

THE UNITED STATES' NUCLEAR NON-  
PROLIFERATION FAILURE IN THE 1970s: THE CASES OF  
INDIA AND PAKISTAN

A Master's Thesis

by

UMER HUSSAIN

Department of History  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University  
Ankara  
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UMER HUSSAIN THE UNITED STATES' NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION FAILURE  
IN THE 1970s: THE CASES OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

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*To Ginger*

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1970s: THE CASES OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

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UMER HUSSAIN

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AUGUST 2021

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

-----  
Assist. Prof. Dr. David E. Thornton  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

-----  
Assist. Prof. Dr. Kenneth Weisbrode  
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

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Assist. Prof. Dr. Bahar Gürsel  
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

-----  
Prof. Dr. Refet Soykan Gürkaynak  
Director

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE UNITED STATES' NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION FAILURE IN THE 1970s: THE CASES OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN**

Hussain, Umer

M.A., Department of History  
Supervisor: Assist. Prof. David Thornton

July 2021

During the 1970s, the US government started becoming increasingly wary of the dangers of nuclear proliferation. The absence of a well-functioning international regime of non-proliferation compounded the United States' fears of a world in which multiple nations outside their sphere of influence could acquire nuclear weapons. In this thesis, I explore the cases of two South Asian nations, India and Pakistan. The Indian peaceful nuclear explosion of 1974 was the result of a relatively low priority given to non-proliferation by the US. It took the US and the world by surprise and India's accession to the ranks of the nuclear powers led to a rethinking of US nuclear non-proliferation policy. India's 1974 explosion also paved the way for the acceleration of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Pakistan's nuclear policy was shaped out of a perceived existential threat and possibility of nuclear blackmail that it faced from India. After several failed attempts to secure security guarantees from the US, Pakistan disregarded

the international non-proliferation regime to try to maintain parity with India. The US government's decision not to commit itself fully to Pakistan's security was what ended up undercutting its broader non-proliferation goals by making it seem an unreliable ally to Pakistan.

**Key words:** Nuclear non-proliferation, Pakistan, India, United States of America.

## ÖZET

### AMERİKA BİRLEŞİK DEVLETLERİ'NİN 1970'LERDE NÜKLEER YAYILMAYI ÖNLEMEDE BAŞARISIZLIĞI: HİNDİSTAN VE PAKİSTAN ÖRNEKLERİ

Hussain, Umer

Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi David Thornton

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1970'li yıllarda ABD devleti nükleer yayılımın tehlikelerine karşı oldukça temkinli olmaya başladı. İyi işleyen ve uluslararası yayılmanın önlenmesine karşı bir rejimin yokluğu, ABD'nin etkisi dışında olan birçok milletin nükleer silahlara erişebileceği bir dünyaya olan korkularını şiddetlendirdi. Bu tezde, iki Güney Asya milleti olan Hindistan ve Pakistan örnekleri araştırılmaktadır. Hindistan'ın 1974 yılındaki barışçıl nükleer patlaması, kısmen ABD'nin yayılmanın önlenmesine verdiği düşük önceliğin bir sonucuydu. Bu ABD'yi ve tüm dünyayı şaşırttı ve Hindistan'ın nükleer güçler arasında yer alması, ABD'nin nükleer yayılımın önlenmesine karşı bir planı yeniden düşünmesine yol açtı. Hindistan'ın 1974 yılındaki patlaması ayrıca Pakistan'ın nükleer silahlar programının hızlanmasına zemin hazırladı. Pakistan'ın nükleer planı, Hindistan'dan deneyimlediği var olan tehdit ve nükleer şantaj olasılığından



şekillenmişti. ABD'den güvenliği güvence altına almak için birçok başarısız denemeden sonra, Pakistan uluslararası yayılımın önlenmesine karşı rejimi Hindistan ile eşitliğini korumaya çalışmak için hiçe saydı. ABD devletinin Pakistan'ın güvenliğine yönelik kendini tamamen adamaması kararı, Pakistan'a güvenilir bir müttefik olarak görünerek yayılımın önlenmesinde kapsamlı amaçlarını baltalamasıyla sonuçlandı.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Nükleer Silahların Yaygınlaşması, Pakistan, Hindistan, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Background and Objectives:**

Top-level political officials of the US realised the need for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons even before Little Boy and Fat Man were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Indeed, the scientists involved in the Manhattan project realised how awesome the power of the atomic bomb was and urged the US government to develop a system of international control over the uses of atomic energy. As far back as 1945, US political elites realised that harnessing nuclear energy for industrial uses through reprocessing and fissile material enrichment employed the same methods as harnessing nuclear energy for the purpose of making atomic bombs. Since the Manhattan project, the blueprints for the construction of the atomic bomb were kept a highly guarded secret by the Truman administration. However, when the Soviets managed to explode their own atomic bomb in 1949 and the UK in 1952, it became apparent that US's monopoly on nuclear weapons was relatively short-lived. Eisenhower realised that shrouding nuclear technology in secrecy had started a nuclear arms race

between the Soviet Union and the US. He understood that while the possession of nuclear arsenals did serve a strategic purpose, their mass production would make them cheaper and the proliferation of a bomb with such destructive potential may bode ill for the future, especially if rogue nations acquired them. Therefore, in a break from the previous administration's secrecy around nuclear weapons, Eisenhower tried to open up the nuclear subject to the American and international public. On December 8, 1953, he delivered his "Atoms for Peace" speech to the UN General Assembly, and declared a "determination to help solve the fearful atomic dilemma" by making atomic energy available to the rest of the world for the purposes of agriculture, medicine, and other peaceful purposes rather than the making of atomic bombs, concluding that "the miraculous inventiveness of man shall not be dedicated to his death, but consecrated to his life."<sup>1</sup> The programme enacted strict safeguards, closely oversaw the nuclear material that was being shared and how it was being used, and did not assist nations that were deemed unreliable. India was the first country to reap the benefits of this programme. The Eisenhower administration viewed South Asia as "a major battleground in the cold war" and agreed that losing South Asia to communist control would be a "serious psychological and

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<sup>1</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Atoms for Peace Speech," 470th Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, December 8, 1953.

<<https://www.iaea.org/about/history/atoms-for-peace-speech>>

political defeat for the West.”<sup>2</sup> A 1954 CIA report argued that the USSR would try to bring India “closer to the Communist bloc.”<sup>3</sup> In an effort to prevent India from moving towards the Soviet sphere of influence, and upon being persistently lobbied by India, the US agreed to help India develop nuclear technology, selling India 10 tons of nuclear heavy water to use for peaceful purposes of nuclear energy development in a Canadian-supplied nuclear research reactor named Canada India Reactor Utility Services (CIRUS). In 1962, Pakistan, too, benefitted from the Atoms for Peace programme, and received its first reactor, named Pakistan Atomic Research Reactor (PARR-1).

Under the Atoms for Peace initiative, Pakistan and India started their nuclear development programmes. This programme catalysed the spread of sensitive nuclear technologies to these two major South Asian nations and both these nations ended up diverting their own indigenous nuclear programmes to using atoms for atomic weapons rather than for peace. One of the principal aims of the Atoms for Peace programme was to make nuclear technology available to other nations for peaceful purposes. This, in turn, was supposed to prevent the

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<sup>2</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 2, 1089.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v11p2/d622>

<sup>3</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Communist Courses of Action in Asia through 1957,” National Intelligence Estimate, Number 10-7-54, November 23, 1954, 12.



proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, as mentioned above, the processes that allow one to harness nuclear energy for peaceful purposes are the same ones used in making atomic bombs. How difficult would it be, once the nations of the world had enough know-how to create nuclear plants for electricity generation to then make nuclear bombs? How clear was the difference between a civilian nuclear programme and a military nuclear programme? Once a nation became capable enough to produce a nuclear bomb on its own territory, how would the international non-proliferation regime manage to stop them from “going nuclear”? If a nation had enough knowledge to create nuclear weapons, did it count as a nuclear weapon state? Or would it actually have to prove to the world by detonating a nuclear bomb that it was a nuclear-weapon state? Moreover, what criteria would one use to determine the difference between a hostile nuclear explosion and a peaceful nuclear explosion? During the 1970s, these issues came to prominence as the US non-proliferation regime started coming to grips with the spread of nuclear weapons in volatile areas such as South Asia.

In this thesis, I explore two cases of nuclear proliferation in South Asia during the 1970s: India and Pakistan. The Indian government shocked the world by detonating a nuclear device in 1974. The Indian nuclear explosion of 1974 threw

Pakistan into a state of existential panic. The Pakistani leadership had, since partition from India in 1947 and due to Indian territorial claims on disputed Kashmir, viewed India as a hostile nation with expansionist aims that was bent on dismembering Pakistan — a fear that was realised in 1971 when, due to Indian military assistance, East Pakistan managed to secede from the union and declare independence. I will explore the cases of nuclear proliferation in India and Pakistan between 1974 and 1980, and the ultimate failure of US non-proliferation efforts in restraining this spread of nuclear weapons.

## **1.2 Historiography:**

The general study of nuclear proliferation is the subject of an extensive literature. However, nuclear proliferation in South Asia during the 1970s and especially the dual cases of India and Pakistan viewed in tandem have been understudied. Most scholarly works have tended to treat the Pakistani and Indian nuclear programmes as two separate rather than interlinked cases. This thesis is an attempt to bridge that gap and also to contribute critically to the literature on the foreign policies of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.

David Albright's *Peddling Peril* chronicles Pakistan's journey to obtaining nuclear weapons by starting with metallurgist, nuclear engineer and "Father of

the Pakistan's nuclear bomb," Abdul Qadir Khan.<sup>4</sup> In 1975, A. Q. Khan, through extensive espionage, managed to steal the blueprints of centrifuge designs from URENCO — a uranium enrichment facility in the Netherlands. Within a span of merely 9 years, Khan exploited loopholes in the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty and, using his extensive international network of nuclear suppliers, managed to obtain nuclear weapons for Pakistan by 1984. The book also narrates the story of Khan's clandestine international network, which would then sell nuclear secrets and capabilities to North Korea, Libya, and Iran.

Christoph Bluth and Uzma Mumtaz's book, *India-Pakistan Strategic Relations: The Nuclear Dilemma*, challenges the prevalent view in strategic security studies that the existence of nuclear weapons by two mutually hostile nations is likely to reduce armed conflict between them.<sup>5</sup> From the standpoint of nuclear deterrence theory, this view is based on the belief that the possession of nuclear weapons acts as a deterrent to armed conflict due to the catastrophic dangers that both nations face in the event of an escalation to all-out war. This book argues that the introduction of nuclear weapons in South Asia has, contrary to conventional

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<sup>4</sup> David Albright, *Peddling Peril: How the Secret Nuclear Trade Arms America's Enemies* (New York: Free Press, 2010). David Albright is the founder and president of the non-governmental organisation, Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS). He has published several books on the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

<sup>5</sup> Christoph Bluth and Uzma Mumtaz, *India-Pakistan Strategic Relations: The Nuclear Dilemma* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2020).

deterrence theory belief, increased the risk of armed conflict escalating into nuclear war. Both *The Nuclear Jihadist* and *Deception* are journalistic works, written and published in the mid-2000s when the US War on Terror was enjoying its heyday. These works invoke the popular notion of the “Islamic bomb” and argue that Khan’s clandestine nuclear network proved that international safeguards were not useful enough to prevent the dissemination of nuclear technology.<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Richelson’s *Spying on the Bomb* traces the intelligence efforts of the United States in detecting the nuclear activities of both allies and enemies on the international level as well as the successes and failures of US intelligence.<sup>7</sup> The work draws on numerous declassified documents from the CIA and other intelligence agencies as well as many interviews with spies and scientists who were in the nuclear know-how.

