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THE SYSTEMIC BASES OF INDIA'S CHALLENGE TO THE GLOBAL NUCLEAR ORDER

by T.V. Paul¹

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The nuclear nonproliferation regime received a jolt in May 1998, when India announced it had detonated five nuclear devices, including a hydrogen bomb. New Delhi's archenemy, Pakistan, followed suit with an announced six tests just two weeks later. These tests were preceded by the test-firing by both countries of short- and medium-range missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads. The nuclear behavior of India and Pakistan presents several puzzles. First, the South Asian tests run contrary to the main trend in nonproliferation. After the end of the Cold War, the nuclear nonproliferation regime became stronger, with several erstwhile opponents joining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The notable new adherents included: Brazil and Argentina, states that had maintained

a nuclear weapons option for over two decades; South Africa, a state that had built seven nuclear devices; and Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, the three successor states that inherited nuclear weapons upon the breakup of the Soviet Union. Second, the semi-unipolar post-Cold War international system has given the United States and its Western allies greater power to enforce nonproliferation through coercive economic and military sanctions. Finally, in an era of globalization and economic liberalization, countries are likely to be sensitive to the adverse effects of international isolation on their economies, and thus, they are likely to avoid provocative nuclear policies.² Why have India and Pakistan then bucked the trend?

Most explanations for the nuclear behavior of the two South Asian

states emphasize one or more of three factors: the regional rivalries that India has with Pakistan and China, domestic politics, or the predispositions of individual decision-makers.³ In this article, I look specifically at the nuclear behavior of India and argue that, although domestic factors may be associated with the timing of the 1998 tests, the tests are primarily the culmination of long-term systemic and sub-systemic processes that began in the 1960s. In other words, the overarching cause of India's nuclear behavior is located in the larger global and regional nature of the nuclear dilemma facing the country. India often couches its challenge to the nonproliferation regime in normative and idealistic terms, such as the sovereign equality of states and the need for global disarmament. However, these rationales mask the real

Indian concern: namely, the nonproliferation regime privileges the five declared nuclear weapon states (NWS) and perpetuates their dominance, while keeping India as an underdog in the global power hierarchy. The argument here, therefore, is that the tests should be seen in the larger context of global power politics involving the great powers and India, especially the fact that the former remain unwilling to accept the latter's aspirations to join their ranks.

This analysis also highlights a larger problem inherent in the current nonproliferation regime. Despite its success with a number of countries, the regime has not been able to arrest nuclear proliferation completely. One reason for this is that the regime disregards the long-term political and military processes that affect the global and regional balance of power.⁴ Specifically, the NPT envisions no conditions under which rising powers could acquire nuclear weapons. The problem with this is that it reflects an underlying assumption that power relations in the international system will remain the same and no new great powers will arise. This assumption runs contrary to the rise and fall of great powers and power transitions among them evident in the 500-year history of the modern international system.⁵ This mismatch between an inflexible nonproliferation regime and the dynamic of shifting power relations suggests that India should not be seen as uniquely driven to flout international norms and that future challenges to the regime should be expected.

In this article, I first present the systemic foundations of India's opposition to the nonproliferation re-

gime, primarily in terms of the discrepancy between India's ascribed status in the international system and its aspiration for a major power role. This is followed by a discussion of the 1998 tests. I argue that the tests are a particular manifestation of India's unhappiness with its ascribed status in the international system, as well as an effort to correct a perceived deterioration in its immediate geo-strategic security environment in South Asia. Although the aspirations for major power status are held by almost all Indian political parties, barring the Communists who fear provoking China, it is also true that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) covets this status most ardently and is the most willing to assert it through military policy. However, because of the underlying systemic considerations, other party governments in the future are unlikely to make radical departures from the BJP's policy on nuclear weapons, although they may slow down the pace of the program.

A SYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK

Robert Jervis has identified three characteristics of a systemic approach that are relevant here. First, outcomes may not be due to the attributes of actors, because a system can produce consequences that are not necessarily what the actors intended. Second, units are interconnected, i.e., changes in some parts of the system produce changes in other parts. And third, relations between any two actors are conditioned in part by the relations between each of them and other actors in the international system.⁶ In this article, I use the term "systemic" to refer to the larger international system, especially the power relationships among major power actors and be-

tween them and all the other actors. The term "sub-systemic" is used for interactions limited to a specific regional system. A systemic approach would explain the security behavior of a state in terms of its position in the international system and how this position is affected by the interactions between it and the major power actors. A sub-systemic analysis would focus on interactions and power relationships among the most prominent actors within a region.⁷

A systemic approach posits that states placed differently in the international system will have divergent security concerns and interests. Great powers tend to have global interests, while the security concerns and interests of most middle powers and small powers are concentrated in a given region. Aspiring great powers also perceive their security as being tied to the larger balance-of-power processes occurring in the international system, involving other established powers. Therefore, as an aspiring major power, India's nuclear behavior can be understood better by using a systemic approach than by any other prevailing framework.

With China and Pakistan as nuclear adversaries, however, India also has sub-systemic concerns. After outlining India's system-wide and regional concerns, I will show how they largely account for the depth of India's opposition to the nonproliferation regime and why they led to the decision to test. Relative to these systemic motivations, domestic factors are less salient. In fact, governments belonging to all political parties since 1988—six of them in all—had maintained nuclear weapons ready to be tested. They differ mostly on the pace and extent

of the program, rather than the goals of it. True, it took the stridently nationalistic BJP government led by Atal Behari Vajpayee to make the final decision to conduct the actual tests. However, India's basic position on nuclear weapons mostly shows continuity due to the systemic compulsions I will now describe.

