

Nuclear Weapons, South Asia and Morality

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Abstract: The paper analyses the concerns arising from a moral perspective in the context of a renewed arms race in South Asia. It challenges the idea that possession of nuclear power could in any way contribute to any sort of balance. The emulation of so-called great powers and expecting that balance would arrive as it did in the case of the US and the erstwhile-USSR during cold war is detrimental to the temporal and spatial uniqueness of South Asia. Deterrence, based on rational choice theory, does not apply to the South Asian context due to ambiguity owing to mutual mistrust especially in the case of India and Pakistan. Also, it no longer only states that are sole actors in the international arena. One cannot expect the non-state actors to behave in a rational manner. Furthermore, the idea of ‘credible minimum deterrence’ itself is questionable as it is a flexible posture adjusted to relative prowess and ambiguity in policy further aggravates the situation. The paper argues from a consequentialist notion of ethics and argues that the principles of harm and equity ought be part of nuclear decision-making. Another aspect that the paper uncovers relates to the ‘reification’ of nuclear power. Using a neo-Marxist framework and concept of Lukács, the paper argues that it is no longer the state as a repository of power that decides the trajectory of nuclear development. Rather the nuclear technology has started to dictate the way states are looking at regional and international relations. This inverted relationship has been created due to neglect of any ethical toolkit. The paper thus proposes an ethical toolkit that focuses on the negative duties of not to harm and also the positive duties to create conditions that would avoid harm being done to people.

Keywords: Deterrence, Ethical Toolkit, Harm Principle, Morality, Nuclear Imbalance, Reification, South Asia.

Introduction

The case of a Nuclear South Asia presents a unique challenge to scholars from different theoretical perspectives in the discipline of International Relations. The realists and proponents of deterrence theory; the liberals, libertarians and the

advocates of cosmopolitan morality and justice; the communitarians and scholars from constructivist perspective; and the Marxist, neo-Marxist and critical-theory scholars – all these schools and theories are able to provide explanations to a limited extent only. The arms race in South Asia, specifically that between India and Pakistan, is a matter of concern from the vantage point of scholars irrespective of theoretical affiliations. The paper thus tries to uncover the concerns arising from a moral perspective in the context of a renewed arms race in South Asia. In this regard, it is argued that far from creating a situation of balance, the presence and proliferation of nuclear power has led to an ‘imbalance in South Asia’. The major argument thus is that the possession of nuclear power could not, in any way, contribute to any sort of balance. The renewed arms race has gained a greater momentum ever since the two rivals gained the possession of nuclear power. Both India and Pakistan are ‘accumulating stocks of fissile materials, enhancing the range and accuracy of their missiles, and putting in place ambitious command and control systems’ (Vanaik, 2003). Thus, one can see that there does exist a probability that might cause an escalated conflict in South Asia.

The case of South Asia is further unique and worrisome owing to the harsh fact that creation of Pakistan was by partitioning British India. The religious backlash and the resultant massacre that the partition saw hardly have any parallels in the history of modern world. The two nations are still mired in continued struggles over the heated issue of Kashmir. The case of Pakistan–India rivalry sheds light on the dynamics of enduring rivalries, more so because it involves the question of identity. Identity here refers not only to ethnic or linguistic attachments, but more to ‘how the nature of politics, purpose of the state, and its underlying values and interests are understood by key political actors and their respective constituencies’. These notions can be defined in terms of over-arching worldviews that are drawn from a religion or political ideology. The Pakistan–India rivalry in particular has involved questions of national identity – in fact, it has helped forge and change those identities on both sides. The rise of Islamism and Hindu nationalism and their role in shaping state ideology and national identities in Pakistan and India has played an important role in the endurance of the rivalry between the two countries (Nasr, 2005).

Pakistan has long argued that the Kashmir problem stems from India’s refusal to accept the reality of Pakistan, and from its hegemonic aspirations. They argue that if India yields to these, only then a peaceful solution to the Kashmir problem can be found. For the Pakistanis, Kashmir remains the unfinished business of the 1947 partition. Pakistan argues that because both India and Pakistan accepted the UN

Security Council resolutions of August 13, 1948, and January 5, 1949, the Kashmiris should be allowed to exercise the right of self-determination in accordance with these resolutions (Cheema, 1992). India, on the other hand, argues that Pakistan's aspiration in Kashmir is driven by its obsession with religion and its unwillingness to accept the fact of a secular India. The presence of this India questions the very need for Pakistan to exist at all and further fuels the Pakistani contention that Indians have never reconciled themselves to Pakistan (Chari et al., 2003).