Michael Brenner’s polemical work, *Nuclear Power and Non-Proliferation: The Remaking of U.S. Policy*, is a critique of the shortsightedness of US non-proliferation policy during the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Frantz and Katherine Collins, *The Nuclear Jihadist: The True Story of the World’s Most Dangerous Nuclear Smuggler* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007); Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark, *Deception: Pakistan, the United States and the Secret Trade in Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Brenner, *Nuclear Power and Non-Proliferation: The Remaking of U.S. Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Brenner lambasts the US's lack of foresight, poor planning and coordination of non-proliferation issues and even goes as far as to criticise the government officials' laziness in formulating sustainable, long-term policies to combat nuclear proliferation. Brenner suggests that government officials on the top of the pecking order and especially of the executive branch, such as the three aforementioned presidents, should have exercised their power more forcefully to achieve their nonproliferation objectives. Malcolm Craig's book, *America, Britain, and Pakistan's Nuclear Programme: 1974-1980*, is as exhaustive in its analysis of recently declassified US and British documents as it is compelling.<sup>9</sup> It explores US and Britain's involvement in impeding Pakistan from obtaining nuclear weapons. It explains how the harsh economic conditions and geopolitical challenges of the mid-to-late 1970s strained the US and the UK's relationship and allowed Pakistan to benefit from the lax non-proliferation policy of 1979 onwards and acquire nuclear weapons. Moreover, it argues, with the benefit of hindsight, that nothing short of US military intervention in Pakistan would have diminished Islamabad's nuclear ambitions. Sumit Ganguly and Paul Kapur in *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb* analyse the behaviour of the two states in responding to each other's perceived or real aggressions.<sup>10</sup> The authors

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<sup>9</sup> Malcolm M. Craig, *America, Britain, and Pakistan's Nuclear Programme, 1974-1980* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-51880-0.

<sup>10</sup> Šumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

debate one another over whether attaining nuclear status has curbed the risk of all-out war between the two countries or encouraged Pakistan to be more reckless and provocative in its foreign policy with India. While both authors acknowledge that nuclear weapons add to the instability in the South Asian region by making unresolvable disputes more dangerous, they disagree over whether the presence of nuclear weapons serves a deterrent function in the region.

In *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age*, Francis Gavin tries to debunk what he deems commonly held misconceptions about the US's attitude towards nuclear proliferation and challenges the prevalent notion that the introduction of nuclear weapons to the world, i.e. the nuclear revolution, has changed US foreign policy since the end of the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> In a compelling chapter on Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon's nuclear policies, Gavin highlights how both these statesmen subordinated the nonproliferation policy to the attainment of what they perceived to be more valuable geopolitical goals and their somewhat unconcerned attitude to nuclear proliferation problematises the belief that US foreign policy, since the 1960s, has actively sought to to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

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<sup>11</sup> Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012).

Husain Haqqani's book *Magnificent Delusions* is a scathing critique of the flip-flopping nature of US foreign policy towards Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> Haqqani describes the US as being wittingly duped by Pakistan time and again to achieve its own short-term and realpolitik goals. Denouncing US foreign policy apropos of Pakistan as essentially short-sighted and marred by half measures and a generally noncommittal nature, Haqqani, through vigorous historical analysis and political critique, characterises the US and Pakistan's history of misunderstanding as fraught with "dependence, deception, and defiance."<sup>13</sup> Not sparing the Pakistani leadership either, he argues that Pakistan's acts of defiance and deception come from Pakistani leaders' overestimation of its geopolitical significance. During the Cold War, Haqqani argues, Pakistan had an inflated sense of its own geopolitical standing. It considered itself the only bastion against Soviet expansionism in South Asia and gained much in US military and economic assistance. However, US policymakers realised that this alliance and Pakistan's need for survival was necessary for US national security. During the 1970s, Pakistan received modest US aid when its leaders felt it needed it the most. It was only after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that the US

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<sup>12</sup> Husain Haqqani. *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2013)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

started channeling massive amounts of military aid to Pakistan. The Pakistani public perceived the US as capricious, serving Pakistan only when it suited its own interests. This view, actively promoted by leaders such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, led overtime to vehement anti-Americanism in Pakistani popular discourse.

In *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, retired Brigadier Feroz Hassan Khan explores how Pakistan's arduous quest for the nuclear bomb was a direct result of the humiliation it suffered during the 1971 secession of East Pakistan followed by the Indian peaceful nuclear explosion of 1974.<sup>14</sup> While India had developed nuclear weapons to ward off China, which in turn had developed nuclear capability to counteract the US, Pakistan set out on the path to nuclear weapons to maintain a balance with India in South Asia. The Pakistani leadership believed that Pakistan was an "orphan state" and was not under any protection from the US or Soviet against nuclear attack.<sup>15</sup> This realisation is what, for Pakistani leaders, made the act of acquiring nuclear weapons a pressing issue upon which Pakistan's survival hinged. Due to this security concern, Pakistan variously employed disingenuous strategies to acquire

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<sup>14</sup> Feroz Hassan Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, Stanford Security Studies (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.



nuclear weapons. Pakistan's leadership was adamant on making it a nuclear power at any and all domestic and economic expense, even if such a route entailed that its citizens would have to "eat grass".

In *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, George Perkovich narrates a compelling half-century account of the motivations behind and the challenges facing the Indian nuclear programme.<sup>16</sup> Perkovich argues that the development of Indian nuclear weapons owed more to India's domestic politics rather than any pressing external security concerns. In Perkovich's view, during the 1970s India's domestic politics required it to forcefully assert itself on the international stage, project its power onto the global arena and exercise its national sovereignty rather than bow to the will of the superpowers. At the same time, Perkovich addresses the seeming hypocrisy in India's condemnation of the nuclear powers and the existence of nuclear weapons in the world. He argues that the more pressing issue for India, however, was to "repudiate all vestiges of colonialism in relations with the leading global powers."<sup>17</sup> Only by asserting its independence and sovereignty by developing and detonating a nuclear device in 1974 could India manage to project its power on the world.

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<sup>16</sup> George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Perkovich duly explains that the prevention of the Indian nuclear programme would not have been possible unless the US, Soviet Union, and other nuclear-weapon states actively pursued international disarmament. Instead, India perceived the US's efforts to prevent it from "going nuclear" as yet another colonial power trying to pull the strings and undermine its national sovereignty. In the face of this perceived hypocrisy of the US — trying to prevent nuclear proliferation while being involved in an arms race itself — India's only response was to assert its power and defy the US's will.

### **1.3 Resources and Methodology:**

This thesis has extensively used the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, which presents the official historical record of US foreign policy and diplomatic correspondence. Among the volumes I have consulted in writing this thesis, the most central to the writing of this thesis are *The Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969-1976, Volume E-8, Documents on South Asia, 1973-1976* and *Documents on South Asia The Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1977-1980, Volume XIX South Asia*. I have also frequently used several other volumes under the FRUS series for background research. These documents include, among other things, diplomatic cables, telegrams, presidential decrees, executive orders, and national security memoranda. Moreover, I have also

included National Security Archives Briefing Books and declassified CIA documents related to the Indian and Pakistani nuclear programmes which examine how US policymakers tried to shape policy designed to prevent, control, and eventually mitigate nuclear programmes in South Asia. The memoirs of former US Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, former US President Jimmy Carter, and former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto have been useful in assessing how their personal narratives line up with official documentation on nuclear matters in South Asia. Also included in this thesis are declassified documents that appear in Wilson Center's Digital Archive which has a wealth of documents and collections on the history of nuclear proliferation and the US's attempts to instate an international regime of non-proliferation during the 1970s. I was, unfortunately, able to access only a limited number of Indian and Pakistani documents related to their nuclear programmes, mostly because these programmes were shrouded in almost complete secrecy. The Pakistani and Indian side of the story can only be gleaned from official US documentation and interviews with the Pakistani and Indian officials who were in the nuclear loop around over forty years ago. The restriction of access to official documentation is upsetting but I have tried, as much as I could, to highlight Indian and Pakistani stances and motivations as well in my narrative of South Asian nuclear proliferation.

This thesis will focus mainly on how the Indian peaceful nuclear explosion of May 1974 paved the way for Pakistan to accelerate their own nuclear weapons programme. By linking the Indian and Pakistani cases, this thesis aims to show that, due to the US's inability to prioritise non-proliferation efforts in India, Pakistan became the second domino to fall in the South Asian region due to its stubbornness in following the Indian example. The following part, Chapter 2, analyses the run-up to the Indian nuclear explosion and discusses how the US government underwent a disconcerting intelligence failure and failed to predict and pre-empt India's so-called peaceful nuclear explosion. The Indian explosion then required a recalibration of US non-proliferation policy towards other nuclear-aspiring nations. Chapter 3 explores how the acceleration of the Pakistani nuclear programme was as a direct consequence of the Indians achieving nuclear status. Pakistani nuclear policy was born out of a perceived existential threat and the possibility of nuclear blackmail that Pakistan faced from India. The chapter shows how Pakistan tried in vain on multiple occasions to get security guarantees from the US and, failing to secure these guarantees, had to develop at full throttle a nuclear weapons programme of its own. This chapter is then followed by a conclusion and a reference list of primary and secondary sources I consulted for the writing of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 2

### INDIA TESTS A NUCLEAR BOMB IN MAY 1974: “SMILING BUDDHA” SHOCKS THE WORLD

This chapter argues that the introduction of atomic weapons in South Asia and, more specifically, the Indian peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) of 1974 was a direct consequence of the low priority that top US government officials gave to the prevention of nuclear proliferation. I argue that President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had a *laissez faire* attitude towards the proliferation of nuclear weapons. They believed that nuclear weapons were a force so formidable — for reasons of national prestige, security, and bolstering military capabilities — that their proliferation was inevitable. Within the calculus of the Nixon-Kissinger philosophy of statecraft, nuclear proliferation in

the long run was almost certainly inevitable and most nations would automatically want to acquire these weapons. This Realpolitik outlook theorised that nations across the world would eventually do everything within their might to try to attain nuclear weapons since their national policies would be based on the pursuit, possession and application of power. For Nixon and Kissinger, trying to stop nuclear proliferation meant devoting limited resources and diplomatic capital towards an unattainable goal, i.e. the prevention of proliferation. This chapter explores the Indian and US positions on nuclear matters in the run-up to the 1974 nuclear test and the subsequent international fallout caused by the Indian PNE.

## **2.1 The Indian Peaceful Nuclear Explosion:**

On May 18 1974, India's underground nuclear detonation, aptly dubbed "Smiling Buddha" to emphasise the peacefulness of the test, made it the sixth nation to detonate a nuclear device and sent shock waves across the world.<sup>18</sup> India government officials declared that they were entirely within their rights within the framework of international law. India was a signatory of the Moscow test-ban treaty of 1963, which forbade explosions in the atmosphere, in outer

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<sup>18</sup> The Indian test made it the sixth nation to test a nuclear device but only the seventh nuclear power. Israel had already achieved nuclear status in 1966 but had forgone testing.

space, and under water.<sup>19</sup> The official Indian position, as the New York Times reported, was “In exploding the device beneath the ground [...] India adhered to the treaty.”<sup>20</sup> Though India’s ascension to the status of a nuclear weapon state took the world by surprise, it was an open secret in intelligence circles in the US, UK, Soviet Union, and France that India had acquired enough technical know-how and fissionable material to create a nuclear weapon whenever they pleased. The issue, therefore, was not *whether* India could create and detonate a nuclear weapon but rather *when* the Indian government would decide to do it.