INDIA'S SYSTEMIC COMPULSIONS

It is important to recognize the unique situation of India among states in the current international system. India's conduct represents the classic behavior of an emerging major power that finds the existing powers seeking to block the entry of any new states to their status in the international hierarchy. Major powers in the past have concluded unequal disarmament treaties with the intent to arrest the rise of a potential challenger to their dominance. The inter-war naval arms control treaties between the United States, Britain, and Japan, which would have maintained the permanent inferiority of Japan, are a case in point. The Japanese perceived them as a grave injustice and began to violate the first treaty even before the ink on it had dried.⁸ The present-day nuclear states are making similar efforts to contain India and keep it at its current middle-power rank for reasons of power, especially because their monopoly of the systemic leadership role gives them significant advantages.

Among the developing states, India seems to be the key state in line for achieving major power status in the coming century. Its closest parallel, Brazil, is situated in a geographically and strategically isolated region and has accepted a trading

strategy within the ambit of U.S. hegemony.⁹ Brazil's population of 165 million is dwarfed by India's 967 million (based on 1996 estimates). Other regional states, such as Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Pakistan, are all only about one-fifth as large as India in either population or economic size. India, with its nuclear capability (as attested by the 1998 tests), a missile capability (one of the most advanced in the developing world), a fairly modern army, and rapidly increasing economic strength, is likely to emerge as a powerful actor in the 21st century. With the test-firing of the Agni missile, with a 2,010-kilometer range, India can now reach many vital centers of its adversaries.¹⁰ India is also working on an advanced version of the Agni that could hit targets in Beijing and Shanghai. In a decade or so, India is expected to possess the capacity for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). India is also emerging as a leading state in space technology. Several indigenously-built satellites have been launched during the past two decades. By the end of 1998, India plans to lift off its first commercial launch vehicle, which will carry Korean and German satellites into space.¹¹ These achievements in space have increased India's potential for developing advanced missiles.

Since its economic liberalization began in 1991, India has maintained an average five to seven percent annual economic growth. If it can sustain this growth and at the same time alleviate the key problems facing the country, it could become a major economic power by the second decade of the 21st century. According to World Bank estimates based on purchasing power parity, the Indian

economy already ranks fifth in the world.¹² This does not mean that formidable problems associated with poverty, weak infrastructure, and internal divisions do not exist in India. But, from the Indian point of view, when China achieved its major power status it resembled India in economic indicators of development. Today's Russia is economically a weak actor as well. These examples lead Indian elites to discount economic power relative to military power. The Indian elite thus believes that, even if India gains economic might, without hard military power resources, including nuclear capability, its proclamations for disarmament will not be taken seriously by the existing nuclear powers and it will not gain a foothold in the global power hierarchy.¹³

India still faces a number of hurdles before entering the major power league. Historically, war has been the main source of the rise and fall of great powers. The current members of the great power club were the winners of World War II. Unfortunately for India, when the world war came to an end, it was still under colonial rule. Recognition of China's status was delayed, but China's willingness to ally with the United States against the Soviet Union allowed it to regain its U.N. Security Council seat. China reinforced its major power status with nuclear and missile technology before the NPT entered into force in 1970, and, since 1978, the liberalization of the economy has allowed Beijing to maintain a healthy level of economic growth.

India took over a decade longer to inaugurate the economic liberalization that began in 1991. This liberalization accelerated economic

growth, but fundamental problems still remain in the Indian economy, especially in terms of human resource development indicators. India's dithering in acquiring nuclear and missile technology after the initial demonstrations of capability also meant some delay. Waiting 24 years after the 1974 test made India susceptible to pressures from the nuclear weapon states to rescind its nuclear program.

From the Indian perspective, the current system leaders deny India its legitimate place in the international pecking order and have no intention of integrating India by giving it a leadership role. At the political level, they oppose the induction of India as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, despite the fact that India is home to one-sixth of humanity and is expected to be the most populous nation by the second decade of the 21st century. They are hopeful that international pressures will force India to scale down or abandon its search for major power status. Instead, attempts to freeze India out have only increased New Delhi's resolve to accelerate indigenous development of its nuclear, missile, and other technological elements necessary for a modern, self-reliant defense force. The nonproliferation regime, aimed at arresting proliferation, in fact increased the pressure on India to come out in the open and exhibit a capability that was held in the basement for 24 years. Since even ambiguity exposed India to sanctions, and pressures to sign international arms control agreements could have foreclosed the nuclear option, New Delhi was forced to clarify its status in the direction of overt nuclearization.¹⁴ No other regional power has shown such a continued opposition to the

regime, demonstrating that India's exceptional position in the international system has something to do with its ongoing opposition.

Nuclear weapons serve some key functions for a rising power. They provide protection against large-scale overt military intervention, such as preventive attacks by the existing major powers. They offer protection of state borders from direct attacks by neighboring countries, although they have proven to be a weak source of compellent power.¹⁵ Since 1971, India has not fought a war with its neighbors, and some believe that it is nuclear deterrence that is preventing interstate war in South Asia.¹⁶ Moreover, nuclear weapons could also provide a hedge against major technological breakthroughs in conventional capability. As a rising power, India seems to be concerned about the revolution in military affairs that is currently taking place, and it does not want to fall further behind the established powers. That Indian leaders have convinced themselves of these functions of nuclear weapons is evident in their code-naming of the testing program, "Shakti," which means "power" in the Hindi language.

India's strategic environment is also unique in the developing world. India is engaged in enduring rivalries with two nuclear states, China and Pakistan, and it has no nuclear ally to provide a protective umbrella. These regional adversaries initiated three of the four wars they fought with India. Moreover, China has colluded with Pakistan to build its nuclear forces. Beijing has joined the other nuclear powers to contain India and maintain its own preponderance in Asia. India could serve as an effective regional counterweight

to China, which Beijing wants to avoid. None of this is to suggest that India holds no responsibility for the conflict with its neighbors. But, as long as these conflicts continue, nuclear capability may remain a key element of security relations in South Asia.

