

INDO-PAKISTAN NUCLEAR "CRISIS", CIA AND MR. HERSH

Itty Abraham

Introduction

In a recent article in the *New Yorker* (3/12/1993), well-known journalist Seymour M. Hersh broke the amazing news of a 1990 "India-Pakistan confrontation [that has] remained a secret for almost three years" (p. 57). He is puzzled about this silence, since "It was the intervention of (then) President Bush's personal White House envoy that defused what looked to be inevitable warfare" between "two perennial enemies" (p. 56).

What gives this alleged crisis its importance is that, in the first half of 1990, the "Bush Administration became convinced that the world was on the edge of a nuclear exchange between Pakistan and India", a nuclear exchange that had been prevented by former CIA director Robert M Gates, who "negotiate[d] a standown" between the two countries. Hersh concludes that the only possible explanation for public ignorance of Mr. Gates' heroic role was the Bush Administrations' culpability in helping to produce a Pakistani bomb, and an Administration official's role in helping defuse the crisis, produces this silence. It is Hersh's role to uncover the "real" story and assign plaudits and blame where they are due.

The Crisis Itself

The article's logic depends on the objective existence of a crisis. No evidence whatsoever is provided to suggest that anyone within the region thought there was a crisis at all. The "fact" that India and Pakistan came to the brink of war rests on the following arguments. In 1990, with a backdrop of worsening riots and demonstrations in Indian Kashmir, the US intelligence community was convinced that Pakistan army commander Beg had authorized technicians to assemble nuclear weapons.

The reason was that, in the "view of American intelligence, the weak governments of Pakistan and India in May of 1990 were willing to run any risk — including nuclear war — to avoid a disastrous military, and this political, defeat in Kashmir." Given this view, increased radar activity in Pakistan, increased F-15 bomb dropping training and jingoistic statements in the Indian Parliament, were all seen as signs that a crisis was brewing.

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Finally evidence described as 100% reliable" — Hersh suggests the degree of conviction was based on the fact that the source was the NSA, the most technologised intelligence gathering agency of all — showed that Pakistan was arming its nuclear weapons, apparently in response to Indian military exercises in Rajasthan. At every stage, satellite photographs in particular and other non-human intelligence sources were used to fill in the blanks of a narrative that was already a truth. Yet why the impressive degree of human intelligence that the Islamabad CIA office appears to have had (and is cited at another point in the article) could not be mobilized to provide a more satisfying answer at this point is puzzling. The degree of conviction expressed in one paragraph is further undone, when one of the primary sources of evidence for the article, Robert Oakeley, former US Ambassador to Pakistan, is reported to say, "We never had any hard indications that any nuclear warheads had been delivered." Was there a crisis at all? Who can really say. Whether the Indians and Pakistanis felt there was a crisis cannot be told, since they do not seem to have been asked. We might deduce from this article, that US Intelligence certainly thought that there was. Hersh's article itself is simply an example that can pass for serious journalism today. However, if we apply a more critical eye to the article itself, far more interesting is what the text reveals, in passing, about US intelligence, and about US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.

Intelligence Agencies

The Article gives us repeated insights into the sources and evidence from which US intelligence agencies come to their conclusions, for these are the primary sources cited in the article. Most alarming are the repeated references to the extent to which the interstices of the Pakistani state are riddled with American informers. The CIA has complete plans of the Pakistani uranium enrichment plant at Kahuta, have first hand information about nuclear weapons work there, A. Q. Khan of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Agency is under Constant surveillance, and CIA operatives in Pakistan and elsewhere had copies of Pakistan Intelligence-produced Video tapes of Benazir Bhutto and her husband. This penetration goes so far as to make Hersh suggest that the "large and active" CIA station in Islamabad "sided with general Beg and President Khan in their intense power struggle against Ms. Bhutto. Interestingly, there is no corresponding first hand information cited on India.



