

## PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING MAY 1998: EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PRESSURES

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### Abstract

*This article attempts to find out why it became imperative for Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons despite external and internal pressures. It examines the significance of Pakistan's nuclear weapon tests in May 1998 in the backdrop of India's initiative. It identifies the factors that helped the proponents of Pakistan's nuclear weapon tests, which this writer calls Pakistan's security epistemic community (SEC), to succeed against the external and internal opponents of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence and outweigh their case for Pakistan maintaining a non-nuclear stance.*

**Keywords:** Nuclear Weapons, External & Internal Pressure, Security Epistemic Community, Proponents & Dissenters.

### Introduction

Pakistan has always considered itself to be an insecure state since its inception in 1947. The country's military build-up in its earlier stages was in response to the demands of state security and territorial integrity. Besides strengthening its conventional forces, Pakistan also formed military alliances with the US to bolster its security in the South Asian region. Pakistan regarded these alliances (SEATO & CENTO 1954-55) as a "security guarantee" against India. However, the defence treaties failed to provide the kind of security guarantee the country expected from them when confronted with military challenge from India, though they provided substantial economic and military benefits in the 1950s and 1960s. Pakistan's security leadership therefore sought a more dependable defence arrangement that could ensure the country's security. This arrangement presented itself in the shape of the nuclear option.

Although Pakistan had been developing nuclear facilities for peaceful purposes since the 1950s, the idea of acquiring nuclear weapons which had been there and evolving since the 1960s took a policy and practical direction only in the 1970s in the wake of traumatic events like the 1965 war, the

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country's dismemberment in 1971, and India's nuclear testing in 1974. Pakistan went through various phases of thinking before taking the political decision and actually acquiring a nuclear weapon from the seventies to the time India tested its nuclear devices on May 11 and 13, 1998. That proved the proverbial straw on the camel's back. Pakistan was left with no option but to follow suit and test its nuclear capability on May 28 and May 30, 1998. After testing six nuclear devices, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif declared, "No matter whether we are recognised as a nuclear weapons state or not, we are a nuclear power."<sup>1</sup> The acquisition of nuclear weapons by Pakistan was a major turning point in its long history of nuclear development programme from initially its peaceful uses to military purposes. There were domestic, regional and international factors that proved decisive in the process of Pakistan's nuclear development programme. One of Pakistan's security strategists, Feroze Hassan Khan, now teaching at the US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, said, "the West could not dissuade Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons because they did not understand the actual cause of Pakistan's struggle for acquisition of nuclear weapons."<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that much before Pakistan's nuclear weapons tests in 1998, preparations for such nuclear testing had already been in the making in 1986 when a team of Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) scientists led by Dr. Ishfaq Ahmed explored several sites in Balochistan where a nuclear test could be conducted. Ultimately, a 3,325 feet long tunnel was bored in the Ras Koh Hills of Chagai (the place where Pakistan conducted its nuclear weapons tests in 1998).<sup>3</sup> In fact, Pakistan had already mastered the technique of conducting cold tests before going for the physical test. The first cold test was conducted in the hills of Sargodha in March 1983 under the Wah group headed by Hafeez Qureshi (the head of Radiation and Isotope Application) and Dr. Zaman Sheikh working under Pakistan Institute of Science and Technology (PINSTECH). Since then, until the 1998 nuclear tests, Pakistan had conducted more than 24 cold tests of its nuclear devices in order to improve the actual testing structure. In addition, one cold test of Pakistan's nuclear weapons device was also carried out independently in 1984 by Kahuta Research Laboratories (KRL).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nawaz Sharif's Declaration to the Nation 1998, cited in Samina Ahmed, "Pakistan Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Points and Nuclear Choices," *International Security* vol. 23, no. 4 (1999): 178-204.

<sup>2</sup> Feroz Hassan Khan, "Nuclear Proliferation Motivations," *The Non-Proliferation Review* vol. 13, no. 3 (2006): 501-517.

<sup>3</sup> Rai Muhammad Saleh Azam, "When Mountains Move: The Story of Chagai," *Defence Journal* (June 2000), <http://www.defencejournal.com/2000/june/chagai.htm> (accessed June 15, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Both in the 1980s and 1990s Pakistan's leadership gave greater importance to nuclear weapons development rather than developing the economy. But until May 1998 Pakistan had not demonstrated its nuclear weapons capability. Pakistan brought an end to its nuclear ambiguity when India tested its nuclear weapons on May 11 and May 13, 1998. The Indian nuclear tests had altered the strategic and military balance in favour of India. Pakistan and its polity felt a security threat. The people of Pakistan were in the middle of a difficult choice: "explode the bomb, and prepare to eat grass. Or decide against it, and eat the humble pie."<sup>5</sup> There were three possible options for Pakistan. First, to do nothing, that is, to avoid testing and consider India's nuclear weapon tests as not challenging or posing threat to Pakistan's security and its territorial integrity; second, to turn to international community, that is, to seek the major powers' security guarantee and let the major powers provide Pakistan economic and military support if Pakistan decided not to conduct nuclear weapons tests; and third, a nuclear option, that is, to respond to India's nuclear weapons tests and thus achieve and maintain strategic parity despite external and internal pressures against going nuclear. Which options suited Pakistan and why did Pakistan exercise the nuclear option?

This paper aims at finding out why it became imperative for Pakistan to demonstrate its nuclear weapons capability. The second part examines the internal and external opposition to Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998. How convincing these arguments were at a time when Pakistan was all prepared for proving its capability. The third section will deal with the public support for Pakistan's nuclear option and its resolve to end the nuclear ambiguity by conducting the nuclear tests. This part also explains the reasons that vindicated the stand of the proponents of Pakistan's nuclear weapons testing. The conclusion will indicate which side was more convincing, the proponents or the dissenters.