The end of the Cold War put India's earlier global strategy in jeopardy. It lost its key superpower supporter, the Soviet Union, following the latter's collapse as a state. Moreover, because non-alignment was a response to Cold War rivalry, it lost much of its meaning as a policy posture when the Cold War ended. India's regional rival, China, has become accepted as a major power despite initial opposition by the West. India thus feels more isolated than ever, a feeling that Western policy unfortunately enhances. Unwilling to accept the Indian security dilemma arising from systemic and sub-systemic challenges, especially the nuclear activities of China and Pakistan, the United States and its allies have solidified their position on the nonproliferation regime. Their stance is that nuclear weapons are meant for major powers only and that no new nuclear power will be allowed to emerge. India's wavering after the tests in 1974 cost it dearly because it gave the impression that India could be coerced into renouncing its nuclear ambitions. The systemic and sub-systemic incentives for India to go nuclear have thus only increased over time.

The Indian opposition to the global nuclear order has been evolving since the 1950s. This opposition solidified as the nonproliferation regime became more embedded in international security relations. At

this point, a brief historical discussion of India's approach towards the nonproliferation regime is necessary to elucidate the systemic arguments further. This discussion will clarify why the tests of May 1998 were mostly a product of this long-term dynamic.

INDIA AND THE GLOBAL NONPROLIFERATION REGIME

At independence from Britain in 1947, India became a staunch proponent of nuclear disarmament. India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, made several proposals for nuclear disarmament at the United Nations and other international fora. India was an active member of the U.N. Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee that negotiated nuclear and conventional disarmament before the superpowers began the bilateral arms control process.¹⁷ The proposals India made included a standstill agreement on nuclear testing and a non-discriminatory nonproliferation treaty. India signed the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty in the hope that the treaty would lead to further nuclear disarmament. Nehru articulated pro-disarmament policies in different world fora, as he believed that the nuclear arms race between the superpowers was heading towards a global war.¹⁸

With China's nuclear test in 1964, the Indian position on nuclear weapons changed dramatically. Although China was acquiring nuclear weapons to obtain major power status and to prevent nuclear coercion by the United States or the Soviet Union, the Chinese action nonetheless altered India's immediate strategic environment profoundly. China had defeated India just two years earlier

in the 1962 Himalayan border war. India claimed that China occupied 14,000 square kilometers of disputed territory. When the Chinese test occurred, Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri sought nuclear guarantees from the major powers. When this failed, Shastri authorized a limited peaceful nuclear explosion program that could be converted into a military program if the situation warranted.¹⁹ Shastri's successor, Indira Gandhi, after initial reluctance, continued the program.

Following the Chinese nuclear testing, the nuclear powers began negotiations on the NPT. India was favorable to the conclusion of a non-discriminatory treaty, but later became a strong opponent of the NPT, believing that the nuclear powers wished to maintain their monopoly and that the treaty was primarily aimed at curtailing the nuclear aspirations of non-nuclear weapon states. Indian opposition thus reflected systemic considerations. The major concern was that the treaty created two classes of states: those that had tested a nuclear device before January 1967 and those that had not done so by that date. The treaty would not only legitimize the nuclear capabilities of the five states that had conducted such tests, including China, but would prevent India from developing a nuclear weapon capability, even if a major nuclear threat arose. Prime Minister Gandhi stated in the Indian Parliament that India refused to sign the NPT on the basis of:

enlightened self-interest and considerations of national security.... Nuclear weapon powers insist on their right to continue to manufacture more nuclear weapons. This is a situation that cannot be viewed with equanimity by non-nuclear countries, espe-

cially as they are called upon to undertake not to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons for their own defense.²⁰

Although India cited the norm of sovereign equality of all states while arguing against the treaty, New Delhi's paramount reason for opposition was self-interest. India did not want its own nuclear option constrained. The Indian opposition to the treaty solidified after 1971 when, during the final days of the Bangladesh War, the Nixon administration sent the *U.S.S. Enterprise* into the Bay of Bengal, hoping to force a cease-fire. The arrival of the warship convinced India that, without sufficient deterrent and defensive capabilities, it could be the target of hegemonic intervention. Indira Gandhi's decision in 1974 to conduct a nuclear test was likely due in part to this perceived challenge by the United States.

In fact, the clearest sign of India's opposition to the NPT was its May 1974 test of a nuclear device at Pokhran, in the Rajasthan desert, the same test range where the 1998 tests were conducted. Indians dubbed the test a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE), although there is hardly any difference between a PNE and a militarily useful weapon. The Indian test galvanized further international efforts at nonproliferation. According to one U.N. official involved in NPT negotiations, "it breached the walls of the 'nuclear club' and once again raised the specter of the Nth Country problem."²¹

India continued to maintain its opposition to the NPT through the 1970s and 1980s, while keeping its own nuclear weapons option open. However, available reports indicate that New Delhi did not develop a

nuclear weapons arsenal until the late 1980s, despite having proven its capability in 1974.²² The decision to build a weapon force occurred after two developments: Pakistan's success in acquiring uranium enrichment capability and subsequently a weapons capability (announced by A.Q. Khan in January 1987), and the failure of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 Action Plan aimed at convincing the nuclear weapon states to achieve nuclear disarmament in a time-bound fashion.²³ There was also evidence that the Reagan administration was turning a blind eye to the nuclear weapons-related activities of Pakistan in order to continue using the country as a conduit to supply military and economic aid to the Afghan *Mujahideen* forces fighting the Soviet Union.²⁴ Indian intelligence agencies reportedly received evidence of increased Pakistan-China nuclear collaboration. Rajiv Gandhi thus authorized the weaponization project, despite his anti-nuclear orientation.²⁵ Open nuclear testing was still not in the cards, however, until further international and regional developments took place that affected India's security concerns and until the nationalistic BJP came to power.