Ten years prior to India’s nuclear test and merely five days after the first Chinese nuclear test, on 21 October 1964, a national intelligence report prepared by the CIA and NSA estimated that India would be the only new state likely to develop nuclear weapons over the following decade.<sup>21</sup> According to this national intelligence estimate, India had a fairly advanced nuclear power programme

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<sup>19</sup> Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, July 26, 1963; United Nations, New York. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20480/volume-480-I-6964-English.pdf> (accessed April 17, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Weinraub, "INDIA BECOMES 6TH NATION TO SET OFF NUCLEAR DEVICE," New York Times, May 19, 1974. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/05/19/archives/india-becomes-6th-nation-to-set-off-nuclear-device-india-signed.html>>

<sup>21</sup> “National Intelligence Estimate NIE 4-2-64, 'Prospects for a Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Over the Next Decade',” October 21, 1964, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CIA Mandatory Review Appeal. Originally published in William Burr, eds., National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book #155 (June 1, 2005). <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115994>>.

with a plutonium separation plant. The Indians could have future peaceful uses for this plant but, at the same time, it placed them “in a favourable position to separate plutonium for weapons if they so desire.”<sup>22</sup> While the Indian government had opposed the creation of nuclear weapons on moral and political grounds, with top government officials publicly stating that India had no intentions to make nuclear weapons, the report concluded that the Chinese test would beget internal pressures in India to counteract this regional development. Another factor that India would take into consideration was the nature of Sino-Soviet relations. If there was any indication of a Sino-Soviet rapprochement, regardless of whether Soviet aid to India, military or otherwise, remained the same, India would feel pressured to expand its own military capability to maintain an equal footing with China. Moreover, the report doubted the efficacy of security assurances by the US and other nations in preventing India from pursuing a nuclear weapons path. After all, in the event of a Chinese nuclear attack, it was unclear whether US and USSR security assurances would be sufficient for India. Soon after China’s test, Lyndon Johnson promised all non-nuclear states, certainly with India in mind, protection against nuclear attack. However, India knew that the US was not legally bound by any benevolent promises of protection it made. Indeed, as

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 7.



historian Susanna Schrafstetter argued, “what exactly was a security guarantee – merely a solemn declaration of intent or a commitment to nuclear defence? How would India’s non-aligned status accord with such a guarantee? Which countries would provide the guarantee?”<sup>23</sup> The 1964 intelligence report concluded that “the chances are better than ever that India will decide to develop nuclear weapons within the next few years.”<sup>24</sup>

Indian nuclear physicist, Homi J. Bhabha, known colloquially as “father of the Indian nuclear programme”, gave a speech on United Nations Day, October 24, 1964, about the dangers posed by China. He exhorted the United Nations to take “concrete steps towards nuclear and general disarmament” fearing that the domino effect of China’s test would cause widespread horizontal proliferation.<sup>25</sup> However, in the same speech, Bhabha stated that atomic weapons give a nation deterrent powers against attack from an aggressor state, “Indeed, the importance of nuclear weapons is that they enable a country possessing them in adequate measure to deter another country also possessing them from using

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<sup>23</sup> Susanna Schrafstetter, ‘Preventing the “Smiling Buddha”’: British-Indian Nuclear Relations and the Commonwealth Nuclear Force, 1964–68’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 95.

<sup>24</sup> National Intelligence Estimate NIE 4-2-64, 9.

<sup>25</sup> “Bhabha Speech on Nuclear Disarmament United Nation's Day,” October 24, 1964, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Homi Bhabha Papers, IDSA-HBP-24101964, 6. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114195>>

them against it.”<sup>26</sup> While stressing the dangers of nuclear proliferation, he simultaneously gestured towards the catch-22 nature of the situation. It was essential for the United Nations to prevent further proliferation and take any and all possible steps towards disarmament. But in the absence of an international regime of disarmament, in Bhabha’s logic, the surest way for a sovereign nation to deter a nuclear aggressor was to develop nuclear weapons itself. This contradiction between preventing nuclear proliferation on the one hand and developing nuclear weapons as deterrents on the other would torment advocates of nonproliferation through subsequent decades.

India’s nuclear test was made possible thanks to the assistance of US and Canadian nuclear suppliers. The path to India’s nuclear capability began in the mid-1950s when Canada agreed to provide India with a nuclear reactor and the US agreed to provide heavy water for the reactor. It was this reactor that was used to produce the weapons grade plutonium used in India’s test in 1974. Moreover, a telegram from Paris to the US Department of State under a month after the Indian test stated that there were rumours that the French were considering the sale of 400kg of highly enriched uranium to India, which was a considerably high amount for a single 40-Megawatt reactor. One possible

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 2.

motivation for the French to lend such assistance to India was “their hope of establishing a future international market for sales of French nuclear technology.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, during the 1960s and early 1970s, especially after Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” speech, there seemed to be little to no concern about nuclear proliferation and the US, UK, and Canada scrambled for customers in a market which would prove quite lucrative.<sup>28</sup> It was this environment of economic opportunity provided by Eisenhower’s nuclear initiative and fuelled by the Cold War which enabled the US, Canada and UK to negotiate deals with and deliver nuclear matériel to India under the assumption that such technology would be used for peaceful purposes.

## **2.2: Intelligence about India’s Nuclear Intentions Prior to the Explosion**

As early as January 1972, the US State Department was aware that India had enough nuclear know-how to make a nuclear weapon. The Indian government

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<sup>27</sup> Embassy Paris to Department of State, Film number D740145-0940, June 6, 1974, 1974PARIS13729, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” speech was delivered at a meeting of the UN General Assembly on 8 December 1953. It advocated sharing nuclear technology with non-nuclear nations in order that such technology may be utilised to improve the power needs and economic conditions of nations across the world and also “hasten the day when fear of the atom will begin to disappear from the minds of people.” Eisenhower had abandoned the policies of nuclear secrecy espoused by Truman’s government fearing that the Soviets’ growing nuclear expertise would enable them to cut deals with other countries in exchange for nuclear assistance. Eisenhower tried to beat the Soviets to it by introducing this bold new initiative.

had a deliberately ambiguous stance on a nuclear weapons programme and held its cards close to the chest. The Government of India had “frequently told Indian Parliament that while it does not want a nuclear weapons program, it will continue to refine nuclear knowledge in order to keep options open for any necessary response to changing world situation.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, since in January 1972, the memories of Indian involvement in the 1971 partition of Pakistan were still fresh, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi considered it imprudent to start “stirring the world community’s uneasiness anew.” In early 1972, the US State Department concluded that while India would not test a nuclear device in the coming weeks, no amount of external pressure would prevent a nationalist country like India from testing a nuclear device.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in early 1972, the Government of Canada found no hard evidence that India was moving towards a nuclear explosion and reasoned that India would not explode a nuclear device at “a time when it was interested in developing its relations with China.”<sup>31</sup> The British were of the same mind and concluded that they had detected no

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<sup>29</sup> “US Embassy Airgram A-20 to State Department, 'India’s Nuclear Intentions',” January 21, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives, Record Group 59, SN 70-73, Def 18-8 India.  
<<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113892>>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “State Department Cable 50634 to US Embassy Canada, 'Indian Nuclear Intentions',” March 24, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives, Record Group 59, SN 70-73, AE 1 India.  
<<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113897>>

indication that the Indian government was planning an explosion.<sup>32</sup> However, the US, UK, and Canada were forced to reevaluate their assessment of Indian nuclear intentions when a series of reports about an imminent Indian test began to surface which would have been insignificant in isolation but “their congruity, apparent reliability, and seeming credibility, when laid against logic of situation, warranted review and updating of our previous assessments regarding Indian intention.”<sup>33</sup> Addressing this spate of reports, National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger concluded, “Although we have no hard evidence that India has made the *political* decision to test, one report indicates that a test device would be ready within six months.”<sup>34</sup> In the first half of 1972, the US State Department was convinced that while India had the capability to detonate, they had no incentive to make that political decision. For about two years, there was little interest in the internal developments of India’s nuclear

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<sup>32</sup> “State Department cable 59655 to US Embassy United Kingdom, 'Indian Nuclear Intentions',” April 07, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives, Record Group 59, SN 70-73, AE 1 India. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113898>>

<sup>33</sup> “State Department Cable 69551 to US Embassy United Kingdom, 'Indian Nuclear Intentions',” April 22, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives, Record Group 59, SN 70-73, AE 1 India. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113899>>

<sup>34</sup> “Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, 'Proposed NSSM on the Implications of an Indian Nuclear Test,' with cover memorandum from Richard T. Kennedy,” July 04, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nixon Presidential Library, National Security Council Institutional Files, box H-192, NSSM-156. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113903>>

programme, mostly due to the US's primary focus being Vietnam and Watergate. As late as 19 January 1974, the US reasoned that the Indian government was assailed by dire economic problems, "Politics is focusing increasingly on these issues rather than on grander nationalistic aspirations [nuclear testing] where confidence has in any event declined since 1972."<sup>35</sup> This cable, signed off by the former deputy director for intelligence at the CIA, could not have been further from the truth.

In early January 1974, US intelligence had dismissed the possibility of an Indian nuclear test, citing budget stringencies, production shortages, high unemployment, widespread corruption, rampant inflation, and food shortages as domestic factors which would dissuade India from conducting a nuclear test. On the day of the test, the US Embassy in New Delhi stated the only possible explanation they could come up with at the time, which was that it was precisely due to the political unrest caused by these domestic factors that the Indian leadership had decided to test their nuclear device. The US Embassy reasoned that the atmosphere of "general domestic gloom and uncertainty" needed to be offset by a "psychological boost, [with] the hope of recreating the

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<sup>35</sup> "US Embassy India cable 0743 to State Department, 'India's Nuclear Intentions', January 19, 1974, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E-8, Documents on South Asia, 1973–1976, Document 156. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113910>>

atmosphere of exhilaration and nationalism that swept the country after 1971.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the nuclear test, within the Indian leadership’s calculus, would guarantee India’s treatment as an important actor in Asia rather than a country relegated to the sidelines. Any international backlash the Indian government faced from non-proliferators could then be used to stir up nationalist sentiment by portraying India as a besieged country whose unilateral decision-making and national sovereignty foreign powers, especially the monopolists of nuclear power, were trying to undermine. At a time when US-Indian relations were already strained due to the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971 and US-China rapprochement under Nixon, the Indian nuclear test openly disregarded the US’s views on conducting nuclear tests. The initial US reaction to the test, however, was restrained.

### **2.3: International Reactions to the Indian Nuclear Test**

The Indian test threw many of the staunch adherents of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 into a state of alarm. Upon detonation of the Smiling Buddha, it dawned upon the signatories of the NPT that their goal of nuclear non-proliferation could not be achieved unless the treaty was universally

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<sup>36</sup> “US Embassy India Cable 6598 to State Department, ‘India’s Nuclear Explosion: Why Now?’,” May 18, 1974, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Access to Archival Databases (AAD), National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 59, Central Foreign Policy File, document number 1974NEWDE06598. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113911>>

accepted. As Michael Brenner states, the Indian test was “a stunning reminder of the NPT’s only partial coverage, of the loopholes in safeguards and restrictions written into bilateral agreements, and of the close link between civilian power facilities and a weapons program.”<sup>37</sup> The much feared nth country had finally stepped forward and tested a nuclear device.<sup>38</sup> Among the first countries to voice their anxiety to the US was Canada, which promptly discontinued all exports of nuclear matériel to India, denounced the test and stated that it was a “violation of a 1971 understanding between the two countries.”<sup>39</sup> Canadian Secretary for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, concerned that the “event could have a highly disturbing effect on other countries,” asked the US Embassy in Ottawa why the US’s reaction was so muted.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the Canadian position

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<sup>37</sup> Michael J. Brenner, *Nuclear Power and Non-proliferation: The Remaking of U.S. Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 64.