### **The Significance of Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Tests**

The BJP's declaration to go nuclear if it came to power after the elections gave impetus to Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. The tests became inevitable for Pakistan. Pakistan's leadership had considered the threat emanating from India's designs of conducting nuclear weapons tests and the implications of such an event in the context of the latter's hegemonic designs in the South Asian region.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, Pakistan was maintaining its status of nuclear ambiguity and was not conducting the nuclear tests unless India did.

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<sup>5</sup> Ayesha Khan and Zaffar Abbas, "Pakistan Joins the Club," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* vol. 54, no. 4 (July-August, 1998): 7.

<sup>6</sup> For details see Rabia Akthar, "Nuclearisation of Pakistan: Motivations and Intentions," *CCRP*, [www.dodccrp.org/events/10th\\_ICCRTS/CD/track01.htm](http://www.dodccrp.org/events/10th_ICCRTS/CD/track01.htm) (accessed June 14, 2011).

Therefore, just before BJP's intention of conducting nuclear weapons test in May 1998, Pakistan tested its Ghauri missile in April 1998. Ghauri is a liquid based missile with a range of 1300km; however, in the following year in 1999, Ghauri II was tested which is the improved version of Ghauri I.<sup>7</sup> This test was significant for Pakistan's nuclear weapons tests for many reasons. First, Pakistan thought that this missile could provide Pakistan a stronger deterring capability because with its range Pakistan could hit major targets in India and the psychological value of its name (after Shahabuddin Ghauri who defeated Pritviraj Chauhan to establish his rule in the subcontinent) could add to its dread as a weapon. Second, it was not only a response to India's missile Agni tested a decade ago, but also a response to India's Prithvi missile tested in 1997. Third, Ghauri missile test was a reply to the declared intention of BJP of India to test nuclear weapons capability.<sup>8</sup>

According to security analyst Naeem Salik: "Pakistan missile program is aimed at achieving a credible, reliable, and survivable deterrence capability, and it is not aimed at achieving a power projection capability beyond its immediate security arena...the goal is to meet the requirement of *credible minimum deterrence*."<sup>9</sup> Soon after India's nuclear weapons tests, Pakistan deplored India's nuclear weapons tests and accused it of commencing a nuclear arms race unilaterally in the Southern Asian region. Then Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Gohar Ayub, stated on May 11, 1998, "Pakistan strongly condemns this Indian act and the entire world should condemn it. It has sucked Pakistan into an arms race."<sup>10</sup> The aim of this statement was to draw the attention of the international community to the fact that it was not Pakistan which went first to conduct its nuclear weapons capability, rather it was India that acted unilaterally to provoke Pakistan to respond in kind. Two days after India's second round of nuclear testing on May 13, 1998, Pakistan's Defence Committee stated: "Indian government had in recent weeks exhibited a pattern of irresponsible behaviour and taken deliberate steps to further heighten the tension in the region."<sup>11</sup> Pakistan's nuclear weapon tests became more contentious both at home and abroad when rhetoric from its adversary tried to

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<sup>7</sup> Bhumitra Chakma, *Pakistan Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group Publications, 2009), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 209-210.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-212.

<sup>10</sup> For Pakistan's Foreign Minister's statement in response to India's May 11, 1998 nuclear test see, "May 1998 Pakistan Special Weapons News," *Federation of American Scientists* (FAS), <http://www.fas.org/news/pakistan/1998/05/index.html> (accessed June 14, 2011). Other Pakistan's officials' statements against the Indian nuclear weapon tests can also be seen. Also see, "Pakistan's Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan," *News International*, May 12, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> For this quotation see for example, Rabia Akthar, "Nuclearisation of Pakistan: Motivations and Intentions."

dissuade Pakistan from conducting nuclear weapon tests. For example, the Indian Minister of State for Science and Technology, Murali Manohar Joshi declared that, “India’s missiles would be armed and deployed with the country’s new nuclear weapons,” and Indian Home Minister L. K. Advani explicitly threatened Pakistan with dire consequences if it continued to support Kashmiris for waging a proxy war against India.<sup>12</sup> In response to these statements, Pakistan had declared its nuclear weapons policy to maintain “minimum credible nuclear deterrence” to counterbalance India’s nuclear capability. Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif stated on May 20, 1998, “Nuclear restraint, stabilisation and minimum credible deterrence constitute the basic elements of Pakistan’s nuclear policy.”<sup>13</sup> Even though the term “credible minimum deterrence” seems vague to most of the nuclear strategists which, according to them, is yet to be modified and formalised,<sup>14</sup> for Pakistan it seems to mean the country’s equal response to every Indian act of nuclear advancement. Pakistan considers this to be necessary as a deterrence assuring security to the state against any threat from nuclear-armed India. The nuclear weapons tests of May 28 and 30, 1998 can be seen in the backdrop of these developments.

### Internal and External Opposition to Pakistan’s Nuclear Testing

Though after New Delhi’s nuclear test explosion, Islamabad was compelled to do likewise in order to restore the balance of power in the sub-continent, it was exposed to tremendous internal and external pressures. Internally, a minority of pacifists believed that the acquisition of nuclear weapons would be counterproductive since the country’s fragile economy could not afford the luxury of a bolted conventional and nuclear arsenal when important sectors of the economy like health, education, agriculture and industry were in a poor shape and would get worse. They argued that rather than going nuclear,

<sup>12</sup> For these statements see, “Time Line: History of India-Pakistan Conflict,” *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/southasia/timeline.htm> (accessed July 14, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> The former Pakistan’s Prime Minister statement on Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence posture, in Bhumitra Chakma, *Pakistan Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge, 2009), 48.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Cyril Almeida, “Uncontested Dominance,” *Dawn*, 2010, <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/columnist> (accessed September 2, 2010); Mario Esteban Carranza, *South Asian Security and International Nuclear Order: Creating a Robust Indo-Pakistan’s Nuclear Arms Control Regime* (England: Ashgate Publishers, 2009), 63; Rodney W. Jones, *Minimum Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: An overview* (US Defence Threat Reduction Agency: Advance Systems and Concepts Office, 2001), 36; Rizwan Zeb, “David Versus Goliath? Pakistan’s Nuclear Doctrine: Motivations, Principles and Future,” *Defence & Security Analysis* vol. 22, no. 4 (2007): 387-408.

