



THE HENRY L.  
STIMSON CENTER

**TO THE BRINK:**  
*INDIAN DECISION-MAKING AND THE  
2001-2002 STANDOFF*

**ALEX STOLAR**

THE HENRY L. STIMSON CENTER  
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## ACRONYMS

CBM	Confidence Building Measure
CCS	Cabinet Committee on Security
JeM	Jaish-e-Mohammed
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
LoC	Line of Control
NSA	National Security Adviser
NSAB	National Security Advisory Board
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

# PREFACE

Dear Colleague,

I am pleased to share with you this new report *To The Brink: Indian Decision-Making and the 2001-2002 Standoff*. The report, by Alex Stolar, a Herbert Scoville Peace Fellow at the Stimson Center, examines the critical period in Indian-Pakistani relations following the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament.

The 2001-2002 Standoff was the largest military mobilization since World War II, and it occurred less than four years after India and Pakistan's 1998 nuclear weapon tests. This report focuses on the perceptions of Indian Government officials who grappled with difficult decisions about responding to terrorist attacks, limited war, and nuclear deterrence. The report also illuminates the many challenges of interagency coordination and message management during tense crises.

This is the second Stimson Center publication to look into the dynamics between India and Pakistan during the border confrontation. The first, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, by Stimson's Co-Founder and South Asia Project Director Michael Krepon and regional expert Polly Nayak, focuses on how policymakers in Washington and U.S. diplomats in New Delhi and Islamabad worked to manage the peaks of the confrontation.

I hope that these reports will be useful not only for those who study India-Pakistan relations in depth, but for those engaged in policy analysis on terrorism, nuclear weapons, and crisis management. I am grateful to Alex Stolar for producing such a compelling study to add to the Stimson Center's work on South Asia.

Sincerely,



Ellen Laipson, President  
The Henry L. Stimson Center

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge and thank the many individuals who helped to make this publication possible. I remain grateful to the University of Virginia, the Jefferson Scholars Foundation, and Anson M. Beard, Jr., who made my first trip to India, almost four years ago, possible and who helped to spark my interest in South Asia.

I have been fortunate to have wonderful mentors, and during my final year at Virginia, Professor John Echeverri-Gent was especially generous in sharing his deep knowledge of India and Pakistan with me.

The bulk of the research for this report was completed during a six month stay at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies in New Delhi. My time at IPCS was invaluable, and Maj. Gen. Dipankar Banerjee (ret'd.), Professor P.R. Chari, and Dr. Suba Chandran were incredible teachers. Likewise, this research could not have been completed without the generous assistance of Vishal Chander and S.L. Vermani.

I am very grateful to the many current and former Indian officials who met with me during my time in New Delhi. I wish especially to acknowledge the assistance, insights, and recollections of Lalit Mansingh, Brajesh Mishra, Ved Patankar, Vinod Patney, C.V. Ranganathan, Jaswant Singh, and Vikram Sood. It is a remarkable testament to these leaders and to India's democracy that a 23 year-old, two months removed from completing his undergraduate studies, could undertake a study like this one.

I wish to also thank the Herbert Scoville, Jr. Peace Fellowship. The Scoville Fellowship gave me the opportunity to work for the Henry L. Stimson Center's South Asia Project, and without the time to write that the fellowship provided, this account would not have been possible.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many individuals who provided comments on earlier drafts of this report. I am especially grateful to Polly Nayak, Ellen Laipson, Desiree Davis, and my mother, Kathleen Stolar, for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this piece. Most of all, I am indebted to Michael Krepon: professor, thesis guide, mentor, teacher, and more. All errors are, of course, my own.

Alex Stolar  
February 2008

# TO THE BRINK

The crackle of gunfire in central New Delhi on the morning of December 13, 2001 started a new chapter in India and Pakistan's tortured history. Outside India's stately Parliament House, five heavily armed intruders exchanged fire with security guards. Inside, much of that country's leadership—its Vice President, cabinet ministers, and scores of parliamentarians—rushed for safety. After a fierce half hour, the guns fell silent. Twelve were dead, including the attackers, and eighteen injured. No political leader was harmed.<sup>1</sup>

Investigations in the following days revealed that the gunmen slipped past the parliament complex's outer gate in a sedan disguised as an official vehicle and opened fire after failing to gain entry to the parliament itself. The gunmen were quickly linked by the Government of India to Lashkar-e-Taiba, a terrorist outfit known to operate from Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

For the next ten months, India and Pakistan mobilized nearly a million soldiers to the border separating the two nuclear neighbors, and to the Line of Control dividing the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Twice, in January 2002 and then again after another brazen terrorist attack in May 2002, it appeared war was imminent.

In the half decade since the confrontation, prominent academics have concluded that India and Pakistan never neared the brink. Kenneth Waltz, who made his mark arguing for the robustness of nuclear deterrence shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis, has written, "what reason do we have to believe that India's and Pakistan's crystal balls are clouded...what reason do we have to believe that military and civilian leaders on either side fail to understand the dangers of fighting a conventional war against a nuclear neighbor?"<sup>3</sup> Waltz's logic of nuclear deterrence is straightforward: he argues that "miscalculation causes wars" and that nuclear weapons create "certainty about the relative strength of adversaries." Consequently, "nuclear weapons make military miscalculation difficult and politically pertinent prediction easy."<sup>4</sup>

Other scholars, as well, subscribe to the view that nuclear deterrence prevented major conflict after the attack on the Indian Parliament. In their 2005 study of India-Pakistan relations, Sumit Ganguly and Devin Hagerty apply Waltz's theory of deterrence to South Asia. They write that, "what ultimately inhibited India was Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons. The fear of Pakistan's resort to a possible nuclear threat was paramount in the minds of Indian decision-makers, thereby inhibiting

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<sup>1</sup> Dugger, Celia. "Suicide Raid in New Delhi; Attackers Among 12 Dead," The New York Times. December 14, 2001. <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F00615F73B5B0C778DDDAB0994D9404482>

<sup>2</sup> Dugger, Celia. "Group in Pakistan is Blamed by India for Suicide Raid," The New York Times. December 15, 2001. <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F30E1FFA355B0C768DDDAB0994D9404482#>

<sup>3</sup> Waltz, Kenneth in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, by Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz. W.W. Norton & Company, New York. 2003. p. 114 and 123.

<sup>4</sup> Waltz, Kenneth in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, by Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz. W.W. Norton & Company, New York. 2003. p. 7-9, and 114.

a resort to all-out war.”<sup>5</sup> Many Indian analysts, similarly, believed that nuclear risks during the confrontation were minimal because, in their view, Indian leaders were in control of the standoff. Bharat Warivwalla typified the view of many Indian analysts when he wrote during the standoff’s second peak that, “[India enjoys] enough superiority over Pakistan in conventional arms to selectively bomb Pakistani military installations...and thus compel Pakistan to widen the conflict along the entire Indo-Pak border. Should [Pakistan] fail to contain India’s conventional thrust, [Pakistan] would have no choice but to escalate to the nuclear level. Would it do it or would it chicken out first? We are better placed than our adversary to win this game of chicken.”<sup>6</sup>

However, this certainty in the infallibility of deterrence obscures the fact that we know little about the deliberations of India’s war cabinet during those ten harrowing months, and even less about Pakistan’s calculations during the standoff. This essay, based upon interviews with two former members of India’s Cabinet Committee on Security as well as other senior Indian national security officials, begins to fill in the details of how and why India’s leaders pursued the strategy they did during the standoff.

The picture that emerges from these interviews is not, however, that of a clear crystal ball; on the contrary, neither the Bomb nor the triggering event of the crisis induced clarity into Indian decision-making. Like many key government officials during times of crisis, Indian leaders often were not on the same page—failing to communicate, perceiving key events differently, and championing different courses of action during the crisis. Indeed, during critical periods, Indian leaders appear to have held disparate views and disagreed on such fundamental issues as Pakistan’s likely responses to possible Indian strategies and whether India was pursuing an escalatory or de-escalatory strategy.

Before proceeding further, several important caveats are in order. The first is that this essay relies heavily upon interviews with former Indian leaders. While these interviews provide new insights on the standoff, it is important to emphasize that memory is imperfect and that the accounts provided to the author might not have been completely candid and may not provide a full understanding of key events. Much more needs to be revealed about this crucial period. Indian government documents that would shed light on the standoff remain under lock and key. Many key players in former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s war cabinet, including Vajpayee himself, have yet to go on the record about their deliberations during the standoff. Accordingly, until more of the key players from both India and Pakistan share their recollections about the events of those ten months, the conclusions reached in this essay must be considered tentative.

## **“THE MOST DANGEROUS CHALLENGE SO FAR TO INDIA’S NATIONAL SECURITY”**

After the attack on the parliament, India’s Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) assembled to determine how to respond to what Prime Minister Vajpayee termed, “the most dangerous challenge

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<sup>5</sup> Ganguly, Sumit and Hagerty, Devin. *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons*. University of Washington Press, Seattle. 2005. p. 180.

<sup>6</sup> Wariavwalla, Bharat. “In this ‘chicken game’, India knows its way,” Indian Express. June 6, 2002. [http://www.indianexpress.com/india-news/full\\_story.php?content\\_id=3870](http://www.indianexpress.com/india-news/full_story.php?content_id=3870)

so far to India's national security."<sup>7</sup> In an interview with *The New Yorker's* Steve Coll, Brajesh Mishra, who was then India's National Security Adviser and was widely considered Vajpayee's closest adviser<sup>8</sup> described that first CCS meeting following the attack, "we debated, we talked, and we came to the conclusion that the threat of military action should be held up." During the meeting, Vajpayee ordered India's armed forces to mobilize for war.<sup>9</sup> Pakistan, in turn, mobilized its military to counter India's display of force.