<sup>38</sup> The term “nth country” came from an experiment called the “Nth Country Experiment” (1964-1967) which tried to assess the risk of nuclear proliferation. The experiment hired three young physicists with little to no nuclear weapons experience and provided them with access only to unclassified information along with basic technical support. The aim of the experiment was to see if they could design an explosive with a significant military yield. The participants ended up creating a viable design for a nuclear weapon in under three years. The term “nth country” then came to denote any country with rudimentary technical knowledge of nuclear weapons design which would succeed in creating a nuclear weapon.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Trumbull, “Canada Says India's Blast Violated Use of Atom Aid,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1974. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/05/21/archives/canada-says-indias-blast-violated-use-of-atom-aid-canada-says-india.html>>

<sup>40</sup> Embassy Ottawa to Department of State, Film number D740140-0926, June 3, 1974, 1974OTTAWA01668, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).



on the Indian test was that there an immediate policy-level meeting of nuclear supplier countries was a must to discuss the dangers of nuclear proliferation that India's test had sparked off. If enough time was allowed to pass without any policy-level consultations, then those nuclear supplier countries "advocating a strictly hard-headed commercial approach would find their position increasingly strengthened."<sup>41</sup> France, a non-signatory nuclear state of the NPT, was one such country. The general administrator of the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), André Giraud sent a congratulatory telegram to India, applauding Indian scientists for taking painstaking steps towards developing nuclear techniques. When questioned why he had congratulated India for detonating a nuclear device which alarmed many countries worldwide, Giraud responded that the cooperation between India and the CEA dated back to the 1940s and that developing such a technology on one's own was an extraordinary feat and deserved due praise. Having said this, Giraud emphasised that the CEA had had in no way contributed to the attainment of India's nuclear test, which was India's independent achievement ("nous n'avons

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<sup>41</sup> Department of State to Embassy New Delhi, Film number D740169-0629, June 27, 1974, 1974STATE138363, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

pas apporté la moindre contribution à l'obtention de ce résultat").<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, as Staff worried, France would soon replace the US to become India's supplier of enriched uranium, which would then be used for India's nuclear weapons programme.

India's nuclear test caused great alarm in non-proliferation circles in Western Europe. A report by Italy's delegation to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva emphasised how the test had trivialised the NPT. The delegation conceded that the new Indian nuclear capability was of no great importance and in terms of vertical proliferation could by no means match the vastly superior nuclear weapons programmes of the superpowers. However, India's test would give many other countries the perfect pretext to start their own weapons programmes, namely that they intended to develop nuclear weapons for peaceful purposes. The delegation censured India's nuclear programme for having been shrouded in secrecy and the Indian government's disdain for the non-proliferation community in wanting to prove its nuclear status on an international level. It concluded that India's breaking of the nuclear taboo would provoke a chain reaction of horizontal proliferation ("reazioni a catena"), the

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<sup>42</sup> "Le Monde, 'Our Neighbors and Other Countries have Nothing to Fear from India, Declares Madam Gandhi'," May 28, 1974, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archives des Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, La Courneuve, Carton 2252, Questions atomiques : explosion indienne, 1973 – June 1980. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117748>>

prevention of which was of utmost importance to advocates of non-proliferation.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, the UK was also perturbed by the Indian nuclear test and the effects it might have on the collective security of the world. UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson told US President Nixon during a meeting, “Great concern has been felt in Britain [...] about the effects of the Indian nuclear explosion. We have serious doubts whether the system of world security based on non-proliferation which has been maintained since 1968 can now be prevented from crumbling further.”<sup>44</sup> While the UK did have serious doubts about the threat caused by the Indian test to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, it did not take a strong stand against New Delhi’s decision to test a nuclear bomb. The UK had reasoned that such a position would be untenable because being itself a nuclear weapon state, “such a posture might appear hypocritical [...] and] any appearance of taking sides between India and Pakistan would certainly adversely affect our own

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<sup>43</sup> “MAE Report on Indian Nuclear Explosion,” September 02, 1974, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Archivio Giulio Andreotti, Box 1499, Subseries -N/A, Folder 1. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188008>>

<sup>44</sup> “Meetings Between Richard Nixon, US President, and Harold Wilson, UK Prime Minister,” 25/26 June, 1974, The National Archives, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 82/444, 11.

position in the sub-continent.”<sup>45</sup> Thus having their hands tied, UK government officials looked to the US for rethinking their non-proliferation policy and the responsibility for chastising India was dropped squarely upon the shoulders of the US government.

The US reaction, much to the chagrin of its Canadian and European counterparts, was muted. The US merely made undirected policy statements saying that it was opposed to nuclear proliferation without singling India out for criticism for detonating their device. In a testimony to the US Senate on July 24, 1974, Kissinger responded to the Senate’s fear that India may make nuclear materials available to other countries. He rightly said that “it is unrealistic to make a distinction at the early stages of nuclear development between peaceful uses and potential military application.”<sup>46</sup> However, the major reason why Kissinger and Nixon had had such a laissez faire attitude towards nuclear proliferation, and had allowed the Indian test to happen without any criticism or repercussions was because they did not share the same worldview as the Genevan disarmament community and did not care much about preventing the

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<sup>45</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office to UK Embassy Washington, ‘Nuclear Test Explosion in India’, May 20, 1974, The National Archives, FCO 66/653, 2–3.

<sup>46</sup> Department of State to Embassy Colombo, Film number D740206-0309, July 1, 1974, 1974STATE163338, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

horizontal spread of nuclear weapons. "For Nixon and Kissinger, geopolitical competition, and not the arms race, remained the core driver of international politics."<sup>47</sup> To begin with, neither of them believed that nuclear weapons or their acquisition would meaningfully transform the way nations behaved. Moreover, they believed that the spread of nuclear weapons was inevitable and neither of them thought "halting nuclear proliferation merited sacrificing other geopolitical goals."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the Indian test was framed by Kissinger as a South Asian rather than a global issue in order to de-emphasise its wider ramifications. Nonetheless, Kissinger realised that India had violated a taboo but, at the same time, it had not violated any formal agreements with the US and "public scolding" would not only fail to undo the event but also strain US-Indian relations further, pushing India closer to the Soviet Union, and give the US lesser influence in India's future nuclear policy.<sup>49</sup> Also, as Perkovich points out, Kissinger "had been generally neglectful of non-proliferation issues and did not want to highlight proliferation dangers now."<sup>50</sup> The Indians had detonated a nuclear bomb and there was no way to turn the clock back.

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<sup>47</sup> Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 105.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies* (Washington DC: National Defence University Press, 1992), 315.

<sup>50</sup> George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 184.

One of the most pressing concerns in discussions of non-proliferation was whether India would actively assist other nations in acquiring nuclear capabilities. The government of India had purposely kept an ambiguous stance about its nuclear intentions, both apropos of the Indian nuclear programme and its willingness to aid other countries acquire materials and design which could help them acquire nuclear status. The International Atomic Energy Agency, in a telegram to the US state department expressed its unease over Indian plans to disseminate nuclear technology to other nations to secure economic and political gain at the risk of hindering the non-proliferation objectives of the NPT. Their concern was justified since India was not a member state of the NPT and had no such international obligations which would stop it from helping other nations acquire nuclear status. Moreover, the Indian government had not given “any indication whatsoever that their willingness to share “nuclear technology” excludes nuclear explosive device technology, or that they are in any way concerned over further proliferation of latter technology.”<sup>51</sup> The one thing that stood in the way of horizontal proliferation was the limited amount of fissionable material India had but the International Atomic Energy Agency

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<sup>51</sup> IAEA Vienna to Department of State, Film number D740186-1129, July 12, 1974, 1974IAEAV06203, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

pondered if India would be willing to export this material to other countries along with its nuclear explosive design without accepting any IAEA safeguards. India had in the days after the test already made a deal with Argentina for technical exchange in the nuclear field. This increasingly became a concern for Kissinger as well who asked the US Embassy in New Delhi whether the “absence of any direct mention of safeguards” in the India-Argentina agreement should be worrisome. However, Kissinger, not wanting to strain US-Indian relations further, instructed the embassy not to approach the government of India over this issue.<sup>52</sup>

As mentioned above, US intelligence circles had known for almost nine years that India was rapidly acquiring the capability to develop nuclear weapons of their own, and had since early 1972 suspected that a nuclear weapons programme was in the pipelines, despite the Indian government’s repeated though ambiguously-worded assurances that they were only developing nuclear technology for peaceful uses. It was, however, only after the test had actually taken place that top-level policymakers were shaken out of their indolence and forced to come to grips with the grim realities of horizontal

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<sup>52</sup> Department of State to Embassy New Delhi, Film number D740183-0600, July 7, 1974, 1974STATE147018, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

proliferation that the Indian peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) had made possible. Merely five days after the Indian nuclear test, the United States National Security Council published a memorandum on US non-proliferation policy and, more specifically, the Non-Proliferation Treaty. This memorandum reiterated the US's nuclear policy since 1945, namely that an unrestrained spread of nuclear weapons would significantly increase the "instability of the world, and the danger of nuclear war."<sup>53</sup> Another cause for apprehension was the damage to both US political and economic hegemony that the Indian nuclear test had caused and would continue to cause. This memorandum was the first official US document that recognised the disquieting consequences of the Indian test in a comprehensive way, "Nuclear power generation is coming into wider use throughout the world and U.S. dominance as a commercial supplier is diminishing [... As] a result of the Indian nuclear test, other non-nuclear weapon states will tend to rethink their decisions regarding independent nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive programs."<sup>54</sup> For the US, another worrying offshoot of the Indian test was how it increasingly challenged the idea of a bipolar world and showed that international relations were becoming

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<sup>53</sup> "National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 202 on Nuclear Proliferation," May 23, 1974, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nixon Presidential Library, National Security Council Institutional Files, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), Box H-205.

<<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115172>>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



increasingly multipolar since other nations' belief in the US or USSR as influential actors in blocking nuclear proliferation in foreign countries was eroded. With the erosion of this belief came the corollary that nations who felt themselves or their interests threatened by the Indian nuclear test would not easily find comfort in security guarantees from the US. Nevertheless, even though intelligence failure had allowed India a surprise nuclear test, the current state of events was not unremittingly bleak. There was, if necessary preventive steps were taken urgently, room for sufficient damage control. For instance, it was not the case that all non-nuclear weapon states had the necessary resources to produce nuclear weapons; nuclear matériel was only available from a handful of suppliers who generally advocated non-proliferation; and many nations due to political and national security reasons chose not to develop nuclear weapons. However, at this critical juncture in the story of nuclear proliferation, the US was resigned to adopting "an imperfect and incomplete non-proliferation strategy" which could "defer the disadvantages associated with an expanded number of nuclear weapons while seeking to create conditions which ultimately check further spread."<sup>55</sup> Within this retaliatory non-proliferation policy was a number of guidelines that the US would have to follow and enforce to achieve both short- and long-term non-proliferation goals. It was crucial that through

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 2.

diplomatic and political pressure, the US urge ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by as many nations as possible while also cooperating with the USSR to align their non-proliferation agendas; try through any and all means possible to get other nations pursuing nuclear options to adopt IAEA safeguards and all nuclear supplier nations to adhere to IAEA export control regulations. Moreover, the US planned to reach out to both France and Canada to discuss the implications of future cooperation with India and to discuss policies for nuclear exports to politically volatile areas such as the Middle East and South Asia. However, while the Indian nuclear test did startle the US into restructuring its non-proliferation policy and force them to manage the dangers posed by this explosion, it is a point worth making that the US *reacted* to the Indian nuclear test. It did not try to *pre-empt* it despite many red flags that had gone up in the years prior to the explosion.

#### **2.4: Post Mortem on US Intelligence Failure**

The lack of a pre-emptive policy was underscored when a post mortem report was issued on the failure of US intelligence in predicting the Indian PNE.<sup>56</sup> The report emphasised the lack of attention paid to Indian nuclear activities due to

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<sup>56</sup> "Intelligence Community Staff, Post Mortem Report, 'An Examination of the Intelligence Community's Performance Before the Indian Nuclear Test of May 1974,'" July, 1974, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Mandatory declassification review request; release by the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113913>>

India being a relatively low priority during the time. The intelligence community, i.e. both the CIA and its sister agencies, had neglected to warn US policy makers that such a test was being planned. Had such intelligence been provided to the relevant policy-making circles, the US Department of State would have had the option of considering diplomatic or strong-arm tactics in order to dissuade the Indian government from going through with their explosion. An “inadequate priority” was given to Indian nuclear activities and there was a “lack of adequate communications” between various elements of the intelligence community.<sup>57</sup> A 1965 intelligence estimate had stated there was reasonable grounds to believe that “within the next few years India will probably detonate a nuclear device and proceed to develop nuclear weapons” and a 1972 estimate had predicted correctly that an Indian test “would almost certainly be conducted underground and probably will be secretly ordered and prepared.”<sup>58</sup> The 1972 report had gone even further to suggest that India had already obtained the technology to detonate a nuclear device even though Indira Gandhi’s government had not made the decision to do so. Moreover, it reasoned that the Indian government was becoming less and less concerned with foreign reactions against a nuclear explosion and, instead, was focussing more on how the nuclear test would reinvigorate its international prestige,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., i.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2.

showcase its importance as an Asian power, strike fear into the hearts of its South Asian neighbours, and bring some much needed national support to its floundering government. In the face of such compelling arguments in favour of an Indian PNE, it seems absurd that US policymakers did not pay heed to Indian nuclear activities and motivations.