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Pakistan must seek security guarantees from international community and development aid. The world powers, particularly the West, were on the same page with the local dissenters and even encouraged them in their pursuit of keeping the country de-nuclearized. Interestingly enough, but understandably, the SAARC countries, other than India and Pakistan, opposed the nuclear testing as dangerous to regional security. The external pressure from the international community was to dissuade Pakistan from conducting nuclear tests and in exchange provide Pakistan full economic and military support. This meant leaving India free to test its weapons while forbidding Pakistan to do the same. What kind of pressure was in play to dissuade Pakistan from conducting nuclear weapons tests? How influential these opponents were at the time Pakistan was ready for nuclear testing? Was Pakistan to absorb the internal and external pressures in May 1998? Taking cue from the external powers the anti-nuke lobby at home mounted its offensive against the tests. Let us examine how influential the external pressure was and whether it was able to influence the hawkish polity of Pakistan in 1998.

#### *The External Pressure*

In the wake of India's nuclear tests, Pakistan had to face external pressure from across the world community as Pakistan was getting ready to respond in kind to the Indian nuclear tests. The external pressure was aimed to dissuade Pakistan from conducting a tit-for-tat nuclear test. The US tried to persuade Pakistan to accept the international community's offer of economic and military assistance and show restraint. The US in addition to military assistance offered to lift the economic sanctions on Pakistan. It is interesting to note that the US President Bill Clinton phoned Pakistan's Prime Minister at the time, Nawaz Sharif, several times to change his decision for going ahead with the tests. In addition to this, the US deputy secretary of state, Strobe Talbott, commander of the US Central Command, General Anthony Zinni, and assistant secretary of state for South Asia, Karl Inderfurth, visited Pakistan after four days of India's nuclear weapons' tests and offered Pakistan economic and military support in exchange. The military offer comprised F-16 aircraft too which Pakistan claimed had already paid for in 1980s. The US ambassador to Pakistan, Thomas Simons, stated that these kinds of offers had never been made before to "a non-ally like Pakistan."<sup>15</sup>

China, a traditional ally of Pakistan, had also urged Pakistan to refrain from nuclear testing. The level of support that Pakistan expected from its traditional ally was not provided. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Shamshad Ahmed's visit to China on May 18- 20, 1998 was to seek a security guarantee

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<sup>15</sup> Hassan Askari Rizvi, "Pakistan's Nuclear Testing," *Asian Survey* vol. 41, no. 6 (2001): 941.

from China in the event of India's attack on Pakistan. It was hoped that Pakistan would seek some sort of security guarantee and expression of restraint from China after this meeting, but the Chinese officials would call this meeting "a routine consultation between the two foreign ministers."<sup>16</sup> It appeared that China publicly avoided any gesture of support for Pakistan's nuclear tests and instead advised Pakistan to show restraint and caution. Admittedly, neither the US nor the Chinese government was willing to provide a security guarantee to Pakistan for not carrying out the test explosions. Also, the Pakistani security management could not feel comfortable with the US security assurances what with its past record of abandoning an ally in the hour of need, both in 1965 and 1971.<sup>17</sup> In 1998, the US had conditioned its offer of an economic assistance package to Pakistan on the latter's renunciation of the nuclear option. It was believed that Pakistan had asked for US \$5 billion as an economic and military package if the US was serious in dissuading Pakistan from conducting nuclear weapons tests.<sup>18</sup>

Why did the US not fulfil Pakistan's economic and military demands if it wanted Pakistan to refrain from conducting the tests? Why were the US incentives unconvincing to Pakistan? Despite its apparent seriousness in dissuading Pakistan from taking the nuclear path, there seemed to be some political and logistical problems in materialising these incentives. Many in the west saw the US approach to Pakistan as confusing and unconvincing. For example, Stephen Cohen, an expert on India-Pakistan military affairs before joining the Brookings Institute, has been quoted as saying: "Two things did not happen. The price we offered was not close to what we offered North Korea.<sup>19</sup> And we and Chinese were unwilling to offer the Pakistan's security

<sup>16</sup> For details of Chinese reactions to both India's and Pakistan's nuclear weapons tests see, "China and Nuclear Tests in South Asia," *Nuclear Threat Initiative* (NTI), <http://www.nti.org/db/china/nsascris.htm> (accessed June 13, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> For interesting accounts on Pakistan-US relations when Pakistan was not given the military and economic assurances, Pakistan expected during the 1965 and 1971 wars with its adversary see for example, Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2001); Howard Wriggins, "The Balancing Process in Pakistan's Foreign Policy," in *Pakistan: The Long Way*, ed. Lawrence Ziring, Ralph Braibanti & Howard Wriggins (Durham, N. C: Duke University Press, 1977), 301-339; Hassan Askari Rizvi, "*Pakistan and the Geostategic Environment: A Study of Foreign Policy*," (New York: St. Martin Press, 1993); & A. Z Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Shahid-ur-Rehman, *Long Road to Chagai* (Islamabad: Shahid-ur-Rehman Publishers, 1999), 116.

