

NUCLEAR WASTE- WHEN THE PURSUIT OF SECURITY TRAMPS PROSPERITY

(M.V. Ramana, C.Rammanohar Reddy (eds.), *Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream*, Orient Longman Private Limited, Hyderabad, India, 2003, ISBN: 81-250-2477-8, 507 pages)

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As our globalized present is determined, both in the media and in the academic literature by the US-Western led timetable, contemporary historical narrative is fragmented between an ante 9/11 part and a post 9/11 era with consequences still unfolding. In doing so, we tend to forget that other regions of the world may have different timetables with logics and developments of their own, without being just footnotes of the CNN&BBC construction of attention. Indian-Pakistani border, probably the most potentially explosive in the world has been consumed by years of low level skirmishes punctuated here and there by high voltage moments. The most climactic of them in the post Cold War period was bracketed between May 1998 nuclear tests and the December 2001 attack against the Indian parliament by members of terrorist group Laksar e Taiba (LeT). During this interval and some time after both nations covered their disputed border with roughly half of million soldiers. A worrisome reminder of what meant the Cuban missile crisis or the Sino-Soviet border embroilment in late '60. Around the time of our writing coincides with several worth-mentioning anniversaries: sixty years since president Dwight Eisenhower put into operation <Atoms for Peace>initiative; twenty five years to date the Indo-Soviet agreement to provide two 1100 MW VVER reactors Kundankulam, Tamil Nadu; fifteen years distance from the above mentioned dual tests in 1998; five years since the completion of US-Indo Civil Nuclear Agreement and last but not least since Mumbai 26/11, South Asia's echo of September 11 or London 07/07/2005.

Prisoners of the nuclear dream tells the story of India's pursuit of nuclear weapons and its motives that climaxed in the May 13, 1998 test. That event which in itself cooled the relations with China, embittered even further those with Pakistan and shocked America into re-evaluating New Delhi's place in the nuclear club. For many of Indian brass, political figures and pundits, nuclear test- presented in an aura of mythical accomplishment- proved India against its original arch enemy from Islamabad and stood as an act of revenge against the ignorance of the great powers accused of denying Delhi its rightful place at the table.

The book edited by M.V.Ramana and C.R.Reddy wants to be a dissonant note out of the chorus of the pro N-bomb Indian euphoria and to argue against the folly and the risks brought forth by any potential escalation of nuclear weaponisation. Its aim

is to emphasise diplomacy as the only long term solution to the Indo-Pakistani enduring hostility.

Two are the topics unfolding in the argumentation. One concerns issues specific to international relations: security dilemma and balance of power. The other dwells upon guns versus butter question.

Indian quest for nuclear energy dates back to the early Independence if not before that. For the political establishment and especially for Nehru, possessing civilian (most of all) nuclear capabilities and technology would have provided India with respectability. For the scientific establishment, headed by Homi Bhaba, a brilliant physician Western educated, it was all about matching the scientific prowess of the West.

The public memory, influenced and influencing in return the historians, constructed Nehru's political vision as a Gandhian praxis, turning India's first head of state into a Woodrow Wilson type figure.¹ It is true that Nehru had envisaged a Moralpolitik that would have turn the newly independent states into some kind of international syndicate, opposed to the US-USSR rivalry. But Nehru himself was not a naive and knew that soft power is powerless without the backing of material factors. In that respect he authorised and supported the efforts of the Indian scientists, expanding and solidifying his friendship with Bhaba into a well contected, routinized state-science relationship. And that perhaps to an even greater extension than in USA or postwar Great Britain. In USA, to focus only on that case, Vannevar Bush, Bhaba's mirror wanted to maintain the resources generating link with the US Congress and the military industrial complex- formula which handed victory into the Allied hands. Also Bush also aimed at establishing postwar scientific establishment as a Vth power in state, benefiting from federal funds but with some degree of autonomy. His 1950 established NSF (National Scientific Foundation) rewarded (even if only partially) his long time effort during the 40s. In India, just a few worlds apart, H.Bhaba along with two other colleagues: K.S.Krishnan and S.S. Bhatnagar submitted their newly born Scientific Advisory Committee to the Indian DoD. Their institutional work would be filled by the thousands of future PhDs that would study in America during the '50s in order to serve their country. [It is estimated that between 1955-1974, around 1100 Indian students earned their credential across the ocean; p.16]

If the multiple temptations and azimuths of Indian diplomacy were kept in balance during Nehru's time, once his daughter Indira came to power a more martial and rough approach would come into practice. India's refusal to sign the 1968 NPT and the 1974 semi-secret nuclear test cast New Delhi once again outside the international norms. If the Non-Alignment signified a loose Commonwealth of the poor and oppressed, the pursuit of the N-bomb had more realistic and self-interest rationale. Indira Ghandi's personal dislike of Richard Nixon only added to the misunderstanding of two cultures, fraction already deepened by US preference

¹ The enduring legacy of British dominion dide lude Jawaharlal Nehru keen notice who even labeled himself the "Last Viceroy on Indian throne" (Taroor, 2008, 208-212, 228).

for Pakistan, India's twin rival. (In an ironic fashion, Indira's hard politics and stubbornness towards the bomb was recycled to a new level by the Hindu nationalist- the BJP which emerged in the post 1991 politics, stemming from a previous radical, fascist like formation: RSS.)