THE NPT EXTENSION AND THE CTBT NEGOTIATIONS

In the second half of the 1990s, two events that were related to the nonproliferation regime further aggravated the Indian sense of grievance against the world nuclear order. The first was the indefinite extension of the NPT in May 1995, largely as a result of pressures exerted by the United States and its allies. Some non-aligned signatories of the treaty sought rolling extensions for 25-year periods, with further renewals sub-

ject to progress in nuclear disarmament, but they did not carry the day.²⁶ This treaty outcome gave every indication to India that the nuclear weapon states were keen to maintain their monopoly rights for a long time. From the Indian point of view, "disarming the unarmed" had become the main value of the NPT, rather than genuine global nuclear disarmament.²⁷

The NPT extension did include a commitment to complete the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) the following year. However, in 1996, India was almost alone in opposing the CTBT.²⁸ The stated Indian objections centered on two issues: (1) the proposed treaty was not linked to a time-bound framework for elimination of nuclear weapons, and (2) it allowed laboratory-type or sub-critical tests, which meant that the five nuclear powers would be free to continue building their arsenals. India also viewed the treaty's entry-into-force provision as a clever way to tie its hands. This provision stated that the treaty would come into force only when all 44 states with at least one nuclear power reactor—including the three threshold states, India, Israel, and Pakistan—had signed and ratified it. This, according to India, would encourage pressures on New Delhi to sign away its sovereign right to keep its nuclear options open and thereby increase the possibility of future coercive sanctions if India did not comply.²⁹ From the Indian perspective, the nuclear weapon states conceived of the treaty more as a nonproliferation tool than as a disarmament measure. The seasoned Indian diplomat, Arundhati Ghose, forcefully presented New Delhi's case before the Geneva negotiating forum. Nevertheless, the Indian de-

cision to veto the draft CTBT, and then not to sign the treaty after it had been approved by the United Nations, received broad international condemnation.

Notably, Israel signed the treaty, and Pakistan agreed to do so if India also signs it, which shows that among the new nuclear states only India was truly concerned about the systemic implications of the treaty. The Indian fear was that, once it signed the treaty, it would forever be constrained from testing and thus unable to verify its nuclear capability, especially the reliability of its thermonuclear weapon.³⁰ Unless the existing great powers gave up their nuclear weapons, this would prevent India from ever joining their ranks. India also wanted the five nuclear weapon states to declare a timetable for elimination of nuclear weapons before it committed to a nuclear test ban because, once it signed the treaty, it would lose a bargaining chip with which to influence their disarmament policies.

THE 1998 TESTS

Domestic and ideological factors did play some role in India's move to go overtly nuclear. The final decision to test was made by the coalition government led by BJP-head Vajpayee, which came to power in the March 1998 elections. The BJP has been a long-standing proponent of India's acquiring nuclear weapons. Under its previous incarnation, "Jana Sangh," the party had declared its intention to make India nuclear ever since the 1964 Chinese nuclear tests.³¹ But, until 1996, it was always in the opposition, except for a short interregnum as a coalition partner in the Janata party government of Morarji Desai from 1977 to 1979.

When Vajpayee was prime minister for 13 days in 1996, he ordered nuclear tests, but his government did not last long enough to carry through the decision. In 1998, the BJP had in its electoral platform a strong pro-nuclear message, and it called for India to exercise the weapons option if the national interest warranted doing so. The BJP has also been a strong advocate of India's achieving a major power role in world politics, and it believes a nuclear capability would help India achieve such a role. Beyond its ideological world-view, the BJP also seems to have perceived possible electoral support for going nuclear.

However, the BJP could not have prepared a nuclear testing program from scratch, barely seven weeks after gaining power. In fact, the order for nuclear tests was given on April 10, 1998, and the tests occurred on May 11 and 13, only one month after the government gave the green light. Thus, the BJP clearly only completed a program for which previous governments had prepared the way. Although domestic and ideological considerations played a part in the BJP decision, they only had influence because long-term systemic considerations had already brought India to the brink of testing.

Reports suggest that, since 1988, successive Indian governments maintained a nuclear bomb and the testing range in Pokhran in order to conduct a test on short notice. There have been six governments headed by various political parties since the time of Rajiv Gandhi. They were led by: V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar, P.V. Narasimha Rao, H.D. Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral, and A.B. Vajpayee. India even came to the verge of testing a device in Decem-

ber 1995, under Rao's Congress government, but the test was called off at the last minute after pressure from the United States. Frank Wisner, the U.S. ambassador to India "showed [satellite] photographs to top Indian officials in a successful effort to persuade them not to test."³² Rao, however, left instructions with the scientists to be ready for tests within one month of receiving notice. His successors, Deve Gowda and Gujral, did not change this state of readiness.³³ Thus, the testing idea was never completely given up. Non-Congress coalition governments under the premierships of Gowda and Gujral had continued the plans for testing and were waiting for the opportune moment. In interviews after the tests, Gujral said that, since Rao's time, the nuclear "file was on our table all the time."³⁴

