

# The 'Pakistani bomb' intensifies India's strategic dilemma

by Susan Maitra in New Delhi

India's unique stance as a developing country, which has proven its capability in nuclear explosion technologies and yet foresworn a nuclear weapons capability, is being put to the test. During the past month's parliamentary debate on the 1985-86 defense budget, the government of India was implored by MPs from both the Congress and Opposition benches, to state exactly what it was doing to meet the threat posed by Pakistan's now widely-acknowledged—in fact, self-advertised—quest for nuclear weapons.

Indian Defense Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao stated in response that the government wished to seek the opinion of the parliament and the country before formulating its policy. With this in mind, he pointed out, special mention of Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear weapons had been made for the first time, in this year's defense ministry annual report.

With this a matter of intense concern and growing private and semi-public discussion in the last two years, the issue has now been officially put on the table for public consideration and debate. The outcome will have far-reaching consequences. No mere "local problem," the Pakistan bomb confronts India with the essence of the irrationality governing world strategic doctrine today. India's response to the predicament will necessarily have an important—and potentially decisive—bearing on the global strategic impasse.

## The scope of the problem

The defense ministry's annual report for 1984-85 opens with a 10-point summary of the "national security environment." Reference is made to a "perceptible deterioration in the international situation"—with particular mention of the stalemate in disarmament negotiations, deployment of medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe, re-emergence of the cold war atmosphere, and the existence of "pockets of tension and strife" in many parts of the world.

Point four goes to the heart of India's immediate concern: "One of the recent developments of grave concern is the likely nuclearization of the subcontinent. There are two nuclear-weapon powers, China and the Soviet Union, in our neighborhood, and in the waters of the Indian Ocean is deployed the powerful task force of a third nuclear weapon

power, i.e., the United States. Pakistan's relentless pursuit of nuclear-weapons capability, with the assistance and connivance of certain countries, has added a new dimension to our security environment."

As long as China and the Soviet Union were the only nuclear powers in Asia, and they had an adversary relationship, a "balance" of sorts was maintained, within which India's rejection of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence (Mutually Assured Destruction—MAD) made both moral and military sense. India could safely parlay its nuclear morality into appeals for nuclear disarmament. It was a comfortable arrangement in which, among other things, the predictable failure of the nuclear disarmament appeals could always be smugly laid at the doorstep of "certain powers." Ultimately, the insane logic of MAD was somebody else's business.

The Pakistan bomb changes all of that.

## The government's stance

For its part, the government of India is holding steadfastly to India's oft-stated commitment to reject the nuclear option. The government's problem is that this does not constitute a convincing, positive policy: It says what we will *not* do, but not what we *will* do. India's rejection of the nuclear deterrence doctrine, if it is to be meaningful and effective, must be grounded in a positive alternative which meets actual military realities.

In the recent weeks, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has stated frequently that 1) the government is still in the process of collecting valid information as to the nature and status of the alleged Pakistan bomb-making efforts; 2) pending the outcome of this information-gathering and analysis, the government will determine the appropriate response; and 3) in the meantime, the government remains totally committed to its traditional opposition to nuclear weapons development and has no plans to change that policy.

The government is opposed by a growing lobby, often associated with the "traders" or businessmen, advocating adoption of a weapons program. There are MPs within every party, including the ruling Congress, who hold this view. In the recent parliamentary debates, it was most prominently

articulated by a spokesman for the Janata Party, H. M. Patel. Patel, a defense and finance secretary in the 1977-79 Janata government, stated that in his view, the country had no option but to go nuclear.

## Playing MAD

In between there is another line of thinking, which argues that if India is not to respond with an actual bomb-making program, it must at least create a credible ambiguity on the matter, so as to deter Pakistan or any other nuclear power from attempting nuclear blackmail against the country. The most prominent public exponent of this view is Dr. K. Subrahmanyam, director of the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA), a quasi-governmental think tank in New Delhi.