As the mobilization commenced, with the Indian public clamoring for war, India's diplomats initiated an urgent round of diplomacy aimed at avoiding a clash. The day after the attack, Indian Foreign Secretary Chokila Iyer met with Pakistan's senior envoy in New Delhi, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi. Iyer told Qazi that India had evidence implicating Lashkar-e-Taiba in the attack. Iyer presented a set of demands to Pakistan.

At a news conference later that day, Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh made those demands public. Pakistan, Singh told the press conference, must terminate the activities of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and another Pakistan-based terrorist organization, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). The offices of these organizations must be closed, their financial assets frozen, and their leaders detained, Singh said.<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan's President, General Pervez Musharraf, quickly condemned the attack but his unwillingness to act on India's demands infuriated politicians in New Delhi. On the evening of December 21, 2001, Prime Minister Vajpayee assembled the CCS. During the meeting, Vajpayee decided to recall India's High Commissioner to Pakistan. For all of the animosity that colors the India-Pakistan rivalry, the two South Asian neighbors have steadfastly maintained diplomatic missions in each others capitals, headed by High Commissioners in the tradition of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Not since the 1971 India-Pakistan War—when the Indian army humiliatingly crushed the Pakistani army, cut Pakistan in two, and helped establish modern day Bangladesh—had either nation recalled its High Commissioner. Indian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nirupama Rao explained the decision:

Since the December 13 attack on Parliament, we have seen no attempt on the part of Pakistan to take action against the organizations involved. India's Foreign Secretary had, in a meeting with the Pakistan High Commissioner on December 14, elaborated on some of the steps that were required...in view of this complete lack of concern on

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<sup>7</sup> "Punishment will be as big as crime: Vajpayee," *The Times of India*. December 18, 2001

<sup>8</sup> Khare, Harish. "Brajesh goes after a powerful innings," *The Hindu*. May 26, 2004. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2004/05/26/stories/2004052604101100.htm> See also: Joseph, Josy. "All the PM's Men." *Rediff*. June 16, 2004. <http://www.rediff.com/news/2004/jun/16spec1.htm> and Chawla, Prabhu. "The Importance of Being Brajesh Mishra," *India Today*. April 2, 2001. <http://www.india-today.com/itoday/20010402/cover-brajesh.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> Coll, Steve. "The Stand-Off: How jihadi groups helped provoke the twenty-first century's first nuclear crisis." *The New Yorker*. February 13, 2006. Pg. 126 Vol. 81 No. 46

<sup>10</sup> Aneja, Atul. "Lashkar responsible for attack, says Jaswant." *The Hindu*. December 15, 2001. See also: "Pak will study evidence against Lashkar, Jaish," *The Times of India*. December 14, 2001. See also: "Govt names Lashkar, tells Pak to act," *The Times of India*. December 14, 2001.

the part of Pakistan and its continued promotion of cross-border terrorism, the government of India has decided to recall its High Commissioner in Islamabad.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after the first of the year, India's armed forces completed its build up along the border with Pakistan. Yet, with his troops poised to strike, Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes emphasized to reporters on January 2, 2002, that, "efforts are being made to defuse the situation through diplomatic intervention."<sup>12</sup>

At Pakistan's Army Headquarters in Rawalpindi and Musharraf's Presidential Palace in Islamabad, the view was increasingly bleak. Along Pakistan's western border, America's *Operation Enduring Freedom*, aimed at rooting out Al Qaeda and the Taliban from Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, was in high gear. And now along Pakistan's eastern border, a half million Indian troops were being mobilized for war. On January 2, 2002, Musharraf reminded India's leaders of the stakes, issuing a thinly veiled nuclear threat that Pakistan's contingency plans reflected its capacity of responding to aggression "in a manner that would cause unacceptable damage to the enemy."<sup>13</sup> Following Musharraf's saber rattling, at an election rally in his home state of Lucknow, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee responded in kind, warning, "no weapon would be spared in self-defence. Whatever weapon was available, it would be used no matter how it wounded the enemy."<sup>14</sup>

As tension continued to mount, leaders from India and Pakistan, the international community, and the media focused on the upcoming South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit which was to be held at a Kathmandu mountain resort. Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, Brajesh Mishra, and Jaswant Singh were scheduled to attend the summit, as were Musharraf and his Foreign Secretary, Abdul Sattar.

In the days before the summit, Pakistani officials appeared hopeful that talks between top level Indian and Pakistani officials would take place on the sidelines of the conference. And India, for its part, did not rule out the possibility of a dialogue during the summit.

### **“WE COULDN’T SUCCEED IN THAT ATMOSPHERE”**

On January 5, 2002, the SAARC summit commenced. During the opening ceremony, each head of state gave an address. At the conclusion of Musharraf's speech, in a stroke of grand political theater, the general dramatically announced that, "as I step down from this podium, I extend a genuine and sincere hand of friendship to Prime Minister Vajpayee. Together we must commence the journey for peace, harmony and progress in South Asia."<sup>15</sup> Musharraf left the dais and Vajpayee, surprised, arose and shook hands with Musharraf. Not to be out done, during his speech to the assembled heads of state, Vajpayee remarked, "I am glad that President Musharraf extended a hand of friendship to me. I

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<sup>11</sup> "Angry India recalls High Commissioner to Pak," *The Times of India*. December 21, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> "Deployment completed, says Delhi," *Dawn*. January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> "JCSC reviews counter-strategy," *Dawn*. January 2, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Shukla, J.P. "No weapon will be spared for self-defence: PM," *The Hindu*. January 2, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Naqvi, Jawed. "Musharraf offers sustained talks: Handshake with Vajpayee charms Saarc," *Dawn*. January 5, 2002.

have shaken his hand in your presence. Now President Musharraf must follow this gesture by not permitting any activity in Pakistan or any territory it controls today which enables terrorists to perpetrate mindless violence in India.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Brajesh Mishra, Musharraf’s public diplomacy greatly irritated the Indian leadership. Mishra explained that, “General Musharraf was fond of theatrics...infructuous<sup>17</sup> theatrical moves—they don’t succeed but Musharraf is very fond of it.”<sup>18</sup>

Far from the glare of reporters and their cameras, Jaswant Singh and Abdul Sattar met in a hotel room at the Kathmandu resort hosting the summit.<sup>19</sup> According to Musharraf, Western diplomats, most notably U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, were applying great pressure on India and Pakistan to talk and defuse the crisis.<sup>20</sup>

However, in an interview, Singh said that his discussions with Sattar did not contribute to any reduction of tension. Singh explained that a series of terrorist attacks preceding the attack on the parliament cast a pall over his meeting with Sattar and prevented de-escalation. According to Singh, “that SAARC meeting followed too soon after Agra [the July 2001 India-Pakistan Agra summit which was torpedoed by terrorist attacks in Kashmir], where after 1<sup>st</sup> October there was a terrorist attack on the State Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir and we had the incident on Parliament of 13 December...[there was] a degree of profligacy by Pakistan in the use of terrorism or terrorist instruments as instruments of state policy.”<sup>21</sup>

However, when citizens of New Delhi, Mumbai, Islamabad, and Karachi read their morning papers on January 7, 2002, they would have believed that de-escalation was in the offing. C. Raja Mohan, India’s leading foreign affairs journalist, reported that, “India and Pakistan appear to have worked out a road map that could help take them beyond the present crisis and begin a substantive political dialogue in the coming days.”

Describing a “relaxed mood,” Raja Mohan wrote that, “the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, and [Pakistani Foreign Minister] Sattar were seen consulting each other and exchanging pieces of paper.”<sup>22</sup> Anwar Iqbal, of United Press International,

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Infructuous” is a term commonly used in Indian newspapers which means “unprofitable, unfruitful, ineffective.” See “Know your English,” *The Hindu*. October 16, 2001. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2001/10/16/stories/13160375.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> See Naqvi, Jawed, “Pakistan seeks de-escalation: Musharraf, Vajpayee hold brief meeting.” *Dawn*. January 6, 2002. See also: “Pakistan’s Musharraf, India’s Vajpayee hold talks,” *Japan Economic Newswire*. January 5, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> “Musharraf rejects India’s demand for handing over criminals.” *The Press Trust of India*. January 6, 2002. See also: Powell speaks to India’s Foreign Minister,” *The Press Trust of India*. January 5, 2002. See also: Sharma, Ashok. “Indian, Pakistani leaders meet informally at South Asian summit, troops remain on alert,” *The Associated Press*. January 6, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Jaswant Singh, December 13, 2006. On the Agra Summit, see “Agra summit at a glance,” *BBC News*. July 17, 2001. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/1430367.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1430367.stm)

<sup>22</sup> Raja Mohan, C. “Road map for de-escalation,” *The Hindu*. January 6, 2002.

also reported that Pakistani Foreign Minister Sattar and Indian NSA Mishra worked together on a document, and that Vajpayee and Musharraf met as well. Iqbal wrote that the meetings caused a “change of heart.” An unnamed Indian official was quoted as saying that the meetings caused, “an abrupt change in temperature...the tone and tenor had changed.”<sup>23</sup> Jawed Naqvi, of Pakistan’s *Dawn* newspaper, similarly reported that, “President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee met for a few minutes in Kathmandu on Sunday for talks that were believed to set the stage for a revived peace process between India and Pakistan.”<sup>24</sup>

In an interview, however, Brajesh Mishra painted a very different picture—a picture of futile diplomacy which failed to ameliorate the crisis. Describing his meeting with Sattar, Mishra explained, “There were two Pakistanis there. They had some paper. I looked at it and asked Prime Minister Vajpayee if he wanted me to engage in this public diplomacy. He said we’ll engage without giving up our basic points. We tried for half an hour but we couldn’t succeed in that atmosphere...although I engaged in that conversation—not more than half an hour—there was nothing that could come out of it.”<sup>25</sup>

The purported meeting between President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee was equally futile according to Mishra. Indeed, Mishra rejected the notion that Musharraf and Vajpayee met at all, explaining, “No—[it was] like this: A holding room for the dignitaries to await their transportation to come—half the size of this room [Mishra’s office,] maybe even less than half the size. Prime Minister Vajpayee went in and Musharraf was waiting and there were two or three other heads of government...and they quietly left the room giving an opportunity to Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf to talk. Nothing happened. It was not the right time or place to engage in discussions. Musharraf was told his car was waiting. He left, and we left.”<sup>26</sup>

Diplomacy had failed. India and Pakistan’s frosty relations precluded any diplomatic resolution.

