



South Asian Perspectives on the Nuclear Weapons Ban: Challenges and Prospects for Disarmament

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This research paper explores the nuanced perspectives of South Asian nations, primarily India and Pakistan, on the global efforts toward nuclear disarmament. Against a complex regional security landscape, historical conflicts, and evolving nuclear doctrines, this study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on document analysis and existing literature. The findings reveal divergent views between India and Pakistan, often shaped by intricate factors of security considerations, regional dynamics, and domestic political influences. The paper discusses the implications of South Asian stances on global disarmament efforts. It proposes potential pathways for fostering dialogue and cooperation in pursuing nuclear disarmament in the region. Through an in-depth examination of South Asian perspectives, this research contributes valuable insights to the broader discourse on nuclear disarmament.

INTRODUCTION

The specter of nuclear weapons profoundly influences the global landscape, shaping international relations and security, particularly in South Asia, a region marked by historical rivalries and geopolitical complexities. This research explores the intricate tapestry of South Asian perspectives on the global initiative for nuclear disarmament. Understanding the nuanced positions of nations, notably India and Pakistan, becomes crucial as the international community grapples with the imperative of dismantling nuclear arsenals. The post-World War II era saw nuclear weapons emerge as a pivotal determinant of global power dynamics. The arsenals of major nuclear-armed states, coupled with the persistent threat of proliferation, highlight the urgency of disarmament initiatives. South Asia has become a crucible of strategic complexities in this context, with

India and Pakistan navigating delicate deterrence equilibrium amid historical tensions and regional security concerns.

This essay addresses a pivotal question: How do South Asian nations perceive and engage with the global movement toward nuclear disarmament? The primary objectives include unraveling the multifaceted factors shaping South Asian stances, identifying divergent perspectives within the region, and assessing the implications of these perspectives on broader global disarmament efforts. The significance of this study lies in its potential to unravel the intricate dynamics influencing South Asian approaches to nuclear disarmament. As the international community pursues the goal of nuclear disarmament, comprehending the perspectives of nations in a region known for its geopolitical volatility becomes paramount. The insights gained from this research contribute to academic discourse and offer policymakers a nuanced understanding to form strategies to foster disarmament in a region, critical to global stability. While navigating the contours of South Asian perspectives on the nuclear weapon ban, this research aims to shed light on the path toward disarmament in a region where the stakes are high, and the implications reverberate far beyond its borders.

NUCLEARIZATION OF SOUTH ASIA

The nuclearization of South Asia, characterized by the development of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan, has deep-seated historical origins shaped by intricate geopolitical, security, and strategic considerations. This narrative unfolds against a backdrop of regional rivalries, security dilemmas, and global power dynamics, ultimately leading to the nuclearization of two neighboring nations.

India's Nuclear Program: India's path toward nuclear weapons dates back to the aftermath of World War II and the onset of the Cold War. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, envisioned a self-reliant and technologically advanced Indian nuclear program for peaceful purposes. However, the Cold War's geopolitical realities and regional security concerns prompted a reassessment. The turning point came with the Indo-China war in 1962, which exposed the limitations of India's military capabilities. **Thus, just as India settled for nuclear weapons in the aftermath of a significant conventional defeat against China, New Delhi initiated what would eventually become its nuclear weapons program** (Tellis 2022).

Given the time lag of ten years between the Chinese nuclear test and the Pokhran-I of 1974, domestic politics, as well as technical constraints appear to have affected the decision to conduct nuclear tests (Cohen 2001). China's nuclear test in 1964, heightened security anxieties in India, thus providing impetus for India to embark on its nuclear weapons program. **In 1974, India conducted its first nuclear test, codenamed "Smiling Buddha". In April 1998, the Indian government announced its nuclear doctrine, affirming that the primary objective of Indian nuclear weapons is to prevent the use or threat of nuclear weapons by any entity against India and its military. It also declared that India will not be the first to initiate a nuclear strike but will respond with punitive retaliation if deterrence fails.**

The strategic imbalance created by China's nuclear capabilities and Pakistan's ties with Beijing influenced India's decision to pursue nuclear weapons, aiming to establish itself as a regional power with a credible global presence. Furthermore, India's reservations about the discriminatory nature of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT)-namely, the unfair division between countries allowed to and not allowed to have nuclear weapons- also shaped its nuclear trajectory.