Descriptions of the various methods of US intelligence are quite revealing, especially regarding the tremendous divide between technologically and humanly generated intelligence data. Far from being the technologically omniscient power that is suggested repeatedly, the overt reliance on technologically produced intelligence demonstrates enormous limitations in both data production, analysis and policy recommendations. Near conclusive proof of a proliferator appears to be satellite pictures of the "laying of a thick concrete floor in a remote site," preparations for war are demonstrated by Pakistani use of greater security measures around airports and the movement of trucks is sufficient evidence that nuclear warheads are being shipped to delivery sites.

These forms of evidence are stacked against psychological studies, war games and human intelligence gathering leading to conclusions that might even be structured to produce crises. For example, when the earlier "evidence" about Pakistani decisions are correlated against "highly classified personality profiles" that conclude with the non sequitur that General Beg was "more closely attuned to the Islamic world than the West", an Islamic bomb is surely in the making. Essentialized statements about the Pakistani National Character abound, e.g., "Look at the Pakistani ego. They want to (play) with the Big Boys." Finally the framing of these events as a nuclear crisis produces recommendations like the following. A suitable course for the war to follow, if it began, was to be to get Pakistan to attack the Indian nuclear plant at Tarapur, rather than strike at the capital, New Delhi. This would give India a "tit-for-tat" option: they could strike at Pakistan's reactor at Kahuta and South Asian honor would be duly satisfied according to the pathological logic of the nuclear mind.

Stories Within: State Mythologies

But coming back to the text of the article again, why Hersh can get away with such a cursory telling of a nuclear-age crisis is because the alleged nuclear crisis is simply the fiction that sustains the more compelling stories he is trying to tell. Even a cursory reading of the piece finds that the apparently central theme, the nuclear confrontation between Pakistan and India, soon becomes the backdrop for a discussion of the labyrinthine (and patently unfair) bureaucratic politics of the state: we hear about shenanigans within and between the CIA, the State Department, the Department of Defense and the Customs, and herein lies the tale behind the tale. Especially in the wake of Iran-Contra and Iraqi purchases of nuclear materials in the USA, an exposé of US covert illegalities produces a well worn, even mainstream narrative. This one is as follows. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan became a frontline ally of the United States in the fight against Communism.

Pakistan's own desire to develop a nuclear arsenal, which runs counter to US proliferation policy and a number of legal statutes, led them to actively seek materials, blueprints, and components all over the world, including the United States. Hersh reports how various branches of the US state discovered traces of Pakistani covert nuclear activity, however, the overriding need to keep US aid to the Afghan rebels flowing through Pakistan, and indeed to keep Pakistan's own support for the mujahideen unwavering, actively prevented this information from reaching the proliferation agencies, or from having legal sanctions applied against Pakistan.

First Myth

In the subtext of this discussion lies a tale. Hersh's primary source for these charges is a former CIA officer, Richard Barlow, who was mad to resign from the Agency for pursuing his job with undue zealotry. Hersh's description of Barlow—a political science graduate whose primary qualification for the CIA job appeared to be his senior thesis on the "failure of American policy makers to stop Pakistan from going nuclear"—"slender, with hazel eyes, light brown hair, and a movie-star's profile" gives the subtext away. The movie star is, of course, Jimmy Stewart, the movie, *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*.

This then becomes a nostalgic tale of the evil head of America, Washington D.C. and its bureaucracy, versus the noble heart, the trials of a young, well meaning and innocent citizen who seeks only to tell the truth and obey the laws of the land. When the forces of innocence backed by moral right go up against the vested interests of incompetence and moral turpitude, there should only be one outcome, but at the end of the article we find Richard Barlow, shunned by the organization he had come to set right, wistfully admitting, "I still think (the CIA is) the best agency in the government." The young whistle blower finds out, much to his chagrin, that following the low may not get you far in a Washington dominated by the Bush White House; a feeling that Hersh clearly subscribes to.

If this had been all the article had been about, it would be easy to place it. Hersh would simply have written one of the many codas to the Reagan-Bush years; further, it would have been a vindication of a young man's career, and, finally, some setting straight of the historical record. That Hersh avoids discussing why nothing on this subject was written by mainstream journalists when so much of Pakistan's activities were well known during that period, or that he continues to treat Reagan-Bush policies as aberrant not typical, can be ignored. He is simply telling a different story. But there are other parts to this article that muddy the waters of this simple cautionary democratic tale.



