4

Responses to Nuclear Proliferation: Indian Nuclear Doctrine and Strategy

By

(b)(6)

(b)(6) principal investigator

Contract No. (b)(4)

December 2006

CONTENTS

(b)(5)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project is part of a series of efforts to expand our thinking about the nature of a world in which there is a larger number of actors armed with nuclear weapons. In order to obtain insights on this issue from non-American sources, this project developed a set of scenarios involving new nuclear armed actors. The scenarios are included in the appendix to this report. These scenarios were presented to Indian interlocutors in an effort to learn what impact they thought these new actors would have on Indian nuclear weapons policies. Over the course of two weeks in New Delhi, we interviewed members of India's strategic elite – analysts, journalists, and retired military officers – to gauge their response to a number of thought provoking scenarios. Our findings provide guidance relating to specific aspects of India's foreign policy as well as offering insights into the decision making processes of relatively young nuclear states. As such, our conclusions are of interest to those analysts and practitioners focused specifically on Indian strategic behavior and foreign policy as well as to those concerned with proliferation and international security more generally.

We developed scenarios designed to find the limits of Indian strategic thinking by discussing a series of plausible vignettes that were chosen because they could drive significant policy changes. Beginning with Pakistan, and then moving outward from India to the Middle East and East Asia, we explored both the specific policy options India would consider under the conditions specified in the scenarios, as well as the broader patterns of Indian strategic thinking. We also queried our subjects about Indian nuclear doctrine itself. Because of the increasingly levels of radical Islamic activity in Bangladesh, we also included that country in our discussions. The catalog of responses is presented, by subject, in the section discussing our interviews. Our most striking findings are summarized below:

- In the event of a jihadi coup or takeover in Pakistan, India fully expects the United States to act as a first-responder in terms of military action, noting that, in India's eyes, the United States, not India, is the most likely target of any subsequent jihadi attacks. India would offer a full-range of staging and intelligence support to such an operation.

- India would take full advantage of a resumption of nuclear testing by any major power by restarting its thermonuclear testing program.

- India is firmly committed to its no-first-use policy, with all but one analyst believing that India is willing to absorb a nuclear first strike before launching any of its own missiles. Conversely, no analyst found India's threat to counter a chemical, biological, or radiation (CBR) attack with nuclear weapons to be credible.

- India would not participate in regional wars in the Middle East (including those involving Iran) or the North Pacific. Some analysts suggested that India may act as part of an international coalition to secure sea lanes and oil, however.

Each of these findings is most relevant to those interested in anticipating Indian foreign policy behavior in the near term, both in its own terms and for purposes of US military and diplomatic planning. And while these specific answers are no doubt useful to many such planners, we also believe the broader pattern of strategic thought revealed in our interviews should be considered by analysts. It is these patterns, some unique to India, some not, that may offer the best insight into future interactions among new nuclear actors.

India's nuclear doctrine is – and will likely continue to be – driven by a firm emphasis on civilian custody of India's nuclear assets combined with relatively weak national security institutions. There are no clear institutional mechanisms for service heads to vet doctrinal decisions. The combination of a strong normative commitment to civilian control and the absence of formal cross-cutting institutions that regularize decision making or check the power of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), results in the following patterns of behavior:

- Civilian custody of India's nuclear assets is based on the distrust with which Delhi's civilians view the military. This results in a largely defensive and reactive posture. In the event of a shock that forces India to depart from such a defensive posture, we (b)(5) India's nuclear elites the luxury deployment or

- Sensitivities to India's domestic Muslim population, and fear of communal violence, will continue to shape India's policies toward Pakistan and the Middle East. At its most extreme, this tendency could allow India's Muslims to hold its foreign policy hostage, preventing offensive action against any Muslim state, while allowing opposing Muslim states a guaranteed first strike.

- India's *ad hoc* decision making results in two related strategic responses: mentally shifting the burden of dealing with serious threats to other great powers (most notably the US in the case of Pakistani and Chinese threats) or wishful thinking (e.g. that conflict with China is no longer a serious possibility). India continues to have a relatively limited notion of what constitutes its strategic interests and is unwilling to become ensnared in major power entanglements. This posture appears to owe in large part to a commitment to economic development over the next decades, during which time India seeks to avoid costly foreign adventures.

- India's nuclear developments are likely to be driven more by prestige motivations at the civilian-led Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) than by coherent strategic doctrine. An emphasis on technology demonstrations – aimed at catapulting India into the "club of world powers" – has often trumped the strategic implications of those demonstrations, and will likely continue to do so. Three notable examples are the development of a nuclear triad (especially the SSBN force), the push

for Indian ICBM capabilities, and resumption of thermonuclear testing if DRDO receives political cover from Chinese or US tests.

While India's civilian institutions may be somewhat anomalous, in degree if not in kind, its strategic situation is still much more illustrative of the kinds of interactions we should expect to see in the future, especially when compared to the Cold War paradigm. Unlike the United States and Soviet Union, India shares borders with two declared nuclear states. As noted earlier, this has serious implications for early warning and second-strike capabilities, resulting, in India's case, in a very different understanding of the notion of deterrence itself. These dynamics are driven by both the small numbers of weapons most states are working with as well as the limited capabilities (or ranges) of delivery vehicles. To the extent that states address these issues incrementally and indigenously, their doctrines may also be dictated by technology in a manner similar to India with a similar potential for "narcissism" in the pursuit of status weaponry.

There were few scenarios – no matter how implausible or shocking – that led any of our interlocutors to believe that India would depart from these major patterns of behavior. Indian nuclear behavior, even in a post-proliferated world, is likely to be guided by firm civilian control over India's strategic direction resulting in: civilian custody of India's nuclear assets, a narrow conception of what constitutes India's strategic neighborhood, and a largely reactive and defensive posture toward that neighborhood.

INTRODUCTION

This study is part of a larger effort to understand patterns of international politics in a future world characterized by the emergence of many more nuclear actors than at present. Specifically, this project investigates the current status of India's nuclear doctrine and strategy and the future conditions under which it might change. If new declared and undeclared nuclear actors emerge, strategic interactions in this new environment can be expected to be very different from those under current conditions. When one considers how to analyze such interactions, the best frame of reference may not be US-Soviet competition, characterized as it was by massive nuclear arsenals and mutually assured destruction, but perhaps Indo-Pakistani conflict over the last 30 years, which has been characterized by conflict under a nuclear shadow and the possibility of limited nuclear war. This consideration motivates our specific focus on Indian doctrine and strategy.

This project necessarily straddles two separate research agendas, one focused broadly on proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional states, and one more narrowly interested in India itself. As such our commentary and conclusions often alternate between the two. We investigated the elasticity and internal contradictions of India's current doctrine, as well as how its nuclear responses to strategic dilemmas may depart from Cold War "lessons" and be indicative of other states with small, relatively new arsenals. Our conclusions are therefore relevant both to analysts and scholars focused specifically on Indian strategic behavior and foreign policy as well as to those concerned with proliferation and international security more generally.

Our research method consisted of exploring potential Indian responses to a variety of future conflict scenarios in interviews with leading strategic analysts in New Delhi. The scenarios are described in Section 2. Our respondents included think tank scholars, journalists, and retired military officers.[1] One might reasonably ask whether the views of the group we met can be considered representative of the views of either the Indian government or even the broader strategic community in India. In this regard, we may note two things. First, several of the people we met served as members of the National Security Advisory Board, a quasi-official entity which among other things produced the draft nuclear doctrine that subsequently was adopted by the Indian government. Second, India has a small strategic elite that analyzes nuclear matters. In response to our solicitation for additional contacts, each of our interlocutors agreed that we had met with nearly all the relevant experts.[2] We are therefore confident that the research reported here represents the broad opinions of the Indian security elite, with the necessary caveat that we did not speak with any current government officials and had no access to any classified or restricted materials regarding Indian nuclear planning and doctrine.

---

[1] See Appendix A with list of interviewees.