Pakistan's Nuclear Program: Pakistan's journey toward nuclear weapons was closely tied to its historical rivalry with India. Military conflicts with India, along with a perceived conventional military imbalance, prompted Pakistan to explore nuclear options for security. Thus, Pakistan's nuclear program is India-specific (Bashir 2022). The 1970s and 1980s saw Pakistan's nuclear pursuit gaining momentum, fueled by international assistance. **The Reagan administration used Pakistan as a base to support Afghan anti-Soviet armed groups** while at the same time attempting to contain the expansion of Soviet power and influence in South Asia. **The Reagan administration justified, providing aid to Pakistan on the ground that it would make Pakistan safer and less likely to build nuclear weapons** (Jones, et al. 1998). Still, Pakistan steadily proceeded with the development of nuclear weapons as armed conflict against Soviet troops continued in Afghanistan. In 1985, Pakistan began to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium (Jones, et al. 1998). Pakistan's primary motivation was its perceived security threat from India, exacerbated by the loss in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war and India's nuclearization. It is thought that this defeat of Pakistan was a direct impetus to the development of nuclear weapons by Pakistan (CRS Report for Congress 1996).

Seeking deterrence against potential aggression from India, Pakistan aimed to offset its larger neighbor's conventional military superiority through the development of nuclear weapons. Thus, the

Pakistani nuclear program was greatly influenced by the 1971 war and the subsequent **independence** of Bangladesh. It has been mentioned that it was the conventional superiority displayed in the '71 war and the desire on Pakistan's part to match Indian capabilities after the '74 tests that led to the Indian nuclear program. These twin concerns pushed Pakistan along the nuclear path (Chakma 2002).

In a nutshell, the genesis of India and Pakistan's nuclear programs is intricately tied to historical events, regional power dynamics, and global geopolitics. The security imperatives, coupled with threat perceptions and strategic considerations, played pivotal roles in shaping the nuclear trajectories of these South Asian nations, with enduring repercussions in the geopolitics of the region and beyond.

POSITIONS ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

The nuclear weapon ban treaty (Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons-TPNW) exists at the crossroads of global disarmament initiatives and the individual security imperatives of nations. In the South Asian context, where both India and Pakistan possess nuclear arsenals, comprehending their respective stances on TPNW offers valuable insights into their strategic thinking and the intricacies of regional security dynamics.

India's Position

India's approach to nuclear weapon ban **treaty** is characterized by a cautious and nuanced stance. The country has not signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), popularly known as the Ban Treaty, adopted in 2017. The Indian government observes that the Ban Treaty "does not constitute or contribute to the development of customary international law; nor does it set any new standards or norms" (Ministry of External Affairs and Government of India 2021). Central to India's nuclear policy is the "No First Use" (NFU) doctrine, signifying a commitment to refraining from using nuclear weapons first in a conflict but reserving the right to respond if attacked with weapons of mass destruction. This was reiterated on May 27, 1998, by Atal Behari Vajpayee, India's Prime Minister, in Parliament that "We do not intend to use these (nuclear) weapons for aggression or mounting threats against any country; these are weapons of self-defense, to ensure that India is not

subjected to nuclear threats or coercion (Kanwal 2001). However, India's hesitancy to join the TPNW is shaped by various factors, including concerns about national security, skepticism about the effectiveness of the Treaty without the participation of major nuclear-armed states, reservations about the discriminatory nature of the existing nonproliferation regime, and the influence of regional security dynamics, particularly unresolved issues with Pakistan and strategic competition with China.

