

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Nuclearisation of the Asian Sub-Continent

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Abstract

Two Countries- richest in territory and human resources: India and People's Republic of China are at loggerheads because of their border issues. Second country with which India faces a lot many tensions is Pakistan, which is being supported by People's Republic of China. The fact that, all the three nations are equipped with nuclear weapons. Constant fear in the minds of the whole world w.r.t. Sino- India war or Indo- Pak war, which may further escalate into a nuclear war, giving options to nations to side on one side, ultimately giving way to widespread destruction and also absolute extinction of mankind. The author has tried to explore the theoretical underpinnings of the same.

Keywords: Asia; China; Destruction; India; Nuclear; Pakistan; Realism; Weapons

Introduction

South Asian region of the globe is often believed to be the most volatile places all over the world. The primary reason behind it is the equal contention of India & Pakistan over Kashmir, a dispute which has been the cause of tension ever since India was partitioned and Pakistan was born. Thereby, increasing the likelihood of a nuclear war in the region.

Adding to the reason is several low intensity and high intensity turfs between the two countries on a continuous basis.

Today close to seven decades, after the birth of usage of nuclear weapons, each individual in the world is living in constant fear and suspense. The major reason for it is the potential unbridled spread of nuclear weapons, which in itself is a complex matrix of various state and non- state actors. The risk is all the more increased by the threat that one or two countries might test their nuclear weapons every five years, a decade or so, thereby rendering no option to the international community and accommodating and integrating novel nuclear entrants into the existing order. The truth of the fact is that in realist worldview many international actors view nuclear weapons as useful, essential instruments to maintain peace and security in the Hobbesian world, where life is "poor, short, nasty and brutish."

There are three approaches to understand a theory:

- a) Through empirical theory scholars offer a simple explanation of an event or pattern of behaviour in the real world, by explaining such patterns and

elaborating on WHY- the reason why a particular incident took place, i.e. it explains law of behaviour. If we move ahead with this conception, theories are useful instruments. If we understand why and how and establish immediate linkages we may then be able to interfere and perhaps change the real structures or situations according to our preferences. Idealism and Reality are well linked by empirical propositions that exhibit relation of one fact to another.

- b) As opposed to Empirical theory, Normative theory as the name suggests deliberates on norms- the ethical standards. Precisely talking in our context talks of what is ethical or moral in International Relations.
- c) Theories are sometimes referred to in constitutive sense. This usage of term is best expressed by correlating other concepts like prescriptive world views; or framework of analysis. I shall move ahead with international theories- Realism to be precise in this context.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Various theories guiding the steps taken by state and non-state actors are varied. Describing some of them- these are not the only theories being debated by intelligentsia; rather they constitute the basis of the theories of International Relations.

- a) Realism roots in the belief that human nature desires power and more power. Stemming from this belief, states are continuously

engaged in the rat race to increase their capabilities. Moreover, absence of international equivalent of a state's government is an aiding factor to give human appetite free hand. In short, realism explains wars, political conquests and how aggressive statesman and domestic political systems give opportunity to various self-motivated greedy people to pursue self-serving expansionist foreign policies. It actually explains conflict ridden states and how humans behave in that particular setup.

- b) Liberalism believes human beings are not just subjects of moral discourse but are key agents of historical and political change. Immanuel Kant's qualified endorsement of the human character marked by self interest and a desire for self preservation yet also possessing the capacity for moral thought, reason and human sympathy avoids the extremes of either naivety or cynicism. Kant's conception is consistent with the traditional liberalism which emphasises on education, individual and collective responsibility for action and the pursuit of enlightened self-interest as the best hope for individual progress and also progress of the society collectively. Up to the 19th century, liberals concentrated primarily upon domestic political gains both achievements and their consolidation, but there was nevertheless an international dimension to the same. It was

concerned with international requirements of development of liberal politics at home and questions of legitimacy of intention to assist liberal movements abroad. The period was characterized by huge uncritical faith in positive benefits of free trade, self-determination and peaceful settlement of disputes. The notion that a market based realm of unhindered trans- societal relations would be beneficial, for civilization was implicit in Richard Cobden (1804- 1865) famous dictum ‘as li’l intercourse as possible between governments, as much connection as possible between the nations of the world.’