<sup>19</sup> Pyongyang got US \$4 billion to cap its nuclear weapons program whilst 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. See Barbara Crossette, "Nuclear Anxiety: The Rivalry; South Asian Arms Race: Reviving Dormant Fears of Nuclear War," *New York Times*, May 29, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/29/world/nuclear-anxiety->

guarantees that would have made them feel comfortable.”<sup>20</sup> Barbra Crossette also quoted Robert Oakley, the former US ambassador to Pakistan, as saying, “For eight years Pakistan has been deprived of everything, and therefore we severely weakened their conventional military capability, which was predicated on the use of American equipment. We certainly weakened their (Pakistan’s) confidence in the United States. At the same time, India was getting stronger. So what could the Pakistani’s rely upon? Missiles and nuclear capability.”<sup>21</sup> Although this paper is not about examining the Indian nuclear tests and the international community’s response to them, one of the reasons why external pressure was not effective against Pakistan is because of the discriminatory attitude of the international community towards Pakistan vis-à-vis India. For example, the international community deplored India’s nuclear weapons tests in 1998 but its pressure in terms of economic and military sanctions against it remained limited or none. Japan remained reluctant in recalling its private companies from India<sup>22</sup> whilst Russia continued to maintain the Russo-India military deal intact.<sup>23</sup> This sort of discriminatory approach by the international community was not acceptable to Pakistan and it protested against this behaviour. France, Germany and UK at the G-8 summit failed to take a united stand on applying sanctions against India for conducting the nuclear tests while the European Union only expressed its concern that the tests had set a dangerous precedent in the South Asian region and that the EU could put sanctions in the future if India did not join the Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the Pakistanis thought that they would become the first nuclear weapons state in the Muslim world if they indeed went for nuclear tests and Pakistan would get the support of Muslim states. Pervez Hoodbhoy, one of the opponents of Pakistan’s nuclear proliferation said, “There is a strong belief that the Bomb would elevate Pakistan’s image among Muslim countries. Some cherish the fond hope that if Pakistan explicitly demonstrate its nuclear capability through a test explosion, oil money will pour into the country.”<sup>25</sup>

However Pakistan government was stunned by the Muslim states’ cold response. In the wake of India’s nuclear testing, a stream of representatives

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rivalry-south-asian-arms-race-reviving-dormant-fears-nuclear-war.html (accessed June 13, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> See Stephen Cohen Statement in Barbra Crossette, “Nuclear Anxiety: The Rivalry; South Asian Arms Race: Reviving Dormant Fears of Nuclear War.”

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Samina Yasmeen, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Tests: Domestic Debate and International Determinants,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 53(1) (1998): 43-56.

<sup>23</sup> Jyotsna Bakshi, “Russia’s Post-Pokhran Dilemma,” *Strategic Analysis* XXII, no. 5 (1998): 721-736.

<sup>24</sup> “EU Sanctions Seem Unlikely,” *Dawn*, May 14, 1998, <http://www.fas.org/news/india/1998/05/index.html> (accessed June 13, 2011)

<sup>25</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy, “Nuclear Myths and Realities,” in *Pakistan’s Atomic Bomb and the Search for Security*, ed. Zia Mian (Lahore: Gautam Publishers, 1995), 17.



and envoys from the Middle East visited Pakistan. Although they regarded India's tests as a security threat to Pakistan, they avoided categorically condemning India's nuclear tests. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference's response in support of Pakistan's nuclear quest was not clear. A strong backing by OIC was not extended to Pakistan. Even Iran, which had been supporting Pakistan in security related matters, refrained from taking a stronger stance against India's nuclear test.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Pakistan's hopes of withstanding the external pressure through the support of Muslim states especially from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, also proved futile. Pakistan found to its dismay that loans from the International Islamic Bank (IIB) would even be difficult to obtain as IIB could not provide loan to any Muslim state without the approval of International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>27</sup> Considering all these pressures, the anti-nuke lobby in Pakistan became strident against Islamabad's nuclear tests. The critics seemed to be convinced that the external pressure would not benefit Pakistan at all if it chose the path of nuclearization. The critics calculated the pros and cons of the May 1998 nuclear testing and tried to convince Pakistan government to adopt the policy of caution and restraint.

#### *The Internal Pressure*

The internal pressure manifested itself in the split in Pakistan's civilian cabinet when it was asked whether to go ahead with the tests or show restraint. One group supported immediate response in kind to India's tests and restore the balance of power structure in South Asia which Delhi had altered. This will be discussed later. First, it needs to be analysed who had opposed Pakistan's nuclear testing from within the polity of Pakistan in 1998 and why were they counselling restraint and caution. In addition, how the external pressure played a role in persuading Pakistan to seek safeguards from the international community.

It is interesting to note that from within Pakistan's polity the opposition, though small, came from Pakistan's cabinet ministers such as Sartaj Aziz, Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Choudhury Nisar, Sheikh Rashid, and General Majid Malik.<sup>28</sup> Amongst them the strongest voice in opposing Pakistan's nuclear tests and favouring the policy of restraint and caution was of Sartaj Aziz because of his apprehension of severe economic implications of these tests. To be sure, Pakistan's economic condition was sluggish in 1998. The Nawaz Sharif government had failed to revive the economy. For example, 4000 industrial

<sup>26</sup> Yasmeen, "Pakistan's Nuclear Tests: Domestic Debate and International Determinants," 53.

<sup>27</sup> Samina Ahmad, "Pakistan Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Points and Nuclear Choices," *International Security* vol. 23, no. 4 (1999): 200.

<sup>28</sup> Talat Hussein, "Pakistan Hedged on Obvious Bet," *Nation*, May 29, 1998.

units which had been closed because of economic constraints could not be reopened. There was a trade deficit of US \$1.36 billion to US\$2.62 billion and his government could not provide Rs.305 billion for the fiscal year 1997-98 while running a shortfall of Rs.100 billion. This poor economic condition could become chaotic if Pakistan chose the nuclear path. India's position was different as its economy was stable and much more sound.<sup>29</sup> With a US\$32 billion foreign debt, Sirtaj Aziz said, Pakistan could not afford any further deterioration of its economy.