### **“ALL THIS WAS UNANIMOUS”**

It remains unclear if India’s Cabinet Committee on Security decided to attack Pakistan. The opacity of the CCS obscures whether Vajpayee reserved for himself the decision to order an attack or whether this decision would have been made by the CCS collectively. Likewise, it is impossible to discern whether there would have been a single green light decision, or if the CCS would have evaluated its options in stages—for instance, making individual go/no-go decisions on mobilizing troops, escalating the crisis, and then finally attacking Pakistan.

In an interview, Lalit Mansingh, who then was serving as India’s Ambassador in Washington, emphasized that during the crisis, he “worked hard to communicate to Washington [that] this is serious—[the] Government of India would take steps without hesitation.” “Deterrence,” Mansingh

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<sup>23</sup> Iqbal, Anwar. “India, Pakistan flirting with peace,” United Press International. January 6, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Naqvi, Jawed. “Pakistan seeks de-escalation: Musharraf, Vajpayee hold brief meeting,” *Dawn*. January 6, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

said, “we were prepared to disprove that. We don’t care if Pakistan has nuclear weapons—there is a price to be paid.”<sup>27</sup>

India’s National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)—which is composed of recently retired military officers, diplomats, and intelligence officials—took a similar, although somewhat less hawkish, stance. According to the board’s chairman, Ambassador C.V. Ranganathan, after the attack on the Parliament, “many members of the board were keen that there should be some retaliation in a manner that will drive home the lesson about terrorism and that India would be proactive in responding...the consensus of the NSAB was that while it is good to show the alert of the army and the rest of it, there should be nothing provocative done by India since it was quite clear that international opinion was in favor of India.”<sup>28</sup>

After the SAARC summit, the CCS met daily to receive intelligence briefings from India’s armed forces and intelligence services and to deliberate on India’s strategy.<sup>29</sup> The dynamics of the CCS are unclear since members take an oath of secrecy regarding their deliberations.<sup>30</sup> Brajesh Mishra added to the opaqueness of its proceedings by stating in an interview that during the crisis, “the political leadership had one voice—only one voice—and that was Prime Minister Vajpayee’s voice. No dissent. No urging to the contrary on the part of any other leader or minister.”<sup>31</sup>

Mishra said that, “the major objective of the mobilization—or mass mobilization as some could call it—was to tell Pakistan that if they did not stop this terrorist activity that we would have no choice except to attack.”<sup>32</sup> After the failure of diplomacy at the SAARC summit, India’s choices were narrowing.

Mishra recalled, “There was a unanimous decision to let Pakistan know this kind of thing would not be tolerated. A unanimous decision to mobilize. A unanimous decision to cross the Line of Control and the border...all this was unanimous.”<sup>33</sup>

When asked of Mishra’s description of the Cabinet Committee on Security’s unanimous decisions, Jaswant Singh, citing his oath of secrecy, said in an interview, “I do not disagree with what Brajesh has said but I cannot add to it or subtract from it.”<sup>34</sup> In his memoirs, Singh quotes from his notes at the standoff’s outset that the objectives of India’s mobilization were to, “defeat cross-border infiltration/terrorism without conflict; to contain the national mood of ‘teach Pak a lesson’; and in the

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Lalit Mansingh, August 6, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with C.V. Ranganathan, October 17, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Jaswant Singh, December 13, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006. I have condensed Mishra’s quote. This is his original quote: “There was a unanimous decision to let Pakistan know this kind of thing would not be tolerated. A unanimous decision to mobilize. A unanimous decision to cross the Line of Control and the border. The Americans came—‘Sir, please listen to Musharraf’—they had some indications on what he would say. So we said ‘OK.’ After that statement of General Musharraf, the decision was to postpone any action across the border and the Line of Control—all this was unanimous.”

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Jaswant Singh, December 13, 2006.

event of war, to destroy and degrade Pakistan's war fighting capabilities." Singh writes that his most taxing challenge during the confrontation was to get India's military chiefs to, "recognize 'restraint'...as a strategic asset, for avoiding conflict."<sup>35</sup>

By January 6 or 7, 2002, according to Mishra, India was ready to cross the international border and the Line of Control in Kashmir. In an interview, a senior Indian army officer then posted in the Punjab stated, "By the 6<sup>th</sup>, we were 100% prepared." He added, "Yes, we were to have gone in a few days before Mid-January—January 11<sup>th</sup>. I was all set. Orders given, rehearsals carried out."<sup>36</sup>

## **“WE WERE ON THE POINT OF LAUNCHING A FULL SCALE WAR”**

What would have happened if war had broken out between India and Pakistan in January 2002? India and Pakistan's war-ridden history may serve as a guide. Since independence in 1947, the two South Asian neighbors have fought four wars. In broad strokes, fighting in the past has taken place—and would presumably take place in a future conflict—in three attack corridors: in Kashmir, where the Line of Control divides the Old Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir; in the plains of the Punjab, in northern India; and in the Thar desert which straddles the border between the Indian state of Rajasthan and the Pakistani province of Sindh.

Indian analysts suggested after the standoff that in January 2002 the Indian leadership contemplated limited surgical strikes aimed at key targets in Pakistani Kashmir.<sup>37</sup> However, Brajesh Mishra recalled that, "in January...we were on the point of launching a full scale war. Whether surgical strikes or this or that—it would have been a part of the campaign." He added that "it would have been all out war."<sup>38</sup> Jaswant Singh, however, disagreed, "I know there wasn't even a risk of a full-fledged war or crossing the boundary or the Line of Control."<sup>39</sup> When asked to explain the difference between his view and Mishra's, Singh demurred, "out of respect for a colleague, I decline to answer."

Vikram Sood, then chief of India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), declined to say how close India was to war during this period. Sood, though, suggested in an interview that, "as President Bush says, all options were on the table."<sup>40</sup> Sood continued, "We came to the assessment that a conventional war in the possession of nuclear weapons was possible—a short war, not a long war." According to Sood, if India had crossed the Line of Control in January 2002, Pakistan would not have "gone to the nuclear [level] right away but they would have tried to strike elsewhere—and then threaten the ultimate weapon."<sup>41</sup> In a subsequent interview, Sood clarified that RAW's assessment that a conventional war was possible under the nuclear umbrella was based upon the assumption that this short war would be a limited war with limited objectives.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Jaswant Singh. *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India*. Rupa & Co. New Delhi. 2006. P. 268-9.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with a senior Indian military officer, September 22, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Sood, V.K. and Sawhney, Pravin. *Operation Parakram: The War Unfinished*. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003. P. 74.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Jaswant Singh, December 13, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, February 1, 2007.

When asked what would have happened during an all out war—a war along the lines that Mishra envisioned and anticipated—Sood responded, “One doesn’t know; it is difficult to comment.” Likewise, Sood said that he had “no firm comment on” how RAW would have evaluated the nuclear risks during an all out war. Finally, when asked if he knew if any members of the Cabinet Committee on Security were considering an all out war, Sood recalled, “No, I don’t know.”<sup>43</sup>

If these accounts are accurate, what is striking is how differently India’s leaders conceived of India’s strategy during those crucial days in January 2002. Brajesh Mishra, India’s National Security Adviser, and Jaswant Singh, India’s senior diplomat, appear to have held quite different views on the most fundamental issue of whether India would attack Pakistan. Mishra, moreover, anticipated launching a full-scale conventional war, while RAW appears to have assessed that only a short, limited war was possible under the nuclear umbrella. And Vikram Sood, RAW’s chief and the man responsible for the CCS’s intelligence briefings, was apparently unaware that Mishra envisioned an all out war.

