



Nuclear CBMs: What Is Possible?

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Technical level talks to discuss nuclear CBMs, suggested by Pakistan in April 2004 and scheduled for 25-26 May, have been postponed to 19-20 June, since the UPA government in New Delhi had to settle down and think through these issues. What could be the agenda?

An agenda for the upcoming talks is available, in the MOU signed by India and Pakistan in February 1999 along with the Lahore Declaration. It envisages their:-

Engaging in bilateral consultations on security concepts and nuclear doctrines to develop confidence building measures in the nuclear and conventional fields;

- Providing each other advance notification of ballistic missile tests and concluding a bilateral agreement for the same;
- Undertaking national measures to reduce the risks of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons, notifying each other of any accident, and establishing a communications mechanism for this purpose;
- Continuing their unilateral moratorium on conducting further nuclear tests;
- Reviewing the implementation of the existing Confidence-Building Measures; and
- Reviewing the existing communication links to upgrade and improve them.

The Kargil conflict intervened, followed by three years of a roller coaster in Indo-Pak relations. None of these nuclear CBM proposals were pursued, although they could have evolved a regime to reassure themselves and the world against a nuclear mishap occurring in the region.

Neither the Indian nor the Pakistani leadership seem truly aware of the great risks in a nuclear confrontation. This may seem odd; but how can one explain the regularity with which nuclear threats are issued and provocative actions taken during bilateral crises. Examples can be multiplied, but three would suffice.

- First, at the height of the Kargil conflict Pakistan's Foreign Secretary warned India that Islamabad could use "any weapon" to defend his country's territorial integrity.
- Second, we have an account by Bruce Reidel, an aide to President Clinton, informing us that U.S. intelligence had uncovered "disturbing evidence that the Pakistanis were preparing their nuclear arsenals for possible deployment" during the Kargil conflict. President Clinton enquired about this from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during their meeting, who "only said that India was probably doing the same."
- Third, a series of missile tests were undertaken by India and Pakistan during their border confrontation over 2001-02 to warn each other at different tense junctures during this crisis, despite the certain knowledge that these provocative actions would raise the temperature and escalate the situation. Nuclear threats were also routinely hurled against each other.

This recital of the dangers that have arisen in a nuclear South Asia leads to the conclusion that an engagement on nuclear CBMs between India and Pakistan is imperative and long overdue. What should be the agenda for these negotiations?

The first priority should be given to consultations on

enlarging mutual understandings on “security concepts and nuclear doctrines”, which will provide the framework to discuss other confidence-building measures. It has not yet been clarified by the UPA government whether it endorses the nuclear doctrine promulgated by its predecessor NDA regime. This is presumably obtaining since the present National Security Adviser was a member of the National Security Advisory Board which finalized the nuclear doctrine. Proceeding on this assumption it requires noting that the Indian Nuclear Doctrine rests on two cardinal principles - no-first-use and credible minimum deterrence which are wholly unacceptable to Pakistan.

- India must recognize that Pakistan feels unable to accept the no-first-use declaration because it premises its defence on using or threatening the use of nuclear weapons against India which is a stronger conventionally armed adversary. India’s initial commitment to its no-first use declaration has considerably eroded over the years; it will not be restrained now in using its nuclear forces to retaliate against a nuclear attack, but could also retaliate with nuclear weapons against a major attack on India or its armed forces anywhere with biological and chemical weapons.

Greater appreciation must accrue that conventional CBMs must be simultaneously proceeded with alongside nuclear CBMs which requires a fuller understanding of the seamless web that is constituted between conventional and nuclear conflict

- Similarly, India’s earlier commitment to maintaining a credible minimum nuclear deterrent requires numbers and types of nuclear weapons to be specified before they could be included in any serious

discussions. Vague references by the NDA government to the need for sufficiency, include China within its strategic calculus, and establish a Triad of nuclear forces only added to obtaining confusions on India’s position on its nuclear force structuring. But, creeping

along to test missiles of increasing ranges, develop cruise missiles and acquire or manufacture a nuclear submarine has not assured anyone, including Pakistan, that India’s nuclear forces would remain “minimum”. The UPA has compounded this problem by referring to a credible deterrent, which implies, in practice, that the size and shape of India’s nuclear deterrent would be a moving target.

How can this circle be squared and a context provided for other CBMs to be negotiated? The very first item therefore on the agenda for the talks on nuclear CBMs should be discussions on enlarging mutual understanding of each other’s “security concepts and nuclear doctrines.” This is especially important for India since Pakistan has not found it expedient to publish its nuclear doctrine, although its broad contours can be surmised from Pakistani statements and semi-official writings over the last few years. Technical level talks would be required to deal with other issues mentioned in the MOU attached to the Lahore Declaration, especially on devising a mechanism to notify nuclear accidents or instances of unauthorized use, and reviewing the implementation of existing Confidence-Building Measures. The need to proceed with further follow-up on these measures could easily be accepted by India.

A problem could arise, regarding pre-notification of missile tests, since India does not include cruise missiles within this agreement, which Pakistan believes is hair-splitting. India could concede this request. More careful thought has to be given to the suggestion for establishing several more communication measures between the two countries - links between the two Air Forces and their nuclear establishments. It can be argued that multiple links between sectional interests adds to confidence and stability. In practice, this would only add to confusions. Contrary messages being passed could have disastrous consequences. It is therefore urged that only a single communication channel should remain between the Director Generals of Military Operations, although its availability could be further improved by ensuring multi-redundancy arrangements.

Three further measures unrelated to the Lahore MOU can also be taken up for consideration. First,

extending the agreement signed in 1988 between the two countries not to attack each other's nuclear facilities and installations to include population centres and major economic assets. Pakistan has been resisting this proposal made by India on strategic considerations, but it could do a rethink in the interests of sustaining the current Indo-Pak peace process. Secondly, India could offer to unilaterally withdraw its short range missiles from border areas, which makes little strategic or tactical sense. This deployment is inherently destabilizing since these missiles could be armed with either conventional or nuclear warheads leading to anxieties; in the latter case, they are also in danger of being captured or lost during conflict that would spark a major crisis. Finally, greater appreciation must accrue that conventional CBMs must be simultaneously proceeded with alongside nuclear CBMs which requires a fuller understanding of the seamless web that is constituted between conventional and nuclear conflict.

A full agenda lies ahead for the two delegations in the upcoming talks on nuclear CBMs, but it would be naïve to expect dramatic progress to occur in these talks. What is necessary is for a realistic agenda to be formulated, but the two countries should not be discouraged by early difficulties and reverses, and continue with the negotiations in a sustained manner. Nuclear CBMs present very complex problems that cannot be resolved in a few days, as the global history of arms control negotiations must inform us.



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