Why did the BJP government show such urgency in conducting nuclear tests? Systemic and sub-systemic considerations were paramount, and domestic considerations were secondary, though not totally irrelevant. Although almost all political parties desire to make India a major power, it is the BJP that holds such views most dearly and consistently. The party has also been a strong advocate of a nuclear deterrent, for its conception of security emphasizes military instruments of power. The indefinite extension of the NPT and the possibility that the CTBT would enter into force after a September 1999 Review Conference caused concern among all the major parties, but these international developments were especially alarming to the BJP. As one Indian commentator puts it, until the NPT extension and conclusion of the CTBT, Indian policymakers assumed that it was

possible to guarantee:

national security by keeping the n-option notionally open and simultaneously pressing for global disarmament.... However, after the NPT was extended in perpetuity, it was apparent that the big powers had no intention of shedding their nuclear arsenal. The moralizing tone of India's stand on disarmament may have held currency earlier but became meaningless after 1995. To compound this irrelevance, the CTBT tacitly sought to make the nuclear club a pre-entry, closed shop.³⁵

The two treaty developments convinced BJP leaders that the nuclear weapon states have formed a cartel and are determined to improve their nuclear capabilities while preventing new members getting into the club. In a written statement before the Indian Parliament on May 27, 1998, Vajpayee placed "the onus of India's nuclear tests on the nuclear haves who had over the decades stubbornly refused to negotiate any treaty to dismantle the nuclear weapon stockpiles." To Vajpayee, India had exercised restraint, but during the 1980s and 1990s "a gradual deterioration of our security environment occurred as a result of nuclear/missile proliferation."³⁶ According to Jaswant Singh, a senior foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Vajpayee, with its indefinite and unconditional extension, the NPT has now become "unamendable." This meant the "legitimization of nuclear weapons" was also "irreversible." "India could have lived with a nuclear option but without overt weaponization in a world where nuclear weapons had not been formally legitimized. That course was no longer viable in the post-1995 world of legitimized nuclear

weapons."³⁷

The post-Cold War security management by the U.N. Security Council and the unwillingness of its five permanent members (P-5) to induct India as a permanent member also resulted in an Indian perception that it needed to achieve hard power resources, such as nuclear weapons, in order to obtain respect from the members of the nuclear club. A former chief of the Indian Air Force articulated India's desperation:

We're not being recognized by world powers. A lot of advanced countries are not backing a seat for India in the Security Council, even though India deserves it in every way. We are a democracy, we have economic strength, and we contribute resources and peace keepers all over the world to help the U.N.³⁸

From the Indian perspective, the CTBT was further evidence of the nuclear weapon states' interest in keeping their capability in perpetuity, because the treaty allowed laboratory tests and miniaturization of weapon systems. The addition of a clause that all countries with at least one nuclear reactor had to sign the treaty before it came into force also gave the impression that a paramount goal for the NWS was to constrain India from testing and developing nuclear weapons. According to K.C. Pant, the head of a task force set up by the BJP government to look into the functions of a proposed National Security Council: our hope that the NPT Review meeting would concentrate on accelerating nuclear disarmament did not materialize. In fact this conference ensured that the nuclear weapon states retained their arsenals while unleashing nuclear apartheid on the rest of the world. The CTBT further rein-

forced this trend. These factors made it necessary for us to take a closer look at exercising our nuclear option.³⁹

The BJP was also deeply concerned about the Pakistan-China nuclear and missile collaboration. Despite its adherence to the NPT and obligations not to transfer weapons and materials to non-signatories, China had been steadily helping to build up Pakistan's nuclear and missile capabilities since the 1980s. This assistance included components for a uranium enrichment plant, M-11 missiles, and other missile parts.⁴⁰ On April 6, 1998, Pakistan test-fired the Ghauri intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), which could reach most major Indian cities. The missile is reportedly based on a North Korean design, but China may have helped in transferring technology and materials as well. China's purpose appears to be to contain India by perpetuating the India-Pakistan adversarial relationship so that India's main focus will remain on Pakistan. The BJP-led government is especially sensitive to larger Chinese containment efforts and has come to see China as India's number one potential threat in the 21st century.⁴¹

China's recent turnaround on nuclear issues, such as signing the NPT and CTBT, is ironic. All the arguments about international inequity that China used in the 1960s to justify its nuclear weapon tests are the same ones India is now asserting. But China has become an accepted nuclear weapon state, and, for reasons of self-interest, China does not want to see India emerge with nuclear weapons and achieve the capability to target key Chinese cities. China has been one of the most stri-

dent critics of Indian nuclear behavior, even though China has been partially responsible for that behavior through its nuclear buildup since 1964, deployment of missiles in Tibet, and continued support of Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs. As one Indian analyst puts it: the pressure by China on India to sign the

NPT marks the assertion of China's status as the sole recognized nuclear weapon power in Asia. It opens the door for expanded cooperation with the U.S. on non-proliferation issues. And finally, the international reaction to the South Asian nuclear tests may have given China the opportunity to gain a long-term say in the management of South Asian affairs.⁴²

Moreover, the Clinton administration's deep engagement with China seems a powerful signal to New Delhi of an impending strategic realignment involving its regional adversary and the hegemonic power. New Delhi especially resents what it perceives as a softening of U.S. criticism of Chinese aid to Pakistan.⁴³ The United States has been attempting to engage China with the hope of avoiding another Cold War, but from India's perspective, any realignment involving China and the United States would dramatically affect the balance of power in the region. Such a shift could adversely affect India's security calculations. This, again, underlines the fact that systemic changes involving great power relations affect the choices of aspiring great powers as well as middle powers that are not on friendly terms with the great powers.

