

## India Conducts Nuclear Tests; Pakistan Follows Suit

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SPURNING THE international non-proliferation regime, and the global norm against nuclear testing embodied in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), India announced two sets of nuclear tests May 11 and 13, prompting Pakistan to announce its own tests on May 28 and 30. The first nuclear detonations since the CTBT opened for signature in September 1996, the Indian and Pakistani tests are feared to be the first steps toward a new and destabilizing arms race between the neighbor-states, which have gone to war three times in the past 50 years. As a result of the tests, both countries, already straining to develop their economies, face international economic sanctions that will drive up the cost of capital, limit prospects for foreign investment and reduce their access to international development assistance.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced India's first tests and said they included a fission device, a thermonuclear device and a low-yield device. Two days later, New Delhi declared it had conducted two more tests, both alleged to have sub-kiloton yields. India's tests were conducted at the Pokhran test site near the Pakistani border. At a May 17 press conference, Rajgopala Chidambaram, secretary of India's Department of Atomic Energy and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, announced the yields of the first tests as 12, 43 and 0.2 kilotons, respectively. The second set of tests did not produce any seismic signal, and their yields cannot be confirmed beyond India's announced yields of between 0.2 and 0.6 kilotons. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, science advisor to the prime minister, noted at the May 17 press conference that the explosions had provided "critical data for the validation of our capability in the design of nuclear weapons of different yields for different applications and different delivery systems." Abdul Kalam also said that data from the tests would be put to use in modeling nuclear explosions with supercomputers.

Seventeen days after the first Indian test, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced that Pakistan had tested five nuclear devices. Two days later, Islamabad declared that it had conducted two more tests, although Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed retracted that claim on May 30, saying only one subsequent test had occurred. The Pakistani tests took place in the Chagai Hills region, close to the Iranian border. A. Q. Khan, who heads Pakistan's nuclear program, said on May 30 that one of the five devices tested on May 28 was in the 30- to 35-kiloton range, with the other four producing small yields suitable for tactical weapons. The test on May 30 yielded 15 to 18 kilotons, according to Samar Mobarik Mand, a Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission official.

Following their respective tests, India and Pakistan announced unilateral moratoriums on nuclear testing, and New Delhi declared itself a nuclear-weapon state—a classification rejected by the rest of the world. Under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), only states that conducted a nuclear test prior to January 1, 1967, are recognized as nuclear-weapon states. All other states-parties are non-nuclear-weapon states. India, a non-signatory of the NPT, has long been an outspoken opponent of the two-tier structure of the regime, denouncing it as "nuclear apartheid" because it does not require a time-bound framework for disarmament by the nuclear-weapon states. Pakistan has also remained outside of the treaty, but has in the past indicated that it would sign the NPT if India did. Both states, however, have refrained from proliferating the nuclear technology or materials they have acquired and have pledged to maintain their no-transfer policies.

India has had a nuclear weapons capability since 1974 when it conducted a "peaceful nuclear

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explosion." It operates several natural uranium-fueled reactors whose spent fuel can be reprocessed to extract plutonium for weapons use. India is believed to possess about 400 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium, enough for 60 to 80 weapons.

Pakistan is believed to have first acquired its nuclear weapons capability in the mid-1980s. In 1992, President Bush imposed sanctions on Pakistan under the so-called Pressler amendment because he could no longer report that Islamabad did not possess nuclear weapons. Pakistan's nuclear program depends on highly-enriched uranium (HEU) produced by gas centrifuges in Kahuta. A shipment of ring magnets from China to Pakistan for use in the centrifuges prompted the Clinton administration to threaten sanctions against Beijing in 1996. Pakistan is believed to have halted HEU production in 1991 after producing about 200 kilograms—enough for 10 to 15 weapons.

## The World Reacts

While the condemnation elicited by India's and Pakistan's nuclear tests has been nearly universal, only a few countries have translated their concern into consequences. The strongest response so far has come from the United States, which has imposed a long list of sanctions. Canada, Denmark, Japan and Sweden have suspended millions of dollars of development aid, and Germany has suspended planned aid talks with New Delhi. Australia and New Zealand withdrew their ambassadors for consultations, while Britain, China, France and Russia have condemned the tests but have not imposed any sanctions.

In the United States, sanctions are mandated by the 1994 Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act, authored by Senator John Glenn (D-OH). Under the so-called Glenn amendment, the U.S. government must prohibit the export of all sensitive technology (dual-use and munitions list items); end all forms of military and foreign aid; cease the provision of credit or credit guarantees through federal entities such as the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the U.S. Export-Import Bank; and forbid lending to the Indian and Pakistani governments by U.S. commercial banks. Additionally, the law requires the administration to oppose the provision of credit to either country from international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Although the sanctions law provides several exceptions for humanitarian purposes, the administration estimates that U.S. sanctions alone will cost India and Pakistan billions of dollars in lost assistance and trade.