The proponents of caution and restraint argued that there was no need for Pakistan to conduct nuclear tests in response to India's because Pakistan already had this capability and could counter India with its development of Ghauri missile, that is, that Pakistan had achieved a minimum credible nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis India with its delivery system in hand. Therefore, there was no reason for Pakistan to end its nuclear ambiguity by exploding a nuclear device.<sup>30</sup> The critics asserted that Pakistan's tests would not only stop the flow of foreign aid but also discourage foreign investment which would be disastrous for the country's ailing economy.<sup>31</sup>

The critics suggested that Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability did not need demonstration and that restraint would boost Pakistan's image as a responsible state in the international community and would help her gain nuclear guarantee from the US against any possible military threat from India.<sup>32</sup> Other critics such as Qureshi suggested that the international community, especially the US, should bear the cost of Pakistan's economy and military build-up in return for not testing nuclear weapons, that is, Pakistan could demand 200 updated F-16 aircraft, advanced radar, high altitude anti-aircraft missiles, anti-ship missiles, air-to-air refuelling tankers, tanks, ships and sub-marines.<sup>33</sup> And Pakistan's two former air force chiefs (Asghar Khan and Nur Khan) including a number of retired army generals were not convinced of Pakistan's so-called strategic and balance of power ideology. They were of the opinion that May 1998 was a God-sent opportunity and that the policy of restraint would result in Pakistan's economic boom.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Yasmeen, "Pakistan's Nuclear Tests: Domestic Debate and International Determinants," 50; Hassan-Askari-Rizvi, "Pakistan in 1998: The Polity under Pressure," *Asian Survey* vol. 39, no. 1 (1998): 181-183.

<sup>30</sup> Talat Hussein, "Pakistan Hedged on Obvious Bet," Asad Rehman, "Nuclear Escalation in South Asia," *Nation*, May 15, 1998; Farrukh Saleem, "Do Nukes Make Power?," *News*, May 24, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> Sarfraz Iqbal, "Wazir-Azam Sey Ek Iltija Hey (A request to the Prime Minister)," *Awsaf* (Urdu Daily), 1998; Saeed Ahson Hasan, "Think Well before Testing," *Nation*, May 20, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Talat Hussein, "Pakistan Hedged on Obvious Bet."

<sup>33</sup> Yusouf Qureshi, "To Test or Not to Test," *Nation*, May 20, 1998.

<sup>34</sup> Ayesha Khan & Zaffar Abbas, "Pakistan Joins the Club," 7.

The arguments of the anti-nuclear lobby that the country's economy could ill afford a nuclear arsenal, though plausible, could not impress the hawks. In fact, the voice of those who wanted a like response from Pakistan grew stronger by the day. The supporters analysed all the options but opted for demonstration of the nuclear capability. How did they support this policy? Were the supporters of Pakistan's nuclear weapons testing more influential than the internal and external critics who were calling for caution and restraint? How did the proponents of nuclear weapons tests defeat the critics and mould public opinion to their logic? The next section will deal with the factors that answer this question.

### **The Proponents of Pakistan's Nuclear Weapon Tests**

Before examining the support for Pakistan's nuclear weapons tests in 1998, it is interesting to note that Pakistan's epistemic community emphasised Pakistan's option of nuclear weapons for purposes of deterrence which perhaps played a decisive role in persuading the government to acquire and conduct nuclear weapons.<sup>35</sup> The epistemic community insisted that Pakistan had to unveil its nuclear ambiguity and acquire nuclear weapons. For example, Tariq Jan's edited volume<sup>36</sup> stated that to deter India, the nuclear weapons'

<sup>35</sup> There are number of proponents who supported Pakistan acquisition of nuclear weapons in response to its adversarial nuclear weapons tests. Few are mentioned as: Abdul Qayyum, "Nuclear Power and the US Dual Standards," *Dawn*, April 26, 1979; Afzal Mahmood, "Priorities in Foreign Policy," *Dawn*, December 14, 1988; Anwar Shamim, "Pakistan's Security Concerns," *Dawn*, November 2, 1988; Mushahid Hussein, *Pakistan and the Changing Regional Scenario: Reflections of a Journalist* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1988); K. M. Arif, "Expanding Indo-Israel Nexus," *Dawn*, June 17, 1993; Ghani Eirabi, "Blackmailing Can Backfire," *Dawn*, April 18, 1993; Jafar Wafa, "Our Security Option," *Dawn*, August 3, 1993; Muhammad Aslam Beg, "Who will Press the Button?," *News*, April 23, 1994; Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg (ret'd), *Development and Security: Thoughts and Reflections* (Rawalpindi: Foundation for Research on National Development and Security Press, 1994); Khurshid Ahmed, "Summation: Capping the Nation," in *Pakistan's Security and the Nuclear Option*, ed. Tariq Jan (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1995), 145-158; Tahir Amin, "The Paradox of Civil-Military-US Triangle and Pakistan's Security," *ibid.*, 99-106; Agha Shahi, "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Security Dilemma," *ibid.*, 39-53; Abdul Sattar, "Nuclear Issue in South Asia: A Pakistan's Perspective," *ibid.*, 55-90; K. M. Arif, "Retaining the Nuclear Option," *ibid.*, 121-129; S. M. Koreshi, "The Method in American Duplicity," *ibid.*, 131-136; Syeda Hussein Abida, "Don't Give Up What is Yours and the World will Come Around," *ibid.*, 107-120; Zulfiqar Ali Khan, "Pakistan's Security and Nuclear Option," *ibid.*, 137-144; Shireen M. Mizari, "NPT: An Unfair Treaty Pakistan Must Not Sign," *ibid.*, 29-38; Haider K. Nizamani, "Nuclear Weapons and Kashmir," *Dawn*, February 22, 1999; Nizamani, *The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan* (USA: Praeger Publications, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Tariq Jan, "Pakistan's Security and the Nuclear Option," 21.