(b)(5)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Following the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) decision to test nuclear weapons in May 1998, India suddenly became a declared nuclear power that lacked a nuclear doctrine. The BJP's national security apparatus scrambled over the course of the next year to draft a nuclear doctrine to govern its newly declared capabilities. After much internal debate, India's National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) released a Draft Nuclear Doctrine in August 1999[3], several months *after* the Kargil War in which both India and Pakistan engaged in limited forms of nuclear diplomacy.[4] Though the status of the Draft Doctrine was unclear for years, it was officially adopted by the Indian government in January 2003 – with one crucial amendment expanding the doctrine's scope to include retaliation against chemical or biological attacks. The evolution of India's nuclear doctrine has been matched by a small but steady increase in both the size of India's nuclear arsenal and the range and accuracy of its delivery vehicles to address its security needs.

India's primary security pressures emanate from its two principal neighbors, Pakistan and China, who have themselves shared an historical alliance against Delhi. The primary threat posed to India by nuclear-Pakistan is the specter of persistent low-intensity conflict and/or state-sponsored terrorism against the Indian homeland. The declaration of its nuclear capabilities in May 1998 has enabled Pakistan, according to most Indian strategists with whom we spoke, to "bleed India with a thousand cuts" with the knowledge that India's retaliatory response is necessarily limited by mutual deterrence. Further, short of a catastrophic act of state-sponsored nuclear terrorism with indisputable Pakistani fingerprints, India has little incentive to initiate a large-scale conventional or nuclear attack on Pakistan which would burden Delhi with stewardship over the Pakistani state. It is widely believed by the Indian strategists with whom we spoke that India and Pakistan are currently in a stable – though certainly neither ideal nor immutable – strategic relationship. This, of course, occurs within the context of Indian conventional superiority and nuclear parity with Pakistan.

If India's future nuclear developments are shaped by any external actor in the near-term, they will most likely be driven by India's political and military-balance relationship with China. Indeed, the tone of India's and China's competition on the Asian landmass and in the Indian Ocean for economic and political primacy may have significant implications for India's nuclear capabilities and doctrine. Currently, India cannot match the quantity, quality, or reach of China's nuclear arsenal. India's present technological emphasis is therefore on developing a reliable intermediate range ballistic missile (Agni-III IRBM) to give Delhi strategic reach against China's major cities. These technological imperatives do not appear, however, to have been paired with similar developments in strategic planning. With respect to global strategic reach, India is still an

---

[3] "Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine", August 17, 1999. Available at http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/CTBT/nuclear_doctrine_aug_17_1999.html.

[4] See General Ved Prakash Malik, *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory*, Delhi: Harper Collins, 2006, Chapter 13.

estimated 15-20 years away from fielding an operational ICBM or SSBN force. Insofar as technological developments drive India's nuclear doctrine, it should be viewed through the prism of China – even though many Indian analysts publicly deny such linkages.

This section describes the backdrop under which India's current nuclear policy operates. It first discusses India's current and projected capabilities – the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of both India's nuclear arsenal and its delivery vehicles. Elements of the doctrine itself were a subject of our interviews and are discussed in Section 2.2

CURRENT CAPABILITIES: NUCLEAR ARSENAL

When India tested five nuclear weapons in May 1998, it was believed to have a maximum of 370 kilograms (kg) of weapons grade plutonium.[5] Given that India's fission designs are indigenously developed and still evolving, Western analysts usually assume that India's 20 kiloton (kT) fission devices require 6 kg of weapons grade plutonium. In 1998 then, India would have had the capacity to field 61 20kT fission devices. Some Indian analysts, notably R. Ramachandran, have reported that India's stockpile of weapons grade plutonium was exaggerated and that it only had about 280kg, or enough for only 46 weapons.[6] With its current reactor capacity for the production of weapons grade plutonium – comprised of its two research reactors CIRUS and Dhruva – and employing techniques to increase production of fissile material since 1998, it is believed that India can harvest somewhere in the range of 24-40kg of weapons grade plutonium per year. India could divert plutonium from its other unsafeguarded reactors if it so desired, which might yield upward of 100kg of fissile material per year, but it has chosen not to do so as of now. Additionally, although India has a limited uranium enrichment program, its fission devices so far have been plutonium devices[7]; if India ever moves to develop thermonuclear weapons using U-235 in the primary reaction it may choose to increase its enrichment capacity but there is no public indicator that they have done this to date.

Therefore, the likely current range of India's arsenal – assuming the arsenal is comprised almost entirely of 20kT plutonium fission devices – is believed to be somewhere in the range of 75-100 warheads. Assuming that for the foreseeable future, India draws its weapons grade plutonium from only its two research reactors, its range of annual warhead production will be between 4 and 7 20kT warheads per year. Development of boosted fission devices or larger yield fission devices which require greater masses of weapons grade plutonium per warhead would keep

---

[5] David Albright, "Fact Sheet: India and Pakistan—Current and Potential Nuclear Arsenals", Institute for Science and International Security, May 13, 1998.

[6] See Ashley Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, Santa Monica: RAND Publications, 2001, 484, 493; also see Ashley Tellis, *Atoms for War: US-Indian Civilian Nuclear Cooperation and India's Nuclear Arsenal*, New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006, 12.

[7] MV Ramana, "An Estimate of India's Uranium Enrichment Capacity", *Science and Global Security*, 12 (2004), 115-124.

India's national arsenal toward the lower end of this range. India will likely continue to increase its arsenal size in this gradual manner, though the US-Indian civilian nuclear deal may increase the amount of weapons grade plutonium that India can harvest annually.

The qualitative characteristics of India's nuclear arsenal reflect the fact that its weapons are indigenously designed. The May 1998 tests demonstrated that India had mastered clean fission designs in the kiloton and sub-kiloton (tactical) range. However, Indian scientists claim that they also tested a 43kT thermonuclear device in May 1998. Both western analysts and Indian strategists – (b)(6) – find this claim dubious and believe that the claimed yield was double the actual yield, suggesting that the device was most likely a boosted fission device (using tritium or lithium deuteride to boost the fission stage) with a maximum theoretical yield of 200kT. It is not clear, therefore, whether India has been able to successfully develop megaton range thermonuclear weapons to date. In fact, for this reason and to create a larger database to simulate cleaner fission designs, (b)(6) openly calls for a resumption of Indian nuclear testing, though he is one of a very few who does so. His primary argument for resuming testing and for rapidly increasing the stockpile of India's nuclear arsenal is to match China's capabilities. However, the other analysts we spoke to were unanimous in saying that any resumption of testing by a major nuclear power – in particular, China or the United States – would lead India to resume its own testing program.

CURRENT CAPABILITIES: DELIVERY VEHICLES

India's current delivery vehicles for its nuclear arsenal are aircraft and ballistic missiles. The Sukhoi- 30, Mirage 2000, and Jaguar are all nuclear capable aircraft that India could theoretically use to deliver its warheads with some modifications. Given the limited range and vulnerability of its aircraft, however, India's preferred delivery vehicles are its indigenously developed ballistic missiles, the Prithvi and the Agni. The Prithvi is currently India's only fully operational nuclear missile, with a maximum range of 250 kilometers which puts most of Pakistan's strategic centers within range but none of China's. The longer range Agni I and II, with ranges of 1500 and 2500 kilometers respectively, are also claimed to be nuclear-capable but with limited testing and only a dozen operational Agnis, it is believed to be a less reliable system than the Prithvi at present. The lack of projection power against China's strategic centers compelled India to recently resume testing the longer range (4000-4500 kilometer) Agni III. The first flight test of the Agni III on July 9, 2006 failed a third of the way into its flight, leading Indian analysts to speculate that India is probably at least 5 years away from having an operational capability to target Chinese strategic centers with land based forces. India is also developing a long-range ICBM, named Surya, supposedly based on its Polar Launch Satellite Vehicle (PSLV) or Geostationary Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), with targeted ranges of 12,000-15,000 kilometers; but the massive weights and diameters of the Indian SLVs (roughly 3x US and USSR ICBMs) suggest that India's ICBM program is only in the development phases and is likely at least several years or more away from being tested. As discussed below, all delivery vehicles are stored separately from both the weapon cores and triggers.