Pakistan's Position

Pakistan's stance on the nuclear weapon ban treaty mirrors its distinctive security challenges and historical context. Similar to India, Pakistan has not acceded to the TPNW, and its declaratory doctrine does not include a "No First Use" policy, leaving room for potential first-use scenarios in response to perceived existential threats. Among others, Pakistan's rationale for its first-use doctrine has been cogently spelled out by Lieutenant General Sardar F. S. Lodhi. Writing in the Pakistan Defence Journal, General Lodhi states:

In a deteriorating military situation, when an Indian conventional attack is likely to break through our defenses or has already breached the main defense line, causing a significant setback to the defenses that cannot be restored by conventional means at our disposal, the government would be left with no option except to use nuclear weapons to stabilize the situation. India's superiority in conventional arms and manpower would have to be offset by nuclear weapons ... (Lodhi 199)

Thus, the key factors influencing Pakistan's position include the emphasis on credible deterrence against perceived aggression, mainly from India, the absence of a regional security framework, unresolved conflicts, and the call for a universal, nondiscriminatory approach to disarmament that includes all nuclear-armed states. The asymmetry in conventional military capabilities with India further underscores Pakistan's need to retain flexibility in its nuclear posture, shaping its approach to nuclear weapon ban treaties within the context of historical tensions and conflicts in the region.

The comparative analysis highlights the nuanced differences in the concerns and priorities of India and Pakistan regarding existing nuclear disarmament frameworks, showcasing the complex interplay of historical animosities, regional security challenges, and global power dynamics that significantly influence their nuclear policies. Understanding these nuanced

positions is crucial for fostering dialogue and building consensus as the global discourse on nuclear disarmament evolves toward a nuclear-weapon-free world.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS IN SOUTH ASIA

The interaction between nuclear weapons and regional security dynamics in South Asia is a complex aspect that shapes the region's geopolitical landscape. The possession of nuclear arsenals by India and Pakistan adds a unique layer of intricacy to the already delicate balance of power, offering insights into the broader implications for regional stability.

The historical backdrop of South Asia is marked by persistent geopolitical tensions, territorial disputes, and a series of conflicts, such as the Indo-Pakistan wars of 1947, 1965, and 1971. The region grapples with complex security dynamics due to the unresolved Kashmir issue and other enduring sources of tension. The nuclearization of South Asia, initiated by India's tests in 1974 and followed by Pakistan's in 1998, brought about a fundamental transformation in the strategic calculus. The motivations behind both nations acquiring nuclear weapons are rooted in the principles of deterrence, strategic autonomy, and the aspiration to shape regional power dynamics. In essence, both nations pursued nuclear weapons based on the factors listed by Scott Sagan in his article titled "*Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb.*" According to Sagan, a country's security compulsions constitute a significant factor for nuclearization. Additionally, domestic politics is another motivating factor for a state to develop nuclear weapons. Finally, the use of a nuclear weapon as a symbol of modernity and identity is also considered (Sagan 1997).

The presence of nuclear weapons in South Asia introduces significant challenges and risks. An ongoing nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, coupled with the absence of robust crisis communication mechanisms, raises concerns about potential miscalculations and rapid escalation during periods of heightened tension. The specter of nuclear terrorism and the involvement of non-state actors further complicate the security landscape. Consequences for regional stability include strategic paralysis, shifts in military posture, and international repercussions that influence major global powers and nonproliferation efforts.

Navigating the future in light of nuclear weapons in South Asia demands a comprehensive approach. Renewed emphasis on diplomatic initiatives and conflict resolution mechanisms is essential for mitigating

regional tensions. Establishing arms control agreements and confidence-building measures, incorporating regularized communication channels and joint initiatives, can enhance crisis stability and minimize the risks of inadvertent escalation (Ganguly and Biringer 2001). Active participation in global nonproliferation initiatives and a commitment to responsible nuclear stewardship reinforce the normative framework against nuclear proliferation and build the basis for future progress on disarmament. In conclusion, the intricate relationship between nuclear weapons and regional security dynamics in South Asia underscores the need for careful management through diplomatic efforts, arms control measures, and international cooperation to foster stability in the region.

GLOBAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AND SOUTH ASIA

The longstanding pursuit of global nuclear disarmament initiatives is a shared objective of the international community, reflecting the aspiration for a world without the looming threat of nuclear weapons. In the specific context of South Asia, where both India and Pakistan possess nuclear arsenals, the impact of these global initiatives is extensive and intricate. This analysis explores how these initiatives influence the security dynamics of South Asia, considering both the opportunities and challenges they present.

Global disarmament initiatives play a role in reinforcing norms of non-proliferation and disarmament, fostering an international environment that encourages responsible nuclear behavior. This influence may prompt South Asian states to align their policies with prevailing global standards. Additionally, successful global disarmament efforts can potentially reduce perceived threats, thereby influencing regional security dynamics and lessening the imperative for an arms race. Moreover, these initiatives can create a conducive environment for diplomatic cooperation in South Asia, providing common ground for dialogue and resolving longstanding regional disputes.

However, challenges and complexities arise due to the varying commitments of major nuclear-armed states and the nonparticipation of crucial actors in global disarmament initiatives, such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). South Asian states may approach these initiatives with skepticism, given the uneven application of disarmament obligations. Security dilemmas in the region, intensified by historical conflicts and unresolved disputes pose challenges to successfully integrating global disarmament initiatives. Perceptions of strategic vulnerability may impede states from fully embracing disarmament efforts, as they fear potential shifts in the regional balance of power. The

fear of unilateral disarmament, where one state maintains nuclear weapons while its regional counterpart disarms, creates a significant hurdle, potentially leading to security imbalances and heightened tensions. Consequently, the TPNW has yet to garner support from nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, both of which have refused to participate in the negotiations over the Ban Treaty. The convergence in armament policies and stated positions on disarmament reflects a form of 'negative solidarity' meant to counteract diplomatic pressure from disarmament initiatives like the Ban Treaty (Tasleem 2018).

The implications for regional stability involve contributions to crisis stability in South Asia by reducing the reliance on nuclear weapons in strategic calculations. This makes mitigating the risks of accidental or inadvertent nuclear escalation more feasible, particularly in the context of prioritizing disarmament goals. Global disarmament initiatives may prompt South Asian states to reassess their strategic postures, potentially altering the regional balance of power. Additionally, the success of these initiatives is intertwined with efforts to prevent non-state actors from acquiring nuclear weapons, extending beyond state behavior to address the broader challenge of nuclear proliferation to non-state entities.

Policy recommendations include implementing gradual confidence-building measures, such as transparency in nuclear doctrines and capabilities, to build trust among South Asian states. Encouraging inclusive regional dialogues on disarmament and security can provide a platform for expressing the region's unique security concerns and aspirations. Moreover, exploring collaborative risk reduction measures that address concerns related to crisis stability and inadvertent nuclear weapons use is crucial.

In conclusion, the impact of global nuclear disarmament initiatives on South Asian security is a dynamic and evolving process. While presenting opportunities for reducing perceived threats and fostering diplomatic cooperation, these initiatives also pose challenges linked to regional complexities and differential commitments of major nuclear-armed states. Strategic reassessments, crisis stability, and collaborative risk reduction measures are essential in navigating the intricate interplay between global disarmament goals and the security dynamics of South Asia.

GEOPOLITICS AND SOUTH ASIA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS ATTITUDES

The attitudes of South Asian countries, notably India and Pakistan, toward a nuclear weapons ban are significantly influenced by the

complex interplay of geopolitical factors. The region's historical rivalries and unresolved territorial disputes deeply impact these countries' perspectives on disarmament initiatives. The resultant **distrust** and security concerns stemming from these conflicts contribute to a perceived necessity for nuclear deterrence to ensure national security, influencing attitudes toward nuclear weapons bans based on strategic realities shaped by historical animosities.