- c) Capitalism supports a clear cut divorce among economy and politics of a society (the de-politicisation and privatization of the economy which makes possible capitalist property and wage labour. Therefore, state in a capitalist mode relies upon the economic activities of entrepreneurs who are majorly resource generators, which can be taxed in order to create enough growth, development and prosperity within the territory to minimally legitimize the government and social order on the whole. For the same reason, the state has an inherent interest. But then in such a scenario, competitors based in other states which may be political rivals may give rise to imperialism which supports the deployment of military powers. This in turn has integrated new areas along

with destruction of non- capitalist ideas which focus on dominance of private property and capitalist mindset to key resources.

- d) Constructivism is another theory which has developed well to study the global politics. It emphasizes on interest, identities and tendency to change even the immutable practices and political institutions of world politics.
- e) Critical theory while challenging the neo-realist claim that chaotic condition in a state, force them to behave in a particular manner characterized by distrust, competition & conflicts. Frankfurt school emphasizes that political analysis should be ruled by the desire ‘to lend a voice to suffering’ and ‘to abolish existing misery.’ Recent researches in sociological thinking have tried to recover physical effects for social enquiry, highlighting the higher degree of susceptibility of individuals to pain and suffering and these deterministic features of social existence, provides a solid foundation for the idea of human rights which are universal in nature. It is very important to understand how the entire human race organizes itself to in turn organize its affairs, in order to release persons & communities from those constraints which are not required for reproduction of society and rather are grounded in gross asymmetries of power, sectional interest, disrespect to people or group of people in the face of fear, distrust and insecurity closely associated with conflicts. The basic idea is to

- understand how the Homo Sapiens can learn to coexist peacefully.
- f) The English school theorizing is based on a triad consisting of three pillars i.e. international system, international society and world society- as analytical devices to enable us to analyze the global polity at any particular juncture, where Realist school of thought, rationalism, revolutionism are sets of ideas which explain how the world is and how best to give it a shape. According to Bull, an international system is formed whenever states are in regular contact with one another and where 'there is interaction between them, sufficient to make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculation of other.' (Bull 1977:10)
- g) Feminist activities and scholars have over a period of time avoided referring to a single homogenous feminism because of the fact that women advocates across the globe have worked to build alliances across the varied political constructions of class, caste, race, generation, nationality, ethnicity, religion and the most important of it sexuality. The feminist political observers are united while saying that there exists liberal feminism)with its focus on individual rights and equality for men & women) Socialist feminism (focusing on gendering of economic class, result of local and international practices of capitalism) Radical Feminism (singles out causes and

consequences of patriarchal society and misogyny) Post Structural Feminism (which prioritises the gradual hierarchy based on gendered racialisation, which helped colonialism to sustain itself and continue to persist even today, despite the fact that former colonial rule has been officially dismantled.) These variations and different explanatory inclinations pave way for ongoing researches and debates among scholars. This is the reason, Feminist International Relations, is made lively by continuous discussions, dependent disagreements & deliberations and pursuit of new conclusions.

- h) Post colonial theory is the latest entrant to the club of theories of International Relations. It is a heterogeneous entity, comprising of critical perspectives which question dominant interpretations and focuses primarily on the powerless and weaker sections of society. According to many scholars, it is unlikely to command the same influence and status on streams which identify themselves with the interests and actions of core states. The amount of attention to culture, identity and complex patterns of power and resistance does not fit well with a discipline which has been since decades been dominated by a preoccupation with mighty states in the backdrop of military and economic might.

In order to trace the nuclear ambitions of India- Pakistan- China attention needs to be diverted to Realism and its variants.

Strategies and actions of state are believed to be decided rationally after an in-depth analysis of cost & benefit of all kinds of possible courses of action. Classical Realism was under high scrutiny in 1960s. Scholars who could not associate themselves with Morgenthau and other classical realists on various grounds, analysed their writings in order to highlight various inconsistencies and contradictions. Adding to these resentment, advocates of behavioural and quantitative methodologies attacked the paradigm with questions referring to relevance of traditional approach to enquiry.