Second Myth

Robert Gates, former director of the CIA and long-standing student of Soviet expansionism, also plays a central role in one of the other tales Hersh tells. A man with no training or experience in South Asia, he is plucked from Moscow by direct command of the President and flown to South Asia to defuse the brewing nuclear crises. Bush apparently wished to impress upon the recalcitrant elites of Delhi and Islamabad that this was serious business. The President's message was, Hersh writes, quoting an unnamed "involved official": "He's (Gates) my top advisor on nuclear matters. I'm sending my No. 1 career intelligence official. He knows. He can't be bullshitted." (p 66)

Sure enough. The crisis is defused after Gates, standing tall, stares down a bellicose pro-Iranian Pakistani general. In Gates' own words, "I looked straight at Beg and said, 'General, our military has war-gamed every conceivable scenario between you and the Indians, and there isn't a single way you win.'" After that shot from the hip, Gates triumphantly goes on to India, where "worried" leaders promptly agree to stop infiltrating into Sind, and to start improving human rights in Kashmir in return for Pakistani concessions wrested by Gates. The crisis is over. Both sides start to reduce their forces on the border and Gates returns, presumably, to private kudos in the US.

Here too we can smile at the various descriptions of Indian and Pakistani elites, and ignore the gross misperceptions of inter-state conflict in South Asia, as when Gates is reported to say "It (in describing the relief evident on Indian faces at his intervention) was the first time that an American had come out and treated Pakistan and India as equals"—when it is to India's constant annoyance that India and Pakistan are habitually treated as equals by the United States. (p 68)

Rather this story should be read as an attempt to rehabilitate Robert Gates, the once greatly feared and admired deputy director of the CIA whose glamour began to pall when his confirmation for CIA director became the context for a public discussion of the CIA and covert and overt foreign policy activities under the Bush and Reagan Administrations. In turning the focus of attention away from his more conspicuous failures (the Soviet Union) to an apparent success (South Asia), Hersh attempts to paint a picture of the committed intelligence officer and organization man, unwilting under the pressure of a conflict that seemed reminiscent of the "the summer of 1914" and "the inadvertent outbreak of the First World War". 1914, let us recall, the historical moment that was considered to have brought the US out of Olympian isolation and into centre stage in this most turbulent twentieth century.

Proliferation Seen From Above

The frame of reference for US crisis managers is important. Gates is quoted as saying that the appropriate analogy for what was happening in South Asia in 1990 was Europe in 1914. Scholarly analysis of the records of the primary belligerent in the First World War has suggested that misperceptions of the others' intention was crucial in generating decisions that proved near-impossible to reverse. Trains were set in motion, armies were mobilized and defense ministries believed that the war they had long expected had begun. These became a set of self-fulfilling prophecies leading to war. The overt task of the crisis managers was to prevent the same from happening in South Asia.

However, the South Asian case was different in one principle regard. The alleged belligerent had nuclear weapons; the problem had to be couched in terms of the great post-war taboo: not the prevention of war, *per se*, but rather the prevention of use of nuclear weapons. The question became then whether South Asians had the degree of calculation and rationality that prevented a global catastrophe during the Cold War. Gates' mission was to ensure they did. What was missing in 1914 was precisely the historical foresight that was insight in 1990.

New World's Order

One of the abiding paradoxes of US policy, the disjuncture between the habitual reference to the rule of legitimate law at home and the rule of anarchy abroad is illuminated here. It is in this juxtaposition of the tales of Barlow and Gates that we see a resolution of the paradox. Rather than expecting internal legitimacy to be projected abroad, it is through imperial successes that domestic illegitimacies are put to rest.

