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The Abiding Lessons of South Asia's Nuclear Tests

by Ramesh Thakur

Two years on, one can draw seven lessons for the security architecture of the nuclear age from the eleven tests with which India and Pakistan crashed through the NPT barrier in May 1998.

First, any security regime must accommodate the vital interests of key actors. The world was simply dismissive of India's security concerns in drafting the clauses of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Outsiders underestimated India's ability to break out of the attempted strangulation of its nuclear weapons option, and overestimated their own capacity to coerce India into submission. If they are to avoid falling into the feel-good trap, international regimes must rest on conjunctions of interests.

Second, nuclear weapons confer neither power, prestige nor influence. The tests diminished the two countries' net security, economic potential, influence and status. South Asians are less secure today than thirty months ago. India still lacks effective deterrent capability against China. History and geopolitics make the South Asian nuclear equation far more unstable than Cold War deterrence between Moscow and Washington. Nuclear weapons failed to deter Pakistani infiltration or Indian retaliation and escalation to aerial bombardment in the 1999 two-month war in Kashmir. They are not going to help combat internal insurgency, terrorism or corruption in either country. Nor can they help to solve any of the real problems of poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition. The almost total condemnation from around the world was proof of just how isolated both countries were in the international community. Outsiders' negative images of India were not based on its non-nuclear status, but

on daily power shortages, crowded roads, congested seaports, user-hostile airport facilities and personnel, almost non-existent sewage and sanitation facilities, child brides, dowry deaths, caste warfare...

Third, the tests revealed a gaping hole in the NPT. India and Pakistan could make, deploy and use nuclear weapons, but would not qualify as nuclear powers under the NPT because they did not test before 1967. If one of the existing five nuclear powers were to give up nuclear weapons, it would still be a nuclear power. This is Alice in Wonderland stuff where words mean whatever the nuclear-haves choose them to mean. This conundrum needs to be addressed more seriously than through finger-wagging at the subcontinent's nuclear naughtiness. Just as weapons that have been invented

cannot be dis-invented, so too that which has been tested may be detested, but cannot be de-tested.

Fourth, the entire nonproliferation regime is not in danger of imminent collapse.

The tests did not produce fresh countries of proliferation concern. We are still stuck with the same NPT rejectionists and cheats. Most countries signed the NPT because they believe their security needs are better met through a rejection than an embrace of nuclear weapons. For India the NPT is illegitimate because it is a denial of the equality of opportunity to proliferate; for most the regime is valuable for providing security from proliferation and the promise of disarmament.

Fifth, the tests confirmed that the logic of nonproliferation is the same as that of disarmament. The NPT is tied to a frozen international power structure decades out of date. Nuclear weapons are neither necessary (witness Germany and Japan) nor sufficient (witness Pakistan and North Korea) to be an effective player in modern diplomacy. Yet not one country that had nuclear weapons when the NPT was signed in 1968 has given them up. They preach but do not practice nuclear abstinence. They justify their own nuclear weapons in national security language, but deny

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such weapons to anyone else for reasons of global security. If India and Pakistan are committed to a nuclear-free world, as they claim, then they need to be told in blunt language that their tests were a setback to the cause. The five nuclear powers have also to be called to account for their complacency and go-slow tactics on nuclear disarmament.

Sixth, no matter how dominant, economics has not totally replaced geopolitics. Strategic calculations, raw politics and emotions have driven the nuclear policies of India and Pakistan even at the cost of economics. The old hard questions of nuclear proliferation, conflict and disarmament are back on the international security agenda.

Seventh, sanctions are too blunt to be useful diplomatic instruments. They are ineffectual, counter-productive, damaging to one's own traders and allies, and morally questionable in shifting the risk of harm from ruling elites to innocent civilians. While economic sanctions were pinpricks for India, they took Pakistan to the precipice of disaster. Most of the important sanctions-imposing countries have slowly but surely eased back from their initial hard-line positions.

Confronted with a world that cannot be changed, reasonable people adapt and accommodate. Nuclear weapons are the common enemy of mankind. Like chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons too should be outlawed under an international regime that ensures strict compliance through effective and credible inspection, verification and control regimes.

Professor Ramesh Thakur is Vice-Rector (Peace and Governance) of the United Nations University and a Member of the International Board of BICC. These are his personal views.

Staff Spotlight:



Wolf-Christian Paes

Wolf-Christian Paes joined BICC in March 1999 as a student assistant, working on small arms issues and maintaining BICC's Surplus Events Database.