Intelligence reports in 1974, on the contrary, carelessly stated that while India may already have a nuclear weapon on the shelf, it “probably would not test a device in the short-term.”<sup>59</sup> This appraisal was made despite the New Delhi US Embassy’s admission that they had little to no information about the debates around nuclear issues and testing in the Indian government and were not even aware if the nuclear testing issue was still active. More absurd still, US policymakers seemed to credulously believe the New Delhi Embassy’s assurances that India was not planning to detonate a nuclear device. The post mortem report gravely concluded that the “lack of any sense of urgency” in dealing with these pressing matters suggested that “few in the [intelligence] community viewed the problem with great interest. Perhaps this simply reflected the attitudes of the policy makers.”<sup>60</sup> It is true that between 1972 and 1974, the executive branch of the US government was more concerned with

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 7.

Vietnam and Watergate, but this preoccupation with seemingly more urgent matters need not have overshadowed covert nuclear activities in South Asia. The US intelligence failure was not merely gross incompetence. It was wilful negligence on the part of the Nixon-Kissinger duo, for whom an India with a rudimentary nuclear explosive device was in no way a threat to US hegemony. Amidst the public and congressional outcry in the aftermath of May 18, Kissinger's mild response to the Indian PNE indicated neither anger nor grave concern. The mildness of the response itself was a calculated act. If, on the one hand, Kissinger publicly rebuked New Delhi and, as a retaliatory measure, cancelled all aid agreements with India, then it would cast the Indian test in an almost heroic light. In the Third World, Indian prestige would soar and it would be viewed as a beleaguered regional power struggling to maintain its national sovereignty and going against a hypocritical superpower that hoarded nuclear technology and threatened those that dare try to join the club with punitive measures. On the other hand, if the US tried to adopt a business-as-usual policy after the explosion and pretended that nothing significant had happened, then perhaps devoting limited economic resources in the pursuit of nuclear weapons capability might not seem to yield sufficient political gains to countries considering the nuclear path. However, the flip side of adopting this business-as-usual policy was that it would make the US government's policy on nuclear

proliferation seem lax to other nations across the world adamant to follow India's example. If the US appeared to merely shrug its shoulders at the Indian PNE, other countries willing to go down the nuclear path may falsely assume that there was no political or diplomatic backlash if they chose to go nuclear like India. As Brenner says, "[Kissinger] instinctively opposed doing anything that could turn the episode into a cause célèbre."<sup>61</sup> As mentioned above, Kissinger had been neglectful of proliferation issues during his time as Secretary of State and National Security Advisor. He did not want to let the Indian nuclear test change his somewhat nonchalant attitude towards proliferation. The low esteem in which Kissinger held the Indian PNE can be glimpsed in his writing. In his memoir of this period, *Years of Upheaval*, the only mention of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi comes in relation to her adversary, Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.<sup>62</sup> There is no mention of the Indian PNE and, in general, it is difficult to find any semblance of concern with nuclear proliferation matters in his memoirs.

One cannot deny that there were serious domestic and psychological pressures on the Indian government that pushed it into going nuclear.

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<sup>61</sup> Brenner, 69.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1982), 485.

However, US policymakers believed that external pressure on India to stop nuclear development would be met with resistance by an Indian leadership that was adamant on projecting its sovereignty on the world and showing the world that it had to rid itself of the imperial yoke. Whether a more proactive and preemptive nuclear proliferation policy could have steered the Indians off the nuclear path is a counterfactual worth considering. Had the US taken a more hands-on non-proliferation policy, perhaps in cooperation with the USSR and the UK, it is quite possible that the Indian leadership could have been dissuaded from their “peaceful” nuclear explosion. Nonetheless, the Indian nuclear test was a watershed for US non-proliferation policy. Theretofore, US policymakers had adopted merely half-hearted measures to prevent nations around the globe from going nuclear. Indeed, it would not be amiss to call it a laissez-faire approach to proliferation, since Kissinger and Nixon subordinated the prevention of nuclear spread to the attainment of other important geopolitical objectives. However, the Indian nuclear explosion accompanied by public alarm and international backlash forced the US to reconsider their non-proliferation policy and pushed non-proliferation to the forefront of US policy. As the next chapter will show, in just the span of a few years, a harsher, less forgiving non-proliferation policy would be instated by the US government.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PAKISTAN ACCELERATES DOWN THE NUCLEAR PATH: US ATTEMPTS TO PREVENT FURTHER PROLIFERATION IN SOUTH ASIA**

This chapter argues that the Indian peaceful nuclear explosion of May 1974 paved the way for the Pakistani leadership to develop its own nuclear explosives programme. During the 1970s, Pakistan's nuclear policy, and also its foreign policy at large, was shaped largely out of a sense of existential anxiety whose source was its hostile next-door neighbour, India, and Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme was a means to combat that anxiety and attain parity with India. However, this is not to say that the nuclearisation of Pakistan became inevitable once the Indians went nuclear. In order to counter India's nuclear status in the South Asian region, Pakistan tried to attain several security



guarantees from the US, including one aimed at protecting Pakistan under the US's nuclear umbrella in the event of Indian nuclear attack or blackmail.

However, the US could not afford to offer Pakistan this security guarantee out of fear of straining its bilateral relations with India. The US also worried about seeming too committed or truly becoming overcommitted to Pakistan. In the final analysis, the US was faced with the choice of maintaining Pakistan as a loyal non-nuclear ally by extending security guarantees to it or dealing with an insecure and insubordinate Pakistan, bent on achieving nuclear status to counter the perceived existential threat from India. The US government's decision not to commit itself fully to Pakistan's security was what ended up undercutting its broader non-proliferation goals by making it seem an unreliable ally to Pakistan.

### **3.1: Pakistan's Reaction to the Indian PNE**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Indian PNE of 18 May 1974 threw the precarious global balance of nuclear power into jeopardy. The nation that felt most immediately threatened by Indian nuclear status was its neighbour and regional adversary, Pakistan. Indeed, a US State Department cable opined that the problem was no longer keeping Indian nuclear developments in check but rather preventing other nations from following suit, with the "most immediate problem" being "containing the Pakistani reaction." In terms of the security of the South Asia region, the Indian test, the telegram predicted, would create an

atmosphere of unrest as Pakistan would undoubtedly consider the PNE as a direct threat to its national security and would seek guarantees from both the US and China to be safeguarded under their nuclear umbrellas. Moreover, the Indian PNE would prompt Pakistan into renegotiating arms sales policies with the US.<sup>63</sup> Merely three days after the Indian PNE, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Aziz Ahmed announced that "his Government would ask the United States and other major powers for protective guarantees against nuclear attack by India."<sup>64</sup> As Husain Haqqani wrote, "The Americans [...] saw India's nuclear ambitions as directed against China. For Pakistan, however, [the Indian nuclear test] was aimed squarely at Pakistan."<sup>65</sup> On May 23, Aziz Ahmed, in a meeting with Richard Nixon, expressed that the Indian explosion had not merely "surprised" but "shocked" Pakistan, regardless of how some nations — possibly with the US and UK in mind — had downplayed its significance and Indira's Gandhi's

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<sup>63</sup> Embassy Jerusalem to Department of State, Film number D740124-0384, May 18, 1974, 1974STATE104613, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

<sup>64</sup> David Binder, "Pakistan Sees India as Nuclear Threat," *New York Times*, May 21, 1974. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/05/21/archives/pakistan-sees-india-as-nuclear-threat.html>>

<sup>65</sup> Husain Haqqani, *Reimagining Pakistan: Transforming a Dysfunctional Nuclear State* (HarperCollins, 2018), 210.

repeated declarations of the “peacefulness” of the test.<sup>66</sup> Ahmed tried to convince Nixon to extend a security guarantee to non-nuclear weapon states against nuclear attack, which was something that Nixon felt the US “must assess” but “may not be able to put in a treaty.” Indeed, Ahmed went as far as to hint that in order to combat India’s newly acquired nuclear capability, more nations should “get nuclear weapons” because, in his reasoning, within a world system in which many countries acquired nuclear weapons, the possibility of nuclear threats from hostile nations would significantly go down, which in turn would reduce the incentive to get more nuclear weapons. Nixon expressed sympathy with Pakistan’s position and reassured Ahmed in general terms that the “independence of Pakistan is a principle to which we are committed” without making any concrete promises of increased arms sales or offering protection against a potential Indian nuclear attack.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto publicly declared that Pakistan faced a kind of “nuclear threat or blackmail unparalleled elsewhere” and sent out cables to world leaders including President Nixon and the UN Security Council to “extend a nuclear umbrella over threatened states.” He further declared that a

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<sup>66</sup> Cable, Stowcraft to Kissinger, “Nixon and Pakistani Foreign Minister Aziz Ahmed,” May 23, 1974, National Security Adviser, Memoranda of Conversations, Box Number 4, Gerald R. Ford Library. <[https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Memoranda\\_of\\_Conversations.asp#Box4](https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Memoranda_of_Conversations.asp#Box4)>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 3.

failure on the part of nuclear powers to extend security guarantees against a potential Indian nuclear attack would leave Pakistan no choice but to embark on a nuclear programme of its own.<sup>68</sup> He insisted that Pakistan would “never be intimidated by the threat created by India’s nuclear capability” and remarked that India’s 1971 proposition of a no-war pact would not be considered by Pakistan anymore since such an agreement would mean that India, which was capable of shamelessly leveraging its nuclear weapons to secure territorial and political gain, would blackmail Pakistan into acquiescing to its demands.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, in an assessment of the Indian nuclear test, the US Department of State concluded that regionally Pakistan had been hit the hardest by the Indian PNE.<sup>70</sup> In 1971, Pakistan had already suffered national humiliation at the hands of the Indians who had assisted a beleaguered East Pakistan secede from the union and declare independence. Indeed, Pakistan’s fears of Indian interventionism and expansionism had intensified overnight into a paranoia of

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<sup>68</sup> National Intelligence Daily, “Bhutto Seeks Nuclear Policy Assurances,” May 30, 1974.