### **“IF YOU REALLY WANT TO PUNISH SOMEONE FOR SOMETHING VERY TERRIBLE HE HAS DONE YOU SMASH HIM”**

After the Parliament attack, the Indian army anticipated launching a major offensive, notwithstanding RAW’s intelligence assessments that apparently pointed only toward limited military options. India’s military mobilization, code named *Operation Parakram*, placed Pakistan in a precarious position. Following the 9/11 attacks, the Pakistani Army deployed its 11 and 12 Corps to the Afghan border to support the American hunt for fleeing Al Qaeda leaders and foot soldiers. Now the Pakistani military, which is roughly half the size of India’s, was simultaneously facing a severe Indian threat along its western border. Outnumbered and poorly positioned to defend against an Indian attack, Pakistan’s military planners quickly redeployed the army’s 11 and 12 Corps to the Indian border.<sup>44</sup>

Given Pakistan’s vulnerability to attack during this period, it is worth keeping in mind Pakistan’s nuclear redlines—lines which, if crossed, might provoke Pakistani leaders to use nuclear weapons against India. Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai, a confidant of President Musharraf and the Director-General of Pakistan’s Strategic Plans Division, set forth Pakistan’s redlines to a visiting group of Italian researchers, who published their interview shortly after the first peak of the ten month-long standoff.<sup>45</sup>

Lt. Gen. Kidwai explained that, “if the very existence of Pakistan as a state is at stake” nuclear weapons will be used. According to Kidwai, thresholds which would trigger a nuclear strike include circumstances where: “a. India attacks Pakistan and conquers a large part of its territory (space

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, February 1, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Nayak, Polly and Krepon, Michael. “US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis.” Report 57, The Henry L. Stimson Center. September 2006. p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Cotta-Ramusino, Paolo and Martellini, Maurizio. “Nuclear safety, nuclear stability and nuclear strategy in Pakistan: A concise report of a visit by Landau Network – Centro Volta.” The Landau Network. January 2002. <http://lxmi.mi.infn.it/~landnet/Doc/pakistan.pdf>

threshold); b. India destroys a large part either of its land or air forces (military threshold); c. India proceeds to the economic strangling of Pakistan (economic strangling); d. India pushes Pakistan into political destabilization or creates a large scale internal subversion in Pakistan (domestic destabilization.)”<sup>46</sup>

In a 2004 newspaper interview, General Sundararajan Padmanabhan, India’s Chief of Army Staff during the standoff, explained that India’s objectives in January 2002 could have included, “degradation of the other force, and perhaps the capture of disputed territory in Jammu and Kashmir.” According to Padmanabhan, limited air strikes against terrorist training camps in Kashmir would have been, “totally futile...If you really want to punish someone for something very terrible he has done you smash him. You destroy his weapons and capture his territory.”<sup>47</sup>

A senior military officer then serving in Rajasthan shared Padmanabhan’s understanding of what conflict would look like, “I have no doubt that if we went to war, we could have sorted Pakistan out well and proper, and sorted out insurgency once and for all...I have no doubt we—the Indian Army, not specifically the 2 Corps—could have brought about a crushing defeat on them, even in that short period in which international pressure would have forced us to stop.”<sup>48</sup> The aim of war, as this officer saw it, was to, “destroy the other guy’s war machine so he lets you live in peace for several years. We could have achieved that. We would get an opportunity to destroy Pakistan’s strategic resources. We were in a position to destroy his missiles, air force—all that we could have done in that period.”<sup>49</sup>

A senior officer then in the Punjab added that in, “December 2001, we meant business...[the] mobilization was rapid and all real.” According to this officer, “there was a little acting on the Pakistani side for three to four days after our troops reached the defenses. They didn’t expect us to mobilize—then they started their movements. When we were laying defensive mines, our front line troops reported Pakistani troops were laying rocks—making due until actual mines came. Pakistan was very ill-prepared...If India [had opened] a front in Punjab, Rajasthan, [Pakistan] would have been at a disadvantageous position.”<sup>50</sup>

Lt. Gen. Ved Patankar, who was commanding India’s 15 Corp in Kashmir, described his preparations for war, “We activated the whole border and that took them by surprise...I thought that was a good time to cross the Line of Control...[If hostilities had taken place] it would have played out differently in different areas. As far as the [Kashmir] valley, we had few options because of high levels of snow—minor gains at a high degree of difficulty. Elsewhere, we would have made substantial gains. ‘Substantial’ is relative—sufficient to give us bargaining position. We wouldn’t have completely

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<sup>46</sup> Cotta-Ramusino, Paolo and Martellini, Maurizio. “Nuclear safety, nuclear stability and nuclear strategy in Pakistan: A concise report of a visit by Landau Network – Centro Volta.” The Landau Network. January 2002. <http://lxmi.mi.infn.it/~landnet/Doc/pakistan.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Swami, Praveen. “Gen. Padmanabhan mulls over lesson of Operation Parakram.” The Hindu. June 2, 2004. <http://www.hindu.com/2004/02/06/stories/2004020604461200.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Interview with a senior Indian military officer, December 10, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a senior Indian military officer, December 10, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with a senior Indian military officer. September 22, 2006.

eliminated Pakistan's forces in POK [Pakistan Occupied Kashmir] but we would have made substantial gains to be in a position of advantage."<sup>51</sup>

Significantly, it is unclear whether Pakistan's key rail and road links would have been attacked in the event of a war initiated in January 2002. The importance of Pakistan's road and rail links to its strategic interests cannot be understated. As Lt. Gen. Kidwai made clear, Pakistan fears military defeat, territorial loss, and economic strangulation. Pakistan's major cities—Islamabad and Lahore in the north and Karachi and Hyderabad in the south—are connected by roads and rail lines that run parallel to the Indus River. For most of Pakistan, from north to south, these transportation links are less than 100 miles from the Indian border. If this transit corridor was severed during war, the Pakistani military would have struggled to move men and matériel and Pakistan's economy would have been crippled.

A senior officer deployed in Rajasthan at the time explained that while he was not involved in determining these specific targets, the “aim of war is to destroy the other's war machine—but [you] have to bring his war machine to battle. But he won't bring it to battle till he fears a loss of territory. If you cut off his arteries to a particular part of the country, he has to react—they [road and rail links] were all strategic targets...threatening the arteries will get him to react.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, a senior military officer who was stationed in the Punjab at the time also explained that he was not privy to specific plans about Pakistan's rail and road links but that he presumed they would have been attacked. He explained, “any attacker would try to do that.”<sup>53</sup>

Air Marshal Vinod Patney was serving on the National Security Advisory Board during the standoff. Patney commanded air operations during India's 1999 war with Pakistan in the Kashmir heights, and rose to Vice Chief of Staff of the Indian Air Force prior to his retirement shortly before the December 13, 2001 attack. As a member of the National Security Advisory Board, Patney no longer had access to specific war plans; however, he explained, “I would take an educated guess that all things being equal [the road and rail lines] would definitely be targets against which there would be some planning; whether to cut the line or hit the bridge, any lines of communication would always be targeted; basically you have to decide, will you hit the rolling stock, the bridge—the dangers involved, the air defenses you are likely to see, and the distances involved. During ops you decide on prioritization and given the overall planning—will it materially support the plan in mind? And if it does, then, ‘yes.’”<sup>54</sup>

Would war between India and Pakistan in January 2002 have led to a nuclear exchange? It is impossible to answer this counterfactual with any certainty. What appears to be clear, however, is that the Indian armed forces anticipated attacking core Pakistani interests in the weeks after the Parliament attack. Had the Indian Army and Air Force been given the green light, Pakistan would have been severely outnumbered and poorly positioned to defend its eastern border. India's military, very conceivably, could have crossed Pakistan's nuclear redlines by capturing large swaths of

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Lt. Gen. Ved Patankar, December 14, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with a senior Indian military officer, December 10, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with a senior military officer, December 11, 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Air Marshal Vinod Patney, December 15, 2006.

Pakistani territory, destroying large portions of Pakistan's land and air forces, and crippling Pakistan's economy.

**“WE FELT THIS WAS ALL HE CAN DO—  
LET’S GIVE HIM ANOTHER CHANCE”**

In the wake of the fruitless SAARC summit, tension continued to mount between India and Pakistan. According to an account of the standoff by Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, two American South Asia analysts, “Washington at this stage was ‘grasping at straws’ to prevent a major conflict that would interfere with [America’s] Afghan campaign and might well escalate.” Nayak and Krepon explain that, “senior US officials seized on Musharraf’s intention to deliver a speech in January 2002—reported back to Washington by [America’s Ambassador to Pakistan] Wendy Chamberlin—as a major opportunity to reduce tensions between India and Pakistan. Washington provided detailed advice to Musharraf on the content of the speech.”<sup>55</sup>

In Washington, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage met with India’s Ambassador, Lalit Mansingh, to convey that “Musharraf will make an important statement, and you will be very pleased, just wait.” Mansingh said that this gave the Indian government the impression that the U.S. would serve as “a guarantor for Musharraf’s promises.”<sup>56</sup>

According to Brajesh Mishra, “we had been told two or three days before [Musharraf’s] actual address by the Americans—they were asking us to be patient and to listen to what Musharraf said.”<sup>57</sup>

On January 12, 2002, during an hour-long television address that was broadcast live in both Pakistan and India, General Musharraf pledged that, “no organization will be allowed to perpetuate terrorism behind the garb of the Kashmiri cause...we will take strict action against any Pakistani who is involved in terrorism inside the country or abroad.”<sup>58</sup>

Brajesh Mishra recalled that for India’s Cabinet Committee on Security, “the impact [of Musharraf’s address] was that the decision to cross the border was postponed.”<sup>59</sup> Mishra elaborated, “The Americans came—‘Sir, please listen to Musharraf’—they had some indications on what he would say. So we said ‘ok.’ After that statement of General Musharraf, the decision was to postpone any action across the border and the Line of Control.”<sup>60</sup> Ambassador Ranganathan, chairman of India’s National Security Advisory Board, concurred, “[Musharraf’s speech] was well received...it was acknowledged that it was a courageous statement to make given Pakistan’s domestic situation.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Nayak, Polly and Krepon, Michael. “US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis.” Report 57, The Henry L. Stimson Center. September 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Lalit Mansingh, August 6, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006

<sup>58</sup> Eckholm, Erik. “The India-Pakistan Tension: Islamabad; Pakistan Pledges to Bar Any Groups Linked to Terror,” The New York Times. January 13, 2002.