With this background in mind, it is important to point out that India has always aspired to gain a position of prominence in global politics. It has tried to behave as a regional hegemon en route to a great power status. The aspiration to be a regional hegemon has reflected in India's assertive and sometimes intrusive policies vis-à-vis its neighbours. Specifically, the cases of East Pakistan and Sri Lanka where Indian intervened militarily are testimony to this. India has tried to emulate the western conceptions to some extent. However, the emulation of the so-called great powers and expecting that balance would arrive as it did in the case of the US and the erstwhile-USSR during cold war is detrimental to the temporal and spatial uniqueness of South Asia. Deterrence, based on rational choice theory, does not apply to the South Asian context due to ambiguity owing to mutual mistrust especially in the case of India and Pakistan. The possibility that deterrence would fail is significant in the context of South Asia (Lo, 2003).

Also, it no longer only states that are sole actors in the international arena. One cannot guarantee the non-state actors to behave in a rational manner. Furthermore, the idea of 'credible minimum deterrence' itself is questionable as it is a flexible posture adjusted to relative prowess and ambiguity in policy further aggravates the situation. Intended ambiguity does have an advantage for deterrence. The opponent is left guessing about the next move and plays safe. However, excessive ambiguity in a doctrine reflects the lack of clarity about India's own deterrent (Kulkarni and Sinha, 2011). Furthermore, ambiguity is always problematic when one is dealing with rouge states or non-state actors. The expectation of cost-benefit analysis by such an opponent would not be a wise inference.

Nuclear deterrence and South Asia

One can locate the genealogy of nuclearisation of South Asia through the reactionary nuclearisation of India vis-à-vis China and even more reactionary development of nuclear capability by Pakistan vis-à-vis India. When China developed its nuclear

weapon in 1964, it was just a couple of years from the Indian defeat in a humiliating war. Though Chinese logic for going nuclear would have been to have a global position and challenge the super powers, India considered it as a major threat to its survival. The war of 1971 with Pakistan was also presenting India with great threat as the United States and China were both rallying behind Pakistan (Chari et al., 2007). Thereby, India went for a peaceful nuclear explosion at Pokharan in 1974 to display its prowess. Scholars, however, have argued that domestic factors and political norms have been more significant in determining India's nuclear policy rather than external security considerations (Perkovich 2000). This can be disputed as the ultimate goal of survivability can trump domestic considerations. Willingness or unwillingness on the part of domestic elite cannot hold for long when external threats are perceived as existential threats. Now the question arises: can one find relevant cases of success or failure of deterrence? The answer to this question depends on whether one agrees with the hypotheses of deterrence.

The essence of deterrence is that 'one party prevents another' from doing something by 'threatening to harm the other party seriously' in case it does. Thus, it is the 'use of threats to manipulate behavior so that something unwanted does not occur' (Morgan 2003). The theory of nuclear deterrence posits that presuming the rational choice that would be made by the actors (essentially the states), it would be irrational to launch a nuclear attack on another actor. This theory presumes that the presence of nuclear weapons would forge stability and 'deter' any action that would be detrimental to either side. The clearest case that favours the advocacy of nuclear deterrence was the cold war era rivalry between the United States and the Erstwhile Soviet Union. The two big powers often went onto the brinks of launching a full-scale warfare and the proponents of deterrence theory attribute the lack thereof to the presence of nuclear weapons. Deterrence was considered to be a 'purely western concept' (McCwire, 2006). Scholars have gone at length debating the success and failure of the logic of deterrence (Sagan and Waltz, 2002). While the 'proliferation optimists' like Waltz argue possession of nuclear weapons would make wars more unlikely, the 'proliferation pessimists' like Sagan argue against the possessing nuclear weapons (Kapur, 2005; Rajgopalan, 2006)

