

## ***U.S.-Russian Lessons for South Asia***

By Zia Mian, R. Rajaraman, and Frank von Hippel

The current South Asian crisis seems to have ebbed, but the underlying dynamic remains. The next crisis will be even more dangerous if South Asia's nuclear confrontation develops in the same direction as the U.S.-Russian standoff, with nuclear missiles on alert, aimed at each other and ready to launch on warning. As Lee Butler, former head of the U.S. Strategic Command, has said, the U.S. and Soviet Union survived their crises, "no thanks to deterrence, but only by the grace of God." Will South Asia be so fortunate?

India and Pakistan are using the U.S. and Russian postures as blueprints. India's Draft Nuclear Doctrine calls for everything that the superpowers have—although at a more modest scale, including a "triad" of bombers and land- and sea-based missiles. It also envisages an "assured capability to shift from peacetime deployment to fully employable forces in the shortest possible time." Finally, it calls for "space based and other assets.... to provide early warning." Pakistan has from the beginning been determined to obtain matching nuclear capabilities.

Early warning systems don't have much point unless retaliatory launch can be ordered in the time before the attacking weapons arrive. Pakistan's Shaheen missiles and the latest version of India's Agni missile use solid fuel. The U.S. used solid fuel in its Minuteman intercontinental missile so that, as its name suggests, it could be kept launch-ready at all times.

A launch-on-warning posture would be far more dangerous in South Asia than for the U.S. and Russia. The time it takes for a missile to travel from the U.S. to Russia or vice versa is a frighteningly short 30 minutes—but it still allows a little time to figure out whether the warning of incoming missiles is real or a human or hardware problem. Available decision time is

vanishingly small in South Asia, where the total missile flight time between India and Pakistan is only about 10 minutes.

Neither country is believed to keep its nuclear weapons deployed on missiles or aircraft on a regular peacetime basis today. But such non-deployment characterized the early U.S. and Soviet nuclear postures as well. As the recent South Asian crisis abates, it is not clear to what extent the various steps taken in the past few months toward nuclear deployment will be reversed. Once elements of South Asia's nuclear arsenal begin to be permanently deployed on high alert, U.S.-Russian experience shows, bureaucratic and political forces will come into play resisting any attempt to roll back a hair-trigger posture.

If we are to help prevent launch-ready weapons from becoming a dangerous reality in South Asia, the nuclear superpowers will have to become more responsible role models. The U.S. and Russia could, for example, now take off alert the nuclear weapons that are to be downloaded over a decade under the Bush-Putin agreement. They could also open talks on options for de-alerting the rest in a mutually transparent manner that would not make their nuclear forces vulnerable to surprise attack. The U.S. could, for example, keep its ballistic missile submarines out of range of Russia instead of sending them forward in a threatening manner—as it does today.

These steps would clear the way to take up India's suggestion for an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers. It would be hard for India and Pakistan to say no. India has proposed this each year since 1998 in a UN resolution on "Reducing Nuclear Danger." The goal should be a global zero alert for nuclear forces.

As the nuclear superpowers unwind their cold war hair-trigger postures, they should do nothing to encourage or assist India and Pakistan to move toward nuclear deployment. Political leaders and military planners in South Asia have sought U.S. command and control technology, citing

concerns about nuclear weapons safety. Such technology also could provide them the confidence to deploy the weapons, and in a crisis adopt more threatening and dangerous postures. Down that path lies disaster.

*(Zia Mian <zia@princeton.edu> is a Pakistani physicist on the research staff of Princeton University; R. Rajaraman is a professor of physics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. Frank von Hippel is a professor of public and international affairs at Princeton.)*