INTERVIEWS AND SCENARIOS

Prior to traveling to India, we developed a series of scenarios that, while improbable, were not implausible. These vignettes were designed to examine both the broad contours of Indian strategic thinking, but also potential limits. How elastic was the current doctrine? How might the internal contradictions in the doctrine, described below, be resolved in a crisis? More important from the perspective of this project, what is the nature of nuclear decision-making in a state with a relatively small, and relatively new, nuclear arsenal? In particular, how are India's possible nuclear responses to strategic dilemmas different from those developed under the Cold War paradigm? These questions are more fully addressed in Section 3 below. Here, we describe the general structure of our interviews and the content of our specific scenarios.

We focused on three major regions in designing our scenarios, with the idea they represented varying degrees in the immediacy of the strategic threat. As with all discussions of Indian nuclear issues, we started with Pakistan, moving outward to the Middle East and North Pacific. We also included a set of questions regarding Bangladesh, which is not directly relevant to nuclear decision-making but plays a significant role in regional terrorism and other non-traditional threats to Indian security, especially through its ties to Pakistani intelligence services.

Each (b)(5) Each participant received a copy of the scenarios and was walked through the questions posed in the slides. As is the often the case in such exercises, some participants were more self-directed than others, resulting in a less structured discussion of the issues at hand. That said, all major topics were covered in each of the interviews giving us a rich foundation from which to compare and make inferences regarding Indian strategic decision making.

BACKGROUND CONDITIONS

As is common when working with future scenarios, ours were set in the "not surprising" future (defined as 10-15 years from now). We assumed a general straight line trajectory for the each state's economy and general political condition. There have been no serious natural disasters, no major-power wars, and no significant realignment of international power. We did posit, however, that Iran and North Korea have acquired nuclear weapons; other states like Japan and Saudi Arabia may have undeclared nuclear programs. We also suggest that China's capabilities have improved markedly allowing them to challenge United States maritime hegemony in the Pacific. These constitute the background conditions upon which the following scenarios are based.

INDIAN DOCTRINE

Our interviews began with a very basic set of questions regarding the status and content of current Indian nuclear doctrine.

The current nuclear doctrine rests on three major pillars. The first is the development of a "credible minimum deterrent". The second is the no-first use of nuclear weapons (except in retaliation for use of chemical or biological weapons against Indian assets). The third is firm

civilian control over India's nuclear arsenal. The importance of the third pillar should not be underestimated – civilian control in India has taken the shape of civilian *custody* of the country's nuclear assets and is probably the most immutable pillar of the doctrine. The institutional structures of Indian civil-military relations are quite rigid and permeate every level of strategic decision-making. The chiefs of the three services are roughly four layers of bureaucracy removed from the Prime Minister and are often not taken into counsel on key security decisions; both the Minister of Defense and the three service chiefs were informed of the 1998 nuclear tests after the fact. Ashley Tellis notes that India's civilian masters were so "fearful of the threat posed by the 'man on horseback'" – colored by their experience with Pakistani military coups – that "they created a bureaucratic framework, first through the Constitution and later through a series of administrative orders" that completely subjugated the military.[8] The "thorough subordination of the military to the civil is ultimately ensured by the fact that *all* strategic, budgetary, acquisition, and personnel decisions are controlled by the Indian Administrative Services," a powerful and thick bureaucratic organ that serves as the intermediary between civil and military authorities.[9] Although India established a National Command Authority (NCA) which laid out the chain of command in nuclear decision-making and which appointed a Commander-in-Chief of Strategic Forces to interface with the civilian command, the details and procedures are not public and the CinC Strategic Forces is still several layers of bureaucracy removed from the Prime Minister.

This third pillar of India's nuclear doctrine has significant implications for India's no-first use clause and what constitutes both a credible and a minimum deterrent. Civilian custody of India's nuclear assets suggests that India is quite serious about its no-first use position – and indeed, almost every analyst we interviewed (b)(6) argued that India would indeed absorb the first blow before the use of nuclear weapons was even contemplated. As such, the civilian control over nuclear weapons has led India into a "force-in-being" deterrence posture[10] – though many of the analysts we interviewed refer to the posture as more of an "existential" deterrent. This has meant that weapons cores are separated from their triggers, all of which are separated from delivery vehicles and launchers; absent coherent crisis escalation thresholds for mating and deployment, this posture increases the time and complexity of a retaliatory strike (i.e. assembling weapons and mating them to delivery vehicles under conditions of a nuclear strike when command and control vulnerabilities may be significant). While several of our interlocutors argued that this dispersion of components increased weapons survivability, this is not necessarily the case.

(b)(5)

[8] Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, 283.

[9] Ibid, 285.

[10] See Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, Chapters 4 and 5.

(b)(5)

Hence, India's current nuclear doctrine leaves open the question of what constitutes a credible minimum deterrent. On this issue, most Indian analysts who we met (again, (b)(6) and (b)(6) hand-wave at the operational complexities introduced by elements of India's own nuclear doctrine and argue that the mere uncertainty generated by the existence of nuclear weapons is sufficient to deter Pakistan and China. Therefore, a substantial portion of Indian thinkers on the subject believe that India's current capabilities are sufficient to constitute a credible minimum deterrent.[12] However, only (b)(6) went through the exercise of survivability and systems reliability in their interviews. Both arrived at a required arsenal size of 250-400 nuclear warheads (though (b)(6) additionally calls for the development of thermonuclear capabilities). Their view, however, seems to be in the minority.

Complications are further introduced by the doctrine's call for the development of a triad – particularly the development of SSBN/SLBM forces. (b)(6) hypothesized that India was 15-20+ years away from fielding an SSBN, but India's Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has already started testing SLBM capabilities, though still in their infancy. The development of a sea-leg to its nuclear forces poses challenges for India's current doctrine – some which seem to have been largely ignored for the time-being. Though positive and negative controls can be implemented to retain civilian control on any future Indian SSBN, the very nature of the sea-deterrent means that component separation is impossible: the SSBN constitutes a ready-deterrent, one in which cores, triggers, and delivery vehicles cannot be separated. Though this leg of India's triad is still at least a decade or more away, its inclusion in the doctrine along side civilian control and component separation suggests that India's publicly acknowledged nuclear doctrine is not entirely consistent with its technical trajectories. These tensions between technological developments and doctrine are discussed below.

If the analysts we met are representative, India's nuclear capabilities will likely continue to grow gradually as dictated by its rate of weapons grade plutonium production (barring any additional diversions from other reactors). Because India is unlikely to resume nuclear tests (unless provided political cover by another state such as China or the United States), it may well not be able to develop a credible thermonuclear capability in the megaton range. Its emphasis in terms of delivery vehicles will likely be on the Agni III until it is fully operational in order to give it strategic reach against China; progress will probably continue on the Surya and the SLBM capabilities but both are likely 10-15 years from becoming operational.

(b)(5)

[12] K Subrahmanyam argued for this level in "India and the International Nuclear Order", in DR SarDesai and Raju Thomas eds., *Nuclear India in the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, 63-85.

A final issue to consider is the credibility of the doctrine itself. There was considerable disagreement among the analysts we spoke with as to what extent the doctrine offered a clear guide to Indian strategy and to what extent the document is a rhetorical device aimed at influencing various external audiences. For instance, on the issue of no-first-use, some of our interlocutors, such as (b)(6) emphasized the "enormity" of the Indian commitment to absorb a first strike while others, such as (b)(6) rejected this possibility. Furthermore, each person we spoke to agreed that the January 2003 amendment to the doctrine promising nuclear retaliation in the event of a CBR attack on Indian assets was utterly non-credible, since it was highly unlikely that such an attack could be sourced conclusively and because a nuclear response would be difficult to justify on grounds of proportionality (this is further discussed subsequent paragraphs). Not one of our respondents could account for how and why the doctrine was amended in this manner – beyond noting that it mimicked US policy – and some suggested that this issue called into question the credibility of the entire document. Similarly, with respect to the apparent contradiction between the doctrine's enunciation of a force-in-being and its call for an SLBM force, several analysts suggested the doctrine was crafted simply to appeal to several different constituencies. Finally, (b)(6) who served on the National Security Advisory Board, made the extraordinary admission that the members of the board were not even aware of – and did not have access to – the precise nature of Indian nuclear capabilities when they drafted the country's nuclear doctrine. In short, even though the nuclear doctrine raises more questions than it answers, most Indian analysts we met were not largely concerned by this and do not accord much importance to the doctrine itself.