A breath of fresh air was infused with the publication of Theory of International Politics by Kenneth Waltz, which took over Morgenthau's Politics among Nations, which was until now a torch bearer for research scholars. Waltz argues that system comprises of a structure and their interacting sub-units. Political structure have three elements:

- a) An ordering principle (anarchic or hierarchical)
- b) the character of the units (functionally alike or differentiated)
- c) distribution of capabilities (Waltz 1979: 88-99)

Waltz argues that the two elements of the structure of the international system are constants: the lack of an overarching authority means that its ordering principle is anarchy and the principle of self- help means that all units remain functionally alike. Therefore, structurally the distribution of capabilities is varied, where the main distinction falls between multi-polar and bi-polar systems.

There are four strands of Realism today in the political context. They are Rise & Fall Realism, Neo- classical Realism,

Defensive Structural Realism and Offensive Structural Realism. Each of the strands are of the view that International Relations are characterised by an interdependent, endless cycle of inescapable succession of wars and conquest. They simply differ in the sources of state preferences- the constant human desire to have more and more power and the need to be more and more secure in this overdeveloped surrounding of self-help- taking into cognizance the fact that these preferences translate into behaviour.

- a) Rise & Fall Realism accords the determination of rules and practices of the international scenario by the wishes of the so-called developed world comprising of the most powerful nations. A huge amount of benefit accrues to the leader, other following nations then cling to one of the poles. It actually traces the trajectory of how nations constantly rise and fall from their respective positions, which ultimately affects the foreign policies.
- b) Neo- Classical Realism believes that the actions of the state depends on the domestic factors and preferences. As Rasler and Thompson (2001:47) note, neoclassical realists stress a wider range of revisionist motives than classical realism's earlier reliance on human nature: 'things happen in world politics because some actors- thanks to domestic structure and institutions, ideology and ambitions- practice disruptive and predatory strategies'. One prominent version of neo-classical realism is Schweller's

(1993, 1994, 1996, 1998) 'balance of interests' theory, which develops a typology based on whether states are primarily motivated by, and the extent of, their fear and greed. Therefore, in the best interest of state foreign policies are crafted in combination of power and interests.

- c) Defensive Structural Realism propounds that states seek safety & security in a chaotic international system marked by anarchy. The basic threat of their well-being comes from other states (Glasser 2003; Waltz 2002). Perhaps the best known variant of defensive structural Realism is Waltz's (1987, 1988, 1991, 1992a,b, 1996, 2000) 'balance of threat' theory. According to Waltz (1987) 'in anarchy, states form alliances to protect themselves. Their conduct is determined by the threats they perceive and the power of others is merely one element in their calculations.' Waltz (2000:2001) suggests that states estimate threats posed by other states by their relative power, proximity, intentions and the offense- defense balance.
- d) Offensive Structural Realism: Mearsheimer's (2001) the Tragedy of Great Power Politics, argues that state face an uncertain international environment in which any state might use its power to harm another. Under such circumstances, relative capabilities are of overriding importance, and security requires acquiring as much power

compared to other states as possible (Labs 1997).

Nuclearisation and the Mankind

Nemesis, the goddess of fate, in Greek mythology in order to punish a man, used to fulfill his wishes too completely. And today's nuclear era is experiencing the wrath of this penalty. Since times immemorial, humanity has suffered from lack or shortage of power and concentrated on developing alternative sources and their special application. This continues to be the challenge of the nuclear age too. The end of World War II intended to bring peace, but not in the face, as we have it today, rather it was an easy armistice our response has been increasingly technological, by devising all the more fearful and sophisticated weapons. The power of weapons is directly proportional to the reluctance of its usage. At a period of unparalleled military strength, President Dwight D. Eisenhower summed up the dilemma posed by the new weapons technology in the phase "there is no alternative to peace."¹

Today's times when the mankind has witnessed two World Wars and an easy armistice, the central objective of the world should be attainment of peace. It is acutely paradoxical to concentrate so much on one's destructive capabilities. It has been understood that the ever-increasing number of thermonuclear stockpiles is resulting into a stalemate which makes war, not just risky but also least unprofitable.

The two impulses- to change the political orientation of the world and to regulate arms, ammunitions and related

¹ Nuclear Weapons & Foreign Policy, Henry A /Kissinger, Westview Press, Colarado, 1957

technologies- came immediately after the nightmarish experiences of dropping of atomic bombs at two cities of Japan-Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. it was realized that the atomic bombs could result to greater catastrophe. Let it loose within the anarchic state system and humankind might find itself embarked on a journey ‘from the depth of night to deepest night’ to borrow a phrase from a novel of the time.² Over History, societies and nations have survived and recovered from devastating wars, they glorified it too. But this war, was different. It was soon concluded everyone & everything shall be destroyed if fought with nuclear weapons.