<sup>69</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “India [Redacted],” *Central Intelligence Bulletin*. May 20, 1974. *U.S. Intelligence and the Indian Bomb*. National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 187. Document 17. <<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB187/index.htm>>

<sup>70</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Assessment of Indian Nuclear Test,” report, 5 June 1974. *U.S. Intelligence and the Indian Bomb*, ed. Jeffrey Richelson, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 187. <<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB187/index.htm>>

nuclear annihilation. Already, Pakistan had backed out of a meeting in early June 1974 to discuss travel and transportation agreements with India. Moreover, PM Bhutto, in a 40-minute press conference broadcast over radio, replete with his customary theatrics, reassured the Pakistani nation that he would not let the Indian nuclear achievement “adversely affect Pakistan’s legitimate objectives in Kashmir and other aspects [of] bilateral Indo-Pak relations.”<sup>71</sup> The Pakistani military at this point had made no public statement but agreed that while India did not yet have a sophisticated delivery system, major cities such as Karachi and Lahore were “so close as to make them vulnerable to nuclear weapons in short time frame.”<sup>72</sup> The military, of course, recognised that India would not actually use its nuclear weapons against Pakistan in the event of a conflict but conceded that the PNE had allowed them to achieve their objective of gaining hegemony in the subcontinent. The vernacular press, catering to the general public, had instilled fear in the hearts of the Pakistani people by alleging Indian willingness to use nuclear bombs against its Muslim enemy state, Pakistan. PM Bhutto’s hyperbolic remarks about the “unparalleled” threat to national security pandered to the fears of ordinary Pakistanis and gained him more popular

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<sup>71</sup> Embassy Islamabad to Department of State, Film number D740126-0069, June 21, 1974, 1974ISLAMA04886, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

support as he attempted to unite the nation against its age-old rival by promising to “undertake a valiant, disciplined effort to rapidly develop Pakistan’s nuclear technology.”<sup>73</sup>

### **3.2: Ford Administration Policies**

With Watergate forcing Nixon out of the White House, Gerald Ford, a novice in foreign policy took over, and counted on Kissinger to tackle nuclear issues.<sup>74</sup>

Pakistani foreign minister, Aziz Ahmed, met Kissinger on the issue of the resumption of arm sales to Pakistan on account of the threat India and Afghanistan posed due to their military build-up and support by the Soviet Union. Kissinger stated that the Indians would never be able to use nuclear weapons in practice to which Ahmed replied that the Indian army, if they were in difficulty, would use the bomb “in desperation as a last resort”. Kissinger responded, tongue-in-cheek, that the Indians would have to “lose the war first and very badly in my opinion. Will you beat them?”<sup>75</sup> The implication, of course, was that India was militarily still much superior to Pakistan and thus would be unwilling to use nuclear weapons against Pakistan because

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2002 : Disenchanted Allies* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001), 215

<sup>75</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–8, Documents on South Asia, 1973–1976, September 30, 1974. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d176>>

conventional arms would be enough to secure a military victory over Pakistan. But Pakistan was getting more impatient by the day with the lack of a US nuclear umbrella guarantee. Ahmed relayed Bhutto's frustrations to Kissinger and Ford about the perceived lack of US support, "We are getting weaker and weaker and in greater and greater peril. Your predecessor and the Secretary of State said, "Be patient, wait for our elections, don't embarrass us," and on and on. We have been patient, but the Prime Minister wanted me to tell you we are desperate."<sup>76</sup> Ahmed then relayed that members of the opposition party in Pakistan and the general public viewed the US as an unreliable ally that merely declares that Pakistan's independence and sovereignty is the cornerstone of US foreign policy without actually coming to its aid when needed most. Indeed, PM Bhutto, a couple of weeks later, asked Kissinger whether he agreed that India had expansionist aims in the subcontinent, to which Kissinger facetiously replied, "After seeing India, I am thinking about supplying nuclear weapons, not only conventional arms, to Pakistan and even Bangladesh!"<sup>77</sup> He did agree with Bhutto that a completely insecure Pakistan would mean Indian hegemony on the subcontinent and would not be in US interests. Bhutto, upon realising that he was unsuccessful in acquiring the nuclear umbrella security that he

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<sup>76</sup> FRUS, October 17, 1974. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d177>>

<sup>77</sup> FRUS, October 31, 1974. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d183>>

desired from the US, put forward a resolution for a South Asian Nuclear-Free Zone (NFZ) in the United Nations General Assembly. Pakistani ambassador Yaqub Khan tried to negotiate with the US to support their resolution for making South Asia a nuclear weapons free zone in the 29th session of the UN General Assembly. However, the US chose to abstain rather than support the Pakistani proposal for a nuclear free zone on account of the implicit assumption in the resolution that all states in the this NFZ would have the right to develop peaceful nuclear explosive capability. US Under Secretary of State Sisco concluded that supporting such a resolution would “antagonise Indians without fully satisfying Pakistanis and without [...] constructively serving our broader non-proliferation objectives.”<sup>78</sup>

Even though the US abstained from voting on the South Asian NFZ in the UN General Assembly, it did however seek to bolster Pakistan’s sense of security in sight of the growing dangers posed by the Indian nuclear programme. On February 24, 1975, US arms sales to Pakistan were resumed after a ten-year embargo, much to the chagrin of the Indian government. The decision to resume arms sales was motivated in large part to appease the Pakistani government and dissuade it from accelerating the development of their nuclear programme.

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<sup>78</sup> FRUS, December 7, 1974. < <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d185>>



Sisco, after having met PM Bhutto in Washington in early February, justified the decision to finally lift the arms embargo on Pakistan as “necessary to rectify a rather anomalous situation” in South Asia.<sup>79</sup> India had already been purchasing arms from the Soviet Union and a resumption of arms sales to Pakistan was necessary to both improve its sense of security and counterbalance India’s growing military edge over Pakistan. Indian PM Indira Gandhi was outraged by the resumption of US arms sales to Pakistan and claimed that the US decision would “reopen old wounds and hinder the process of healing and normalisation with Pakistan”. She further claimed that it was incorrect to equate Pakistan and India, a policy which seemed intended to create tensions on the subcontinent, and “dishonest” to assert that the Indian nuclear programme posed a threat to Pakistan.<sup>80</sup> This and subsequent polemics by Indian officials on US policy towards Pakistan angered Kissinger, who, in a telegram to US Embassy New Delhi, said that in light of a major arms deal that India had made with USSR on order of 200-500 million US dollars, “it is hypocrisy for GOI to cry wolf under these circumstances.”<sup>81</sup> The resumption of US arms to Pakistan and the public

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<sup>79</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “10-YEAR U.S. BAN ON PAKISTAN ARMS WILL HALT TODAY,” New York Times, February 24, 1975. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1975/02/24/archives/10year-us-ban-on-pakistan-arms-will-halt-today-sharp-protests-from.html>>

<sup>80</sup> FRUS, February 26, 1975. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d191>>

<sup>81</sup> FRUS, April 26, 1975. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d197>>

outrage it generated in Indian officials contributed to a worsening in India-US bilateral relations. However, an interagency intelligence report confirmed that India had spent twice as much on military imports as Pakistan during 1975 and the “net impact of the military imports to India and Pakistan and India’s domestic production will be to widen still further India’s already large edge in military capabilities.”<sup>82</sup> The US had agreed to resume sales of arms to Pakistan but it did not alter the fact that India was militarily much stronger than Pakistan.

The arms issue was tied up with nuclear proliferation concerns. Bhutto, as suggested in a US state department background paper in January 1975, suggested to Kissinger that Pakistan saw no alternative to developing nuclear capability unless the US was willing to supply Pakistan with “the necessary conventional weapons for [its] security.”<sup>83</sup> The paper expressed concerns over Pakistan’s nuclear industry’s potential for expansion and Pakistan’s intentions about going nuclear. In light of the Indian explosion, state officials reasoned that Pakistan had a genuine incentive to make a bomb with “less world

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<sup>82</sup> FRUS, December 30, 1975. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d217>>

<sup>83</sup> State Department Background Paper, “Pakistan and the Non- Proliferation Issue,” January 22, 1975 (SECRET), 5. <<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB6/index.html>>

condemnation than might otherwise be expected” and one of the ways to prevent this from becoming a reality was to sustain political pressure on the Pakistanis.<sup>84</sup> While achieving nuclear parity with India was the immediate factor, Pakistan also wanted nuclear weapons in order to join the emerging prestigious class of less-developed countries with nuclear status. As a CIA research study argued, nuclear proliferation “is largely a political phenomenon and as such is strongly influenced by the growing atmosphere of confrontation between the developed and less-developed countries.”<sup>85</sup> The distinction between civilian and military nuclear programmes had been blurred by India’s PNE and competition among supplier states to export nuclear technology had grown. Under these circumstances, applying political pressure against proliferation on states trying to acquire nuclear weapons seemed a hypocritical and imperialist stance by the developed nuclear powers against underdeveloped nations. The last time a nuclear weapon had been used against another nation was in 1945. Since then, the desirability of nuclear weapons was not primarily due to their massive destructive potential but rather in the value of their political use as a “relatively quick and inexpensive means of gaining

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>85</sup> “Managing Nuclear Proliferation: The Politics of Limited Choice,” Research study, December 1975, Directorate of Intelligence Office of Political Research, Central Intelligence Agency, 1.

international attention and prestige.”<sup>86</sup> The spread of nuclear technology, the ease with which components for nuclear reactors and nuclear fuel could be purchased from various supplier states, and the apparent political benefits of achieving nuclear status were all contributing factors in the story of nuclear proliferation during the 1970s. In this international atmosphere, the CIA reasoned, as Kissinger had in the case of India, that openly applying pressures against a would-be nuclear country would be costly in terms of others interests. Therefore, in an effort to prevent the global nuclear balance from changing too rapidly, “one of the prime objectives will probably be to delay and space out successive nuclear debuts to prevent or reduce the momentum of change.”<sup>87</sup>

### **3.3: Attempts to Prevent Pakistan from going Nuclear**

When Pakistan began negotiating a deal with France for the purchase of a nuclear reprocessing plant and the Federal Republic of Germany for a heavy water plant, US Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Sisco, took issue with Pakistani ambassador Yaqub Khan over Pakistan’s nuclear intentions. Recalling Bhutto’s assurances that Pakistan would not try to develop a nuclear explosive device, Sisco reprimanded Khan saying that Pakistan did not have any technical

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 34.

or economic justification for purchasing a reprocessing plant.<sup>88</sup> In February, Kissinger tried in vain to convince Bhutto to cancel these deals because of the negative congressional reaction they would elicit in the US. After failing to convince Bhutto, he asked the German Foreign Minister Genscher not to supply Pakistan with these facilities for the time being.<sup>89</sup> Kissinger also asked the French Foreign Minister Jean Sauvagnargues to join the United States in “an act of leadership to deter or delay Pakistani acquisition of a national reprocessing capability and to pursue, when the need is clear, safer and more economic alternatives.”<sup>90</sup> The Germans decided to stop and watch subsequent developments before finalising the deal whereas the French responded to Kissinger’s request with a cold no. As a final diplomatic effort to prevent Pakistan from continuing with the nuclear reprocessing plant, Kissinger urged Ford to send a cautionary letter to Bhutto. President Ford, in this letter, reiterated Sisco’s concerns, urging Bhutto that Pakistan’s wish to obtain a plant for nuclear fuel reprocessing would add to “apprehension in this country and elsewhere over the spread on a national basis of the nuclear technology

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<sup>88</sup> FRUS February 19, 1976, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d224>>

<sup>89</sup> Telegram, Kissinger to Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Folder Pakistan Prime Minister Bhutto, Box 3, Gerald R. Ford Library.