<http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=FB0E13FC3C5C0C708DDDA80894DA404482>

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with C.V. Ranganathan, October 17, 2006.

For Vikram Sood, however, Musharraf's speech was, "expectantly disappointing—we didn't expect dramatic promises—[the speech] could be interpreted in different ways. We interpreted it to mean that [Musharraf's promises about banning terrorism on Pakistani soil] didn't include POK [Pakistan occupied Kashmir.]" Despite India's disappointment with the speech, Sood said, "we felt this was all he can do—let's give him another chance and see if there is a decline in terrorist activity."<sup>62</sup>

In the days following Musharraf's address, tension between India and Pakistan subsided. While the rhetoric from New Delhi and Islamabad cooled, troops on both sides remained mobilized at a high state of alert along the international border and the Line of Control in Kashmir. It seemed, at the time, that conflict had been averted.

### **“THE TIME HAS COME FOR A DECISIVE BATTLE”**

General Musharraf's January 12, 2002 address allowed India and Pakistan to inch back from the brink. The subcontinent, however, was still a tinderbox—relations between Islamabad and New Delhi were poisonous, and the million Indian and Pakistani troops along the border remained poised for war. On May 14, 2002, a spark set the tinderbox ablaze. Early that day, three terrorists disguised as Indian soldiers attacked an Indian army encampment in Kaluchak, Jammu, storming the family quarters of the camp and killing soldiers' wives and children. By the time the terrorists were killed, thirty were dead and many injured, including a two-year old child.<sup>63</sup>

In New Delhi, furious Indian leaders huddled to chart India's response to the attack. The day after the Kaluchak massacre, Prime Minister Vajpayee spoke in the upper house of India's parliament and declared in Hindi that India would have to counter the terrorist attack.<sup>64</sup> His speech was matched the following day when India's army chief declared that the "time for action has come."<sup>65</sup> On May 18, 2002, India's Cabinet Committee on Security took the unprecedented step of demanding that Pakistan recall its High Commissioner to India.

Four days later, Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Srinagar, Kashmir. During a speech at a military base, Vajpayee declared, "The time has come for a decisive battle and we will have a sure victory in this battle...The enemy has thrown us a challenge by waging a proxy war. We accept it and pledge to give it a crushing defeat," he said.<sup>66</sup>

With each day, war clouds seemed to grow darker. According to Vikram Sood, "the tension that time [after the Kaluchak attack] was much higher [than in January]...a lot of table thumping that you've got to do it or this will never stop."<sup>67</sup> Like the spike in tensions in January 2002, it is unclear whether

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Puri, Luv. "30 killed in Jammu suicide attack," *The Hindu*. May 15, 2002. See also: "Not a coincidence: Advani," *The Hindu*. May 15, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> "We must counter terrorist attacks, says Vajpayee," *The Hindu*. May 16, 2002.

<sup>65</sup> "Time for action: Army Chief," *The Hindu*. May 17, 2002.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/05/17/stories/2002051704170100.htm>

<sup>66</sup> Puri, Luv. "Be ready for decisive battle, PM tells jawans," *The Hindu*. May 23, 2002.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/05/23/stories/2002052304320100.htm>

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

or how India would have attacked Pakistan. The apparent division between Singh—who believed there was no risk of a full-fledged war—and Mishra remained. Mishra recalled that, as in January, “we were on the point of launching a full scale war...It would have been all out war.”<sup>68</sup>

As the Indian Army again readied for war, Pakistan’s defensive formations—which had been reinforced since January—complicated the army’s plans. General Padmanabhan explained in a 2004 newspaper interview that the army’s objectives were, “more achievable in January, less achievable in February, and even less achievable in March. By then, the balance of forces had gradually changed.”<sup>69</sup> Padmanabhan’s analysis was echoed by senior officers who were serving at the time in Kashmir and Rajasthan.

According to a senior officer then posted in Rajasthan, “In January [the attack window] was adequate to sort out Pakistan. In June, the window would have to be extended by 10 to 20 days. When forces on both sides are well deployed, breaking the crust is difficult. In January, breaking the crust was that much easier.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Lt. Gen. Patankar explained that in Kashmir, “gains and losses would have been limited. The degree of difficulty would have been high on account of military action. High tempo battles and heavy toll of men. Physical gains would have been limited because both sides were well prepared.”<sup>71</sup>

### **“WE DON’T TAKE TEST FIRING OF MISSILES BY PAKISTAN SERIOUSLY”**

The crisis escalated further on May 25, 2002, when Pakistan test fired a nuclear capable intermediate range “Ghauri” missile. Despite General Musharraf’s claim that the test “was not meant to give any message to anyone”<sup>72</sup> and Prime Minister Vajpayee’s dismissive rejoinder that “we don’t take test firing of missiles by Pakistan seriously,”<sup>73</sup> Islamabad’s message was heard clearly enough in New Delhi: the Ghauri missile had sufficient range—at least 1,500 kilometers—to deliver a nuclear warhead to most of India’s bustling metropolises.<sup>74</sup>

Following the missile test, Pakistani state television announced that General Musharraf would address the Pakistani people two days later.<sup>75</sup> During the address on May 27, 2002, General Musharraf declared, “We do not want war. We want peace in the region. Pakistan will never allow

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006

<sup>69</sup> Swami, Praveen. “Gen. Padmanabhan mulls over lesson of Operation Parakram.” *The Hindu*. June 2, 2004. <http://www.hindu.com/2004/02/06/stories/2004020604461200.htm>

<sup>70</sup> Interview with a senior Indian military officer, December 10, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Ved Patankar, December 14, 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Hassan, Ahmed. “Musharraf says no message thru missile test: We want peace, but not afraid of war,” *Dawn*. May 26, 2002. <http://dawn.com/2002/05/26/top1.htm>

<sup>73</sup> “Our patience is running out, says Vajpayee,” *The Hindu*. May 26, 2002. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/05/26/stories/2002052605780101.htm>

<sup>74</sup> “Pak. test-fires Ghauri missile,” *The Hindu*. May 26, 2002.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/05/26/stories/2002052603660100.htm>

<sup>75</sup> Sly, Liz. “Missile tests by Pakistan spur alarm; 2<sup>nd</sup> firing follows calls for restraint from Bush, Putin.” *Chicago Tribune*. May 26, 2002. C; Pg. 3.

the export of terrorism anywhere in the world from within Pakistan."<sup>76</sup> At the same time, Musharraf angrily vowed in Urdu that, "if war is imposed, a Muslim is not afraid, and he doesn't retreat, but with cries of 'God is great!' he jumps into the war to fight...our security and our national prestige are under threat and...we are ready to protect our motherland."<sup>77</sup>

It appears that Pakistan's intelligence services did indeed try to halt terrorist infiltration across the Line of Control after Musharraf's May 27, 2002 address. Later in the summer, Lt. Gen. Patankar told Robert Blackwill, America's Ambassador to New Delhi, that there had been "a perceptible dip in infiltration" following Musharraf's address.<sup>78</sup>

Musharraf's May 27, 2002 speech was an important but hidden turning point in the standoff. Brajesh Mishra recalled that, "for the second time [Musharraf's speech] stopped us from going across the border. We were reluctant to go to war. But we were willing to do it if we were forced to—any opportunity available to us to postpone the action, that was utilized by us." Mishra explained that Musharraf's January 2002 address, "gave us confidence he would stop cross border terrorism. The Kaluchak massacre gave lies to his assurances. As a result of Kaluchak, he went on television and reiterated what he had said in January. So we said 'OK'—let's see what happens now. The idea was to—if possible—stop short of a war. If not possible, then go ahead."<sup>79</sup>

For Mishra, Musharraf's speech was the end of the second peak of the standoff, an inflection point after which tension subsided. Musharraf's assurances were sufficient for India to de-escalate: troops would remain on the border, relations between Islamabad and New Delhi would still be frosty at best and venomous at worst, but the imminence of war had receded—the standoff remained, but the crisis was over.

However, the next day, Jaswant Singh held a press conference to respond to Musharraf's speech. Singh began the press conference, "His Excellency Gen. Pervez Musharraf's television address of May 27 is both disappointing and dangerous. Disappointing, as it merely repeats some earlier assurances which remain unfulfilled till today, and dangerous because through belligerent posturing tension has been added to, not reduced."<sup>80</sup>

Alarmingly, Singh and Mishra were pulling the crisis in opposite directions—Singh escalating while Mishra believed that the crisis had passed. (In a subsequent interview with Brajesh Mishra, Mishra reviewed Singh's response to Musharraf's May 27, 2002 address and confirmed that he believed the crisis had subsided after Musharraf's May 27, 2002 speech.)<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> LaFraniere, Sharon and Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. "Musharraf Pledges to Rein in Militants; New Vow on Kashmir Fails to Sway India." *The Washington Post*. May 28, 2002. Section A; Pg. A01.