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option was important for Pakistan. In its view the acquisition of nuclear weapons was necessary both to protect the ideology and territorial integrity of Pakistan. The volume condemned the NPT's nuclear discrimination and urged Pakistan's nuclear leadership to be self-reliant in respect of its acquisition of nuclear weapons.<sup>37</sup> Agha Shahi stated: "In South Asian context, nuclear weapons are instruments of military and political powers that could be turned to advantage in the pursuit of regional hegemony."<sup>38</sup> Whilst Abdul Sattar emphasized, "Not until 1971, when Pakistan's conventional defence capacity proved inadequate to safeguard its territorial integrity, and East Pakistan was militarily separated by India to create Bangladesh, did Pakistan embark upon efforts to acquire nuclear weapons option as a means of deterring the persistent Indian threat."<sup>39</sup> Besides Shahi and Sattar, who were foreign ministers of Pakistan when Pakistan was in a security dilemma whether to acquire nuclear weapons or sign NPT to forgo the nuclear weapons option, others from within Pakistan's epistemic community such as retired army general K. M Arif and former Air Marshal Zulfiqar Ali Khan remained equally influential in urging Pakistan's nuclear leadership to keep the nuclear option open. Arif stated that Pakistan faced a strong Indian conventional might and this could be deterred neither by conventional means nor by the external security guarantee;<sup>40</sup> and Zulfiqar Ali Khan contended that the threat faced by Pakistan from its adversary is not a dream but a "harsh reality"...Pakistan should have an option for acquiring nuclear weapons in order to offset the might of India's conventional power. The acquisition of nuclear weapons will provide Pakistan a strong deterring force vis-à-vis India, improve its status as a major power in the region even though smaller in size than its adversary, and would ensure Pakistan's security and territorial integrity.<sup>41</sup> Almost every one of these analysts was of the view that Pakistan should not sign the NPT and retain the option for acquiring nuclear weapons that were meant to deter India, and that nuclear weapons would ensure Pakistan's territorial integrity and sovereignty. They linked the acquisition of nuclear weapons to Pakistan's national interest and its security vis-à-vis India.

In addition to these expert views, there was widespread political support from major parties like the Pakistan Peoples Party, the Muslim League, the religious parties and large number of intellectuals who called upon the leadership to go for nuclear tests. The former PAEC Chairman, Munir Ahmed Khan, stated that if Pakistan did not conduct the tests, its nuclear weapons development programme would be "over-rated and overplayed" and it could

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>38</sup> Shahi, "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Security Dilemma," *ibid.*, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Sattar, "Nuclear Issue in South Asia: A Pakistan's Perspective," *ibid.*, 59.

<sup>40</sup> Arif, "Retaining the Nuclear Option," *ibid.*, 122.

<sup>41</sup> Khan, "Pakistan's Security and Nuclear Option," *ibid.*, 140-144.

be said that “Pakistan might be just bluffing.”<sup>42</sup> The Nawaz government took some time to devise an appropriate policy. A cabinet meeting was held to form a committee to evaluate the peace and security situation of the country which had been altered by the Indian nuclear tests. The committee comprised Sartaj Aziz (Finance Minister), Gohar Ayub (Foreign Minister), Mushahid Hussein (Information Minister), Siddique Kanjo (Minister of State for Foreign Affairs), Lieutenant-General (retired) Abdul Majid Malik (Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas) and Raja Zafar-ul- Haq (Minister of Religious Affairs and Minorities). In addition to them, the three chiefs of Pakistan’s armed forces were also brought into the core discussion on the issue.<sup>43</sup>

Just before Pakistan’s nuclear tests, there also had been a parliamentary discussion over the issue. A strongly worded resolution on May 14 1998 was passed which condemned the Indian nuclear tests and opposed the international community’s pressure for dissuading Pakistan from going nuclear. The Parliamentary resolution was also opposed to those elements within Pakistan that were against Pakistan’s nuclear tests and were pleading restraint in order to get the benefits of international economic and military aid.<sup>44</sup> There were, however, voices within the parliament that suggested that Pakistan bargain with the international community for guarantees against India. Others such as Sirtaj Aziz, Sheikh Rashid, General Majid Malik, Choudhury Nisar and Muhammad Ishaq Dar were worried about economic sanctions that the international community might impose if Pakistan conducted the tests (Hussein 1998). At the Foreign Office level it was apparent that Pakistan was ready to join the nuclear weapons club. Gohar Ayub (the then Foreign Minister) stated that testing nuclear weapons was a matter of “when, not if, Pakistan will test.”<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that his father Ayub Khan, the former military dictator of Pakistan, who went to war with India, did not harbour nuclear ambitions.

The role of Pakistan’s public opinion remained equally instrumental in Pakistan’s option for the tests. Public opinion was manipulated in such a way that the government could not decide against the nuclear weapons’ tests. According to Gallup survey published on May 25, a few days before Pakistan’s nuclear tests, 70 per cent of the respondents favoured nuclear testing and 30 per cent suggested restraint to seek military and economic benefits from the international community. According to Kroc Institute’s survey, 61 per cent of

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<sup>42</sup> Munir Ahmed Khan, “Nuclearisation of South Asia and its Regional and Global Implications,” *Regional Studies* 26(4) (1998): 3-58.

<sup>43</sup> Tariq Butt, “Only Gohar, Mushahid Allowed to Speak on Foreign Policy,” *Nation*, May 19, 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Rana Qaiser, “Senate Supports Government against India,” *Nation*, May 15, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> The former Pakistan’s Foreign Minister statement quoted in, Yasmeen, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Tests: Domestic Debate and International Determinants,” 52; Rizvi, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Testing,” 952.

the people were in favour of the tests and 85 per cent of the elite justified Pakistan's nuclear response to India's tests.<sup>46</sup> The public survey from various sources indicated that there was strong support in favour of Pakistan's nuclear tests. Public opinion in the country played an effective part in shaping the policies of Pakistan's decision-makers in going for the tests and acquisition of nuclear weapons. In this environment of strong public demand and the predominant position of Pakistan's armed forces and other analysts from across the country ultimately convinced the then polity under the civilian leadership of Nawaz Sharif that there was no choice but to go for the bomb.