In the wake of the Indian tests, a spate of newspaper articles raised the question: does China pose a military

threat to India? Some argue that the China-India border is stable along the line of control, established after the 1962 War, and that China does not include India in its defense planning.⁴⁴ Since the 1980s, China and India have made serious efforts to improve bilateral relations. A number of top-ranking official visits by both countries, a relaxation in the military situation on the border, and increased economic ties between the two countries had improved Sino-Indian relations to some extent. But, even when relations were improving, China accelerated its nuclear cooperation with Pakistan in an effort to contain India. Thus, the Chinese policy towards India could be characterized as simultaneous engagement and containment. According to Indian defense analyst K. Subrahmanyam, the Chinese threat to India is at present not direct but indirect:

India as a neighbor of China is bound to be affected by the inevitable turbulent transition accompanying the emergence of China as a global power in the 21st century.... Sun Tzu's advice—the best victory was one gained without fighting a war—may be what Chinese leadership is following vis-à-vis India. If China can transfer nuclear and missile technologies to Pakistan and thereby countervail India, there is no need for China to pose a threat to India. China can continue to be friendly with India, but at the same time lock India in a nuclear standoff with Pakistan. It can also treat both Pakistan and India in the same category as regional powers, not in the same class as China, which is a global player. ... China's ambition is to replace the U.S. as the primary hegemonic power in Asia and in that perspective China looks at India as a re-

gional player to be offset by Pakistan. This is a very sophisticated Chinese challenge to India and not a crude military threat.⁴⁵

Thus, New Delhi perceives the Chinese threat to India as both systemic and sub-systemic in nature. In the sub-systemic sense, it is the changing balance of power in Asia, favoring China, that is causing concern to India. While India sees China as the state with which it should aim to catch up and a potential and actual threat, China sees India as a potential challenger that can be contained through alignment with its regional rival, Pakistan. The United States' elevation of China into the key state for obtaining nuclear non-proliferation in South Asia has increased India's security fears; Indians view Chinese foreign policy as part of the problem and not the solution.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

In the wake of the nuclear tests in South Asia, the P-5 nations have accelerated their efforts to maintain their monopoly rights. In meetings in Geneva and London, following the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, they declared that "India and Pakistan do not have the status of NWS according to the NPT." They sought to get India to restrain its capability and adhere to the discriminatory regimes it has so vehemently opposed.⁴⁶ This position of the great powers is largely based on systemic considerations. Great powers tend to oppose the arrival of a new great power, until they are forced to accept the newcomer through war or major diplomatic changes. They often follow policies of containment and "satellization" to stop regional

powers from becoming too strong.⁴⁷ They tend to form concerts to prevent the emergence of rising powers. They are especially uncomfortable with middle-ranking powers acquiring nuclear weapons because such acquisitions would constrain their capacity to intervene militarily in regional theaters.⁴⁸ But unlike the past, when war was an acceptable method of statecraft, in the nuclear age, war has become an unacceptable means of system change. Economic coercion has become the preferred alternative. However, independent-minded regional powers will resist efforts to contain them. This is again a systemic imperative, because without autonomous capabilities, they are likely to be dominated, directly and indirectly, by the existing great powers. A state that perceives it has potential great power status is most adamant when it comes to resisting treaties that are meant to arrest its progress towards that goal.

The nuclear powers are likely to continue demanding India's unconditional adherence to all the treaties and arrangements designed to maintain their superiority. But India's nuclear capability is a fait accompli, which it is unlikely to give up without a substantial global move towards disarmament. The present major power attempts to contain and isolate India are unlikely to work. These efforts may slow down the Indian drive, but they will simultaneously increase India's resolve to achieve self-sufficiency in military capability. No disarmament treaty or regime that has failed to take into account the security interests of the great powers or rising great powers has functioned effectively.⁴⁹ The 500 years of the modern international system powerfully attest to the

fact that new great powers emerge periodically only to find that the system has closed its doors against them. India is on the threshold of such a situation. The best course for the major powers is to make efforts to take into account India's perceived security interests and to integrate it into the international order before it becomes a thoroughly dissatisfied state and a system challenger.⁵⁰ Now that it has tested nuclear weapons, India has expressed its willingness to join the CTBT and the proposed fissile material cut-off treaty if certain conditions are met. Similar to its predecessors in the nuclear club, now that India has obtained its nuclear capability, it is willing to stop others from acquiring the same.

India's challenge is mostly directed against the global nuclear regime, especially its chief component, the NPT. The NPT, as structured currently, is likely to fail in the long run, because it attempts to freeze power relations in international politics indefinitely. This runs contrary to the forces of change that are characteristic of the modern international system. The fault-line thus lies in the very structure of the treaty. At the global level, the treaty offers no room for new great powers emerging with nuclear weapons. At the regional level, the treaty attempts to forestall regional powers from gaining nuclear weapons. Medium-sized states in high conflict zones are likely to see value in the deterrence and potential equalizer role that nuclear possession provides. Any threat of use of nuclear weapons by the present nuclear weapon states will only increase the perceived need for nuclear possession by non-nuclear weapons states. India's tests are not an aberration re-

sulting from the election and ideology of the BJP. Unless the existing great powers can find a way to make the nonproliferation regime more flexible and dynamic, systemic processes are likely to lead to more cases like India's in the future.

¹ I thank Baldev Raj Nayar for his useful comments.

² Etel Solingen, "The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint," *International Security* 19 (Fall 1994), pp. 126-69.

³ For a domestic politics explanation, see Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 54-86; for a decisionmaker-level explanation, see Peter Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation," *Security Studies* 2 (Spring/Summer 1993), pp. 192-212.

⁴ Further, states involved in enduring rivalries and protracted conflicts find the possession of nuclear weapons advantageous. The lack of simultaneous efforts to resolve long-standing conflicts, especially among those states without a great power ally, is another reason why the regime has been ineffective in arresting some states' nuclear ambitions.