<sup>77</sup> Sly, Liz. "Pakistan will not start war, leader says." *The Chicago Tribune*. May 28, 200. News; Zone: N; Pg. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Ved Patankar, December 14, 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>80</sup> "Transcript of Press Conference by Jaswant Singh, External Affairs Minister," *The Embassy of India*, Washington, DC. May 28, 2002. [http://www.indianembassy.org/new/2002/jk\\_02/js\\_may\\_29\\_02.htm](http://www.indianembassy.org/new/2002/jk_02/js_may_29_02.htm)

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, December 6, 2006.

As heavy shelling continued along the Line of Control and the international border, Western capitals grew increasingly concerned that war would break out. In the days following Singh's press conference, a host of foreign leaders—among them, U.S. President George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Jiang Zemin, and foreign and defense ministers from America, Britain, France, and Japan—phoned or visited Indian and Pakistani leaders to encourage them to de-escalate.<sup>82</sup>

Despite Mishra's belief that the crisis was over, with Singh's denunciation of Mushraf's speech, the crisis deepened. On May 31, 2002, Pakistani authorities imposed a nighttime blackout for much of Pakistani Kashmir, disconnecting the districts of Bagh, Kotli, and Bhimbher near the Line of Control from the national power grid and cutting power to Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani Kashmir. Muzaffarabad's deputy commissioner explained that given, "Indian threats to launch war...we must be prepared to meet any situation."<sup>83</sup>

Again on June 1 and June 2, 2002, Pakistani officials sounded air-raid sirens and cut power to "sensitive areas" in Pakistani Kashmir, including Muzaffarabad. According to an Agence France Presse report, an unnamed Pakistani official asserted that, "we are facing a serious threat of air raids from the enemy, due to which we have to switch off power at night."<sup>84</sup> With war preparations continuing, the U.S. State Department urged Americans in India for business or tourism to depart immediately because "tensions have risen to serious levels."<sup>85</sup>

Many indicators—over a fortnight of continuous heavy artillery exchanges between Indian and Pakistani troops along the border and the Line of Control, tests of nuclear capable missiles, speeches beating the drums for war, and finally the blackouts in Pakistani Kashmir—suggested that the crisis had not been ameliorated by Musharraf's speech.

Indian leaders at this vital juncture, however, held vastly disparate views on the standoff. When asked about the blackouts in an interview, Brajesh Mishra was surprised by the blackouts—he could not understand why Pakistan imposed the blackouts since they occurred after Musharraf's speech on May 27, 2002, when Mishra believed the crisis had peaked. Shaking his head with disbelief, Mishra

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<sup>82</sup> "India's Patience Running Out, Vajpayee Tells Blair," The Press Trust of India. May 27, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on October 15, 2007. See also: "China Strives for Peaceful Settlement of Indo-Pakistani Conflict, Official Says," BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit; Interfax-Kazakhstan News Agency. June 4, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis Nexis on October 15, 2007. See also: "No Plans to Hold Talks with Musharraf: Indian PM," Xinhua General News Service. June 2, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on October 15, 2007. See also: Laurinda Keys. "No Face-to-Face for India, Pakistan," Associated Press Online. June 3, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on October 15, 2002.

<sup>83</sup> "Blackout in Pakistani Kashmir as Indian shelling continues," Agence France Presse. June 1, 2002. Retried from Lexis-Nexis on August 30, 2006.

<sup>84</sup> "Power black-out as Pakistani Kashmir fears invasion by India," Agence France Presse. June 3, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on August 30, 2006.

<sup>85</sup> Thom Shanker and Elisabeth Bumiller. "Citing Tension, U.S. Advises Americans in India to Leave," The New York Times. June 1, 2002.

<http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=FB0A14F73F5E0C728CDDAF0894DA404482>

explained, “This was after the second T.V. address of President Musharraf on May 27<sup>th</sup>. There is no basis for this, no basis for this.”<sup>86</sup>

Vikram Sood, India’s intelligence chief, suggested that while Pakistan, “had legitimate fears that after [the Parliament attack on] December 13<sup>th</sup> we were going to do something big,” the blackouts in Pakistani Kashmir were just posturing. Sood downplayed Pakistan’s fears of attack, “I think a lot of it was meant for Washington because there was pressure on Musharraf to do something on the Taliban and Al Qaeda.” The blackouts, Sood believed, would help Musharraf tell the Americans, “get the Indians off my back so I can do something on the Taliban and Al Qaeda.”<sup>87</sup>

In Washington, Indian Ambassador Lalit Mansingh could not understand why the international community—and the U.S. in particular—was so fearful of war. Mansingh contended that the travel advisory was an “important miscalculation” as the State Department tried to get India and Pakistan to de-escalate. Mansingh suggested that the Americans exaggerated the risks of war, “We were still adhering to CBMs [confidence building measures.] The U.S. misread Indian intentions—[believing] the worst scenario.”<sup>88</sup>

Ambassador Ranganathan, the chairman of the National Security Advisory Board, took a similar view, expressing irritation with the State Department’s departure warning, “Frankly, one didn’t understand why such a drastic step was taken.” The blackouts in Pakistani Kashmir were equally puzzling for Ranganathan who believed they were “done for domestic reasons. I don’t think there was any particular threat that warranted it.”<sup>89</sup>

On the frontlines in Srinagar, Kashmir, the view was quite different. Lt. Gen. Patankar said that he was unaware of the blackouts; nonetheless, according to Patankar, Pakistani fears of air raids were, “a justified fear. Muzaffarabad would have been targeted. What would have been hit would be bridges, bottlenecks—not the civilian population.”<sup>90</sup> Patankar, though, believed that Pakistani fears were lower in May and June than in January, “I got the feeling that their comfort feeling on the other side was getting better in April and May. Thereafter, a perceptive change in their stance.” Patankar indicated that intelligence reports and the army’s assessments suggested that the Pakistani military was, “comfortable to take us on if we had gone across” in May and June.

Jaswant Singh also gave credence to Pakistani fears. Assessing Pakistani intentions in the face of a possible Indian attack, Singh explained, “I think Pakistan was strategically placed in a situation of great imbalance. It hasn’t the resources—military, physical, or indeed even moral—to fight a war on two fronts [Afghanistan in the East and India in the West.] I do believe it is never a good policy to push your adversary into such a corner that the responses he is compelled to think of are extreme.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Lalit Mansingh, August 6, 2006.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with C.V. Ranganathan, October 17, 2006.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Ved Patankar, December 14, 2006.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Jaswant Singh, December 13, 2006.

## “IT WAS NAUSEATING TO TALK TO MUSHARRAF”

On June 3, 2002, attention turned to Almaty, Kazakhstan, where heads of state from sixteen Asian nations—including India, Pakistan, China, and Russia—gathered for the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures.<sup>92</sup> Prior to the summit, President Musharraf expressed his desire to meet with Prime Minister Vajpayee, “We support solving the conflict through peaceful means...I’m ready to meet anywhere and at any level.”<sup>93</sup> However, Prime Minister Vajpayee rejected the possibility of talks with President Musharraf, declaring brusquely before the summit, “No meeting is planned.”<sup>94</sup> Vajpayee’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Omar Abdullah, emphasized, “There will be no secret parleys, no official level talks, no dialogue at delegation level.”<sup>95</sup>

While the conference commenced in Almaty, back in New Delhi, Yogendra Narain, India’s Defence Secretary, stole the spotlight when an interview Narain gave to the Indian newsweekly *Outlook* was published in the Pakistani press. India had considered the possibility of nuclear war, Narain told *Outlook*, and India “will retaliate and must be prepared for mutual destruction on both sides.” Moreover, India’s nuclear command structure was in place, Narain said, and in the event of a nuclear exchange, “we don’t expect any delay in issuing orders.” Narain concluded the interview by warning Pakistan that Indian troops were poised to strike on three hours’ notice. Narain’s comments were quickly disavowed by an Indian Ministry of Defense press release which reaffirmed that, “India does not believe in the use of nuclear weapons. Neither does it visualise that it will be used by any other country.”<sup>96</sup>

Narain’s comments cast a shadow over the conference in Almaty. And when night fell on the conference’s first day, little had changed. Throughout the day, Musharraf and Vajpayee each attended the requisite summit luncheon, briefed the press, and meet with presidents and prime ministers from other nations—but they never so much as shook hands with each other.

Brajesh Mishra, who was accompanying Prime Minister Vajpayee in Almaty, told a press conference that evening that if President Musharraf’s promises to halt terrorism from Pakistan were implemented then, “we can take appropriate steps.” But India, he said, would not meet with Pakistani officials in Almaty, opting instead to “wait and see and verify what has been promised first.”<sup>97</sup>

On June 4, 2002, the final day of the conference in Almaty, Russian President Vladimir Putin met individually with both Musharraf and Vajpayee. Putin urged Musharraf and Vajpayee to de-escalate

<sup>92</sup> “Warn countries sponsoring terror: PM,” *The Hindu*. June 4, 2002.

<http://www.hindu.com/2002/06/04/stories/2002060404600100.htm>

<sup>93</sup> “Musharraf appeals to Vajpayee for peace talks,” *The Hindu*. June 3, 2002.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/06/03/stories/2002060303120100.htm>

<sup>94</sup> “No Indo-Pak. Meet in Almaty,” *The Hindu*. June 3, 2002.

