

Uses of nuclear ambiguity

first and second step of the proliferation ladder during the late 1940s-1960s, although during this period its public posture and nuclear policy appeared to be one of latency. It repeatedly said that it would not be the first to introduce nuclear arms into the Middle East. There has been a controversy between US and Israeli officials about the meaning of "introduce." To Israelis this meant that Israel would not test or advertise nuclear arms; to Americans it meant that no production would occur. Israel seems to have moved to a bomb-in-the-basement position during the initial phase of the Middle East crisis in 1973. There appeared to be the prospect of moving towards an open advocacy of nuclear arms, but when conventional armament did the job of securing Israel's existence, it retained its bomb-in-the-basement position. Here, as in the case of India, there is a movement forward and then a movement backward. The difference, however, is that Israel acted in a crisis situation in moving towards the bomb whereas India's movement forward was in post-crisis circumstances:

Value of ambiguity

The finding is that so far there are overwhelming incentives favoring nuclear ambiguity rather than nuclear armament. So far it has been unnecessary for the near-nuclear states to dip into their nuclear insurance because existing approaches have adequately served national requirements. However, the strategic environment can deteriorate and impact on nuclear decision-making. The following argument about India is illustrative.

Let us begin with the premise that India's nuclear development has never really been a reaction to Chinese nuclear development. India took the first steps towards the nuclear field before China did. India did not get hysterical about Chinese nuclear arms. There was no arms racing. Symmetrical nuclear development is not the norm in Sino-Indian relations; rather the central premises and approaches are quite different.

The first premise is that persistent Indian mistrust of Soviet and Chinese intentions has for long been the basis of Indian foreign policy thinking. Early in the 1950s Nehru encouraged the development of Sino-Soviet differences because Sino-Soviet controversy helps Indian security, just as a joint Sino-Soviet front clearly does not. If Sino-Soviet reconciliation occurs in the future then the change in the Asian balance of power would require a change in Indian nuclear policy. This no Indian government could resist. As it is, Sino-Soviet talks make the Indian government nervous.

The second premise is that if Pakistan breaks up because of the Sind revolt, and American power is shown to be weak in the Arabian sea and on the ground in the Gulf region, then the prospect of coexistence between Soviet and Indian military power — a new contingency — would

require an escalation of Indian nuclear power — from ambiguity to a viable force.

In this line of argument the People's Republic of China (PRC) is a secondary factor in Indian strategic thinking. India knows that the PRC is not in a position to determine the power relationships in Pakistan; or in Afghanistan where it could not even prevent the Soviet annexation of the Wakhan corridor that sits across the strategic Soviet-Afghanistan-PRC-Pakistan nexus; or in the Indian Ocean. The PRC today cannot even manage the power relationships in South-East Asia — where it enjoys a natural ethnic constituency; or in Africa — where Chou en Lai had revolutionary aspirations in the 1960s. Today the PRC has marginal international influence in territories south of its border, whereas the USSR has a wide ring of bases — Angola, Mozambique, Aden, Socotra and Camranh Bay — and naval-diplomatic forces.

Ambiguity works for Israel

By comparison Israel does not face strategic dilemmas that would require a change in its present stance of nuclear ambiguity. There are good reasons for this assessment. First, despite the upheavals in Israeli politics and despite the changes in tone in US-Israel relations, the American commitment to Israeli national security is a traditional one and Israel and the American Jews have ways to keep Americans in line. Second, there is a special reason why Israel and the Soviet Union share a parallel concern not to do anything that could nuclearize the Middle East. Shrewd observers point out that Moscow does not seek Arab victory and it does not recognize the notion of a single united Arab nation. It is the direct Soviet interest to maintain a continuous state of instability in the Middle East rather than to seek a resolution of any Middle East problem by active and prolonged Soviet involvement on the side of the Arabs and the Palestinians in a crisis moment. Israeli strategists probably factor this vital element into their calculations of the strategic equation and accept it positively. Accordingly, Israeli strategists have an incentive not to make any move — except in a grave emergency — that could appear to be a movement towards nuclear armament and the Soviet Union has an incentive to accept the Israeli denial of possession of nuclear armament positively. It is not cause the existence of Israeli nuclear armament — as distinct from capability that many nations possess — could provide concrete justification for further and direct Soviet involvement on the Arab side. If the lines of adversarial relationships in nuclear relations have already been established between Israel and the USSR — as they have in the Gulf-Arabian sea area between India and the USSR — then the Middle East is not likely to be the central arena of third world nuclear politics during the 1980s.

Anti-proliferators should consider the realities of foreign relations before making the next speech.