⁵ For an elaboration of these arguments, see T.V. Paul, "The NPT and Power Transitions in the International System," in Raju G.C. Thomas, ed., *The Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime: Prospects for the 21st Century* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 56-74.

⁶ Robert Jervis, "Systems Theories and Diplomatic History," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy* (New York: Free Press, 1979), pp. 212-44; Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). See also Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 64.

⁷ A regional sub-system emerges as a result of regular interactions among two or more proximate states in a given region (William R. Thompson, "The Regional Sub-System: A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory," *International Studies Quarterly* 17 [March 1973], pp. 89-117). See also David Lake, "Regional Security Complexes: A System Approach," in David Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, eds., *Regional Orders* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 45-67.

⁸ On a comparison between the inter-war naval treaties and the NPT, see Paul, "The NPT and Power Transitions in the International System."

⁹ A natural question arises why India has not adopted a trading state strategy similar to Japan and Germany. The major difference between the two defeated powers of World War II and India is that the United States, especially through the nuclear umbrella, guarantees their security, while India has no serious ally to rely on. Following their defeat, Germany and Japan were also forced to adopt a low-profile military policy by the victors, i.e., the allied powers. India initially followed a low-profile military policy, but the conflicts with Pakistan and China, especially the defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War, changed the Indian defense policy to a more assertive one. India also chose a non-aligned policy and an autarkic economic policy largely for systemic reasons, i.e. out of desire to maintain as much autonomy as possible in an international system that Indian leaders generally view as unequal and adversarial. For an excellent account of India's strategic dilemma, see Ashok Kapur, "Indian Strategy: The Dilemmas about Enmities, the Nature of Power and the Pattern of Relations," in Yogendra K. Malik and Ashok Kapur, eds., *India: Fifty Years of Democracy and Development* (New Delhi: APH Publishing, 1998), pp. 341-71.

¹⁰ India is yet to induct the missiles into its forces, as it needs at least two dozen more tests. Only three tests had been conducted through June 1998 (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 11, 1998, p. 20).

¹¹ *The Times of India*, June 15, 1998, p. 10.

¹² World Bank, *World Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 188.

¹³ Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs* 77 (September/October 1998), pp. 41-52.

¹⁴ "In the last three decades, the global nuclear order kept punishing India through an ever expanding regimen of sanctions and technology denial, because it was considered a proliferation risk. Unwilling to make up its mind about nuclear weapons and clearly define its status, India had to relentlessly oppose every single international nuclear arms control agreement" (C. Raja Mohan, "Nuclear Politics-III: Signalling Nuclear Moderation," *The Hindu*, May 27, 1998, p. 13).

¹⁵ On the limitations of nuclear weapons as a source of power, see T.V. Paul, "Power, Influence and Nuclear Weapons: A Reassessment," in T.V. Paul, Richard J. Harknett, and James J. Wirtz, eds., *The Absolute Weapon Revisited: Nuclear Arms and the Emerging International Order* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), pp. 19-46.

¹⁶ Former Indian Army Chief, General K. Sundarji, has been a strong advocate of the viability of nuclear deterrence in India-Pakistan relationship. See his "India's Nuclear Weapons Policy," in Jørn Gjelstad and Olav Njolstad, eds., *Nuclear Rivalry and International Order* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 176-81; see also Devin T. Hagerty, "Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: The 1990 Indo-Pakistani Crisis," *In-*

International Security 20 (Winter 1995/96), pp. 79-114.

¹⁷ On these earlier negotiations, see Alva Myrdal, *The Game of Disarmament* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

¹⁸ On India's early disarmament efforts, see J. P. Jain, *India and Disarmament: Nehru Era, Vol. I* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1974).

¹⁹ Shyam Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb* (Sahibabad: Vikas, 1979), pp. 54-69. For the early nuclear debate, see also Ashok Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option: Atomic Diplomacy and Decisionmaking* (New York: Praeger, 1976); T.T. Poulouse, ed., *Perspectives of India's Nuclear Policy* (New Delhi: Young Asia, 1978).

²⁰ "Debate on Foreign Affairs," Lok Sabha, New Delhi, 5 April 1968, reprinted in *India and Disarmament: An Anthology of Selected Writings and Speeches* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1988), pp. 176-77.

²¹ William Epstein, *The Last Chance: Nuclear Proliferation and Arms Control* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), p. 285.

²² See Gaurav Kampani, "From Existential to Minimum Deterrence: Explaining India's Decision to Test," *The Nonproliferation Review* 6 (Fall 1998).

²³ The Action Plan called for nuclear weapon states to cease the production of nuclear weapons and weapon-grade fissile materials, the conclusion of a comprehensive test ban treaty and a convention outlawing the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, and a halt to transfers of weapons, delivery systems, and weapon-grade fissionable materials. In return, non-nuclear weapon states would promise not to acquire nuclear weapons. Further, multilateral negotiations were to be initiated for the conclusion of a new treaty, which would eliminate all nuclear weapons within a time period of 22 years. See Rajiv Gandhi, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," Proposal Presented at the U.N. General Assembly, Third Special Session on Disarmament, New York, June 9, 1988, reprinted in *India and Disarmament*, pp. 280-94.

²⁴ See T.V. Paul, "Influence Through Arms Transfers: Lessons from the U.S.-Pakistani Relationship," *Asian Survey* 32 (December 1992), pp. 1078-92.

²⁵ K. Subrahmanyam, "Politics of Shakti: New Wine in an Old Bomb," *Times of India*, May 26, 1998, p. 4.

²⁶ On the negotiations, see Tariq Rauf and Rebecca Johnson, "After the NPT's Indefinite Extension: The Future of the Global Nonproliferation Regime," *The Nonproliferation Review* 3 (Fall 1995), pp. 28-41; Joseph F. Pilat and Charles W. Nakhleh, "A Treaty Reborn? The NPT after Extension," in Thomas, *The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime*, pp. 41-55.

