

What lessons, if any, can be drawn by comparing the impact of nuclear weapons on the U.S.-  
Soviet and Sino-Indo-Pakistani rivalries?

by

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## **Introduction**

When there is a controversial situation with nuclear powers involved so, as Prof. Kadercan<sup>1</sup> said in his lecture, the actors want to survive, and it is expected for a little rationality by them. In light of the above, it is necessary to put in two packages, one that includes the U.S. – USSR, at the Cold War behavior, and another in the Asia scenario, with China, India, and Pakistan. In the first situation, the U.S. and USSR were keeping deterrence as the primary use of nuclear weapons, they had the ideology as the leading cause of attrition, and no one would want to use nukes first. Moreover, they did not have a real conflict or border problem. On the other hand, Pakistan and India have been fighting for years in which the visible issue is Kashmir, but it began a long time ago.

Meanwhile, China is present in this region and seeks to influence the environment, and India has nukes, but it is not for first use, what they say. On the contrary, Pakistan maybe looks to use to protect against India's attack, even conventional, that is, this region seems like a gunpowder barrel. My perception is that both circumstances have a valid lesson in which all countries must look carefully.

## **Cold War – The United States of America and USSR**

Nuclear weapons emerged, at a time of ideological war, as a threat instrument, initially far from, considering that the U.S. and the USSR were not precisely neighbors. On one side, the U.S. had a Europe of friends in the middle, just as the USSR had an iron curtain of allies. It was like a game of chess, in which the Americans responded to every movement from Russians, or vice versa. In this nuclear arms race, both countries frightened the world with the possibility of a

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture "Nuclear Proliferation and Arms Race" by Prof. Burak Kadercan.

war that, according to scholars, would ultimately devastate the earth. Despite the imminent threat, leaders signed several agreements<sup>2</sup> between both countries to keep the environment stable.

The Cold War was inserted in a different context, in which the USSR wanted to grow its ideological dominions all over the world. Indeed, it managed to expand close to the United States, in Cuba, for example. Except for the missile crisis in 1962, the world has never been closer to using this deadly weapon.

The keyword was deterrence, which, according to Prof. Kardecian, in simple words, means "dissuading adversaries from doing something". Although it seemed more pacifist, its consequences were an arms race, because with both countries developing nuclear weapons, others began to build their arsenals. At that moment, inside the United Nations, the Security Council was entirely outfitted with nuclear weapons. Somehow, the two Great Powers of the Cold War had the control of some slices of the world, although other pieces had no single owner or any owner, as was and is the case in South Asia. And in these hands was the power of nuclear weapons.

The first lesson learned is that considering that the impact of the use of nuclear weapons was global, both countries should make use of deterrence as a priority. It was practically impossible to know the size of the arsenals of each country, speculation was being made about, and much espionage. And the deterrence proved to be valid, being shaken only in the Cuban Missile Crisis. The U.S. and USSR leaders had the complex mission of communicating to their adversary that, in the event of a nuclear attack, the answer would be immediate, while trying to negotiate a peaceful solution for their problems.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the John Lewis Gaddis (p. 280), the following agreements were written: Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty of 1972.

Another lesson learned is that countries that wish to have nuclear weapons need to have an efficient diplomatic service to maintain a stable relationship with its rival and to keep a kind of stability over the issues that arise. In the case of Cuba, the wisdom (or was it fear?) prevailed, of both leaders, in not being the first to launch a nuclear attack, which would reach not only its enemy but also allies and could trigger a sequence of attacks with unimaginable consequences.

The Cuban Missile Crisis showed to the U.S. that its homeland was too threatened, and one probable war should go far away. What was the consequence? They used more diplomacy and nuclear weapons. What was the lesson? If you have nuclear weapons, you must have more than your biggest enemy, especially if you believe that he is not as democratic as you are.

The nukes affected the international system that governs the relationship between all countries. The U.S. allies, principally the NATO countries, were extremely concerned about this situation, even though, supposedly, they were more potent than the USSR bloc. Thus, maintaining allies with nuclear power was an excellent Cold War teaching. With all this, the impact of nuclear war can still be global, depending on who launches their weapons first.

In the end, after all these years of the Cold War, the survival of both prevailed. As Marc Trachtenberg (p. 482) mentioned, John F. Kennedy's most basic goal as president of the United States was to reach a political understanding with the Soviet Union. That understanding would be based on a simple principle, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were both the Great Powers and therefore needed to respect each other's most fundamental interests.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Cold War symbolically ended and it began to discuss its nuances and strategies, mainly in the nuclear field, which had not yet been absorbed by other actors, including what would be the doctrine of use of atomic weapons. In this context, it inserts India and Pakistan.

### **Asia Meridional – China, India, and Pakistan**

Unlike the case involving the U.S. and the USSR, in South Asia situation was eminently regional in which the countries involved had conflicts on their borders, beyond ethnic and religious factors in its origins, in the case of India and Pakistan<sup>3</sup>.