After leaving school, he served with the German Air Force in Cologne and Washington DC and began studying Political Science, Economics and Law at Bonn University upon his return from the United States in 1995. Having been bitten by the "Africa bug" on his first trip to South Africa as an Election Observer in 1994, he focused much of his attention on development studies and worked as a student assistant at the Arbeitsstelle Friedensforschung (Peace Research Unit) in Bonn from 1996 to 1997. In 1998, a Rotary Foundation scholarship allowed Wolf-Christian to return to Africa to pursue postgraduate studies in International Relations at the University of Stellenbosch. Here he worked as a part-time project assistant for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and as an Election Observer in Lesotho for the Germany Foreign Office. He gained a Masters degree from Stellenbosch in early 1999. His thesis dealt with the impact of Structural Adjustment Programs on the consolidation of democracy in Zimbabwe.

Wolf-Christian has been working full-time at BICC since April 2000, dividing his time between small arms and military expenditures projects. Together with Jörn Brömmelhörster, he organized the recent BICC conference *Soldiers in Business—The Military as an Economic Actor* in Jakarta. He gained a second Masters degree in Public Administration from the Deutsche Hochschule für Verwaltungswissenschaften (German College for Administrative Studies) in Speyer in November 2000 and will assume responsibility for BICC's Military Expenditures projects in January 2001.

Wolf-Christian's favorite activities include travelling to obscure destinations and spending as much time as possible scuba diving in tropical waters.

For further information please contact
 → Wolf-Christian Paes at paes@bicc.de

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The Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and facilitating the processes whereby people, skills, technology, equipment, and financial and economic resources can be shifted away from the defense sector and applied to alternative civilian uses.

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Publishing management: Michael Dedek
 Responsible for this issue: Andreas Heinemann-Grüder,
 Lynn Benstead (editing) and Svenja Bends (layout).

Phone: +49-228-911960
 Fax: +49-228-241215
 E-mail: bicc@bicc.de
 Internet: <http://www.bicc.de>

Soldiers in Business—The Military as an Economic Actor

The Institute for Policy and Community Development Studies (IPCOS) and BICC jointly organized the first international conference on *Soldiers in Business*, which took place in Jakarta (Indonesia) from 16–19 October 2000. ‘Military Business’, the economic involvement of individual soldiers, military units and the armed forces at large, takes place in many parts of the world and assumes various forms, ranging from the production of (civilian) motorcycles in China, the operation of bowling alleys in Vietnam and the operation of bakeries in Pakistan, to involvement in illegal activities such as extortion and smuggling. Even though many politicians openly acknowledge the existence of ‘Military Business’, this subject has attracted little academic attention. Indonesia provides a prime example of the political problems of a military force that defines its mandate both politically and militarily. With the official defense budget covering just about a quarter of total expenses, the military is virtually self-sufficient economically and as a result operates largely outside of Parliament’s (budgetary) control. The conference dealt with the historical development of ‘Military Business’ as well as with regional case studies covering Indonesia, China, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam, South America, Central America, Russia, Nigeria and Central Africa. A third session, attended by Indonesian policymakers and civil society representatives, dealt with exit strategies for Indonesia.

Further information on the conference as well as selected papers can be found at

→ <http://www.bicc.de/budget/events/milbus/jakarta.html>. Alternatively contact Wolf-Christian Paes at paes@bicc.de

Military Base Closure in South Africa

The South African government has decided to reduce the number of military bases as part of overall defense transformation. Eleven bases have been handed over by the South African National Defense Forces (SANDF) for civilian use, and another six bases are to be co-used by the SANDF and civilians. The South African Department of Public Works (DPW) is the custodian of the state’s property assets and is in charge of the military sites which have been closed. DPW intends to draft a policy guideline on military base conversion and has informed the cabinet accordingly. It has commissioned BICC to compile a report on the process of base

conversion in South Africa. This report is part of a project funded by the World Bank which aims at building capacity in South Africa to tackle issues of military base conversion and redevelopment. The challenge of conversion and redevelopment consists in using vacated areas in such a way that, ideally, local and regional economic structures are improved. Within the South African context, the reallocation of assets, employment opportunities, and empowerment rank highest among the criteria for base conversion. The availability of former military bases provides opportunities for land redistribution. Not only will territory and infrastructure become available for settlement and economic development, it will also be possible to overcome apartheid patterns of ownership and employment. Apart from returning land which was confiscated when the military facility was established to its legitimate owners, the process will also allow opportunities for the redistribution of land which are unlikely ever to occur again on this scale in future.

For further information please contact

→ Renée Ernst at ernst@bicc.de,
Henri Myrtilinen at hm@bicc.de, or
Kees Kingma at kingma@bicc.de

Arms Embargoes and Travel Sanctions—The Bonn-Berlin Process

More than 70 sanctions experts from 28 countries met in Berlin from 3–5 December 2000 to conclude a series of meetings and deliberations which began in Bonn in November 1999 and to discuss reports suggesting improvements in arms embargoes and travel and aviation bans. The reports were prepared over the course of a year by Expert Working Groups and were based on initial discussions at a first Expert Seminar which was held in Bonn from 21–23 November 1999. Major suggestions include improvements in the wording of UN Security Council Resolutions, measures to improve the national implementation of arms embargoes and travel sanctions, and the reform of sanction monitoring and enforcement at the UN. The series of meetings, the *Bonn-Berlin Process*, was organized by BICC on behalf of the German Foreign Office and in cooperation with the United Nations Secretariat. The reports of the Expert Working Groups will be revised for presentation in New York in the spring of 2001.