The shaping of India's perspective on nuclear disarmament is significantly influenced by regional power dynamics. The perceived threat from China is crucial for Indian decision-makers in developing nuclear deterrence capabilities. While India seeks to enhance its nuclear deterrence against China, its nuclear modernization efforts also stimulate Pakistan's nuclear program (Lou 2022). Thus, the complex relationships among South Asian nations play a key role in determining their attitudes toward nuclear weapons ban and broader nonproliferation efforts. As the regional power balance changes, these countries carefully evaluate their security needs within the broader geopolitical landscape.

The intensifying competition between the United States and China has global repercussions, impacting South Asian attitudes toward a nuclear weapons ban. The strategic posturing of these major powers and their engagements with regional countries contribute to the complex dynamics that influence security calculations. South Asian nations navigate this competition, considering the implications for their security and aligning with significant powers, shaping their stances on global disarmament initiatives.

The structure and functioning of the global nonproliferation regime, including the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), also impact South Asian perspectives on nuclear weapons bans. The perceived discriminatory nature of the existing regime, especially from the standpoint of India and Pakistan, influences their approach to international disarmament efforts. Questioning the fairness of the nonproliferation regime, these countries scrutinize its recognition of certain states as nuclear-armed while excluding others, shaping their attitudes toward disarmament initiatives.

The roles of major powers, such as the United States and Russia, in influencing the nuclear policies of South Asian countries are critical. Bilateral relations with these major powers, encompassing arms agreements and strategic partnerships, affect attitudes toward any prohibition of nuclear weapons. South Asian nations strategically navigate these relationships, seeking assurances and benefits that align with their security interests, contributing to shaping regional positions on global disarmament initiatives.

The perspectives on security threats, both internal and external, play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of South Asian nations toward the idea of nuclear weapons bans. India consistently views the 'Chinese threat' with particular concern in the security domain. India's apprehensions about China primarily revolve around the boundary dispute, China's military modernization, and its strategic alliances with Pakistan (Li 2023). These perceptions of threats are influenced by regional conflicts, historical tensions, and the broader geopolitical context, thereby influencing the perceived necessity of possessing nuclear weapons as a deterrent for South Asian countries.

The involvement of non-state actors and the prevalence of proxy warfare in the region further contribute to the complexities of South Asian geopolitics. Concerns about non-state actors and the potential misuse of nuclear weapons amplify the importance of maintaining a credible deterrent. Attitudes toward nuclear weapons ban are influenced by the imperative of preventing unconventional threats, highlighting the role of non-state actors in shaping South Asian perspectives on disarmament.

In conclusion, the attitudes of South Asian countries toward nuclear weapons bans are intricately shaped by geopolitical influences, including historical rivalries, regional power dynamics, global competition, and the role of major powers. Recognizing this complex interplay between geopolitics and disarmament efforts is essential for understanding the nuances of the South Asian security landscape and navigating a path toward global nuclear stability.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this essay explores South Asian perspectives on global nuclear disarmament, focusing on India and Pakistan. Factors like security concerns, regional dynamics, and domestic politics shape their nuanced positions, reflecting a complex nuclear policy marked by historical conflicts and evolving doctrines. The nuclearization of South Asia, driven by historical events and global geopolitics, has enduring impacts on strategic calculations. India's motives, influenced by China and NPT concerns, contrast with Pakistan's focus on countering perceived threats from India. Both countries approach nuclear disarmament cautiously. India's "No First Use" doctrine and skepticism about the TPNW reflect strategic considerations. Pakistan emphasizes credible deterrence and a universal, nondiscriminatory approach.

The interplay between nuclear weapons and regional security introduces challenges, including an arms race and concerns about crisis stability. Potential pathways for cooperation include diplomatic initiatives, arms control, and confidence-building measures. Recognizing the global influence on South Asian security, inclusive regional dialogues, and risk reduction measures are crucial. This research provides insights for policy-makers and contributes to the broader global goal of nuclear disarmament in the critical South Asian context.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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