Nawaz Sharif announced that "we have settled scores with India... We have paid them back."<sup>47</sup> On 28 May 1998, Chinese spokesman Zhu Bangzao, just hours before Pakistan's tests, was again asked if Beijing supported or opposed a nuclear test by Pakistan. He made it clear that China believed India was responsible for the nuclear crisis in South Asia. "The current situation in South Asia was created solely by India. India, in disregard of strong international opposition, brazenly conducted nuclear tests and threatened its neighbours." He reiterated that, "the most pressing matter for the international community now is to act together to immediately demand that India abandon its plan to develop nuclear weapons and change its mistaken stance. Only in this way can the security concerns of this region be fundamentally resolved."<sup>48</sup>

Pakistan finally adopted the long pursued *opponent-centric nuclear posture*. This was in the wake of long and controversial public debate in Pakistan and the US pressures to dissuade Pakistan from nuclear testing by providing Pakistan economic and military assistance. Pakistan remained determined to acquire nuclear weapons despite formidable constraints from both internal sources (opposition to Pakistan's policy of conducting nuclear weapons' tests) and external sources (pressure of international community and strict nuclear export control).<sup>49</sup>

There can be certain reasons why Pakistan's security epistemic community (SEC) shared ideas and beliefs that remained influential and successful. First, Pakistan considers and justifies its nuclear development

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<sup>46</sup> Samina Ahmed & David Cortright, *Pakistan and the Bomb: Public Opinion and Nuclear Option*, ed. (Indiana: Notre Dame Publication, 1998), 15-23, 78, 92 & 111-131.

<sup>47</sup> Nawaz Sharif's Speech to the Nation 1999, in Ahmed "Pakistan Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Points and Nuclear Choices," 195.

<sup>48</sup> For details of China's stance on the ultimate Pakistan's decision of conducting nuclear weapons, see <http://www.nti.org/db/china/nsascris.htm> (accessed June 13, 2011). It is interesting to note that China initially was in support of the policy that both India and Pakistan should not test their nuclear weapons rather should engage in resolving their outstanding issues including the core issue of Kashmir politically and peacefully. However, when India went for nuclear tests, China seemed to be tacitly supporting Pakistan's policy of responding in kind.

<sup>49</sup> Bhumitra Chakma, "Road to Chagai: Pakistan's Nuclear Programme: Its Sources and Motivations," *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 36, no. 4 (2002): 909.

programme as a response to India's. Both these states have fought more than three times and confronted several other limited crises. They have been rivals since their inception in 1947, and Kashmir and other outstanding issues have strained their relationship. Pakistan's SEC have propagated their shared ideas and beliefs that the country cannot deter its adversary with conventional means. If Pakistan desires to protect its territorial integrity and maintain its sovereignty, it needs to develop and acquire nuclear weapons to offset the conventional might of its rival. Due to this conflicting past, the shared ideas and beliefs in relation to state security were likely to be more successful, and hence institutionalised. In the words of John Ikenberry, "Particular historical moments can provide expert groups wielding new policy approaches and philosophies with opportunities to decisively shape a government's conception of the national interest."<sup>50</sup> So it was this defining situation that tilted Pakistan's decision in favour of the nuclear option. In the words of Foote, "Motivation refers to degree to which a human being, as a participant in the ongoing social process in which he necessarily finds himself, defines a problematic situation as calling for performance of a particular act..."<sup>51</sup>

Second, the shared opinion and expert advice of Pakistan's SEC were both credible and capable of influencing the state policy on security related matters. The success of diffusion, selection, and persistence of shared ideas and beliefs depends on their effectiveness, translation, and capability of popularisation. They should "be capable of being transmitted through a mechanism in a way that affects behaviour in a desirable way from the standpoint of the members of a community."<sup>52</sup> In addition to this, Pakistan's SEC remained accessible to Pakistan's nuclear management because majority of them were/are part of government officialdom. The epistemic community's access, as Haas argued, to main decision-makers in an issue-area is one of the reasons of success of the policy ideas.<sup>53</sup>

Third, for shared ideas and beliefs to be innovated, transmitted, and accepted, it is important that these shared ideas and beliefs converge with the state security interest. Both shared ideas and beliefs should be congruent to the

<sup>50</sup> G. John Ikenberry, (1993) "Creating Yesterday's New World Order: Keynesian 'New Thinking' and the Anglo-American Post-war Settlement," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, eds. Judith Goldstein, & Robert O. Keohane (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 57-86.

<sup>51</sup> N. Foote Nelson, "Identification as the Basis for a Theory of Motivation," *American Sociological Review* 16(1) (1951): 14-21.

<sup>52</sup> Geoffrey Garrett & Barry R. Weingast, "Ideas, Interests, and Institutions: Constructing the European Community's Internal Market," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, 173-206.

<sup>53</sup> Peter M. Haas, "Do Regimes Matter? Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution Control," *International Organisation* 43(3) (1989): 377-403; also see, Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organisation* 46(1) (1992): 1-35.

state's political or strategic culture. Pakistan's state leadership and ideas and expert opinion from within its SEC merged together for the policy ideas to be selected and persisted. Any divergence of interests between the epistemic community and the state may not help the shared ideas to be selected and persisted. Had Zia's military regime not been interested in developing and acquiring nuclear weapons, the shared voices of Pakistan's nuclear family could not have been effective, and hence not institutionalised. Ayub's military regime's turning down Bhutto's stance for acquiring nuclear weapons is an example to this convergence-divergence approach of interest, that is, Bhutto's perception for acquiring nuclear weapons<sup>54</sup> at that particular time did not match with the pre-existing beliefs of Ayub's regime who was more interested in military forces rather than nuclear weapons.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, Pakistan's knowledge-based experts could better crystallise their set of opinions in respect of Pakistan's development and acquisition of nuclear weapons because, majority of the members of Pakistan's SEC had served Pakistan's government on various important fronts. Their ideational endeavours and shared beliefs built a "winning coalition" within the Pakistan's government. They had an authoritative claim to setting up a security agenda for Pakistan's security. Their shared voices in support of Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons have not only resisted the internal<sup>56</sup> and external pressure,

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<sup>54</sup> It is imperative to note that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the first person in Pakistan's polity who had developed the perception for acquiring nuclear weapons out of Pakistan's nascent nuclear development programme. The desire for the acquisition of nuclear weapons exists in his discourses that later shaped the discourses of subsequent Pakistan's governments (civilian & military) in connection with acquisition of nuclear weapons. See, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *The Myth of Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishers, 1979).