PAKISTAN

As is well known, Pakistan looms large in India's strategic psyche. As such, we began our exploration of Indian doctrine with the set of contingencies we expected our Indian interlocutors to have thought most extensively about. These scenarios revolved around two twin poles: regime type and terrorism. With respect to regime change, we asked how India would react to the following: (i) an Islamist overthrow of the Pakistani government and (ii) the establishment of an ISI state-within-a-state, with control of some nuclear weapons. With regard to terrorism, we were interested in the possibility of CBRN attacks. We asked how India would respond to: (i) a terrorist attempt to use a nuclear weapon (and/or a non-nuclear unconventional weapon) against India; (ii) a Pakistani-derived nuclear weapon that is used against the US, resulting in an American attack on Pakistan.

In India's worldview, these two issues of regime type and terrorism are inextricably linked. As such our interviews often dealt with these issues simultaneously. Some respondents spoke directly to the intersection of these two issues, or rather, their divergence: emphasizing the inability of nuclear weapons to solve the problems associated with terrorism.[13] Most, if not all, of the analysts with whom we spoke had little doubt that Pakistani intelligence was significantly involved with many of the terror groups plaguing India. Few, however, believed that India had

[13] This topic was further highlighted by the timing of our research trip, just one week following the Mumbai bombings on July 11, 2006.

developed an appropriate strategic response, whether nuclear, conventional, or diplomatic. This frustration was further revealed when discussing Pakistani actions at higher rungs on the escalation ladder. While the current terror activity does not pose an existential threat to India, India's long-term inability to develop effective responses to such low-level threats bodes poorly for strategic developments at both the conventional and nuclear levels, insofar as such low-level provocations have previously served as flashpoints for regional conflicts. This begs the question as to whether India will continue to respond in an ad hoc fashion to cross-border terrorism or whether it will eventually develop a more systematic and aggressive policy response to deter such actions in the future. It is difficult to determine, however, what such a response might consist of since any of the obvious options, such as bombing terrorist training camps in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, would guarantee a military response from Pakistan and bring the concomitant risk of escalation.

While answers to our proposed scenarios varied, sometimes greatly, two broad themes emerged. First, several analysts indicated that India's primary strategy with respect to a jihadi coup in Pakistan would be to buck-pass to the United States. In particular, they anticipated strong and immediate US, not Indian, action against Pakistan in the event of a coup by jihadi elements in Pakistan. Stating this "is not just India's problem, it's the world's problem",[14] and noting that the United States, not India, would be the jihadis' primary target,[15] these respondents fully expected immediate US action should such a scenario unfold. These analysts suggested that India would be more than willing to provide staging and intelligence support to US action but emphasized that they expected the United States to perform the bulk of the regime-change operation. This reliance on US action is one part of India's Janus-faced strategic thinking, alternating between staunch independence and buck-passing. What is surprising here is that the combination of answers suggests that not only does India believe that the United States will be the "first responder" to a Pakistani coup, but it does not feel compelled to alter its strategic posture in response. Nor does there seem to be much thought about how India might react to the presence of potentially large numbers of US forces in its neighbor's territory.

There was little indication that a jihadi coup would radically alter India's nuclear doctrine, with two respondents stating flatly that the doctrine would be unaffected by questions of regime type.[16] As noted above, this could be a reflection of the lack of operational content in India's nuclear doctrine – since the document lacks guidance for command and control procedures during crises, there is little to change. But these responses also reveal the degree to which Indian nuclear strategists have not fully considered how the emergence of a jihadi regime in Pakistan could impact two core doctrinal elements: no first use and civilian control of nuclear assets. Of all the possible conflict scenarios, a jihadi coup in Pakistan constitutes the circumstances under

---

(b)(6)

which one would most readily consider a pre-emptive strike (nuclear or conventional) against Pakistani nuclear installations and/or devolving nuclear assets and possibly authority to the armed forces in the field to minimize response time. Neither of these options is incorporated into the current doctrine, nor does there appear to be much planning as to how to pursue such options in the absence of doctrinal prescriptions. This seems to be symptomatic of India's faith in an "existential" rather than a "ready" deterrent and its lack of interest in (or discomfort with) operational nuclear planning. Only one respondent[17] was willing to openly counsel the idea that such a coup would create "an enemy image" for Pakistan, changing the decision-making calculus of Indian leaders. The extent to which Indian leaders are both expecting American action and possibly neglecting contingency planning of their own may well come as a shock to many in Washington who had hoped India would offer solutions to this scenario.

The second main finding with regard to Pakistan concerns India's response to an unconventional terrorist attack sourced to Pakistan. This is of particular interest in assessing India's nuclear doctrine in view of the January 2003 amendment to the draft doctrine stating that India's no first use doctrine would not apply in instances of a CBR attack, even by non-state actors. It was the opinion of every analyst we interviewed that this statement was not credible: in the event of a CBR attack, India is seriously unlikely to retaliate with nuclear weapons. Some attribute this to questions of morality and proportionality of response.[18] Others cite a much more practical concern: how would one establish the source of the attack with certainty?[19] As an illustration of this difficulty, (b)(6) pointed out that the outbreak of the plague in Surat, Gujarat in 1994 bore many of the hallmarks of a biological attack even though all available evidence suggests that it was a natural occurrence. This practical challenge is in some ways tied into the questions of morality: absent an incontrovertible smoking gun, one respondent argued that India would be unable to establish the moral authority necessary to create a consensus for a military – especially nuclear – response in its noisy political arena.[20] In contrast to the coup scenario described above, here India does have clear doctrinal guidance as to potential responses, but its response seems no more predictable than when doctrinal guidance is lacking.

Several analysts suggested that the only long-term solution for Pakistan is economic growth and eventual democratization. This solution is derivative of both economic and security interests: there exists a strong belief that India's bullish economic growth cannot be sustained in the long term if Pakistan and Bangladesh continue to drag it down. As one analyst noted, "All ships in

---

(b)(6)

the harbor must rise together."[21] That said, it remains far from clear that India is prepared to deal with the short-term "birth pangs" of democracy in Pakistan. Many analysts were also unwilling to confront the contradictions inherent in democratizing a state where the only functional national institution is also the locus of the primary threat to India—the Pakistani Army. If democratization is difficult to imagine, establishing genuine civilian control of the military in Pakistan seems even more quixotic. Nevertheless, democratization in Pakistan over the medium to long-term remained the only comprehensive strategy suggested by any of our interviewees.

Our findings suggest that one should have serious questions as to what Indian behavior might actually be in the face of crises on the subcontinent, despite what might be stated in current doctrine. This question is addressed in greater detail in the *Analysis of Indian Strategic Behavior* section. Here we only note that if such behavior is unpredictable or inconsistent with regard to Pakistan – the state allegedly foremost in Indian strategic thought – one must have even stronger reservations regarding their strategic thought in other regions.

MIDDLE EAST

The scenarios posed regarding the Middle East were primarily focused on the possibility of an American or Israeli strike against Iranian nuclear weapons sites. Our questions, however, emphasized not only the possible Indian responses, but also what Indian analysts anticipated Pakistan might do in such a conflict situation. Here again, scenarios were somewhat over-run by events, as the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah escalated with each day we spent in Delhi. As with the Pakistan scenarios, these actual events made it difficult, at times, to convince our participants to focus on the scenarios at hand. That said, we were able to discern a number of striking patterns in response to our questions.

