

have witnessed decisions in both capitals to pare down their nuclear forces. And both states now exhibit greater transparency on nuclear matters. Barring a major war involving at least one of the nuclear superpowers, British and French nuclear systems would not likely be used to support what in both cases amount to relatively limited interests abroad.

Threats closer to home are more plausible. Yet they are also problematic. And it is not clear that a nuclear deterrent offers the most effective means for addressing them. In the case of China, war with India in 1962, past skirmishes along the Sino-Indian border, and tensions over Tibet all work to insure its status as a long-standing source of concern. More recently, Beijing's nuclear cooperation with Pakistan has only served to intensify New Delhi's worries.⁸

Still, near-term dangers are difficult to identify. No major conflict has occurred between the parties in over a decade, and recent years have seen a slow but steady demilitarization of shared borders under existing Sino-Indian agreements. Current sources of dispute remain well below a level which would warrant armed conflict. And inhospitable terrain along with a well-trained Indian army insures that successful conduct of a large-scale conventional assault could not be guaranteed.

Beijing's present nuclear policy appears similarly benign. China retains a doctrine premised on no-first-use, and while its nuclear systems can reach India, US intelligence estimates indicate that deployment patterns emphasize coverage of targets in Russia and the United States.⁹ Retirement of the DF-3A – the most appropriate missile for use against Indian targets, and the PLA's rejection of a replacement in the mid-1980s (i.e. the DF-25) are reassuring. Furthermore, while speculation about the existence of a Chinese missile base in Tibet continues – more reliable US sources conclude that such claims are unfounded.¹⁰

The case of Pakistan is more worrisome. Three wars between the two parties since independence, long-standing and continuing skirmishes over Kashmir, a number of intense crises – some of which occurred against a backdrop of mutual suspicion concerning the possession of nuclear capabilities, and Islamabad's recent move toward a more "overt" nuclear posture all attest to the likelihood and potential seriousness of any future conflict. Beyond this, Sino-Pakistan cooperation fuels concerns in some quarters over the future prospect of a two-front war.

⁸ Viewed in this context, comments by former Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes justifying last year's nuclear tests primarily on the ground of a "China threat" are not entirely surprising.

⁹ See Arnett, "Facts and Fiction: Current Nuclear Weapon Capabilities in South Asia", <http://www.sipri.se/projects/technology/Facts.html>. While recent de-targeting arrangements between the U.S. and China signal some shift in their strategic relationship, this should not obscure the fact that a portion of China's nuclear capability remains reserved for use against the U.S.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*