The South Asian temporal and spatial uniqueness is quintessential to understanding about the success of nuclear deterrence or the failure thereof. India and Pakistan have had a long drawn rivalries pertaining mainly to religious and territorial domains as discussed in the introduction. As a consequence, the expected stability is far from being achieved. Instead, what is conspicuous is deficit of trust and regular border

skirmishes. The proponents of nuclear deterrence argue that nuclear deterrence worked during the cold war and avoided an otherwise imminent great war. However, it should not be mistaken that the same would hold in the South Asian context. It is true that no major war – in terms of lives lost and damage incurred – has occurred between the two nations possessing nuclear weapons. However, this would be a mistake to infer that threat is not imminent. Transfer of technology and thereby the spread of nuclear weapon is ‘more threatening for relatively powerful states than it is for relatively weak states’ (Kroenig 2009). India is definitely a relatively powerful state when compared to Pakistan. This argument is premised on the idea that the states that relatively powerful can use their conventional military power to their advantage when dealing with a state that does not have nuclear power. However, the ‘strategic advantage’ is lost once the other state acquires nuclear weapons (Kroenig 2009). This line of argument in a way proximates to the thinking that nuclear weapons serve as an equalizer and deny any advantage that may have a say in a pre-nuclear stage.

With respect to nuclear policy, India has been reluctant to release a detailed document on its nuclear doctrine. The only official document that it has brought out is ‘brief press release on the operationalization of doctrine’ in 2003 (Basrur 2008). The Draft Nuclear Doctrine as well as the National Security Advisory Board was released in August 1999. However, these were never officially adopted. Even the then External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, made a point by calling iterating that it was ‘not a policy document of the Government of India’. Pakistan as well has not publicly declared its nuclear doctrine. All that is known is through interview of officials. With respect to the idea of ‘credible minimum deterrence’, the thinking of India and Pakistan converge. In this regard, ‘credibility and survivability’ are the two pillars on which nuclear deterrence in South Asia is said to rest (Basrur 2008). The problem that remains unresolved are that how much is ‘credible’ or ‘minimum’ to allow deterrence to take place? The government is reluctant to say how much the minimum is. Also, whether that ‘minimum position’ will be fixed and stable is another question. It can be argued that the ‘minimum’ is always is a flux and depends on the ‘changing quantity and quality of the nuclear arsenals’ that its presumed rivals – Pakistan and China in this case – possess (Vanaik 2003).

From a realist vantage point, the argument supports nuclearisation and posit that the nuclearisation of the two countries and the threat of escalation has ‘constrained both Indian and Pakistani decision-makers as they are worried about even ‘minimal risks when such risks have great consequences’ (Rajagopalan 2006). However, the truth is not that simple. Owing to the fact that ambiguity regarding credibility looms large, it

is difficult to assume that a typical rational choice decision would be made. Had the worry been true as pointed out by Rajagopalan, even the continuous skirmishes would not have happened. Nuclearisation, therefore does nothing more but make the situation even more tense. It has led to high economic costs for the two countries and has led South Asia on a 'short fuse' (Bidwai and Vanaik, 2001). This is to emphasize that 'since 1998, relations between India and Pakistan has seen at least three major crises – In 1990 due to troops deployment along the Line of Control, then in Kargil conflict of 1999, and again in 2001-02 case of Operation Parakram (Basrur, 2008). The period saw the 'largest full-scale mobilisation of troops between any two countries in peacetime anywhere in the world since 1945' (Vanaik, 2003). If this is seen an indicator of improved relations with the advent of nuclear weapons, one is just being naïve. If anything averted the escalation of 1999 and 2001-02 conflicts, it was not 'deterrence' but external pressure from the United States.

An ethical toolkit and the problem of harm

The paper adheres to an ethical toolkit. The toolkit focuses on the negative duties of not to harm as well as the positive duties to create conditions that would avoid harm being done to people. This ethical toolkit is the major part of the moralist argument that the paper puts forward. The idea of morality is to argue for a certain set of principles that does transcend cultural and spatial dimension. In this sense, it tends to be prescriptive in ways what 'ought to be' done. With respect to negative duties of not to harm, the presence of a weapon that might annihilate entire cities at the push of a button poses serious questions. Is it really necessary to possess such weapons? At first, such an argument might echo activism rather than an academic argument. However, the paper tries to posit the same under the theoretical underpinnings of critical theory.

In this regard, it is important to explain what is meant by the notion of harm. From a utilitarian perspective, J.S. Mill asserted the idea of 'harm-principle'. For Mill, the principle is states that:

“...the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.”
(Mill, 1978: 68).