By far, the most common response to our Middle East scenario was that neither India nor Pakistan would become involved in a conflict between the United States or Israel and Iran. For India's part, this is not itself surprising: India has long remained neutral in the face of major power conflicts. That they do not consider Iran to be within their immediate security environment is perhaps of greater interest, as it contradicts India's stated aspirations to become (or be treated) as a major power itself. Several different reasons were offered, however, as to why India would stay out such a conflict. One analyst suggested that India had little to offer militarily and therefore would not risk participating (whether this was in the context of aiding Iran or the US and Israel was unclear).[22] Another suggested that while India was uncomfortable with the Iranian nuclear program, it objected to the idea that any country had the right to intervene militarily to stop it.[23] Finally several analysts suggested that the sensitivities of India's large Muslim population would temper any Indian foray into Middle East politics, which we explore further below.

(b)(6)

There were two oft stated Indian concerns with regard to a conflict in the region, however: Indian civilians and oil. India could unwittingly become involved in a Mid-East conflict while attempting to secure either of these interests. There are currently some three million Indian citizens working throughout the Persian Gulf. In our conversations, Indian analysts expected India to attempt to evacuate these workers by either air- or sea-lift, much as they did in 1991. Under conditions of a regional war, it is not difficult to imagine how such an operation could be hindered by large numbers of armed sorties or significant hostile traffic in the Gulf. But, the nature of India's response should one of its vessels or aircraft to become engaged by hostile forces (or by accident) is unclear.

There was also some indication that India would participate in an international coalition in an effort to secure Gulf oil in such a crisis.[24] Again, the specifics of such participation were left unsaid. More generally, two analysts suggested that India had not thought seriously about the possibilities of a dramatic curtailment of Persian Gulf oil.[25] If that is true and given that 70% of Indian oil comes through the Gulf, this must be seen as a rather serious oversight in Indian strategic planning. Obviously, any Indian naval effort to secure oil from the Gulf generates a risk of its naval assets being targeted by hostile forces. If the perceived lack of planning in this area is correct, one must also assume that there are few, if any, contingency plans governing Indian rules of engagement in such a situation.

Our participants seemed almost equally certain that Pakistan would not become directly involved in a Middle East conflict. The reasons as to why varied. Again, several mentioned domestic politics. One participant suggested that Pakistan would not want to alienate Israel, with which it has secretly cultivated ties to prevent a strong Indo-Israeli axis in the region.[26] Another argued that so long as the US maintains a military presence around Pakistan, Pakistan will be constrained in its adventures abroad.[27] Others suggested that to the extent that Pakistan becomes involved at all, it will try to play both sides (whether Israel/US-Iran or in a Sunni-Shia conflict more generally).[28] There also appears to be little expectation that Pakistan would become involved, for example, by way of military assistance to Saudi Arabia. Insofar as there was anything approaching a consensus, it was that Pakistan would avoid overt assistance to any one side.

(b)(6)

This brings us to the question of domestic politics. It was surprising the degree to which analysts returned to this as an explanation for both India's and Pakistan's supposed reluctance to engage potential conflicts in the Islamic world. In both cases, it was not just domestic politics, but communal politics that were expected to limit action. In India's case, analysts believed that India's actions would be crafted with an eye toward its 134 million Muslims, suggesting that an active military role amidst a Mid-East war would result in significant tensions if not outright riots among or against Indian Muslims. Pakistan's case is somewhat more complicated by sectarian tensions between its Sunni and Shia citizens. In this instance, while Pakistan could potentially come to the aid of a Muslim ally, it would face significant pressures among its restive Shia population not to take action against Iran. (The logic of this scenario would not necessarily lie in fear of the Shia population itself, but rather in the domestic Islamist response to large protests by Shia. The Pakistani state and army may question their ability to quell any massive violence between the two groups, including how jihadi elements in the Army and ISI themselves would act.) The responses to these scenarios reveals the strong influence of domestic politics on foreign policy decision making in the sub-continent, an input too often discounted by Western security analysts. The ability of elements of India's domestic Muslim population to hold India's foreign policy toward the Middle East and other regions hostage is likely to create significant constraints on India's strategic behavior when Islamic states or populations are involved.

CHINA

Our China scenarios evoked a wider range of opinion than that offered in response to the Pakistan and Middle East scenarios. Here we focused on three separate issues: Chinese nuclear tests, a North Pacific conflict (likely involving China and Japan), and a defeat of US naval forces by China during a Taiwan Straits crisis. As before, we were interested both in India's immediate response as well as how such developments may impact the future evolution of their nuclear doctrine. Unlike the aforementioned scenarios, there were no current events impinging on our discussion of China. There was however a general sense that conflict with China was no longer part of the public discourse; China is now viewed through the engagement-oriented "Look East" policy (though some respondents were adamant that India was utterly lacking in developing a true China policy).[29] The degree to which this dominates official circles, or stifles strategic planning, is unknown.

The clearest set of responses dealt with Chinese nuclear tests. As noted above, several respondents suggested that if China – or any other major power – engaged in nuclear testing, India would eagerly take advantage of the political cover and follow suit. Stating that India would "not want to rock the boat,"[30] these analysts believed that India would, however, gladly test in the wake of another state. This is likely due to the sparse nature of India's existing nuclear test data coupled with considerable doubt that the previous thermonuclear test was successful. As a result, India finds itself in a position where it is in rather serious need of additional tests from a technical perspective, but lacks the political interest or strength to do so.

(b)(6)

That said, none of our respondents seemed particularly troubled by the idea of a resurgent Chinese testing program, regardless of the current state of India's arsenal. To the extent that India is already overwhelmed by Chinese nuclear capabilities, it stands to reason that they genuinely might not be further cowed by a larger or more advanced arsenal. There also seemed to be the belief, albeit implicit, that any such tests and resulting improvements in the Chinese nuclear program would be directed at the United States, not India.

As with the Middle East scenarios, most analysts believed that India would have no part in a North Pacific conflict involving China and Japan or China and Taiwan. Our participants were also relatively unconcerned about a possible move by China against the sea lines of control; they argued that because all Chinese oil must come through Indian territorial waters India is in a position to cut off China, and not the other way around. From a US perspective, we noted that our participants were not troubled by the idea of a defeat of US naval forces by China in during a Taiwan straits crisis. There appear to be two broad elements feeding this: one regarding China's intentions vis-à-vis India and another regarding current US capabilities in the region.

Several analysts suggested that China was no longer perceived as a direct threat. Surveillance on the Tibetan plateau prevents any surprise attack through the Himalayas,[31] and the Indian Navy is more than capable of countering any maritime aggression in the Indian Ocean.[32] Perhaps more important was the idea, if not among our respondents themselves, then among government officials, that trade and economic integration will dampen any impulse toward war between the two states.[33] This, then, begs the question as to whether India no longer believes it has conflicting interests with China and therefore no reason to see China's significant military build-up as threatening. Our best guess is that while there is recognition of a diminished immediate threat from China, this has not been coupled with a serious consideration of China's future interests and capabilities.

Meanwhile, Indian analysts were also quick to downplay US effectiveness in the region; few thought India's long-term security or national strategy would be significantly affected by diminished US hegemony, or even presence, in the Pacific. From one perspective, India has long balanced China on its own terms in the region and will continue to do so.[34] Another suggested that the United States' recent moves toward India were the efforts of a declining power reaching out to a rising one.[35] Finally, one hawk posited that India needs to work to develop "organic Asian security" as outside powers lack the self-interest necessary to induce them to stay

---

(b)(6)

indefinitely.[36] Our respondents generally concluded that China is not a significant threat and that the United States is a capricious guarantor were it to become one.

