

# Dual Bomb Blasts in South Asia: Implications for the Middle East

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## Brief Analysis

**T**he recent series of nuclear weapons tests in South Asia -- reportedly five bombs by India last week and five by Pakistan yesterday -- are likely to have reverberations for nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, though the impact of these tests may not be evident for some time.

### A Source of More Proliferation?

Pakistan's test finally confirms the existence -- after more than a decade of speculation -- of an "Islamic Bomb." While this has been the subject of much hype and hyperbole by both non-Muslim and Muslim commentators (the former out of fear, the latter out of pride), the test is a reminder that Pakistan is a potential second tier nuclear supplier -- if not as a matter of policy, then due to the unauthorized actions of individuals connected with that country's nuclear program. Two candidates for Pakistani assistance stand out: Saudi Arabia and Iran.

**Saudi Arabia:** Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a long history of military cooperation: Pakistanis have long served as instructors and advisors with the Saudi military; both sides worked together in the 1980s in support of the Mujahedeen during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; and until the early 1990s Pakistanis manned at least one Saudi army brigade. In 1994, a Saudi diplomat who defected to the United States made unverified claims that Saudi Arabia had for years bankrolled the Pakistani nuclear program, leading to speculation that Pakistan might eventually repay this largesse by providing nuclear warheads for Saudi Arabia's Chinese CSS-2 missiles (which due to their poor accuracy have little military value unless armed with nonconventional warheads). To date, however, there is no information to substantiate such concerns.

**Iran:** Pakistan and Iran have also established a degree of cooperation in the military sphere. In 1991, Pakistani Chief of Staff Mirza Aslam Beg publicly called for nuclear cooperation with Iran, but was quickly reprimanded by his political masters. Some analysts, however, believe that Pakistan may have subsequently assisted Tehran's nuclear procurement effort by identifying for Iran sources for equipment and technologies that were crucial to Pakistan's own nuclear program. Again, there is no evidence to substantiate such speculation. Finally, Pakistan has provided assistance to Iran's navy, reportedly transferring midget submarines in the early 1990s, and holding a naval exercise with Iran in February-March 1994. This was the first military exercise of any kind that Iran has held with a foreign

country since 1979.

Recently, relations between Pakistan and Iran have become strained. Iran fears that the Pakistani- supported Taliban government in Afghanistan could stir unrest among the two million Afghans in Iran, who provide much manual labor in large cities. The fierce anti-Shi'i policies of the Taliban have led Iran to provide military support to the Shiite Hazara, who are twenty percent of all Afghans. Meanwhile, Sunni-Shiite tensions have become acute in Pakistan -- with regular attacks on Pakistan's Shi'i minority and an attack on an Iranian culture center -- and in eastern Iran, where the Sunni minority comprises a third of the population. These tensions and Pakistan's weapons test might provide additional reasons for Iranian nuclear proliferation.

#### Lessons from Indo-Pakistani Proliferation for the Middle East

**The Costs of Proliferation Outside the NPT:** Because India and Pakistan never signed the NPT, the international community has been unwilling to punish them for developing and testing nuclear weapons. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that these actions have been cost-free. Pakistan has paid a high political price -- in terms of its relationship with the U.S. -- and both India and Pakistan will pay a substantial economic price -- due to unilateral U.S. sanctions -- for becoming declared weapons states. Nonetheless, the failure of the international community at large to censure India and Pakistan may lead potential proliferators to conclude that the costs of overt nuclear proliferation outside of the framework of the NPT are acceptable. This might induce potential proliferators that are signatories to the NPT -- such as Iraq or Iran -- to consider withdrawing from the treaty as they approach the nuclear threshold. In fact, the treaty allows for the possibility of withdrawal "if extraordinary events...have jeopardized the supreme interests" of the country.

**The Domestic Political Motivations for Nuclear Proliferation:** Traditional approaches to non-proliferation tended to focus on the regional threat environment as the main driver of nuclear proliferation, and rarely took account of domestic motivations for proliferation and testing. In fact, both India and Pakistan's weapons tests were motivated, at least partly, by domestic politics. It is extremely difficult, however, for outside actors to influence a country's domestic politics. This raises questions about the efficacy of non-proliferation efforts when domestic politics are a factor. Moreover, both the Indian and Pakistani cases show that non-proliferation education efforts need to target not just elites, but entire populations.

**The Atom Bomb is "The Poor Man's Atom Bomb":** The weapons tests also demonstrate that even relatively poor countries have the wherewithal to build nuclear weapons. They need not settle for chemical or biological weapons as a "poor man's atom bomb." Chemical and biological weapons (India has admitted to producing chemical weapons in the past) lack the prestige and impact of nuclear weapons, and nuclear weapons tests have a domestic and international impact that chemical or biological weapons tests lack. Finally, these tests have established a new standard: the true hallmark of a regional power is the possession of nuclear weapons. There is thus a new hierarchy in the developing world: second-rate (non-nuclear) and first-rate (nuclear) regional powers. This may, in the long-run, create new pressures for proliferation and testing in the developing world.

**A Nuclear Chain Reaction?:** The Indian and Pakistani bomb tests have raised fears that these actions would give additional impetus to further weapons testing in the Middle East. This, however, is not likely. Israel, like India and Pakistan, is not a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), but it is unlikely to abandon a policy of nuclear ambiguity that has served it so well for so long. Tel Aviv has nothing to gain and much to lose, by an open declaration of possession or an open, unambiguous weapons test. (Some analysts believe that Israel covertly tested a weapon off the coast of South Africa in 1979.)

#### Policy Implications

The Indo-Pakistani nuclear tests raise questions about how best to impede further proliferation. One step the U.S.

could take would be to seek an amendment to the NPT mandating the imposition of harsh sanctions on countries violating the treaty. Another step would be to close the loophole that allows members to withdraw from the treaty in order to proliferate; an amendment could impose stiff sanctions on those who withdraw. These steps would make more explicit the enforcement mechanism underpinning the NPT, and help bolster the treaty which remains a cornerstone of the current international order.

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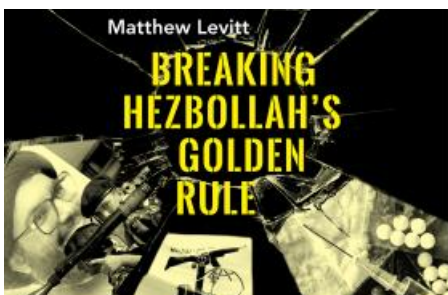
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