In this regard, Mill's argument is strictly libertarian establishing a limit on state power until and unless 'harm to other people' is caused (Mill, 1978). Now such a libertarian

argument based on the notion of utility and free market can be seen to hold much ground in social behaviour of individuals. If we try to locate harm caused by possession of nuclear weapon, the policy of no first use is a clear case of a negative liberty of 'not to' do something which may otherwise cause harm or suffering. Avoiding unnecessary harms to others is the central aspect of harm principle. However, the harm principle does not apply universally for Mill. There are circumstances in which society is justified in interfering with what someone is doing even when it doesn't harm others (Lacewing, 2009).

Taking cue from this and arguing that the universalisation of harm principle is the crucial part of world ethic, Andrew Linklater, talks about five forms of harms:

"1. Deliberate harm in relations between independent political communities; 2. Deliberate harm caused by governments to their own citizens; 3. Deliberate harm by non-state actors; 4. Unintended harm; and 5. Negligence" (Linklater, 2011).

The paper borrows from this categorisation and applies it to the South Asian post-nuclear context. With both the states possessing nuclear power, one cannot rule out the possibility of escalation of conventional wars to the nuclear level. Either of the two can cause 'deliberate harm' to one another owing to the fact that a slightly weaker control over military organisations, ill managed by civilian-control institutions, is 'likely to lead to deterrence failures and deliberate or accidental war, because of common biases, inflexible routines, and parochial interests' (Sagan and Waltz 2002). Unrestrained proliferation and reluctance of both India and Pakistan to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty further increases the possibility that a rouge non-state actor, say a terrorist organisation, can get access to the nuclear weapons. This raises the possibility of 'deliberate harm by non-state actor', to use Linklater's terminology. 'Negligence' as well contributes to such a possibility. Furthermore, there can be case of 'unintended harm' that may occur in absence of clear command and control in cases of urgency.

In this regard, it is important to weigh the aspects of security and freedom when a decision is to be made that might eventually harm a huge number of people. In a situation of nuclear brinkmanship a risk of loss of control is deliberately presented, thereby increasing the prospects of a nuclear escalation that neither side could completely control. Brinkmanship was not seen as a deliberate threat of escalation during cold war but rather 'the deliberate creation of a recognizable risk of war' (Schelling 1980). During the Kargil conflict of 1999, Pakistan was presenting a risk

of uncontrollable escalation. The threat was not that Pakistan may go to war in support of the Kashmiri rebels but that ‘war may result’ because neither New Delhi nor Islamabad may be able to maintain full control (Rajagopalan, 2006). Such a posture of brinkmanship clearly defies the ethical toolkit just presented. The idea that the fear of an uncontrollable war would cause the two parties from embarking on the path of war and that it has made them more cautious does not seem to be a very plausible explanation. It is clearly a ‘deliberate’ attempt at creating such a risk that may endanger the survivability of states concerned.

Furthermore, by allowing proliferation in the name of making the states more cautious is a risky business. The presence of rogue actors who are not concerned with the logic of a mutually assured destruction, the possibility of proliferation reaching their hands is high. This calls for the positive duties to come into place thereby creating conditions that would allow that such a proliferation does not occur. The non-proliferation treaty has its own caveats that are beyond the scope of the paper. Also, the confidence building measures are hard to be undertaken in shadow of mutual distrust that exists between the two countries. Efforts have been made in the past and will definitely bear fruits over time. However, dependence on a course that might not fructify in near future could, in fact, causes more harm than good. Thus, the point is to argue for the case of an arrangement, based on a moral perspective that integrates the two duties – positive and negative – thereby avoiding harm and creating condition that would avoid harm being done. Definitely, as the argument shows,

Reification and the case of nuclear weapons

The paper uncovers relates to the ‘reification’ of nuclear power. Using a neo-Marxist framework and concept of Lukács, the paper argues that it is no longer the state as a repository of power that decides the trajectory of nuclear development. Rather the nuclear technology has started to dictate the way states are looking at regional and international relations. This inverted relationship has been created due to neglect of any ethical toolkit. The paper has thus proposed for an ethical toolkit in the preceding section that focuses on the negative duties of not to harm and also the positive duties to create conditions that would avoid harm being done to people. Proponents from the realist camp may argue that morality has no meaning unless it serves the the powerful. Thus, morality is seen as a ‘function of power’ in relations among states (Carr, 1946). However, even if one looks at morality in terms of self-interest, the nuclear logic fails to serve the purpose.