One possible course of action India might consider to counter a rising China is military cooperation with Japan. This relationship would be less formal and less extensive than India's partnership with the Soviet Union and would fall short of a formal alliance. Several Indian analysts did state that Japan is a natural partner for India in the region, and recent naval exercises have gone well. How this would impact India's actions in the region remains unclear, but it does suggest that in the event of a wider Pacific conflict India would likely support Japan and be capable of a fair amount of inter-operability with the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

Nevertheless, the most surprising conclusion we infer from our interviews is that India's future conventional and nuclear planning is less tied to China's future trajectory than one might expect. The extent to which this is just public rhetoric masking a private fear of a rising China is unknown, but there are few public indicators that India is making longer-term plans to militarily compete with China. Again, the reliance on an "existential" deterrent – both conventional and nuclear – emerged as the overriding theme with respect to China.

BANGLADESH

In many ways Bangladesh proved to be the most inscrutable of the subjects we asked our respondents to address; to our surprise it elicited nearly as much exasperation as Pakistan. Indeed, one analyst did suggest Bangladesh was more unstable than Pakistan.[37] And like Pakistan our questions focused primarily on the potential for a jihadi takeover, as well as the risks associated with continued erosion of government control in peripheral areas. More broadly we were interested in future prospects for Bangladesh and how they impacted India's overall security. This proved not to be idle speculation as reports came out during our trip that several of the Mumbai bombers had entered India through Bangladesh. Our respondents were sanguine, however, about Bangladesh's future and India's best course of action in relation to it.

While most acknowledged the jihadi threat currently in Bangladesh, most did not believe that such a movement would come to control the government directly,[38] with one suggesting that the jihadists lacked sufficient grass-roots support to pull off such a feat.[39] However, others believed that the jihadi groups were currently tolerated by the existing government which relied on their support to some extent.[40] Highlighting the jihadi threat, several analysts speculated as to

---

(b)(6)

Pakistan's relationship with such groups, insisting that the ISI played an active role in Bangladesh.[41]

None denied that the inability to control the Bangladeshi frontier posed a long-term threat to India's internal security, though few had any viable solutions. One somewhat flippantly suggested that the easiest way to solve the Bangladesh problem was to solve the Pakistan problem.[42] And several were quick to note the army's complete reluctance to return to either Bangladesh or peace-keeping operations like those it conducted in Sri Lanka.[43] Others again suggested that economic and political integration with India was the only way to improve conditions in Bangladesh in such a way as to improve security. As with Pakistan, India is left with few viable short or medium-term options, and it's not clear that it is willing to bear the immediate costs of its long-term approach.

(b)(6)

ANALYSIS OF INDIAN STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR

In this section we extrapolate from the scenarios discussed above to India's strategic and crisis behavior more generally. Here we attempt to discern patterns of thought or adherence to principles that will likely guide Indian behavior in times of crisis or strategic uncertainty. Said differently, what are the immutabilities of Indian decision making? Based on our interviews, we discerned two underlying characteristics: (i) a firm commitment to civilian control of nuclear assets and decision making and (ii) a profound tendency toward *ad hoc* decision making. These, in turn, both have specific implications for how India might behave across a wide variety of possible scenarios. These elements are explored in the sections below (3.1 and 3.2) followed by a discussion of the conditions under which these patterns may no longer hold (3.3) and the comparability of Indian decision making with other young nuclear powers (3.4).

CIVILIAN CONTROL

As discussed earlier, one of the core pillars of India's nuclear doctrine is maintaining civilian control over its nuclear arsenal. However, this pillar should perhaps be rephrased as firmly maintaining civilian *custody* of its nuclear arsenal. While, as in the US, the ultimate authority to launch nuclear weapons lies with India's elected leadership, the level of Indian civilian control over its arsenal runs much deeper. The deep historical distrust with which political and bureaucratic elites have viewed the military has shaped the structure of India's civil-military relations and, consequently, its defensive and reactive nuclear posture.

CIVILIAN CUSTODY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

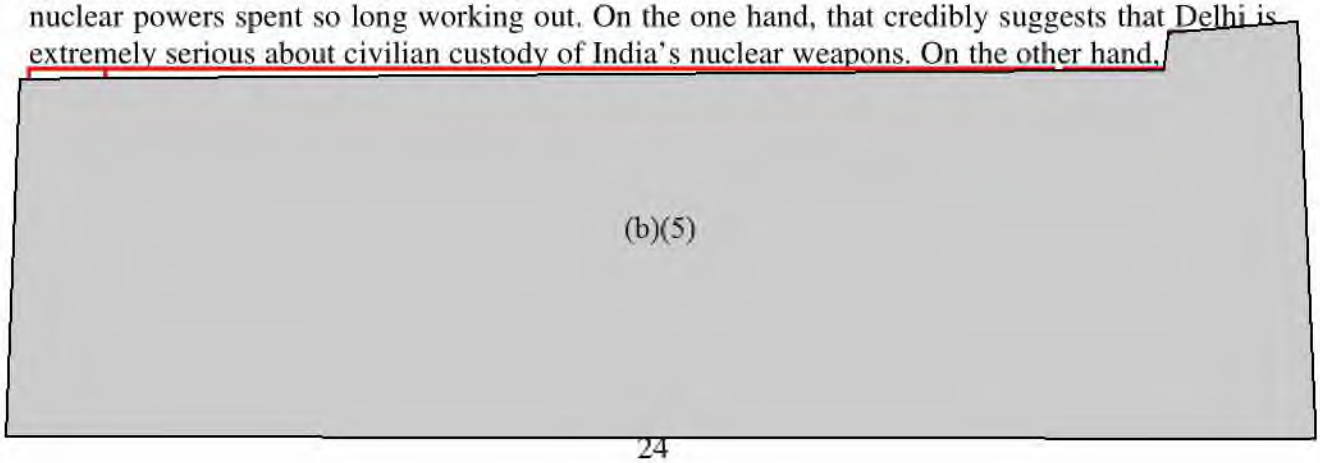
The institutional features of Indian politics and bureaucracy have meant that not only does the civilian leadership retain ultimate launch authority, but the civilian leadership has also taken measures to ensure firm and unwavering custody of India's nuclear assets. Component separation – not system separation – is the vehicle through which Delhi's political elites have kept the Indian military's hands off its nuclear arsenal; cores are kept with the civilian-led Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), triggers and non-nuclear warhead components are retained by the civilian-led DRDO, and the latter also develops and maintains custody of many of India's ballistic missiles. The military has had little input into the shape of India's arsenal and its operational requirements and, unlike other nuclear powers, will not retain peacetime custody of the nation's nuclear arsenal. Though the 2003 creation of a Commander-in-Chief for Strategic Forces was designed to interface with Delhi's civilian leadership, the military will not acquire custody of India's nuclear assets. This institutional design is unlikely to change, even as strategic elites discuss a whole alphabet-soup of further committees to better integrate the uniformed services with the civilian leadership (most notably the proposed appointment of a Chief of Defense Staff to serve as the sole military advisor to the Prime Minister). It is highly unlikely that a Congress or BJP government would ever devolve peacetime custody to the military under any foreseeable circumstances.

DEFENSIVE NUCLEAR POSTURE

This enduring institutional structure has presently led India to adopt a solely retaliatory deterrent posture that Delhi seems unlikely to ever abandon. There does not seem to be any serious consideration of offensive or even preemptive nuclear postures. Many of the analysts with whom we spoke suggested that India would not move out of its component separation posture until *after* India absorbed a first-strike; one reason for this is likely to keep the military away from India's nuclear arsenal for as long as possible. Another is that India values civilian control of the military to such an extent that it considers that the starting point for all doctrinal and strategic considerations. Given that such control could not be maintained in the face of fast-paced decision making necessary for a pre-emptive strike, India has taken that option off the table. Barring Bharat Karnad, most of our interlocutors suggested that India's political leadership would never even contemplate fielding its arsenal until after it had been struck first (though the formal amendment to the doctrine in 2003 implies that India may deploy its weapons in response to chemical or biological as well as nuclear attacks). This structure means that India will necessarily have a lag-time in its ability to retaliate, and its current aim is to be able to assemble and fire a retaliatory strike within 24 hours of an order to do so from the Prime Minister. This posture suggests that India has a very different view of deterrence than did the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War: it totally discounts the possibility of disabling first strike and simply assumes a second-strike capability. While the NCA has secret provisions for an alternate chain of command in the event that the Prime Minister is incapacitated, it is not at all clear what can guarantee the survivability of the various components of India's nuclear systems. Because future governments would seem to have little incentive to ever relinquish civilian custody of India's nuclear assets, India will likely be forced into a strictly retaliatory posture barring the emergence of an extremely aggressive government.