<sup>95</sup> ul Haque, Ihtasham. “Musharraf ready for unconditional talks with India: Almaty conference begins today,”

*Dawn*. June 4, 2002. <http://www.dawn.com/2002/06/04/top1.htm>

<sup>96</sup> “Indian official says attack plan ready: Defence ministry plays down report,” *Dawn*. June 4, 2002.

<http://dawn.com/2002/06/04/top6.htm>

<sup>97</sup> Atul Aneja. “Appropriate steps if Pak. keeps word: Brajesh,” *The Hindu*. June 4, 2002.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/06/04/stories/2002060404620100.htm>

the crisis. Press reports following the meetings described Putin's intervention as stressing the need for initiatives, "so that this conflict is not just defused, but the two sides move away from future confrontation."<sup>98</sup> Putin underscored that Russia, "like the whole world community, [is] extremely concerned at the course of relations between India and Pakistan."<sup>99</sup>

Putin's intervention, phone calls from Washington, and the concern of world leaders in Almaty and across the globe were insufficient to convince Indian leaders to meet with their Pakistani counterparts. In an interview, Brajesh Mishra said matter-of-factly, "we were not trying to engage in a dialogue." Mishra explained that he did not speak with Pakistani officials because, "if the Prime Minister had no desire to do it, no sense in my talking to them." Mishra continued, "We had made up our minds even before leaving Delhi [for Almaty]—we would not talk with him." Mishra said that among the Indian leadership there was "intense dislike for Musharraf: A man who had sabotaged the Lahore Conference, who had made Agra infructuous, who had not reigned in the terrorists from attacking across the Line of Control—and even the Parliament of India. There was no eagerness at all on our part to engage in a discussion with him at that time—too charged an atmosphere...it was nauseating to talk to Musharraf at that point in time. Almaty was a failure from his point of view—not our point of view...we were not going to talk to him."<sup>100</sup>

With tensions still simmering and steps toward de-escalation as yet untaken, Musharraf briefed the press before departing from Almaty. Musharraf told the gathered reporters, who had asked about Pakistan's nuclear strategy, that "the possession of nuclear weapons by any state obviously implies that they will be used under some circumstances." Rattling a nuclear saber, Musharraf said, "Pakistan will never initiate a war...but will defend its honor and dignity with full resolve...the reality of the tension between India and Pakistan is that India is continually threatening Pakistan with an attack and also refusing a dialogue."<sup>101</sup>

That night, in Jammu, the winter capital of Indian Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian Air Force and civilian officials held a blackout drill to practice responding to Pakistani air attacks.<sup>102</sup> Lt. Gen. Patankar explained that the drill was "just to check out [our] level of preparation and to carry out rehearsals—to check if the civilian machinery was prepared to deal with an air strike by Pakistan—hospitals, ambulances, the whole civilian machinery."<sup>103</sup>

Vikram Sood suggested as well that the Jammu blackout drill was to "give a message across the border," that India was ready and "we will strike if you do something." Sood said that the Jammu

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<sup>98</sup> "Leaders agree on using peaceful means: Putin: Talks with Musharraf, Vajpayee held." Dawn. June 5, 2002. <http://dawn.com/2002/06/05/top1.htm>

<sup>99</sup> "Serious and positive signals from Musharraf: Putin," The Hindu. June 5, 2002. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/06/05/stories/2002060505410100.htm>

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>101</sup> "N-arms possession implies usage: Musharraf," The Hindu. June 5, 2002. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/06/05/stories/2002060505390100.htm>

<sup>102</sup> "Blackout drill in Jammu city," The Press Trust of India. June 4, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on July 9, 2006.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Ved Patankar, December 14, 2006.

exercise also conveyed to the United States, “we are serious about the whole thing. Our patience has been tested again and again and...Musharraf isn’t doing what he is supposed to.”<sup>104</sup>

### **“A COMMITMENT BY MUSHARRAF TO END PERMANENTLY, CROSS-BORDER, CROSS-LOC INFILTRATION”**

The next day throughout eastern Pakistan, local officials feared that war was imminent. In Rawalpindi, home to the Pakistani Army’s headquarters, as well as the bustling Punjabi metropolises of Multan and Lahore, air sirens wailed while ambulances and emergency personnel drilled for the worst. Hospitals were told to prepare extra beds for the wounded, and officials warned those villagers still in their homes along the border with India to evacuate and head for safer ground.<sup>105</sup>

When the sun rose on the subcontinent on June 6, 2002, a tenuous peace still held. That morning, Richard Armitage, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, arrived in Islamabad for shuttle diplomacy aimed at staving off war. After midday meetings with Pakistan’s foreign secretary and foreign minister, Armitage sat down for what would be a nearly two hour session with General Musharraf.<sup>106</sup> During the meeting, according to Nayak and Krepon’s account, Armitage believed that, “he elicited, confirmed, and reconfirmed Musharraf’s pledge to make cessation [of infiltration of terrorists into Indian Kashmir] permanent.” Armitage and Musharraf discussed making the latter’s pledge public but apparently did not go into detail about to whom Musharraf’s assurances would be conveyed.<sup>107</sup>

After spending the night in Islamabad, Armitage flew to New Delhi.<sup>108</sup> In meetings with Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani, Jaswant Singh, and then finally with Brajesh Mishra and Prime Minister Vajpayee, Armitage relayed Musharraf’s pledge to halt infiltration across the Line of Control. After the final meeting in the evening with Mishra and Vajpayee, Armitage emerged and told waiting reporters that there is a “commitment to the US by Musharraf to end permanently, cross-border, cross-LoC infiltration.”<sup>109</sup> Armitage also asked India to take “reciprocal, de-escalatory steps” to defuse the crisis.

Within days, the tension between India and Pakistan abated. Seventy-two hours after Armitage’s visit, India began to stand down from its war footing—ordering ships that had been patrolling off the coast of Pakistan to return to port, lifting restrictions that had banned Pakistani aircraft from flying over Indian territory, and initiating the formal process to appoint a new Indian High Commissioner to

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

<sup>105</sup> “Cities in eastern Pakistan drill for attack by India,” Agence France Presse. June 5, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on July 6, 2007. See also, Sipra, Adnan. “Pakistani cities hold civil defense drills to prepare for possible Indian attack,” The Associated Press. June 5, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on July 6, 2007.

<sup>106</sup> “Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage Press Availability, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Islamabad, Pakistan,” The United States Department of State. June 6, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on July 6, 2007.

<sup>107</sup> Krepon, Michael and Nayak, Polly. “US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis.” Report 57, The Henry L. Stimson Center. September 2006.

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Roche. “Trouble-shooting US envoy meets Indian leaders over Kashmir,” Agence France Presse. June 7, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on July 5, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Vij, Bhavna and Malhotra, Jyoti. “US puts money to Musharraf’s mouth,” The Indian Express. June 8, 2002. [http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/ple/archive\\_full\\_story.php?content\\_id=4016](http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/ple/archive_full_story.php?content_id=4016)

Pakistan.<sup>110</sup> And in Islamabad, General Musharraf expressed confidence that, “the chance of war is minimal. The threat...has diminished.”<sup>111</sup>

American analysts point to Armitage’s visit as the turning point in the crisis, an instance when American shuttle diplomacy helped India and Pakistan back away from the brink.<sup>112</sup> And certainly from the chain of events, Armitage’s meetings in Islamabad and then New Delhi appear to have paved a path that permitted both nations to de-escalate. However, in India, Armitage’s visit is viewed quite differently. For Vikram Sood, Armitage’s visit was not particularly significant to the point of being hardly memorable. Despite American efforts to get India to defuse the crisis, Sood said, “we always felt Musharraf would be two-timing the U.S.”<sup>113</sup> According to Sood, India de-escalated after the Almaty summit because, “you have to live with your neighbor and the fear is that high tension at any point can snap and lead to a situation which neither side wants—having made your point it is best to try to cool down the thing—you can’t do away with your neighbor.” After a long pause, Sood added, “we will live with them.”

Jaswant Singh also downplayed Armitage’s role, explaining that, “people like to claim credit for a lot of things and in complex situations a lot of people claim credit when they are eased.” However, Singh acknowledged that American efforts to encourage Pakistan to halt infiltration were greeted warmly as, “any step Pakistan takes to wind down the nemesis of terrorism is a step we would welcome.”<sup>114</sup> And Brajesh Mishra also minimized Armitage’s role because, Mishra said, the crisis ended after Musharraf’s May 27, 2002 speech and Armitage arrived in June. Mishra told me, “The tension went down after the 27th of May address by Musharraf in which he repeated his assurances of the January statement. Armitage came after that.”

Nonetheless, Mishra said that American diplomats in January 2002 were, “willing to give assurances on behalf of Pakistan.” Conversely, during Armitage’s meeting with Vajpayee in June, Armitage was “less categorical.” Though Armitage publicly expressed great certainty in Musharraf’s pledges, Mishra said that in private Armitage told Mishra and Vajpayee, “this is what Pakistan is saying and you can decide what you want to do...[Armitage] was less confident of [Pakistan’s] inclination or...ability to control cross-border terrorism.”<sup>115</sup> Whatever the reason for the de-escalation, after Armitage’s shuttle diplomacy, five months passed before soldiers along the border redeployed to their barracks and the standoff finally came to an end. Ten months of eyeball to eyeball confrontation, complete with two crises, came and went without the outbreak of war.

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<sup>110</sup> Malhotra, Jyoti. “India opens a window in the sky—and sea,” *The Indian Express*. June 11, 2002.