<sup>90</sup> Telegram, Kissinger to Jean Sauvagnargues, Folder Pakistan Prime Minister Bhutto, Box 3, Gerald R. Ford Library.

associated with the development of nuclear explosives.”<sup>91</sup> Ford entreated Bhutto to make a “highly important contribution” towards the cause of nonproliferation by forgoing the reprocessing plant deal with France and said that the good bilateral relations that Pakistan and the US were enjoying at the time would become strained due to a negative reaction to this deal by the US Congress and public.<sup>92</sup>

Bhutto’s reply to Ford showed that he was unwavering in his attempts to secure the reprocessing plant and continue with his nuclear programme. Bhutto repeated that he had time and again reassured the US that the Pakistani nuclear programme was a peaceful one and that Pakistan had adopted “iron-clad safeguards” for all of its nuclear facilities.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, he maintained that there was nothing new or unsettling about his country’s nuclear programme, which was at least two decades old, and that he had done everything to acquire this facility for reprocessing fuel by the book, according to IAEA safeguards, and without violating any international law. Moreover, Bhutto justified the acquisition of this plant by reminding Ford how hard Pakistan had been hit by

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<sup>91</sup> FRUS, March 19, 1976, 1. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d225>>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>93</sup> Letter, PM Bhutto to President Ford, 30 March 1976, Folder Pakistan Prime Minister Bhutto, Box 3, Gerald R. Ford Library, 1.

the 1970s oil crisis and said that if Pakistan did not take preemptive steps to meet its energy needs, it would be faced with an “appalling situation in the 1980’s”.<sup>94</sup> Bhutto further justified Pakistan’s acquisition of this reactor by saying that India had neither accepted IAEA safeguards for the CIRRUS reactor that enabled it to detonate its nuclear explosive in 1974, nor had the supply of enriched uranium to India been discontinued by the US. He complained that “while India is getting away with the fruits of its ‘fait accompli’, it is Pakistan which is being treated with discrimination and suspicion.”<sup>95</sup> Bhutto’s justification for Pakistan’s nuclear programme tried to mask the reality that once Pakistan had a fuel reprocessing facility, it could easily abrogate its commitments to IAEA safeguards and choose to have a PNE as the Indians did when the time was deemed appropriate. Indeed, as Deputy Assistant Secretary Myron B. Kratzer remarked during a high-level departmental meeting on the issue of preventing Pakistan from acquiring this capability, “The difference between the Indian and Pakistani cases is that Bhutto came in second.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>96</sup> FRUS, July 9, 1976. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d231>>

After Bhutto's reply to Ford, US Ambassador to Pakistan Henry A. Byroade sent a telegram to Kissinger explaining that Bhutto would not succumb to any amount of diplomatic pressure on the nuclear issue and would continue to go forth with his plans. Byroade suggested that Bhutto's stubbornness meant an end to the first "easy" phase to prevent Pakistan from developing nuclear weapons.<sup>97</sup> He reasoned that the US government had to reassess its attitude towards Pakistan apropos of nuclear proliferation and decide once and for all how important nonproliferation was as a policy objective and what price it was willing to pay in terms of its bilateral relations with Pakistan. Given that Bhutto was keeping his nuclear options open since he did not want to be seen to yield to US diplomatic pressure during an election year, Byroade reasoned that no amount of "subtle or more obvious pressures", such as embargoes on military equipment or stoppage of developmental aid, would convince Bhutto to forgo the nuclear option. In fact, if this strong-armed approach was adopted, US-Pakistan relations would not only deteriorate but Pakistan would also be all the more encouraged to acquire nuclear capability since they could not rely on the US for military equipment anymore. Byroade reasoned that adopting such a negative approach would mean the "worst of both worlds" for the US.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> FRUS, April 7, 1976, 2. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d226>>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 3.



Byroade's telegram brought out the horns of the dilemma the US was on. On the one hand, Pakistan's perceived security need for achieving nuclear parity with India meant that no amount of diplomatic pressure could prevent Pakistan from going nuclear and any kind of threats of embargoes the US made would only push Pakistan further along the nuclear path. On the other hand, quickly supplying Pakistan with all the military equipment it desired would associate the US much too closely with Pakistan than Byroade "thought appropriate."<sup>99</sup> Also, increasing the supply of military equipment to Pakistan would certainly cause a political fallout with India yet again. This meant that the US had to completely rethink its priorities: how important were regional interests in South Asia for the US to allow Pakistan to go nuclear? How important was a global policy of non-proliferation that the US could risk alienating Pakistan through coercive means? In a matter of months, President Ford would be replaced by Carter, who was elected on a platform of non-proliferation and, as Kissinger predicted, "wanted nothing better than to have somebody to make an example of."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>100</sup> FRUS, December 17, 1976. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08/d239>>

### 3.4: Non-Proliferation: Carter's Tough Stance on Nuclear Activities

When Carter came to office in January 1977, there was already apprehension among Pakistani officials that his presidency would bring about tensions in US-Pakistan relations.<sup>101</sup> Carter had moralised during his election campaign that the US should stop being the “arms merchant” of the world and had made nuclear proliferation a key issue of his foreign policy. In his inaugural address, he grandiosely claimed, “we will move this year a step toward our ultimate goal—the elimination of all nuclear weapons from this Earth.”<sup>102</sup> He knew that Pakistan wanted to join the prestigious club of the nuclear weapon states and that it was eager to purchase reprocessing facilities, “intended ostensibly for the production of electric energy”.<sup>103</sup> In April 1977, Pakistani PM Bhutto was facing domestic challenges to his rule and, most notably, charges of having rigged the elections to secure a landslide victory for his party. By July 1977, amidst domestic unrest, Bhutto was ousted from office by Army General Zia ul Haq, who declared martial law in Pakistan and seized power. While a democratically elected Prime Minister was ousted from power by the military in Pakistan,

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<sup>101</sup> William Borders, “Pakistan Wonders Whether Ties To US. Will Erode Under Carter,” New York Times, December 26, 1976. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/26/archives/pakistan-wonders-whether-ties-to-us-will-erode-under-carter.html>>

<sup>102</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1977. <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-0>>

<sup>103</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1982), 215.

democratic rule was restored in India as the Janata Party was elected, thereby ending Indira Gandhi's authoritarian rule of emergency. Carter, with his focus on human rights and democratic principles, tilted towards India and even paid an official visit to New Delhi without stopping by in Pakistan. Pakistani Minister of Foreign Affairs Agha Shahi described this visit as a development which was "painful and disturbing" and one that "confirmed the worst apprehensions about US intentions in the sub-continent in the average Pakistani mind."<sup>104</sup> It soon became apparent that Zia was not going to change course on the nuclear issue, which had by 1977 become imbued with nationalist pride. Carter cut off economic assistance to Pakistan when Pakistan refused to back out of the reprocessing plant deal with France, worsening bilateral relations even more.

A CIA study in April 1978 mistakenly assumed that while it was in the interests of the Pakistani military leadership to acquire nuclear capability, Zia's government was going to give it a "relatively low priority" compared to Bhutto.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the study argued that a reprocessing capability was crucial

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<sup>104</sup> "Telegram from K. V. Rajan, First Secretary (Pol), 'Agha Shahi's meeting with [Cyrus] Vance'," October 24, 1977, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, File No. WII/104/1/77. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123936>>

<sup>105</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Pakistan Nuclear Study," 26 April 1978, Top Secret, excised copy.

to Pakistan's attaining nuclear weapons but many factors, including a lack of scientific know-how, economic problems at home, fear of an Indian response and backlash from Western powers would prevent Pakistan from developing nuclear weapons "perhaps for the next decade or even longer."<sup>106</sup> However, US intelligence had not by then realised that Abdul Qadeer Khan, colloquially known as the father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, had already stolen blueprints from a Dutch uranium enrichment plant, which would allow Pakistan to develop uranium centrifuges, which could then be used to make atomic bombs. By mid-1978, US intelligence had not considered uranium enrichment as an alternative path to building nuclear bombs and instead emphasised preventing Pakistan's acquisition of a nuclear reprocessing plant from France. While Zia had continued to stress publicly that Pakistan's nuclear programme was indeed a peaceful one, he privately told a visiting American scholar of International Relations, Stephen Cohen, that "Pakistan obviously had need of two or three nuclear weapons as deterrent against 20 Indian weapons."<sup>107</sup> This was the most open acknowledgement by the Pakistani leadership of its real motives behind acquiring the reprocessing plant from France. When US Ambassador Hummel

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>107</sup> Department of State to Embassy Paris, Film number N780005-0002, May 5, 1978, 1978STATE114649, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Released Telegrams (Access Demand), RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed April 17, 2021).

asked Agha Shahi for an assurance that the Pakistani government would not build their own reprocessing plant if the deal with France fell through, Shahi retorted that “No govt of Pakistan could give even a private assurance not to engage in reprocessing and still survive in face of public opinion.”<sup>108</sup> He stated the Pakistani position aggressively: Pakistan, being an independent nation and having to look out for itself, did not want to have its sovereignty impinged on by a US demand for such assurances. Further, in a meeting with Under Secretary of State Newsom, Shahi again displayed the Pakistani leadership’s recalcitrance on the reprocessing issue by stating that Pakistan had the “unfettered right to do as it wishes and will retain all its options.”<sup>109</sup> By this time, however, the French had given in to non-proliferation pressures exerted by the US and had already decided to cancel their reprocessing deal with Pakistan. They notified the US that “the deal is definitely off without waiting for an official response from the Paks”<sup>110</sup> and confirmed that “no amount of Pak pressure on commercial deals”

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<sup>108</sup> U.S. Embassy Islamabad cable 7591 to State Department, "Pakistan Reprocessing Plant: USG Stipulation," 5 August 1978, Secret <<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm#32>>

<sup>109</sup> State Department cable 205550 to Embassy Islamabad, "Discussion between Under Secretary Newsom and Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Agha Shahi on the Reprocessing Issue," 14 August 1978, Secret

<sup>110</sup> 'Next Steps on Pakistani Reprocessing Issue,' US Embassy Paris cable 29233 to State Department, September 01, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112837>>

could change France's decision not to supply a reprocessing plant.<sup>111</sup> In a meeting with US Ambassador Hummel, Zia said with uncharacteristic sarcasm that American pressure on France had paid off, tacitly acknowledging the fact that he knew the French deal was dead. He further said that US-Pakistani relations were now at "the lowest ebb."<sup>112</sup>

While the cancellation of the French reprocessing deal signalled a temporary success for US non-proliferation efforts, the Pakistani leadership was not deterred and persisted in trying to find alternative routes to acquiring weapons-usable material. A French source at the Palais de l'Élysée informed the US embassy that Pakistan was bent on completing the reprocessing plant on its own and had "approached Italy, Japan, and Spain to try to buy equipment for that purpose."<sup>113</sup> This development startled the US State Department who had earlier believed that cancellation of the French deal would buy them at least a few years to keep the Pakistanis from progressing with their nuclear

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<sup>111</sup> 'Pakistan Reprocessing vs. French Commercial Deals,' Embassy Islamabad cable to State Department, September 03, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112838>>

<sup>112</sup> 'Ambassador's Talk with General Zia,' Embassy Islamabad cable to State Department, September 05, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112839>>

<sup>113</sup> US Embassy Paris cable 31540 to State Department, 'Elysée Views on Reprocessing Issues', September 23, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112845>>

programme. In order to combat the Pakistani government's obstinacy on the nuclear reprocessing matter, the US started another diplomatic campaign, reaching out to the UK and eleven other nuclear supplier countries and forbidding them from exporting sensitive nuclear materials to Pakistan. Bhutto had written in his memoir from prison that Pakistan was "on the verge of full nuclear capability when I left the government to come to this death cell."<sup>114</sup> While the US government did not readily take Bhutto at his word, they found "this statement of intentions to be disquieting" and affirmed that their non-proliferation initiative had its support from the "highest levels" of the US government, i.e. the executive branch.<sup>115</sup> The Saur revolution and growing instability in Iran had already made the region volatile and to add a nuclear Pakistan to the mix would even greatly destabilise South Asia. Presumably for this reason and also to satisfy its broader non-proliferation goals, the US government in its démarche asked the governments of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the UK and West Germany to refrain from exporting nuclear equipment to Pakistan. Officials in the UK had earlier wondered whether this approach was too rash and seemed to "assume that a confrontation with Pakistan is

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<sup>114</sup> Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *If I Am Assassinated*, 1st ed. (Vikas, 1979), 166.

<sup>115</sup> 'US Demarche on Pakistani Reprocessing Plant,' Department of State cable 281962 to US Embassy United Kingdom et al., November 04, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112895>>

inevitable.”<sup>116</sup> However, just as Pakistan was developing its nuclear weapons capability in the shadows, the UK got on board and collaborated with the US to obstruct it with the furtiveness of non-paper. The UK shared intelligence about the Pakistani nuclear programme with the US and other nuclear supplier countries, stating that evidence had come to light that “Pakistan intends to construct a uranium enrichment plant and may have already begun to do so” by importing components in a piecemeal fashion and using a national team of nuclear scientists to assemble them to build a gas centrifuge for producing highly enriched uranium.<sup>117</sup> Funnily enough, earlier in 1978, Britain had not only authorised the construction of THORP (Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant) in Cumbria and continued with nuclear reprocessing in England at full throttle, but it had also been engaged in negotiating a lucrative deal to sell nuclear-capable Jaguar strike aircraft to India. The hypocrisy of this stance was not overlooked in Islamabad, and the Pakistani leadership was doubly frustrated, both at Britain’s attempts to obstruct Pakistani reprocessing and also at the Carter government for turning a blind eye to reprocessing elsewhere and singling out Pakistan for censure.