This revolutionary technology which was immensely destructive in nature became a subject of intense study and research. Soon after, some advocated world government³ was the need of the hour. It also influenced the establishment of World Federalist Movement, in 1947. All wars shall be relegated to the past, if fear, distrust, suspicion among states and their mad rush to acquire more and more weapons could be ended. Other more pragmatic voices called for the submission of nuclear technology to an encompassing international control, removing it from warfare without tinkering with the states system’s basic design.⁴ The civil use of nuclear technology was encouraged under a strong global governance setup, but finally wanted to eliminate its military appropriation. Many others still called

for development of nuclear weapons as instrument of deterrence and power protection, taking into account their unmatched capacity to influence their enemies.

The fear of unprecedented aftermath provoked opposite response. On one hand suggestions like sharpening the sword to maintain balance and strengthen nuclear deterrence and the non- nuclear weapon states to hedge against proliferation in all the countries under the garb of civil development, which would allow them to switch on to their weapon programmes as and when need arises. The other response suggested absolute nuclear disarmament. Absolute disarmament is claimed to be the only fruitful option available to states. In an Article of January 2007 in the Wall Street Journal, four eminent retired US statesmen suggested governments to promote worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons to be one of the serious objectives, a call also made by President Obama in his speech in April 2009 in Prague.

While discussing international scenario and its gradual evolution, it is worthwhile to focus on issues of order which haunt the problem. The evolution of international order can thus be regarded as a result of structured response to the interaction levels and consistencies both intrinsic and extrinsic. Such issues are seldom smoothly carried out and the disorder is often characterized HOW, WHEN to address the problem, that lends it a special character.

First problem is because of dual character of nuclear weapons, i.e., it is simultaneously a blessing and also a curse in disguise. These types of weapons can be used to both protect and kill. This dualism of nuclear weapons is

² Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus, 1947, translated by John E Woods (New York: Alfred a Knopf, 1997 pg5)

³ Emery Reves ‘the anatomy of Peace’ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945)

⁴ This was proposed by the Acheson-Lilienthal Report of April 1946

many times multiplied by their destructive power and the effects of radiations they emit: which shall result in large scale deaths and injury on massive scale spread over a long duration, which cannot be afforded. An appropriate analysis of the destructive nature also comes as a blessing in disguise through the capacity to discourage people, states and their respective leaders, from an understood fact of avoidance of wars. Furthermore, it is an achievement for some countries and the nations that do not own such weaponry are likely to be predominated and overshadowed by its negative consequences.

All this leaves us to ceaseless debates and discussions about nuclear weapons and related policies with unprecedented moral agony and practical doubts. "We are morally perplexed about nuclear weapons"⁵ This strengthens the hold the nuclear weapons cannot be legitimized and can be possessed by states conditionally and temporarily. This is already a concession on the fraternity which absolutely grants illegitimacy to nuclear weapons.

The second problem is directly linked to the first problem of order. There are obvious questions if nuclear weapons are granted legitimacy and items of utility as symbols of display of power and prestige, but at the same time nuclear weapons proliferation spread fear, instability and suspicion and simultaneous likelihood of future catastrophe. Why should some nations be allowed to acquire and deploy the weapons and establish nuclear deterrence, which have already been

⁵ This sentence open Leslie Stevenson's 'Is Nuclear Deterrence ethical?'; Philosophy, 61, 1986, pg 193

denounced by them, or denied to them? Why should these nations be considered more trustworthy than others? How can the world differentiate between the haves and have-nots on justified grounds? How can their right to possess and achieve legitimacy not perceived simply to imbalance the power and privilege? How will the haves compensate the have-nots for their sacrifice and their vulnerability. The Nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty also does not provide justifiable reasons for the same.