For further information please contact

→ Michael Brzoska at mb@bicc.de

BICC Publications

In addition to its annual *conversion survey*, the BICC publishes *reports*, *briefs*, and *papers*. These series analyze the international conversion process, report on conversion projects and experiences, and offer scientific as well as practical know-how. Further details can be obtained at <http://www.bicc.de/publications>

Brief 17: Ksenia Gonchar, *Russia's Defense Industry at the Turn of the Century*, November 2000

Brief 18: Peter Batchelor, Jacklyn Cook and Penny McKenzie, *Conversion in South Africa in the 1990s: Defense Downsizing and Human Development Changes*, December 2000

Forthcoming:

No 4: Hartmut Küchle, *Rüstungsindustrie im Umbruch: Anpassungsstrategien deutscher Unternehmen und Ansätze einer europäischen Neuordnung (Arms Industry Restructuring: German Companies in a New European Setting)*, Winter 2000/2001

Upcoming Events

The **Globalization of the Defence Industry—Policy Implications for NATO and ESDI**, organized by the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), 29/30 January 2001 at Chatham House, London, United Kingdom. Contact: <http://www.riia.org/Conferences/cona.html>

Tim Shaw, Professor of Political Science & International Development Studies at Dalhousie University and Research Professor at Aalborg University in 2000/2001, will talk about **Conflicts in Africa: Dilemmas of Humanitarian Intervention** at Bonn University, Center for Development Research (ZEF) at 17.00 on 8 January 2001. The emerging political economy of violence in Africa carries profound implications for policy and practice, especially for peace-building. The struggle over resources in many conflicts, such as in Angola and Sierra Leone, places in jeopardy naïve peace-making efforts. Despite these challenges, some novel forms of peace-building and governance mechanisms are emerging. Contact: Dr. Indra Desoysa at idesoysa@uni-bonn.de

BICC Notes

BICC is a partner in a network of 10 university and research institutes from European Union and candidate countries. These institutes are engaged in a **four-year EU-funded project** entitled *Bridging the Accountability Gap in EU Defense and Security Policy*. A kick-off meeting was held in Brussels on 6 December 2000. Young researchers—pre- and post-doctorate—will work on the project at the 10 institutes. BICC's first task is to organize an arms control workshop in Bonn.

For further information please contact

→ Herbert Wulf at wulf@bicc.de

In December 2000, the exhibition **ConverArt—The Art of Disarmament** was shown in the foyer of the North-Rhine Westphalian Parliament in Düsseldorf. The exhibition marked the presentation of the 4th Report on Conversion and Base Closures and was accompanied by the display *Ten Years Troop Withdrawal and Conversion in North-Rhine Westphalia—Retrospective and Perspectives*. The next venue for *ConverArt* and BICC's exhibition on troop withdrawal and conversion will be Magdeburg Cathedral, from 11 January to 12 February 2001.

For further information please contact

→ Susanne Heinke-Mikaelian at heinke@bicc.de

The Joint Conference Church and Development in Germany published its fourth **Arms Export Report** in December 2000. The report critically notes that German arms exports are on the rise. The group responsible for the report, which includes BICC's Michael Brzoska, takes issue with recent decisions to export weapons to a number of countries, for example Turkey. It welcomes the recent publication of the German government's first official Arms Export Report but expects future reports to be more transparent.

For further information please contact

→ Michael Brzoska at mb@bicc.de

International delegates attended a conference entitled *Curbing the Demand-Side of Small Arms: A Seminar on Learning and Applying Lessons in East Africa* in Nairobi/Kenya from 12 to 16 December 2000. BICC, in conjunction with the regional SALIGAD Project Office, co-sponsored this event with Project Ploughshares and the Quaker UN offices. Building on recent governmental initiatives such as the Nairobi Declaration Experts' Meeting, this was the first major civil society-led conference to **examine the proliferation of small arms and light weapons** in the region from a demand perspective. One of the highlights of the seminar was the presentation by SALIGAD researchers Col. Peter Marwa and Sabala Kizito of the findings of their case studies in Kenya.

For further information please contact

→ Christina M. Yeung, Project Assistant, SALIGAD Project
PO Box 76621
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: 254 2 567386 or 254 2 574092/6
Fax: 254 2 561357

BICC staff wish you all a happy and successful 2001!!