

The final section deals with policy implications for Canada and the international community. There it will be suggested, in a preliminary fashion, that a 'second generation' response be considered, designed to foster complex interdependence within South Asia, through a complex effort to engage the nuclear states.¹

THE BLASTS OF SPRING: How to Think About the Unthinkable

After a half a year to reflect, there is still little consensus on the implications of South Asia becoming officially nuclear. Among academics and close observers, there seem to be two polar positions. Essentially the divergence is between the *qualitative* and *incremental* perspectives. There are those who see the tests as a watershed, a crossing from one era to another. From this view, moving from nuclear-capable, to open possession of nuclear capacity, is a qualitative change in the subcontinent and in the wider global context. There is something inherently different about nuclear weapons of mass destruction; the tests are a step with inevitable consequences. The other view is that there is little material difference between being nuclear-capable and openly-nuclear. The strategic thinking remains the same, the military planning and the overall balance are not disturbed. The incremental step may have consequences for other states, but for the subcontinent it is just another stage in a long and predictable strategic relationship. The balance is not changed, and if it is, then it is in the direction of stability. Avowedly nuclear states act more cautiously. Carried to the logical conclusion, this perspective becomes an argument that if there is a new era, it is one of balance of terror. The tests of Spring become the harbinger of more stable relations. They

¹ The author is a political scientist and Asian Studies specialist at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. This paper represents a 'snapshot' of how events appear six months after the South Asia nuclear tests, and draws on publically available sources. It was first presented in spoken format at the CANCAPS Annual Conference held at Dunsmuir Lodge, Victoria, December 4-6, 1998.