There are two further implications of Delhi's commitment to civilian control. First is the role of domestic politics, particularly India's sensitivities regarding its own Muslim population. Fear of intercommunal violence certainly plays a strong role in Indian decision making when dealing with Pakistan, Iran and other Muslim states. This linkage between domestic politics and a defensive nuclear posture may combine to give opposing states the impression that they can get a free shot at India in any crisis situation.

The second implication of firm civilian custody of India's nuclear assets allows Delhi's civilian leadership the ability to potentially overlook – for the time being anyway – many of the operational safeguards, deployment procedures, and communication infrastructure that other nuclear powers spent so long working out. On the one hand, that credibly suggests that Delhi is extremely serious about civilian custody of India's nuclear weapons. On the other hand,



(b)(5)

BUCK-PASSING

Most of our interlocutors suggested that India would not take strong actions in the face of the various conflict scenarios with which they were presented. This was perhaps least surprising with respect to conflict in Northeast Asia between China and Japan or China and Taiwan, an area which India has traditionally viewed as beyond its sphere of interest. In the Middle East, however, where all our respondents agreed India had significant interests – both in terms of oil supplies and its expatriate workforce – the general tenor of the responses again was that India would try to avoid involvement. Most surprising was the emphasis on external responses in the aftermath of a jihadi takeover of Pakistan. These responses suggested an extraordinarily sanguine attitude about external intervention in India's strategic backyard – made all the more striking given how resolutely India has resisted any internationalization of the Kashmir conflict. Taken together, these responses suggest a willingness to try to externalize and buck-pass on various regional security challenges. That is to say, there appears to be a tendency to identify relevant great powers whose interests are affected by a given crisis and to rely on those states to provide the leadership and resources for any action. This reluctance to insert itself in regional or global crises and this willingness to look for external leadership in crisis situations could be symptomatic of a deeper characteristic of Indian strategic thinking. Several of our respondents emphasized that the Manmohan Singh-led Congress government was committed to "keeping its head down" and focusing on economic development for the next twenty years. Only once India had achieved a sufficient level of wealth would it truly begin behaving like a great power on the world stage. While such a view may be especially true of a government led by a development

---

(b)(6)

economist, it is not unreasonable to expect all Indian governments to manifest this type of thinking in the coming years. This view would then help explain the strong aversion to foreign entanglements of any kind that we encountered in our interviews. To this extent that this behavior is deliberate, it constitutes a conscious buck-passing strategy. The responses to our scenarios, however, seemed marked with both such deliberate externalization as well much less considered faith in the role of outside powers.

TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN DOCTRINE

A second underlying characteristic of India's *ad hoc* nuclear posture has to do with the relationship between doctrine and technology. Our various discussions strongly suggested that Indian nuclear doctrine did not set the direction for India's technological ambitions but rather that the relationship was reversed. In particular, several analysts emphasized the autonomy of DRDO and the freedom with which it could pursue its own research agenda regardless of the implications for nuclear doctrine or for broader strategic stability. The potential contradictions this situation could generate are most readily apparent in the development of SLBM and SSBN forces. Since an SSBN force would imply the existence of a ready nuclear deterrent operated by the navy, this could pose significant challenges to India's firm commitment to civilian custody over its nuclear assets. Some of our interlocutors suggested that this was not necessarily the case. (b)(6) noted, "Just you wait and see, Delhi will put two politicians on every boat. If India is to maintain civilian control over its nuclear arsenal as its technology matures, the central government will likely be forced to devise both positive and negative controls over its SSBN force – which it currently has the luxury of avoiding – preventing it from becoming a truly ready deterrent. In this way, the doctrine follows technological development rather than vice-versa.

(b)(6) put the issue slightly differently, emphasizing what he termed the "narcissism" of India's technological program. In his view, India pursued specific nuclear-weapons advances as the totems of big-power status, without necessarily considering the strategic implications in terms of Pakistani or Chinese responses. For instance, is it strategically stable for India to have a sea-leg for its nuclear forces either a) when Pakistan does not have them or b) which compels Pakistan to develop and/or buy them? The relative lack of thinking about these issues suggests another tendency in Indian behavior: a strong nationalist desire for weapons development – particularly among the influential and autonomous scientific community – as markers of great-power strength (i.e. nuclear great powers have triads, so we must as well). Doctrine is then necessarily *ad hoc* and reactive in the face of such a commitment. Again, this situation also appears to derive partly from the disjunction between India's great-power aspirations and its current sense of limited capabilities.

POSSIBLE FUTURE CONDITIONS

Under what conditions might these qualities change? Envisioning a situation where civilians relinquish their firm control over nuclear weapons in India requires contemplation of some very low probability events. And given our belief that this drives much of the *ad hoc* behavior found in Indian foreign policy, it is also difficult to foresee changes to this element either. It does, however, behoove us to consider possible events, unlikely as they may be, that might catalyze

such changes. One way to facilitate this thought experiment is to better specify the question. To gain a foothold in future Indian decision making, one would want to know the conditions under which any of the following might occur:

- Indian military elites would become formally and substantively integrated into the foreign policy apparatus;
- Indian civilian leaders would develop operational level C^3i plans for nuclear readiness and deployment in a crisis;
- Military spending is not perceived to trade off directly with social spending and economic development;
- The Nehruvian foreign policy consensus (highlighting sovereignty, non-intervention, and the pursuit of a "moral" foreign policy) begins to fracture;
- India begins to behave self-consciously as a great power and involves itself in affairs beyond its immediate neighborhood.

One obvious answer to each of these questions is the presence of a compelling existential threat or serious military confrontation (i.e., war) with China or Pakistan. We are of course reminded that many of the current American national security institutions were not established until after WWII. This is, however an uninteresting or at least unimaginative scenario. Such a major change in the regional security environment would undoubtedly lead to many changes in the strategic interactions found there, not least of which would be changes in Indian civil-military relations or party politics.

This may well beg the question as to why Pakistan's current nuclear capabilities do not appear to constitute such an existential threat. One should remember, however, that for all its skittishness on nuclear issues, India currently enjoys both conventional superiority and a devastating second-strike capacity with regards to Pakistan. Given the differences in conventional military strength, Pakistan can never overwhelm India in a conventional war. Thus the small size of Pakistan's current arsenal appears to play a significant role in preventing Pakistan from being viewed as an existential threat. This suggests that moves by Pakistan toward a larger or more robust arsenal could shake India out of its current complacency either by forcing changes in the foreign policy institutions or by encouraging more direct political (or military) control over development efforts at DRDO to better counter-balance Pakistani capabilities. This new strategic imbalance could induce India to address many of the more difficult doctrinal and operational issues it has heretofore avoided.

Another potential vehicle for change is the evolution of Indian strategic ideology and, in particular, the possibility that future strategists and politicians may not be wedded to some of the traditions of Nehruvian foreign policy. Much as "liberal hawks" emerged in the US in the mid-1990s to challenge the post-Vietnam foreign policy consensus in the Democratic party by calling for military action in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo, it is not difficult to imagine future Indian elites being shaped by the ongoing low-intensity conflict with Pakistan in the context of a

broader threat of Salafist terror. The frustration expressed by our interviewees was palpable, and one need not be too creative to see a world where that is translated into support for a re-envisioning of Indian strategy and budget priorities.