The concept of reification in Marxist and Neo-Marxist thought related mainly with the economic dimension. It 'specifies the dialectical relationship' that exists between existence and consciousness in a society. The major point is that the aspect of 'commodity production' dominates such a society. More simply put, reification implies the phenomenon in which a 'particular set of social relations' acquires the 'appearance of naturalness or inevitability' (Burris, 1988; Markus, 1982). In this way, an inverted relation is established owing to the logic of capitalism and free market that allows a free flow of capital thereby creating a continuous and exponential repository of surplus value (Foley, 1986). Thus, what was created to serve people has, over time, achieved naturalness in a sense that it no longer remains constrained by the purpose for which it came into being in the first place.

The paper takes the logic of reification from the aforesaid framework and applies it to the nuclear scenario in South Asia. It is thus argued that presence of nuclear weapon has achieved a stature of its own, independent of security and strategic concerns. Lukács has argued, in economic domain, that the continuous production and reproduction of capitalist system on higher economic levels causes the 'structure of reification' to sink 'more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man' (Lukács, 1971: 93). This argument is borrowed here for the nuclear context. Taking this analogy, if one replaces capitalist system with global nuclear order and replaces commodity/money with nuclear power, one can see it resembling the reality. The quest for nuclear power does show a clear manifestation of 'fetishism of force' (Harrington de Santana, 2009). Nuclear power is seen as the highest currency in the lexicon of instruments of force. The sheer destructive capability of atomic power and nuclear weapons outweigh the existing instruments of war making by a big margin. Thus, the way states have justified its presence questions even the basic rationality in an ironic sense. The price of peace is seen as the creation of a massively destructive force.

In a similar vein, Abraham (1999) argues that atomic energy has been presented as the 'privileged instrument of development' in the discourse that is created in a postcolonial state. However, the instrument of development 'became its end' due to inherent urgency and secrecy. The conditions of production overshadowed the prominence of state itself in the process. This is to reiterate that what was seen merely as an instrument has transcended the logic and derived a reality of its own, independent of state. The paper argues that the mad rush to nuclearise is a common sight in Asian countries that do so even at the cost of economic bankruptcy has to do with the lexical superiority of nuclear weapons. The history of Pakistan's nuclear

program show how the nuclear developments were ‘interwoven into the broader narrative of Pakistani nationalism’ (Khan, 2012). The Indian case of nuclear development also saw an entwinement of nuclear power with religion, ideals of modernisation and the ‘rhetoric of swadeshi or self-reliance’ (Kaur, 2010). These cases clearly manifest the need to justify the path to nuclearisation as the cost accrued is such that it can not be seen justifiable only for defence and security. Furthermore, the link of weaponisation beyond security imperative reinforces the reification even further. Thus, the instrumental logic for which it was initiated has lost its meaning and nuclear weapons have reached to a deterministic stature.

Conclusion

The paper sought to explain the unique case of South Asia with the nuclear shadow as the contextual framework. India and Pakistan has had long drawn rivalry mainly related to the issue of Kashmir. In this light, it is argued that, the coming of nuclear capability has aggravated the situation even further. The theories of deterrence do not apply to the South Asian context. The paper went on to argue that the policy of a credible minimum deterrence itself is indefinite and flexible relative to the opponents’ prowess. The element of rationality can be taken as a necessary condition but not a sufficient one. Furthermore, the changed global scenario that no longer has only states as actors, the possibility of a nuclear catastrophe has further increased. The reluctance of both India and Pakistan to be part of the non-proliferation treaty adds to the worry. The paper then assessed the problem of harm and presented the typology of Linklater. These were then analysed in the nuclear scenario and thereby the paper argued in favour of an ethical toolkit that would be concerned with both the negative duty of not to harm and the positive duties to create conditions that would avert harm. The paper then discussed the idea that nuclear power has been reified in the sense that it is no longer serving the instrumental logic that was envisaged. Rather, it has become deterministic in the sense that the states are governed by its logic. Thus the paper presented the case from a moral perspective arguing against the illusion that nuclear power could lead to a balance in South Asian context.

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