Although U.S. opposition alone would be insufficient to block lending from the international institutions, Washington's position will be supported by the other seven members of the Group of Eight (G 8) industrial powers (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and Russia). Assembling this consensus, however, took several weeks.

At a previously scheduled G-8 meeting May 16–17 in Birmingham, England, Washington was unable to persuade its allies to adopt any measure stronger than a joint statement condemning India's tests. Subsequently, following a June 4 meeting in Geneva of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (which are also the five nuclear-weapon states under the NPT) and a June 12 meeting in London of the G-8 foreign ministers, the Clinton administration has managed to persuade the other G-8 nations to agree to block assistance to India and Pakistan from international financial institutions with the exception of humanitarian aid projects.

In a joint communiqué from Geneva, the G-8 also agreed upon a list of steps they have urged India and Pakistan to take in order to mitigate the consequences of the tests, including their signature of the CTBT "immediately and unconditionally." India and Pakistan are among the 44 named countries whose ratification is necessary to bring the CTBT into force, although the treaty may be provisionally applied under certain conditions. Following India's first test, Brajesh Mishra, principal secretary to the prime minister, announced on May 11 that India "would be prepared to consider being an adherent to some of the undertakings" in the CTBT. So far, Pakistani statements have downplayed the value of the treaty but have not ruled out accession, depending on what action New Delhi takes. The G-8 also called on both countries to participate in negotiations at the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament (CD) of an internationally binding instrument banning the production of fissile

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materials for weapons purposes. ([See story.](#))

Finally, the G-8 called on both India and Pakistan to renew their bilateral dialogue, including the issue of Kashmir, and to take steps to ensure their nuclear competition does not spiral out of control. Both states were urged to refrain from further nuclear testing; producing more fissile materials for weapons purposes; testing ballistic missiles; and deploying nuclear weapons. While neither state is believed to have actually deployed nuclear forces, the fact that such weapons could reach their targets in a matter of minutes makes the danger of escalation especially acute.

Reviving bilateral relations, however, appears unlikely in the near term. On May 18, Indian Interior Minister Lal Krishna Advani, a hard-liner in the recently elected government led by the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), intimated that India's nuclear tests had strengthened New Delhi's position with regard to Kashmir and warned Islamabad to "roll back its anti-India policy." Advani's remarks were denounced by Sharif, who said Pakistan was prepared to respond to any Indian "misadventure." Relations between the two states remain very tense, as the two sides have continued to exchange artillery and small weapons fire in Kashmir.

### Vajpayee's Gambit

As part of his government's pre-test activities, Vajpayee prepared identical letters to the leaders of the G-8 justifying the nuclear tests. According to Vajpayee, the nuclear tests were prompted by a "deteriorating security environment." In particular, the prime minister pointed to India's unresolved border dispute with a nuclear-armed China, Beijing's transfer of nuclear technology to Pakistan, and Islamabad's continuing support for insurgent groups in Kashmir. Eight days prior to the first tests, India's defense minister, George Fernandes, also pointed to the threat to India from China, accusing Beijing of constructing a helicopter landing pad near the Indo-Chinese border, stationing intelligence assets on Burmese territory in the Bay of Bengal and moving nuclear-tipped missiles directed at India into Tibet. Beijing has described both Vajpayee's and Fernandes' threat accusations as groundless, and has asserted that New Delhi is using China as an excuse to develop nuclear weapons.

While a variety of explanations have emerged as to why India decided to challenge the international no-testing norm, some critics of U.S. South Asia policy have suggested that the rationale offered in Vajpayee's letter is correct; that is, much of the blame rests with President Clinton for not taking a harder line regarding Chinese proliferation practices. Other observers have claimed that India's motive was nationalistic; that the tests represent both a protest against the discriminatory nature of the NPT, and an assertion of India's status as an emerging power. A third explanation focuses on the nearly universal Indian domestic approval and the surge of nationalist sentiment that has strengthened the BJP's otherwise tenuous hold on power.

U.S. sanctions on both India and Pakistan are of indefinite duration, and can only be lifted by an act of Congress. Notably, the Glenn amendment contains no presidential waiver authority if sanctions are imposed on a country for testing a nuclear device. Without any substantial movement by New Delhi and Islamabad on the arms control and regional security issues listed by the G-8, sanctions are likely to remain a long-term component of U.S. policy toward South Asia.

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