The third problem of nuclear disorder derives from the features of Ballistic Missiles in the age of nuclear warfare. So much is being talked and discussed about compression of time, distance and space, status of sovereignty eclipsed by the nuclear armed Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles; the diminishing relevance of geographical boundaries and protections in warfare, the challenges to decisions, stemming from difference of microseconds in action and reaction, the anxiety, the calculations w.r.t. surprise attacks or first strikes and the intrinsically dangerous reliance over hi-tech machines to control other hi- tech machines. The problem of trust, accountability and control became most acute in relations between opposing nuclear armed states, which can become locked into a tight ever watchful embrace as they try to manage their deterrent relations and avoid either side gaining a decisive advantage.⁶

The Fourth problem of nuclear order refers to the nature of technology and

⁶ On the issue of trust in International Nuclear Relations, see Jan Ruzicka & Nicholas J Wheeler, 'The Puzzle of trusting relationships in the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty,' International Affairs, 84:1, Jan 2010, pg 69- 86

options it provides in order to exercise domination on weapons proliferation. It was initially realized that an international regulatory system would not be able to focus on constraining technical know-how of war head designs, because this system would actually result in revealing knowledge. This would again result in debacles like North-South dispute, polluting the political atmosphere and degrade appropriate responses.

The Fifth problem involves When- How- Why- What to respond to in case of non-compliance of nation-states with international norms and laws. It is unclear how to convince leaders of decision making group to abandon nuclear weapons programme at whichever stage they exist. The United Nations Security Council is divided on means and methods of coercive intervention.

The international nuclear order is shaped by interaction among three great social systems which actually dominate social life in contemporary issues. They are: the states system, the industrial system and the science system.

The nuclear technology is a result of the science system. It has been absorbed in the industrial system, in the process of developing own system of organisation and activity both w.r.t. supply of weaponry or usage in civil sector. Ultimately a creature of state system.

The chief defining feature of international politics since the end of Second World War has been the beginning of nuclear age. Ever since, the usage of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a sword in the form of nuclear war hangs over the head of humankind. Human beings are now capable of destroying life on the planet, absolutely extinguishing not just human species but

a lot many living creatures, inhabiting this world. Therefore, this era is unique. The nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to humankind.

Conclusion

In the South Asian Subcontinent People's Republic of China tested its nuclear weapons in 1964 and tested its first hydrogen bomb in 1967. India tested its first nuclear device in 1974, and termed it as Peaceful Nuclear Explosion, but the tests of May 1998, made India a de-facto Nuclear Weapon State. India accorded the reason for its going nuclear full-fledged to China as one of the threats to India security, as they both have been involved in constant skirmishes along the border. Third state in the region, Pakistan also tested its nuclear weapons in May 1998, with the help of supplies from both United States and People's Republic of China. A strategic move on both their parts, in order to contain emergence of India as a superpower.

To include China, in the discussions of South Asian region is essential as India & China are the sole superpowers in the Asian region to command attention of the so-called developed nations. President Hu- Jintao when shook his hands with Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2007 had very confidently stated: "The handshake between the two of us, will attract attention of the world." Coming back to the discussion South Asian Security environment with special reference to China, following reasons are being cited as fundamental issues:

- 1) Boundary tensions are the underlying cause of inter-state suspicions in South Asia. People's Republic

of China shares boundaries with four South Asian Countries out of seven, therefore is integral to the region.

- 2) The Ethnic Chinese community is virtually non-existent in South Asia. The ones present are far less active in local economic and political systems and are barely organized to influence policy making.
- 3) China's South Asia policy has been guided purely by an aim to ensure territorial integrity and Sovereignty as a nation.
- 4) Sino- Pak nexus is a unique example of inter-state relations. The uniqueness is granted by the fact that one Nuclear Weapon State has been primarily responsible for promoting all types of assistance to a non-nuclear weapon state.
- 5) Despite the lack of luster to China's ideological & military policies, its alliance with smaller countries of South Asia, by exploiting their common fear about India and provision of military equipment to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh & Myanmar raises serious questions on the intention.

The situation among India & Pakistan is worrisome for the entire continent, as both the countries are forever involved

in their disputes, major ones being that of Kashmir. Even a glance through the security environment of South Asia reveals mutual suspicion, mistrust in the bilateral relations among the nations, which retards the process of regional cooperation and integration. However concerted efforts in this direction are the need of the hour through meetings, debates, discussions, deliberations among scholars, academicians, analysts, policy makers, to create an environment of cooperation and confidence to show unity and integrity of the regional area.

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