Two years after the 1996 protest at the UN Assembly against the CTBT India, through its political establishment led by the BJP Prime Minister, Atal Biharee Vajpae wanted to prove in front of the international community its status as great power. After India's testing the Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif was pressure by the military and political public figures (included Benazir Bhutto) rapped in the street inflated nationalism to conduct tests with the Pakistani made Ghauri missile. But not all the generals and politicians praised the test and criticised it as a folly: Ghinna Bhutto, Air Marshall Asghar Khan, Sardar Farooq Khan Legari. (Mian Koothari 2001, 31)

In front of the international community and especially to the United States, Vajpae hinted towards China as the archmenace and the agent of regional instability. In this respect, Kanti Bajpai anatomises the Indian political nuclear psychology trying to decipher the inner clock of the May 13, 1998 test. According to him, India is to blame for spiraling its enmity with Pakistan and fostering a paranoia that became its own cage. Moreso, Bajpai highlights that during early '80s Pakistan offered several times to negotiate a peace treaty with India and to convince it renounce the nuclear option but Delhi refused, fraught with mistrust [p.30-31]. Again, China can no longer be evoked as a threat- the main proof is the bilateral economic boom that flourished between the two countries during the '90s. At the very moment of 1998 tests a Chinese military delegation was present in India [pp.36-42].

The other argumentative pillar of the book bothers itself with the main costs of maintaining the nuclear as part of the guns vs butter canvas.

According to Admiral L.Ramdas, India's fixation with nuclear capabilities diverts important finance from the developmental priorities. Writing in the late '90s early 2000s, Ramdas approximates India defence budget at 586 bld. Rs to which one must add other 15 bld. Rs for keeping safe the nuclear command and control. With those 15 bld, continues Ramdas the government could pay for the potable water and health clinics for 100.000 villages, the primary education for an extra 15% school children, and the education of the adults from 100.000 villages. Ramdas' conclusion which soaks his entire argumentation blames India's grand strategy for being incoherent and unable to identify a clear enemy against whom should allocate resources [pp.54-58]

Jean Dreze, world renowned development economist goes deeper on the avenue taken previously by Radas and speaks about the tension between guns and butter. He points the degree of bewitchment displayed by mainstream media when it comes to militaristic issues as the table bellow shows us [p.279]:

Defence versus Development: Front-Page Coverage in "The Hindu":

Year/Category	1996	1997	1998	1999
Number of front page articles posted on "The Hindu" website	508	556	543	189
Number of defence-related articles	77	81	115	189
Number of development-related articles	82	82	48	53

Prisoners of the nuclear dream> remains a glimpse of that debate. Around the time of our writing, Kudankulam double nuclear reactors became fully operational amidst month of mass rallies (BBC, 22 October 2013). September 2013 witnessed Indian armed forces testing a nuclear-capable Agni V rocket followed by a similar exercise with Prithvi II early October (Dash, 16 September 2013; The Times of India, 7 October 2013). Thus one may see how the full spectrum of nuclear technology is engaged, both for civilian as well as for military purpose. However, apart from all the above, Nawaz Shariff's electoral victory in May 2013 bears the promise of a new start. Shariff's third tenure as Prime minister begun basking in rhetorical optimism, as he seems eager to indulge in confidence building measure with his country's perennial archenemy. Calling for a "*serious, sustained and constructive engagement*" Shariff states further that "*I have always given high priority to good relations with India for the sake of durable peace in the region. We are keen to have a comprehensive dialogue with India for the resolution of all issues including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir*" (Nelson, 18 September 2013; Wheeler, Farroq, 23 February 2014). Is he sincere or is actually wrapping hidden goals in beautiful words just when Pakistani nuclear arsenal amounts to surpass Britain's by 2020 should it continue to grow at current pace? (SIPRI, 2013)

The future of South Asia's entanglement with atomic paraphernalia remains to be unfolded and will probably have some surprises to share in the future. Though it remains to be seen if this nuclear development will be a dream towards prosperity or it will be used to advance aggressiveness with little regard to the needs of so many.

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