The reference to 1914 alerts us to recognize that this period is perceived as the next century's crucial moment. Hersh portrays an image of a United States that is the last, best hope for a world on the brink of a new world-era disaster. Based on its technological knowledge and, even, occasionally, on "simple common sense", American analysts can determine sooner, and more reliably, than anyone else what the world is up to, and then step in to set things right.

This is where the two myths, of Gates and Barlow, come together in a sustained narrative of American right and might projected globally. Barlow represents the good within the American state, striving for global security guided by law; Gates, who was probably on the other side with respect to Barlow's indifference to institutional strictures is the good abroad. The apolitical instrument of American-right, Gates strides into the inner sanctum



of belligerent elites abroad and sets them right with straight talk backed by technical truths: we've "gamed" you to death, he says, a statement to which there can be no response.

What Hersh tells them is a vision of the New World Order, of, in other words, the ideological production of a new basis of US imperialism. In brief outline it appears to be like this. The underlying assumption is that a system of governance based on law cannot be bad. Of course, the system itself can be prone to subversion, but the morally justified position will always come through.

The perfect example is the tale presented above. Barlow, the wronged citizen domestically, is ultimately vindicated by the actions of the wronged official, Gates abroad. Gates's mission abroad cannot be wrong, for he is backed by US truths about the dangers of nuclear weapons, historical knowledge of what can happen in cases of assumed misperception, and finally, by scientifically produced information about the "true" state of affairs. These truths feed back to Barlow, his shattered career notwithstanding, and to bolster a new legitimacy for the resilience of US law—the evidence of which has come from abroad.

ETHNICITY, CLASS, RELIGION AND GENDER: QUERIES AND NON-ANSWERS

Selvy Thiruchandran

The above title for a short article like this should not give the readers an impression that I intend to tackle or deal with grand narratives. Neither should they entertain any hopes that I will ground my propositions and arguments on metatheories of legitimation. What I propose to do here is to share some ad hoc strands of thought, some thoughts of anger, frustration and dire helplessness. These feelings go beyond scientific theories. In narrating them as mere experiences I do realise that they are not the outbursts of an impotent mind.

As someone belonging to the Women's Education and Research Centre abbreviatively called the WERC, I was responsible for organising a project for the refugee children in Colombo. When the refugees were "camped" in the various refugee centres, one of the problems identified by Women's Education and Research Centre was the lack of Educational facilities for girls. Hence we launched a project to have classes in our centre to teach them English and Sinhalese as Second languages. The classes in Sinhala were arranged only after their consensus was sought. This was to prevent us imposing our ideology of peaceful multi-ethnic co-existence on some people, though children, who might have different perceptions at this point of our history. Such an imposition would have had political implication such as imposing the language of the oppressor on innocent little girls of the oppressed nation! The children were all Tamil. The Women's Education and Research Centre staff and the Sinhalese Directors were deeply involved in the educative and the administrative process and in the successful

implementation of the project. There were Tamils who taught them Tamil and Maths, Social Studies and Religion. The involvement of the teacher and administrators was positive, intensive and inter-active.

The children learnt to smile and laugh and play. The blank, expressionless girls had over time learnt to express, talk and laugh. The little minds would have seen different Sinhalese, people different from the image they would have built up so long by the political propaganda and by their own experience of overt and covert violence. This project covered only the two camps which are near our Centre.

Meanwhile we came to know that the Muslim children in another "camp" were also in a similar plight and there were requests to include them also in our project. We were prepared to stretch our minds, funds and services and readily accepted them into our fold. The little head-covering girls, burdened as they were physically in addition to their horrible experience of mental agony, walked sorrowfully in to Women's Education and Research Centre. The head covering symbols, we were told, were politically instituted on an argument of ethno-cultural identity on these children who had no say in the matter. The symbol signified exclusive ethno-cultural identity. The children told us while they were in Jaffna they were not wearing this symbol. It would appear that the assertion of separate ethno-cultural identity through symbols that affect only women and manifest as signs of gender subordination came up only after being driven out of the "Tamil Homeland" by the LTTE. Hence this sign of exclusive ethno-cultural signification of gender repression and constraints on the free movement of young children had to be continued and contained. Contained,

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