Both countries had four significant wars and some crisis in their fraught bilateral relationship<sup>4</sup>. The wars happened in 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and 1999, and the last one, the Kargil War, was the most relevant because, at that moment, both already had nuclear weapons, despite Pakistan was still testing advice. In other wars, limited means were employed.

Connections between Pakistanis and terrorist groups contributed, for a long time, for keeping spirits high in this region, and which was supported by the Americans. About Pakistan, Paul Kapur (p. 85-86) described that "To serve as an ally in the U.S. antiterrorism effort - thereby avoiding the United States' wrath and enjoying its financial largesse - the Pakistanis were forced to reduce their support for Islamic insurgents in Kashmir, in some cases going so far as to outlaw militant group". This situation may have been one more factor in order not to escalate the crisis in the region, especially after 9/11, when the U.S. launched the War on Terrorism, and the hunt for Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, which was supported by Pakistan. Likewise, the U.S. maintained a close relationship with India, which sought a diplomatic vein in resolving border conflicts, despite having more significant military and nuclear power. This state is a good lesson from this rivalry. Despite being more powerful, India always conducted its actions so as not to be the first to use its nuclear weapons to gain international recognition for the proper conduct of negotiations in wars and friction against Pakistan, which was part of its strategy. Although it may

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<sup>3</sup> Lecture "The Road to Kashmir" by Prof David Stone.

<sup>4</sup> Expression coined by Sumit Ganguly (p. 70).

initially have seen an image of weakness or fear from its leaders, over the years, it has gained credibility from the international community.

After the Kargil War and the 2001-2002 crisis, the passions became more intense at the border. Sagan explained the problems about the civil-military relationship on Pakistan's side during this war, citing the metaphor "game of chicken" as an example. About this, he said that "... it is important to recognize that a single driver was not in control of the Pakistani automobile in the Kargil game of chicken" (p. 233). This case demonstrates another helpful lesson from this regional conflict; civil-military relations play a decisive role in the conduct and decision-making. Thus, it is a fact that the control of the use of nuclear weapons must be subordinated to only one leader, rather the highest authority.

Another characteristic arising from the rivalry between both countries is that Pakistan felt defensive, exposed to the greater strength of the Indians. Kapur (p. 93) pointed out that "Nuclear weapons do enable Pakistan, as a conventionally weak, dissatisfied power, to challenge the territorial status quo with less fear of an all-out Indian military response. Ensuing crises do attract international attention potentially useful to the Pakistanis' cause." Pakistan's decision to have nukes aimed at increasing his defense system to be able to claim the Kashmir region with a higher power. From that moment on, it began to draw the international community's attention, as it now had nuclear weapons, placing itself at the same level of negotiation as India on the international board. It was the way found by the weaker state to remain equal with a more robust nation. In my perception, the Great Powers should have exercised their influence and ability to avoid a country like Pakistan to have nukes, so that this is not happening.

Indeed, as the weakest link maintaining the first-use doctrine would keep the region on the alert state, that was the move. Sagan stated (p. 220) that "Pakistan, as the weaker power in

terms of conventional military capabilities, maintains an explicit nuclear first-use doctrine, which might include limited nuclear strike options, to provide a credible threat of nuclear escalation to deter an Indian conventional attack”. And maybe this could be the big mistake of Pakistani leaders. The consequences of using nukes against conventional war could be disastrous for both countries, even for Pakistan, because a counterattack from India, more substantial, could annihilate the country.

On the other hand, India's view of using nuclear weapons is distinct. One more time, Sagan precisely observed that (p. 220) "The Indian government, as the conventionally stronger power in the South Asian rivalry, has maintained an explicit 'no-first-use' nuclear doctrine against Pakistan, which could place the onus of nuclear escalation during a conventional war on the government in Islamabad". India knew the consequences of atomic weapons and had as doctrine used for deterrence. Of course, the impacts were regional, affecting just both countries and do not cause effects collateral, as by Cold War.

It is the pertinent hallmark that India and Pakistan's intentions are diffuse and difficult to understand. Sumit Ganguly (p. 48) declared that "... because neither India nor Pakistan has a clear appreciation of the other's intentions, each is prone to making serious misjudgments through a process of mutual misperception". The escalation of one conventional war to a nuclear could happen quickly. Maybe this could be the main lesson that when you have nuclear weapons with limited objectives, it is possible to use it when you have unlimited objectives.

It is noteworthy that the U.S and USSR had been worried about this region since after WWII, and they tried to influence them in attending their private interest, which does not mind a lot with the Kashmir problem. On the other hand, Chinas' concerns were different because it yet

had issues on the border, on Tibet, an autonomous region of China, awake some interest to India and Pakistan.

