

Top Indian official threatens Pakistan with nuclear annihilation

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The chairman of India's National Security Advisory Board, Shayam Saran, has warned Pakistan that if it ever uses tactical, i.e. battlefield, nuclear weapons against Indian forces, it will be the target of an all-out Indian nuclear attack.

In an April 24 lecture titled "Is India's nuclear deterrent credible?," Saran declared, "[I]f [India] is attacked with such [tactical nuclear] weapons, it would engage in nuclear retaliation which will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage on its adversary." He continues, "From the Indian perspective...the label on a nuclear weapon used for attacking India, strategic or tactical, is irrelevant."

A former Foreign Secretary and India's chief negotiator during the Indo-U.S. civilian nuclear treaty talks, Shayam is an authoritative spokesman on India's military-strategic and nuclear policy. He would not have made such a bald, significant, and blood-chilling statement without having received the go-ahead from the highest levels of India's government and military.

In his speech, Saran claimed Pakistan is developing tactical nuclear weapons so as to "dissuade India from contemplating conventional punitive retaliation to sub-conventional but highly destructive and disruptive cross-border terrorist strikes." Terming this "nuclear blackmail," Saran countered it by threatening Pakistan with nuclear annihilation should it ever try to halt a conventional Indian military attack with tactical nuclear weapons.

Declaring "a limited nuclear war ... a contradiction in terms," Saran said that any use of nuclear weapons "would swiftly and inexorably escalate to the strategic level." To emphasize the point, he then added, "Pakistan would be prudent not to assume otherwise as it sometimes appears to do, most recently by developing and perhaps deploying [battle] theatre nuclear weapons."

In the past, India has proclaimed its adherence to a "no first-strike" nuclear policy. While Saran claimed this remains India's policy, his statement dramatically lowers the bar for the use of India's strategic nuclear arsenal and the possibility of all-out nuclear war in South Asia—a war

that would result in the deaths of tens if not hundreds of millions of people and potentially have catastrophic impact on life around the world.

Saran's denunciations of Pakistani nuclear blackmail are entirely self-serving. Since their establishment through the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent, India and Pakistan have been locked in a reactionary geo-political conflict that has resulted in three declared wars and countless war crises. A "comprehensive peace process," initiated almost a decade ago after the countries came to the brink of war in 2001-2, has been stalled for years. Meanwhile, the two countries are engaged in an arms race.

India is seeking to exploit the advantages of its much larger size, rapidly expanding economy, and burgeoning "global strategic partnership" with the U.S. to greatly expand and modernize its military—both conventional and nuclear forces. This includes building a blue-water navy and developing the capacity to launch nuclear strikes from the air, land, and sea. According to Saran's April 24th speech, India will operationalize its sea-based "nuclear deterrence," i.e. deploy sea-launched nuclear weapons, in 2015-16.

Perturbed at the length of time it took Indian forces to mobilize for war after the then Bharatiya Janata Party-led government held Islamabad responsible for the December 2001 terrorist attack on India's parliament, the Indian military-strategic establishment has developed an offensive-orientated "Cold Start Strategy" under which India's military is supposed to be able to mobilize for an all-out conventional attack on Pakistan in just a few days. The aim of such a rapid mobilization is not only to maximize the element of surprise, but to lend still greater weight to India's troop and conventional weapons superiority.

In an attempt to offset India's greater resources, Pakistan, whose military budget is less than a fifth of that of India, has focussed on building up its nuclear weapons capabilities, including developing tactical nuclear weapons.

The pivotal factor fuelling this arms race and upsetting the balance of power in South Asia is US imperialism's aggressive moves to make India a "linchpin" of its strategy

to counter and, if need be, militarily thwart China's rise. The Indian bourgeoisie, for its part, has clenched with both hands Washington's offer of a "global strategic partnership."

A key foreign policy objective of George W. Bush's administration was to radically transform Indo-US relations, with a view to using India as a counterweight to China. Under Obama, Washington has mounted a much more explicit strategic offensive against China, the so-called US "pivot to Asia", and successfully enticed and cajoled New Delhi to bind itself ever more tightly to the US's geo-political agenda.

In 2008, under the Indo-US civilian nuclear treaty, Washington negotiated a unique status for India in the world nuclear regulatory regime allowing India access to advanced civilian nuclear technology and fuel. Washington claimed this deal had no military implications, but this was a brazen lie. It allows India to concentrate the resources of its indigenous nuclear program on its nuclear arsenal and was tied to the removal of US restrictions on the sale of advanced conventional military technology to India.

In the five years since, US arms sales have risen from nothing to \$8 billion and as the US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, Andrew Shapiro, boasted last month, the US has hopes of selling billions of dollars more in weapons systems to India in the next couple of years.

The Pentagon has reportedly carried out more joint-training exercises with India's military over the past decade than with that of any other country. And Washington has repeatedly declared its support for India playing a major role in policing the Indian Ocean—across which, not coincidentally, the bulk of China's oil must traverse.

Although New Delhi has not agreed to a U.S. request that it formally join a quadrilateral partnership, involving its two other most important allies in the Pacific-Indian Ocean region (Japan and Australia), India has been participating since 2011 in a trilateral US-Japan-India strategic and economic "dialogue."

The US's strategic alliance with India is placing tremendous military-geo-political pressure on Pakistan. Washington curtly dismissed Islamabad's warning that the Indo-US nuclear treaty would fuel an arms race, as it did Islamabad's request for a like treaty. While the US has not repudiated its longstanding geo-political partnership with Pakistan and continues to promote the Pakistani military as its chief Pakistani partner, it has—in the pursuit of its own predatory global ambitions—pursued policies and objectives that undermine the position of the Pakistani elite. Thus it has bullied Pakistan into bearing much of the brunt of suppressing the insurgency against the US occupation of Afghanistan, plunging the country's tribal northwest into

civil war, and encouraged Islamabad's arch-rival New Delhi to develop close relations with Kabul. While Pakistan desperately needs natural gas, the US has repeatedly threatened it with reprisals if it builds a pipeline to Iran.

The Pakistani elite, while clinging to Washington and conniving in drone strikes against its own people, has sought to bolster its precarious position by strengthening its ties to Beijing. Toward this end, Islamabad recently announced it would turn over management of its new Arabian Sea port at Gwadar to China.

India has long resented Beijing's close relations, including military ties and arms deals with Islamabad.

Significantly Saran in his speech threatening Pakistan with nuclear war accused China of assisting Islamabad's nuclear program, declaring, "Chinese assistance to Pakistan's strategic program continues apace."

Speaking April 29 at the "Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," the US Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Non-proliferation, Thomas Countryman, expressed "concerns" about "the dangers posed by the continuing buildup of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems in South Asia" and urged "India and Pakistan to restrain their nuclear and missile programmes."

Countryman's remarks are both hypocritical and cynical. US imperialism's reckless drive to maintain its world position through wars, as currently in Afghanistan, and preparations for war as against China, are stoking the rivalry between India and Pakistan.

Moreover, the US's aggressive moves to build up India are not just destabilizing South Asia, they are binding the Indo-Pakistani and US-Sino rivalries to one another, adding a new and explosive dimension to each and with potentially catastrophic consequences for the world.



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