it calls for liberation of Afghanistan and Kashmir earns more of aid from the Middle Eastern states. A large inflow of foreign aid from various countries brings gains to the ruling group. The move for the manufacture of nuclear bomb is a convenient way for the ruling group to retain its hold over the military and an atmosphere of tension against India is essential for their continuance in power. Anti-Indian hysteria is the best antidote to the growing resentment against the government's domestic policies which the Opposition in the country can mobilise against it. Jingoism against India and craving for nuclear bomb are two powerful weapons in the arsenal of the Pakistan government which can paralyse the opposition effectively.

The success of Pakistan's military rulers in carrying the people with them cannot be ascribed to the weakness of the democratic forces within Pakistan alone which cannot see through the game. Equally responsible are those democratic forces within India who react in about the same manner when the government of India raises the issue about the threat to the security of India against Pakistan or advocates India's manufacturing a nuclear bomb in response to Pakistan. There is a kind of symmetry in the reaction of the progressive forces in both the countries when these sensitive issues are posed before them by the respective governments. Each sees in the other country a homogenous block of hostile population. Both fail to distinguish between
the interests of the ruling class from those of the toiling masses opposed to the former, not only in respect of their own country but also in respect of the other country.

The Government of India's stand on Pakistan's offer of a no-war pact and the suggestion for a zone of peace in the sub-continent on the plea that Pakistan could not be trusted, compromised her position before the world public opinion. It appeared inconsistent with her urging to the two world powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, to conclude such a pact. There has recently been a shift in her position when Shri Rajiv Gandhi agreed to consider non-agression against each other's nuclear installations. The pity is that such a change came to effect only at the prompting of Washington. The progressive forces in India failed to take the initiative to bring about a change in the atmosphere vitiated by mutual bickering between the two countries. The softening of the US attitude towards India is however not unrelated to the new Prime Minister's professions to liberalize the operation of the foreign multinationals in the country and his moves for freet play of big capitalist forces within the country. Any swing away from the present trend may very well change to a stiffening in the attitude of the US when Pakistan will be viewed as a but end to pressurize India again. The continuance of an autocratic regime in Pakistan remains the major cause of concern in this regard.

One of the common arguments which easily confuse the minds of the population about Pakistan is to argue that the Pakistanis are united in their aggressive design against India and they cannot be trusted. It is seldom recognised that such a stance only aids the reactionary forces in Pakistan to consolidate their position within the country. Distrust about the whole population of a country blinds one towards the possibility of winning friends when the cause is just. Such mistrust proved costly for the Allies during the Second World War. The conviction of Churchill and Amery that the whole of the German population consisted of fanatical admirers of Hitler restrained the British Military Intelligence from attempting to raise resistance groups from among the German population. The news about the attempted assassination of Hitler by von Stauffenberg roused the Allied leaders belatedly to the realisation of their mistake.7

There is wide apprehension that if Pakistan possesses the nuclear bomb she can hold India to ransom and force her to concede unjust demands about Kashmir and other border areas so long as India does not manufacture the bomb for herself. It is, however, a matter of record that a series of confrontations or conflicts have taken place over the past decades between countries around the world where one side had to bomb while the other side did not. In all these conflicts, paradoxically, the countries in possession of the bomb found it impossible to use it even under pressing circumstances, leaving free way to the adversaries who were not in possession of it.

Among the evidence which one can cite in this regard is the blockade of Berlin by the Soviet Union in 1948. The United States, in sole possession of the nuclear bomb, was urged by Winston Chuchill to threaten Soviet Union
with its use unless she withdraw from Berlin and East Germany. The suggestion was not acted upon. The possible outcome of an attack on the Soviet Union before she came to secure nuclear bomb for herself was analysed by statesmen in the United States even earlier in 1946. Henry Wallace, for instance, had warned;

“If we should attempt to destroy all principal Russian cities and her heavy industry, we might well succeed. But the immediate counter-measure which such an attack would call for, is the prompt occupation of all continental Europe by the Red Army. Would we be prepared to destroy the cities of all Europe to finish what we started”

The United States was again caught in a dilemma when during the Korean war in 1950, the United Nations Forces under the leadership of General MacArthur swept northwards towards the Yalu river beyond which lay the borders of China. Mao Tse Tung declared that China was not afraid of the nuclear bomb and dubbed it as a “paper tiger”. The Chinese Government warned that they would intervene in the war if the UN Forces continued their progress towards the Yalu river. The Chinese forces later did intervene and pushed the UN forces back to the 38th Parallel before a cease-fire was agreed to. The nuclear bombs stayed where they were.

A similar situation was faced by France when she met with reverses in military conflicts in Indo-China in 1954. France had to give way ultimately to Vietnamese forces after her debacle at Dien Bien Phu, although she had acquired the nuclear bomb.

Pakistan’s strategists must also realise that if she chose to mount a nuclear attack against India they have to face a logistic problem similar to the one U.S. strategists faced in Europe. Any nuclear attack against India has to be away from Pakistan’s own border lest the radioactive fall-out affects her own army as well. This leaves her border open to being overrun by the Indian army. Considering the relative size of the population of the two countries, Pakistan’s atomic bomb would remain a “paper tiger”, meant for intimidation of Indian population rather than for its actual deployment.

One may consider in this context that although India could not maintain cordial relations with China over the two decades after the border clashes, it was not thought necessary for her to manufacture the atom bomb to deter any Chinese aggression. If India has been able to live with China in possession of the bomb for over two decades, she can as well live with Pakistan with the same equanimity of mind.

One should recognize in this connection that sufficient grounds for concern to Pakistan were provided when Indian carried out an underground nuclear explosion at Pokharan in May 1974. While the scientific merits of the exercise remain in doubt, the effect it had on Pakistan has been quite evident.

The pressure to drive India to manufacture an atom bomb as a deterrent to Pakistan is misdirected. It cannot but be the beginning of a policy of costly escalation of the arms race between the two countries which neither can
afford. The progressive forces in India have a special responsibility to help the democratic elements in Pakistan to assert their rights. The democratic movement in India has a firmer foundation. It works in a relatively free environment. It is in a better position to expose the manoeuvring of the reactionary forces in India to mount a frenzy against Pakistan to divert militant movement against the Government's right-wing policies. The Left and democratic forces in India have to expose the imperialist game to destabilise the condition in the Indo-Pak sub-continent. They should extend the hand of cooperation to the democratic forces in Pakistan by dissociating themselves clearly from the machinations of the reactionary forces entrenched firstly, within the Congress(I) and secondly, among some of the opposition parties in India. An unequivocal policy for peaceful coexistence and renouncing the path of nuclear weapons by them can strengthen the progressive forces in Pakistan and prevent the sub-continent from turning into a hotbed for imperialist games.

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2 Blackett (1949), 136-137
4 Zhukov (1985), 449.
6 Jungk, Robert-Brighter than a Thousand Suns-Penguin Books, 1970. 160-165. For extracts from the publication relevant to current discussion, see Bose (10).
8 News item, The Statesman 4-1-1979
9 Blackett (1949). 81-82.
10 Bose, D K—“India's Options in Nuclear World”, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XX, No. 38, September 21, 1985, 1594-1596.