Other aspects of these rivalries in South Asian are the relationship between the U.S. and India and Pakistan, separately, and friendship between India and Russia. It is worth mentioning the words of Prof. Sally Paine<sup>5</sup> about international relations, mainly in this region, which looks like a competition where no one could believe in others, and the rules were so flexible that it was impossible to understand them. This step-up the sensation of a gunpowder barrel in the area. Of course, it seems that despite Pakistan considering nuclear weapons as first use, it knows how difficult and complex it is to push the button first. By the way, the real problem from India is not necessarily Pakistan, but maybe it is China.

### **Counterargument**

I could say that the main counterargument would be the fact that some countries still intend to develop nuclear weapons or increase their arsenals, even though they are aware of the catastrophic consequences of their use. In this way, we would have to enter the debate between optimists and pessimists. In short, I would say that the optimists will defend that nuclear weapons were not used in the Cold War or South Asia, so nations are only using them as deterrence, and it avoided the atomic war. On the other hand, pessimists would say that the world would be safer, which would be used as a counterargument by optimists that if there were no

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<sup>5</sup> Lecture "The Intervening Powers: China, the United States, and the Soviet Union" by Prof. Sally Paine. About the situation she cited that "as rules for cutthroat billiard, which every ball can be a cue ball, players take turns at will, players leave and join at will, some cooperate some of the time, not all aim at the same pocket, and if so, no enduring cooperation".



nuclear weapons, we would have even more conventional wars. And this debate would be endless.

I would not like to make any defense in favor of optimists or pessimists, not least because, as revealed by Ganguly (p. 47) “Much of the literature on the consequences of nuclear proliferation, whether optimistic or pessimistic, whether focused on South Asia or elsewhere, is inherently deductive”. That is, and as also mentioned by Prof. Kadercan, it is not up to debate who is right or not, or what arguments are presented. At the end of a nuclear war, the result will be the death of millions of people, destruction of entire countries, and the need to rethink what to do from then on.

So, I will use another counterargument. Even though nuclear weapons have not been used in both cases, the tension in some regions can rise very quickly, just because the weapons exist. Although there are several agreements, treaties, and specific doctrines for their use, the final decision is in the hands and minds of a few people, the highest leaders of these nations. Thus, what will decide at the end, to push on or not the launch button, will be the motivations and desires of the decision-makers. And this decision is not associated with a democratic or not nation, because if we think that a democratic country would never use its weapons, its enemies could attack without fear of counterattack, that is, the decision is up to the leaders.

It can also be considered that because there was no nuclear war, we would have no lessons to be transmitted to all powers. It only knows that the first to use it will be considered an enemy of humanity, the one who killed millions of people because whoever fights back will be merely following the universal law of defending themselves. Thus, we would remain in the field of deductions and possibilities, and that if the U.S. or USSR had not used it for more than fifty years, there is no guarantee that India, China, or Pakistan will not use it today.

## **Rebuttal and Conclusion**

In the end, we have seen lessons learned from both circumstances. It is a fact that the use of deterrence is essential in the resolution of conflicts involving countries with nuclear weapons. Perhaps, this is the most relevant aspect of maintaining the non-use of nuclear weapons so far. By exercising the power of arms, it is possible to obtain more advantages in negotiations between countries, especially when one does not have it. But, even when both have nukes, there will always be a robust diplomatic performance behind the scenes. For instance, the role of U.S. diplomacy in South Asia was fundamental, avoiding the escalation of crises.

Of course, in the strategy of using nukes, it is relevant to manage the number of weapons and possess more than your opponents, so that you have an advantage in the case of counterattacks. Also, being an ally of a state with nuclear weapons gives it a special power over that which it does not have.

An interesting lesson about India is, which, despite being more powerful than Pakistan, has always been guided by the no first use of nukes. Perhaps because India did not have the greatest fear in Pakistan, but in China, so India's movements always aimed at not lifting crises. The Asian environment also showed us how complicated civil-military connections could be in the decision-making process. It is up to the country to establish the role of each in this game.

Another aspect mentioned is concerning the development of weapons by a small power with dangerous and suspicious relations with terrorists, which is the case of Pakistan. When it started to possess nuclear weapons, it left is just another one on the board and became a player in the international field. This situation cannot happen again in the world, and maybe this could be the reason why the U.S. diplomatic actions with North Korea have increased in recent years.

Finally, the last lesson about the regional case is that the possibility of war is more significant due to limited objectives, what requires permanent attention, and maybe action, from the Great Power aiming to avoid escalating crises.

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the paradox of stability/instability mentioned by Sagan<sup>6</sup> to make a consideration. Democracies indeed have a fear of using nuclear weapons because of the consequences. But, the fact they have it keep the environment stable. On the other hand, they have a fear that North Korea or other rogue states own them because they will create an atmosphere of instability. In the end, this game is the weakest threat to attack, and the strongest do not want to use their weapons.

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<sup>6</sup> Sagan, Scott (p. 229)

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