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<sup>116</sup> “Pakistan’s nuclear weapons programme—Western Reactions,” 1979, The National Archives, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 37/2201, 19.

<sup>117</sup> 'UK Approach to Supplier Governments on Pakistan,' State Department cable 278247 to US Embassy, November 01, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112846>>



It was only as late as January 1979 that the US realised that the obduracy of Pakistan in choosing not to forsake the nuclear route meant that pressure had to be applied on India in order to accept international safeguards on its nuclear facilities in order to convince Pakistan of the “peaceful nature of Indian nuclear programs.” US intelligence estimated that it would take the Pakistanis between “3-5 years to produce a device.”<sup>118</sup> At this point, upon increasing scrutiny from the US, Zia had on two occasions agreed to allow a US team to conduct an inspection of Pakistani nuclear facilities but later reneged on his promise, “contending that India has not had to submit to such inspections.”<sup>119</sup> Zia further made his intransigence on the nuclear issue clear when, in a meeting with Ambassador Hummel, he neither denied the existence of reprocessing and enrichment programmes nor agreed to discontinue Pakistan’s weapons programme. Shahi made his grievances clear to Hummel, arguing that there had been a double standard in the US’s treatment of India and Pakistan. Indeed, as one scholar wrote, the more India’s nuclear developments went unchecked, and “the more assiduously the [Pakistani] program was opposed by India and the

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<sup>118</sup> Department of State cable 22212 to Embassy New Delhi, "Ad Hoc Scientific Committee and Related Topics," 27 January 1979, Secret. Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Department of State Records, Records of Warren Christopher, 1977-1980, box 56, Pakistan II.

<sup>119</sup> FRUS, February 28, 1979. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v19/d324>>

West, the more precious it became”, and eventually turned into a matter of national sovereignty and pride in the Pakistani public’s eyes.<sup>120</sup> Zia and Shahi were apparently not ruffled when Hummel made it clear that the Symington amendment would be invoked and all military and economic aid to Pakistan cut off.<sup>121</sup> The US State Department concluded that “no unilateral or multilateral pressure” would convince Pakistan to “forego its efforts to achieve a nuclear explosive capability.”<sup>122</sup> Moreover, it would be impossible to convince India to dismantle its nuclear apparatus. Nothing short of giving Pakistan a security guarantee under the US’s nuclear umbrella would convince them to come off the nuclear path but this in turn would ruin US-India relations and adversely affect US interests in the region. Moreover, providing Pakistan with increased economic and military aid as an incentive for foregoing its nuclear programme would, as an NSC member opined, would open the US up “to blackmail from other possible nuclear powers.”<sup>123</sup> Soon after, in April 1979, the Symington

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<sup>120</sup> Feroz Hassan Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, Stanford Security Studies (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>121</sup> U.S. Embassy Islamabad cable 2769 to State Department, "Nuclear Aspects of DepSec Visit Discussed with UK and French Ambassadors," 7 March 1979. Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Department of State Records, Records of Warren Christopher, 1977-1980, box 56, Pakistan II

<sup>122</sup> U.S. Embassy Islamabad to cable 2655 to State Department, "Pakistan's Nuclear Program: Hard Choices," 5 March 1979, Secret. Source: National Archives, Record Group 59, Department of State Records, Records of Warren Christopher, 1977-1980, box 56, Pakistan II

<sup>123</sup> FRUS, March 9, 1979. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v19/d327>>

amendment was invoked and over \$80 million in US aid to Pakistan cut off.

However, as Ben Martin Hobbes notes, "Because US aid was modest, it had little effect in dissuading a nation from steps it regarded as necessary to assure its own survival."<sup>124</sup>

In June 1979, however, US policy towards non-proliferation in South Asia had to be dramatically altered in face of the pace of nuclear development Pakistan had undergone. US state department officials realised that they had reached a "dead end" in preventing "the spread of nuclear weapons technology to the nations of South Asia."<sup>125</sup> Having accepted that nuclear proliferation could not be prevented in South Asia, the recommended changes included both guarantees from Pakistan that it would not stage a PNE like India did in 1974; that Indian PM Desai offer Pakistan a formal assurance that India would not develop nuclear weapons; and that China offer India a guarantee that it would not use its nuclear weapons against India. This would be the only way to assure that the two nuclear nations in South Asia which had a long and troubled history of violence and conflict would not consider the use of nuclear weapons as a means

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<sup>124</sup> Ben Martin Hobbes, 'The Limits of Power?: Jimmy Carter's Nuclear Agenda in Pakistan', *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 33, no. 1 Special Issue (July 2014): 28.

<sup>125</sup> Department of State to United States Embassy New Delhi, 'Non-proliferation in South Asia', June 6, 1979, Wilson Center History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive. <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114198>>

to solve their problems. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is often cited as the reason why US non-proliferation pressures on Pakistan were loosened, but the recommendation to accept the realities of nuclear proliferation in South Asia and work towards assuring stability in a region inhabited by two unstable and mutually hostile nations was propounded over six months before the invasion took place. When the Soviets finally did invade Afghanistan, Brzezinski, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, confirmed to Shahi that Pakistan's stability amidst the Soviet threat was the most pressing concern for the US government and so "the nuclear impediment" was no longer the "central issue in our relationship with Pakistan." However, Brzezinski warned that once the "immediate atmospherics of the current situation change, non-proliferation will return as an important political reality."<sup>126</sup> By April 1980, a National Intelligence Report suggested that the Pakistani leadership believed that the US had become "reconciled to a Pakistani nuclear capability" and that India would continue with its "peaceful nuclear experiments."<sup>127</sup> The US's attempts to prevent a nuclear Pakistan had eventually turned out to be unsuccessful and Pakistan would have nuclear explosive capability by 1984.

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<sup>126</sup> FRUS, January 12, 1980. <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v19/d407>>

<sup>127</sup> Special Assistant for Nuclear Proliferation Intelligence via Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment [and] National Intelligence Officer for Warning to Director of Central Intelligence, "Warning Report --Nuclear Proliferation," 30 April 1980, secret, excised copy.

Malcolm M. Craig argues that the US's attitude of resignation towards Pakistan's nuclear programme came about due to "the unwillingness of Zia and his subordinates to make any concessions on the nuclear front."<sup>128</sup> However, it is worth noting that Pakistan's intransigence on the nuclear issue was not merely a matter of showing the US that Pakistan would not bow to its every demand. In fact, Pakistan's persistence down the nuclear path was a result of its perceived insecurity against India, which was a matter Pakistani officials had brought up in their discussions with US statesmen on multiple occasions. They had, however, failed to receive adequate security guarantees from the US. Would the US come to Pakistan's rescue in the event of a showdown with the Indians? Given the nature of US interests in South Asia, its desire to maintain good relations with India and stay noncommittal with Pakistan, the chilling answer was a hard no. In the face of such a regional security threat, the Pakistani leadership decided that it would be better to develop national nuclear capability than count on hollow pledges of support from the US. The US Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher asked an NSC staffer Thomas Thornton in March 1979, "If you were the President of Pakistan would you seek to develop nuclear

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<sup>128</sup> Malcolm M. Craig, *America, Britain, and Pakistan's Nuclear Programme, 1974-1980, Security, Conflict, and Cooperation in the Contemporary World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 236.

weapons?" Thornton replied, "Yes, but I would be acting irrationally."<sup>129</sup> For the purposes of national survival, Pakistan had to choose between two irrational options. It could either choose not to respond to the Indian PNE, allow Indian hegemony on the subcontinent, and open itself to possible threats of nuclear blackmail from India on territorial and other political issues. Or it could flout US and international laws, develop an indigenous nuclear programme, and try to maintain parity with India. The Pakistani leadership chose the latter.

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<sup>129</sup> Handwritten notes, Warren Christopher Meetings with General Zia and Foreign Minister Shahi, 1 and 2 March 1979. National Archives, Record Group 59, Department of State Records, Records of Warren Christopher, 1977-1980, box 56, Pakistan II.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to explore the development of US non-proliferation policy in South Asia during the 1970s and particularly between 1974 and 1980. I have tried to raise several issues that plagued US non-proliferation policy from the start of the 1970s. One of the questions I asked was how difficult would it be for the US non-proliferation regime to prevent nations with enough nuclear know-how and access to fissile material from making nuclear weapons? The Pakistani and Indian cases demonstrated that it would indeed be very difficult and nothing short of military intervention and confiscation and dismantling of these nations' nuclear plants could stop them. However, would it have been possible to stop these nations from going nuclear if the US prioritised their non-proliferation policy from the outset? The short answer is yes.

The Indian peaceful nuclear explosion of 1974 took the United States and the rest of the world by surprise, I argue, because there had been significant neglect in US intelligence circles about nuclear happenings in India. US intelligence had

known as early as 1972 that the Indians had all the know-how to make a bomb and yet had been caught by surprise when the Indians finally decided to detonate their device in 1974. In face of such compelling intelligence that dated as far back as 1972, it is odd that the US did not take preemptive action against Indian nuclear explosion. I have suggested that this lack of priority given to Indian nuclear intentions was due to the Nixon and Kissinger's *laissez faire* attitude towards nuclear proliferation which in turn stemmed from their belief that nuclear weapons would not meaningfully transform the behaviour of nations. Their Realpolitik understanding of the issue was that nuclear weapons were a force so formidable that their proliferation was inevitable since the nations of the world would do anything within their power to acquire them. Therefore, within Nixinger's calculus, limited resources and diplomatic capital should not have been diverted towards non-proliferation, which was an unattainable goal and not worth prioritising over other geopolitical strategic interests. Moreover, once the US had to reckon with the international outcry that the Indian PNE provoked, their reaction was muted since they did not want to highlight their failure in pre-empting India's PNE nor did they want it to seem that they had been neglectful of nuclear proliferation.

The Indian nuclear explosion of 1974 threw its immediate neighbour, Pakistan, into a state of existential dread. Since 1947, Pakistan had viewed India as a



hostile nation who was bent on territorial expansion at the expense of Pakistan and had hegemonist designs on the subcontinent. These fears were confirmed in the eyes of the Pakistani leadership when, in 1971, East Pakistan declared independence as Bangladesh and was immediately recognised by India. Due to this fear of future dismemberment and annihilation at the hands of the Indians, the Pakistani leadership, fearing that national security was at stake and wanting to maintain a balance with India, thought that developing nuclear weapons to match India's nuclear status was the best possible course for Pakistan's survival. However, this is not to say that the Pakistanis could not have been dissuaded from "going nuclear". On several occasions, they tried to obtain security guarantees from the US for protection under its nuclear umbrella. They also tried to lobby towards making South Asia a nuclear weapons free zone. However, they lacked US support. The US government was so wary of not alienating India that it failed to realise that the extent of frustration felt by the Pakistani leadership at the US's betrayal of their closest ally in South Asia. Moreover, Pakistan's indignation at being treated unfairly while India got away with the rewards of its fait accompli made it a matter, in Pakistani public discourse, of a sovereign nation trying to protect itself from Indian aggression but being hampered by western imperialist powers. The nuclear issue in public discourse became imbued with nationalist pride and the Pakistani nuclear

programme itself, with the help of Abdul Qadeer Khan's clandestine network, had gained too much momentum to be stopped. The more the US tried to obstruct the Pakistani nuclear programme, the more subordinate the Pakistani leadership became. The reason, I argue, that US non-proliferation efforts failed in the case of Pakistan, is that the US government failed to consider Pakistan's concern for its national security and instead only considered US regional interests in South Asia. Considering US attitude towards Pakistan, it is not surprising that the Pakistani leadership openly defied the US's demands to come off the nuclear path. Given how noncommittal US policy towards Pakistan was and how important its other interests in the South Asian region were, it was difficult to imagine the US coming to Pakistan's aid in the event of nuclear blackmail from India. India went nuclear due to the US's laissez faire approach towards proliferation. The next domino, i.e. Pakistan, fell because while the US did indeed want to instate an ambitious and strong international regime of non-proliferation, it failed to put in the required effort to see non-proliferation become a reality.

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