<sup>55</sup> The perception for acquiring nuclear weapons is missing in Ayub Khan's discourse. There is no insight that Khan's military government was interested to acquire nuclear weapons as a deterring force vis-à-vis its adversary despite India's perception for going nuclear in the mid 1960s. See, Ayub Khan "Pakistan Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* vol. 38, no. ¼ (1960): 547-556; Khan, *Friends, Not Masters: A Political Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>56</sup> Amongst the Pakistan's epistemic community who opposed the ideas and beliefs of acquiring nuclear weapons, Zia Mian, Pervez Hoodbhoy, Inayatullah, and Khalid Ahmed were at the forefront. This opposition to Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons can be depicted through their writings in the Zia Mian edited volumes and other short pieces in the Pakistan's English news papers and magazines. See for example, Zia Mian, ed., *Pakistan's Atomic Bomb and the Search for Security* (Lahore: Gautam Publishers, 1995) & Smitu Kothari & Zia Mian, eds., *Out of Nuclear Shadow* (London: Zed Books, 2001). Also see, Khalid Ahmed, "Pakistan's America Problem: Crisis of Defiance," *Friday Times*, March 24-30, 1994; Ahmed, "NPT: More Troubles Ahead for Pakistan," *Friday Times*, December 1-7, 1994; Ahmed, "After Hiroshima: Why Do We Still Love the Bomb?," *Friday Times*, August 17-23, 1995).



but also manipulated the public opinion in such a way that the latter could not deny the knowledge providers. The authoritative claim to their ideas helped the policies to be adopted and acted upon.

## Conclusion

Pakistan was looking for a concrete security guarantee from a major power vis-à-vis India's nuclear weapons capability, but the major power failed to convince Pakistan and its polity that in the event of any crisis with its adversary the security umbrella would be guaranteed. Due to the lack of security guarantee coupled with the discriminatory approach of the major power towards Pakistan, Pakistan felt more insecure, isolated, and unconvinced. Despite external and internal pressure, the only option left for Pakistan was to demonstrate its nuclear weapons capability. Cohen is quoted to have said: "Pakistan is a profoundly insecure state. It is a state that feels itself surrounded by enemies, beginning with Iran, a security problem. Afghanistan has turned out to be a terrible disaster for them. The Indians are as troublesome as ever. Their friends are not really friends. The US has moved out of the region, and the Chinese are cool. Add to that the domestic troubles."<sup>57</sup>

In a similar vein, in response to two articles titled "Against the Nuclear Apartheid" by Jaswant Singh, senior advisor on India's defence and foreign affairs (September/October 1998) and "Dealing with the Bomb in South Asia" by the former US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott (March/April 1999) published in *Foreign Affairs Journal*, Pakistan's former Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad stated that, "To restore strategic balance to South Asia, Pakistan was obliged to respond to India's May 1998 nuclear blasts. India already held an advantage in conventional weaponry, and it followed its underground tests with statements threatening nuclear blackmail. Pakistan's nuclear tests were undertaken in self-defence."<sup>58</sup> That said, Pakistan did not refrain from carrying out nuclear weapons tests despite internal and external pressure. Pakistan disclosed that its primary motivation of conducting nuclear weapon tests was to follow in the footsteps of India on the basis of nuclear deterrence and self defence. The claims by the proponents of Pakistan's nuclear weapons tests seemed stronger and convincing for Pakistan's government than that of the critics.

Keeping all these factors into consideration, the following assumptions could be made as to why Pakistan responded by retaliatory nuclear tests to India's in 1998. First, if Pakistan did not respond to nuclear tests in kind,

<sup>57</sup> Cohen's statement in, Barbra Crossette, "Nuclear Anxiety: The Rivalry; South Asian Arms Race."

<sup>58</sup> Shamshad Ahmad, "The Nuclear Subcontinent: Bringing Stability to South Asia," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August, 1999): 1

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India's statement on 'Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons and their testing is a bluff' would prove correct not only to India but this would also assure the international community that, in fact, Pakistan was bluffing about its possession and testing of nuclear weapons. Second, Pakistan would lose its nuclear weapons capability and credibility if it showed restraint and kept its nuclear weapons' opacity. A nuclear India would have a greater and hegemonic say in the South Asian region finding Pakistan weak with no credible nuclear capability. It would plunge Pakistan's nuclear leadership into psychological confusion if the tests were not conducted to correct the balance of power disturbed by India's initiative. Third, Pakistan could not set aside the strong security rationale in favour of restraint for the sake of international guarantees in the background of the conflicts that have marred the relationship of the two countries since their inception. Signing the NPT/CTBT unilaterally and accepting the offers made by the international community for not conducting the nuclear weapons tests in 1998 would mean that Pakistan forget its long history of conflicts with India, leave aside all its endeavours and investments on Pakistan's nuclear weapons development programme, and overlook the contribution of those individuals who shaped the country's security rationale since its inception.

Taking these factors into consideration, it was not easy for anybody to summarily dismiss the plea for the nuclear weapons tests. The most effective option left - albeit a difficult option - for Pakistan in the 1998 scenario was testing the nuclear weapons and declaring Pakistan a nuclear-weapons state to boost state security and restore equilibrium in South Asia. ■