In some ways, this option is already open to many Indian voters in the form of the BJP. While mainstream BJP leaders are generally in line with, if to the right of, most Indian security elites, the far right wing of the party decidedly is not. Under what conditions could such a leader come to power in India? We foresee two possibilities. In the first, a mainline BJP prime minister could be assassinated in office and replaced by a more extreme party member during the ensuing national panic. Less spectacularly, a more extreme BJP candidate could become elected in the face of rising communal tensions in India, perhaps resulting from a perception of the domestic Muslim population serving as a fifth column for Pakistan or their directly aiding and abetting terrorist attacks in India. Whether the BJP would pursue any of the institutional reforms described above in pursuit of its more aggressive foreign policy is an open question.

(b)(5)

LIMITATIONS

The above sections suggest that there are two pervasive patterns that characterize Indian decision making: a firm commitment to maintaining civilian control, if not outright custody, of nuclear weapons and an *ad hoc* decision making process resulting in technological determinism and buck passing. This, however, obviously begs the question as to whether these tendencies are unique to India or more broadly applicable to other relatively young nuclear powers. The answer depends on how strongly one believes India's commitment to civilian control and a defensive nuclear posture drives the other elements.

India's status as a secular democracy suggests that many of its characteristics will likely not be found in more authoritarian Islamist states like Iran, Saudi Arabia, or even Pakistan. This is not

to say that these states will not have their own struggles with civil-military relations as they relate to nuclear issues. Rather, the patterns of bureaucratic politics within those regimes are likely to be characterized by a host of additional concerns that are rather far afield from those Western analysts are accustomed to confronting (including, for example, state-cleric relations). India's particular civil-military context is unlikely to shed much light on decision making in these countries.

It is not unreasonable to argue, however, that one might see similar patterns of civilian dominance and defensive postures in other modern democracies like Japan and South Korea. While the parallels are obviously inexact, both East Asian states exhibit a similar pre-occupation in maintaining civilian control over military affairs. It is not clear, however, that this would manifest itself in a willingness to absorb a nuclear first strike, particularly given that Japan and Korea's political development occurred beneath America's nuclear umbrella. Israel, however, seems to provide a counter-example and suggests that in some ways India's particular tradition of defensive postures may have as much influence over its decision making as its formal civil-military institutions. As a result, in trying to understand the patterns of international politics in a world with these additional nuclear actors we should pay particular attention to both the norms and institutions that govern the degree of integration between military and civilian elites engaged in strategic and crisis planning.

While India's civilian institutions may be somewhat anomalous, in degree if not in kind, its strategic situation is still much more illustrative of the kinds of interactions we should expect to see in the future, especially when compared with the Cold War paradigm. Unlike the United States and Soviet Union, India shares borders with two declared nuclear states. As noted earlier, this has serious implications for early warning and second-strike capabilities, resulting, in India's case, in a very different understanding of the notion of deterrence itself. These dynamics are driven by both the small numbers of weapons most states are working with as well as the limited capabilities (or ranges) of delivery vehicles. To the extent that states address these issues incrementally and indigenously, their doctrines may also be dictated by technology in a manner similar to India with a similar potential for "narcissism" in the pursuit of status weaponry.

CONCLUSION

This report is part of a larger project focusing on the nature of political interactions in a world populated by many additional nuclear actors. As such, our interviews with Indian security elites bring to bear an important, if unique, perspective on the potential contours of such future interactions. The nature of this exercise necessarily means that our conclusions are in many ways specific to Indian foreign policy, but there are many elements that do indeed shed light on the broader issues of proliferation and international security. As such, we present findings with regard to expectations of specific Indian actions or policies revealed during our interviews, as well as an analysis of the broader patterns of Indian strategic behavior that may be applicable beyond the sub-continent.

In addition to highlighting a strong tendency toward *ad hoc* decision making, our scenarios elicited a surprising amount of consensus regarding Indian behavior in regional crises, highlighted by a tendency to resort to buck-passing or wishful thinking as a strategic response. Our analysis of these broader patterns is discussed in greater detail below. Here we wish to emphasize the strongest specific findings resulting from our interviews:

- In the event of a jihadi coup or take-over in Pakistan, India fully expects the United States to act as a first-responder in terms of military action, noting it is the most likely target of any subsequent jihadi attacks. India would offer a full-range of staging and intelligence support to such an operation.

- India would take full advantage of a resumption of nuclear testing by any major power by restarting its thermonuclear testing program.

- India is firmly committed to its no-first-use policy, with all but one analyst believing that India is willing to absorb a nuclear first strike before launching any of its own missiles. Conversely, no analyst found its threat to counter a CBR attack with nuclear weapons to be credible.

- India would not participate in regional wars in the Middle East (including those involving Iran) or the North Pacific. Some analysts suggested that India may act as part of an international coalition to secure sea lanes and oil, however.

Each of these findings are most relevant to those interested in anticipating Indian foreign policy behavior in the near term, both in its own terms and for purposes of US military and diplomatic planning. And while these specific answers are no doubt useful to many such planners, we also believe the broader pattern of strategic thought revealed in our interviews should be considered by analysts. It is these patterns, some unique to India, some not, that may offer the best insight into future interactions among young nuclear states.

India's nuclear doctrine is – and will likely continue to be – driven by a firm emphasis on civilian custody of India's nuclear assets combined with relatively weak national security institutions. Though the NCA attempted to provide a better interface between civil-military

relations for strategic and operational nuclear issues, it does not fundamentally alter the isolation in which civilian managers can drive India's nuclear doctrine. In practice, India's nuclear decision-making is conducted by less than a handful of civilians: the Prime Minister, his or her National Security Adviser, and the civilian heads of India's AEC and DRDO. There are no clear institutional mechanisms for service heads to vet doctrinal decisions. The combination of a strong normative commitment to civilian control and the absence of formal cross-cutting institutions that regularize decision making and serve to check the PMO lead results in the following patterns of behavior:

- (b)(5)

- Sensitivities to India's domestic Muslim population, and fear of communal violence, will continue to shape India's policies toward Pakistan and the Middle East. At its most extreme, this tendency could allow India's Muslims to hold its foreign policy hostage, preventing offensive action and allowing opposing states to consider first-strike strategies.

- India's *ad hoc* decision making results in two related strategic responses: buck-passing serious threats to other great powers (most notably the US against Pakistan and China) or wishful thinking (e.g. that conflict with China is no longer a serious possibility). India continues to have a relatively limited notion of what constitutes its strategic interests and is unwilling to become ensnared in major power entanglements. This posture appears to owe in large part to a commitment to economic development over the next decades, during which time India seeks to avoid costly foreign adventures.

- India's nuclear developments are likely to be driven more by prestige motivations at the civilian-led DRDO than by coherent strategic doctrine. An emphasis on technology demonstration – aimed at catapulting India into the "club of world powers" – has often trumped the strategic implications of those demonstrations, and will likely continue to do so. Three notable examples are the development of a nuclear triad (especially the SSBN force), the push for Indian ICBM capabilities, and resumption of thermonuclear testing if DRDO receives political cover from Chinese or US tests.

(b)(5)

With respect to scenarios beyond India's narrowly defined strategic neighborhood, India's *ad hoc* posture indicates that for the most part India would try to avoid significant involvement. As noted previously, India appears to have a strong tendency toward externalizing its broader security concerns and identifying great powers that can provide the necessary leadership and resources in crisis situations. For instance, in the face of a crisis in the Middle East, such as a Western military confrontation with Iran, India would try to stay out. Moreover, as noted above, concerns about India's Muslim population would moderate any Indian actions in the Middle East. Iran could potentially seek to exploit this ambivalence, as well as India's concerns for securing its oil supply, by trying to engineer a "separate peace" with India alongside perhaps Russia and China. In more general terms, both sides in any Middle East conflict could expect India to be very easily sidelined in the crisis.

There were few scenarios – no matter how implausible or shocking – that led any of our interlocutors to believe that India would depart from these major patterns of behavior. Indian nuclear behavior, even in a post-proliferated world, is likely to be guided by firm civilian control over India's strategic direction resulting in: civilian custody of India's nuclear assets, a narrow conception of what constitutes India's strategic neighborhood, and a largely reactive and defensive posture toward that neighborhood.

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)