Though Subrahmanyam is a widely respected individual, who combines articulate statements with meticulous argument, the "strategy of ambivalence," as he himself has termed it, seems more a reflection on its author's own intellectual-existential dilemma than a military strategy.

The fact that Subrahmanyam is a regular participant in the Pugwash Conferences, may help to explain the fatalism with which he is apparently wedded to the Pugwash brainchild, the doctrine of MAD, which presently governs strategic relations. This, together with his simultaneous deference to the government's rejection of the MAD deterrence doctrine, leads him to propose that in response to the Pakistan bomb, India should *pretend* to adopt MAD; the government should create the *illusion* that it is building bombs.

"It is obviously not in India's interest to become an overt nuclear weapons power in response to Pakistani policy of ambivalence, for that itself will provide Pakistan justification to declare itself a nuclear-weapons power," Subrahmanyam wrote in an essay titled "Pakistan's Nuclear Capability and India's Response." "On the other hand, the Indian objective should be to use Pakistani overt nuclear declaration to justify its own program. At the same time, Pakistan should not be left with any doubt that India would not allow an asymmetric situation to develop. . . . We may not in fact subscribe to the doctrine of deterrence; but to take steps to deter someone, it is not necessary to be a believer in that doctrine, just as one need not be religious to respect others' religious susceptibilities. So long as Pakistanis and the rest of the world believe in deterrence doctrine, it should be possible for us to deter them."

The similarity between this and the various "aura of power" doctrines which were circulated in the United States by the MAD lobby in the 1970s, when the cracks in the MAD doctrine began appearing there, are too striking to ignore. Henry Kissinger promoted a variation of this doctrine based on creation of an "aura of irrationality" to deter potential aggressors. The line of thinking reflects the peculiar amoral unreality that characterizes the evolution of the MAD doc-

trine itself, and its actually destabilizing logic.

In the real world, pretending to make a bomb is not the same thing as making a bomb. The strategy Subrahmanyam proposes, cannot be taken seriously at face value. Whether he is simply creating a noisy diversion to give the government time to come to grips with the matter and adopt a policy, or whether he is acting as a back-handed spokesman for the "bomb lobby," remains to be seen. The IDSA director has been included in a new "apex" group on national security, created by the prime minister, which could conceivably take up this, among other national security issues.

## India and the Strategic Defense Initiative

More recently, another voice has emerged to add a qualitatively new dimension to the debate. "India should not ignore the implications of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), also dramatically but unnecessarily called the 'Star Wars,'" wrote J. D. Sethi in the English-language daily the *Indian Express*, "if the outcome of successful research would be a non-nuclear answer to a nuclear threat or attack."

A member of the Planning Commission during the Janata government, Sethi is a commentator on Indian foreign and national security policy. His April 26 column, titled "India and Star Wars," is the first balanced and generally accurate discussion of the controversial SDI program, which this author has seen or heard in India. Whether the views expressed by Sethi are being given any serious consideration among policy-makers, remains to be seen.

The SDI holds out a hope for the so-called nuclear threshold powers, such as India, Brazil, and Japan—nations which "abhor the manufacture of nuclear weapons, but may be pushed into doing so if their security is threatened," Sethi argues. Any serious Reagan initiative to share SDI technology with these nations would not only reduce nuclear weapons to "paper tigers," but it would strike a blow for peace.

Since it is doubtful that Washington will make such an offer to India and the other threshold nations, Sethi concludes, there should be a concerted move to demand a share in the research on the threat of going nuclear. For starters, says Sethi, Rajiv Gandhi should "test Mr. Reagan's sincerity," by demanding on behalf of the threshold powers a share in SDI research during his upcoming Washington visit.

Sethi's thinking echoes a proposal made by the Mexican government in March. As *EIR* reported at the time, Mexican Ambassador Alfonso García Robles argued before the United Nations Defense Committee in Geneva that not only the Soviet Union, but also the signatories to the New Delhi declaration of January 1985, should be included in the SDI technology-sharing program. The Mexican government initiative was backed by a group of leading scientists, who called for investigation of how the technology spinoffs from the SDI can enhance development of the Third World.