²⁷ "It was not just the indefinite extension of an unequal treaty that troubled India, but also the fact that no real balance was struck to bind the nuclear weapon states in the way the non-nuclear weapon states were bound. ... More serious was the international reaction to the NPT extension: anger on the part of many leading non-aligned countries and the obvious triumphalism of some

of the nuclear weapon states, which appeared to believe that the conference had secured their positions in power for the foreseeable future" (Arundhati Ghose, "Negotiating the CTBT: India's Security Concerns and Nuclear Disarmament," *Journal of International Affairs* 51 [Summer 1997], pp. 247-48).

²⁸ For a comprehensive discussion, see T.T. Poulouse, *The CTBT and the Rise of Nuclear Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1996).

²⁹ On the Indian objections to the treaty, see Ghose, "Negotiating the CTBT," pp. 239-61, and Dinshaw Mistry, "Domestic-International Linkages: India and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty," *The Nonproliferation Review* 6 (Fall 1998).

³⁰ According to Indian analysts, the 1974 tests produced only limited data and further tests were necessary to prove beyond doubt the reliability of the nuclear weapons force (Amitabh Mattoo, "Enough Scientific Reasons Seen for Conducting Tests," *India Abroad*, May 15, 1998, p. 10).

³¹ Vajpayee, who was a member of the upper house of the Indian Parliament, Rajya Sabha, had declared in 1964: "The answer to an atom bomb is an atom bomb; nothing else" (quoted in Manoj Joshi, "Nuclear Shock Wave," *India Today*, May 25, 1998, p. 14).

³² *The New York Times*, May 25, 1998, p. A3.

³³ Raj Chengappa, "The Bomb Makers," *India Today Webpage*, June 22, 1998 (<http://www.india-today.com/itoday/22061998/cover.html>).

³⁴ Quoted in *India Abroad*, May 22, 1998, p. 10. The nuclear testing was approved by an overwhelming majority of the Indian public. In a public opinion poll after the first round of tests on May 11, 91 percent of those polled in cities supported the tests while 82 percent expressed support for India building a nuclear weapon force (*The Washington Post*, May 18, 1998, p. A13). Interestingly, despite the high level of public support, the BJP could not capitalize on it on the electoral front, as in several by-elections in assembly seats spread around 13 states, it did not make any major gain, but in fact lost its advantage in some states ("Tests Fail to Boost BJP's Poll Fortunes," *The Hindu*, June 7, 1998, p. 9).

³⁵ Joshi, "Nuclear Shockwave," p. 16.

³⁶ *The Hindu*, May 28, 1998, p. 1.

³⁷ Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," pp. 44-45.

³⁸ Quoted in Indira A.R. Lakshmanan, "New Delhi's View: A Push for Respect," *Boston Globe*, May 13, 1998, p. A1.

³⁹ *The Times of India*, June 6, 1998, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Tim Weiner, "U.S. And China Helped Pakistan Build Its Bomb," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1998, p. A6.

⁴¹ Defence Minister George Fernandes in an interview in May 1998 cited China's activities in Burma's Coco Islands off the coast of India and expansion of military airfields in Tibet as evidence of the emerging threat (Manoj Joshi "George in the China Shop," *India Today International*, May 18, 1998, p. 12).

⁴² C. Raja Mohan, "China Takes the Hard Line," *The Hindu*, June 4, 1998, p. 11.

⁴³ In response to the statement by the P-5 in Geneva on June 4, 1998, asking India and Pakistan to forgo their nuclear weapons, an Indian Foreign Ministry statement said that the five nations "are not unaware that one of the most serious threats to our security has arisen because of the non-observance of the obligations they have undertaken under the NPT," and they have declined to take any action to address a serious "violation of a treaty provision to which all of them were a party" (Kenneth J. Cooper, "India Accuses Powers of Nuclear Transfers," *The Washington Post*, June 6, 1998, p. A14).

⁴⁴ Kenneth J. Cooper and Steve Mufson, "Nuclear Cloud is Cast Over India's Relations with China," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1998, p. A14.

⁴⁵ K. Subrahmanyam, "Understanding China: Sun Tzu and Shakti," *The Times of India*, June 5, 1998, p. 7.

⁴⁶ For the resolutions of these meetings, see Craig R. Whitney, "Top U.N. Members Urge India and Pakistan to End Arms Race," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1998, p. A8. At the Geneva meeting on June 4, 1998, foreign ministers of the five permanent members called on India and Pakistan to end all further tests, adhere to the CTBT unconditionally, negotiate the FMCT, and not weaponize or deploy nuclear weapons and missiles.

⁴⁷ George Liska, "The Third World: Regional Systems and Global Order," in Robert E. Osgood et al., eds., *Retreat From Empire?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 226; Baldev Raj Nayar, "A World Role: The Dialectics of Purpose and Power," in John W. Mellor, ed., *India: A Rising Middle Power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), p. 119.

⁴⁸ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 50; T.V. Paul, "Great Equalizers or Agents of Chaos? Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Emerging International Order," in T.V. Paul and John A. Hall, eds., *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 1999); Ashok Kapur, "New Nuclear States and the International Nuclear Order," in Paul, Harknett, and Wirtz, *The Absolute Weapon Revisited*, pp. 237-61.

⁴⁹ As Robert Jervis contends, security regimes tend to emerge and persist only if the great powers want them ("Security Regimes," in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983], p. 176).

⁵⁰ According to Baldev Raj Nayar, India can already be characterized as a semi-challenger to the international order ("India: A Limited Challenger?" in Paul and Hall, *International Order and the Future of World Politics*).