[http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/pIe/archive\\_full\\_story.php?content\\_id=4178](http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/pIe/archive_full_story.php?content_id=4178)

<sup>111</sup> “Chances of war minimal: Musharraf,” *The Hindu*. June 10, 2002.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/06/10/stories/2002061005280100.htm>

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Michael Krepon and Polly Nayak. “US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis,” *The Henry L. Stimson Center*. September 2006. Report 57. p. 37.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Jaswant Singh, December 13, 2006.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

## **“A NUCLEAR DIMENSION JUST DID NOT EXIST”**

For as much as Indian policymakers appeared not to be on the same page during those ten harrowing months, they remain united, at least publicly, in their belief that the nuclear risks during the standoff were minimal. In his memoirs, Jaswant Singh suggests that there is a need for a, “better understanding [of the] ‘nuclear war scare’...then raised, primarily by the US and the UK. I found this odd, also entirely unnecessary: Why cause a deliberate scare by raising alarms about the possibility of a ‘nuclear conflict’, or of this troops’ mobilisation acquiring any kind of uncontrollable autonomy? This scare was incomprehensible, for a nuclear dimension just did not exist.”<sup>116</sup>

Given Singh’s assertion that there would be no war, his logic seems fairly sound: no war, no nuclear risks. However, those who anticipated war also believed that there was little chance that a conflict would escalate to a nuclear exchange. Vikram Sood, for example, believed that a limited war was possible and that the risks of a nuclear war were minimal given the constraints of a limited conflict. For Sood, Pakistan’s nuclear threats during the standoff were, “a risk you take. The assessment was this was all rhetoric...more rhetoric than reality.” Sood believes Westerners were fearful of a nuclear conflict in a way that Indians were not because, “distant fears always seem more dangerous than at home.” Sood added that during the ten month confrontation, he did not, “remember that either side had developed that type of precision capability to launch [a] first strike and second strike. And the [nuclear] rhetoric always came from [Pakistan] first—reactive statements from India—[India was] not the initiator.”<sup>117</sup>

Within the Indian officer corps, there was a similar sense that the risks of a nuclear exchange were minimal. A senior officer then posted in Rajasthan recalled, “No way about nuclear risks...What is Pakistan’s nuclear threshold? India possesses second strike capability. Pakistan knows this. If Pakistan uses nuclear weapons first, it will cause great damage, but our second strike will annihilate Pakistan. Therefore, the threshold—Pakistan will turn to use nuclear weapons when it sees it is being annihilated...If our ground operations had gone in a manner that Pakistan is being dismembered and finished as a country, they will consider using nuclear weapons...till then Pakistan wouldn’t use nuclear weapons.”<sup>118</sup>

Brajesh Mishra, who anticipated launching an all out war, agreed, “here in South Asia there is much less fear of a nuclear escalation. I think in both countries there is a realization of the incalculable damage which a nuclear conflict would entail.” Mishra added that, “given the irrationality of the leaders of Pakistan, one cannot rule out 100% a nuclear misadventure by Pakistan. Having said that, we are confident that there are sane voices in Pakistan which would stop any such misadventure.”<sup>119</sup> Moreover, reflecting this confidence, Mishra stated that the Cabinet Committee on Security never gave consent for India’s military to deploy nuclear capable missiles or aircraft during the standoff.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Singh, Jaswant. *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India*. Rupa and Co. New Delhi. 2006. P. 341

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Vikram Sood, October 31, 2006.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with a senior Indian army officer, December 10, 2006.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, December 6, 2006.

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## **“IN SITUATIONS OF TENSION, EVENTS HAVE AN INBUILT AUTONOMY”**

The 2001-2002 standoff ended with minimal casualties. There was no conventional war, limited or otherwise, and no crossing of the nuclear threshold. The majority of those killed and maimed during the confrontation were Indians and Pakistanis living in borderland villages in the Punjab, Rajasthan, and Kashmir who were struck by mortars or who inadvertently detonated buried landmines.

The absence of war did not diminish the dangers of the standoff. As noted earlier, Brajesh Mishra claimed that in January 2002, the Cabinet Committee on Security made, “a unanimous decision to let Pakistan know this kind of thing would not be tolerated. A unanimous decision to mobilize. A unanimous decision to cross the Line of Control and the border.”<sup>121</sup> How statesmen and generals on both sides would have prevented such a war from escalating, even if it initially was limited in scope, is a question that lacks reassuring answers. It is notable, as well, that some Indian leaders, convinced that the nuclear risks were minimal, felt little sense of urgency to pull back from the brink when the standoff twice devolved into deep crisis. Opportunities for direct communication with Pakistani leaders were eschewed.

Contradictory recollections about the course of events provided by those interviewed deepen questions about the standoff, and they serve as a reminder that the conclusions reached in this essay are quite tentative. Additional studies are needed to help resolve these contradictions. Key question deserving further study include: Is it true that Brajesh Mishra believed that the Cabinet Committee on Security had unanimously decided to attack Pakistan? If so, how could Brajesh Mishra have believed that the Cabinet Committee on Security had unanimously decided to attack Pakistan while Jaswant Singh was firmly convinced there would be no war? Is it true that Mishra, despite RAW’s assessment that only a limited war was possible, envisioned launching an all out attack while maintaining that the risks of a nuclear exchange were minimal? If so, how could Vikram Sood not know that Mishra anticipated an all out war? If it is true that the Indian Army anticipated attacking core Pakistani interests, then why, given RAW’s assessment, did the Indian Army anticipate attacking core interests in Pakistan without any fear whatsoever of a nuclear reprisal?

Musharraf’s May 27, 2002 speech also raises important questions. Is it true that Mishra believed that Musharraf’s address served to de-escalate the crisis? If so, then how could Mishra believe that Musharraf’s address had resolved the crisis and Jaswant Singh, the very next day, declare that Musharraf’s speech had made the crisis more dangerous?

Moreover, in the days after Musharraf’s address, there were many signs that the crisis had not abated: artillery duels along the border continued, international calls to defuse the crisis mounted, Pakistan tested several nuclear capable missiles, Indian and Pakistani towns prepared for air strikes, and finally Richard Armitage traveled to Islamabad and New Delhi to press both countries to de-escalate. Mishra said that he believed the crisis was long over. If it is true that Mishra believed the crisis

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

began to de-escalate on May 27, 2002, then Mishra's unawareness of the continuing crisis may indicate that Mishra was badly misreading events.

In light of these puzzling questions and some in India who publicly claim that there were no nuclear risks during the standoff, perhaps it is Jaswant Singh who, ironically, puts forward the best explanation for why the confrontation was so dangerous. In his memoirs, Singh claims that "a nuclear dimension just did not exist" during the standoff. Yet at the conclusion of Singh's interview, he explained, "I incline to the view—which is not philosophical, it is a realist view—that it is an error to assume infallibility of judgment; also, that in situations of tension, events have an inbuilt autonomy." Singh paused before continuing, "Human beings all over the world incline to the view that they are in control of events. My experience and study informs me: so often events assert that autonomy, and human will and judgment is rendered inoperative thereafter."<sup>122</sup>

**“IT IS ONLY AFTER THE MOBILIZATION OF 2002 THAT THE PEACE PROCESS COULD BEGIN. THIS WAS THE REALIZATION: HAVING GONE TO THE BRINK, A MORE RATIONAL VIEW PREVAILED.”**

The people who know the 2001-2002 standoff best are those political, military, and diplomatic leaders who managed the crisis. The specific "lessons learned" regarding the standoff, and how those lessons apply to India and Pakistan, are still being evaluated by foreign policy practitioners in South Asia and in Washington. Yet diplomatic crises, and especially those with a nuclear tinge, are not limited just to South Asia. This narrative illuminates four important and enduring challenges of crisis management: the limits of nuclear deterrence; the risks of limited military action; the complexities of message management; and the challenge of interagency coordination.

The theoretical foundations of nuclear deterrence are grounded upon the premise that the Bomb makes national leaders clear-eyed about the risks of a conflict between nuclear-armed adversaries. Pakistan's nuclear weapons certainly influenced the strategic calculus of Indian leaders. It is unlikely, for example, that Vikram Sood would have anticipated only a limited war if Pakistan did not have the Bomb. However, this narrative presents reason to question whether nuclear weapons did, in fact, induce clarity into Indian decision-making during the standoff. The disparate perceptions relayed in this essay suggest that nuclear weapons may not, in fact, eliminate as Waltz and others contend, "the miscalculation [that] causes wars." Nuclear weapons may help stabilize an adversarial relationship but they certainly do not prevent severe crises that can lead to conflict, inadvertently or deliberately.

Similarly, notions of "limited" war are a staple of the literature of deterrence. Before embarking on a "limited" military action, statesmen and generals consider many questions. Among the most important questions that statesmen and generals consider are: What factors would keep a limited military action limited, and what factors would cause a limited military action to escalate? What impact would the media—and, in particular, live television and internet coverage—have on the military action? How would a country contemplating a limited military action respond to retaliatory

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<sup>122</sup> Singh, Jaswant. *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India*. Rupa and Co. New Delhi. 2006. P. 341

attacks targeting territory, soldiers, or civilians? What factors may cause an adversary to underestimate redlines during a crisis? How can a country credibly convey redlines or credibly threaten another nation?

Message management during a crisis is both essential and difficult. Disciplined message management can help prevent unintended escalation during a crisis. At the same time, politicians, diplomats, and generals must convey information to multiple audiences during a standoff, including the adversary country's military, diplomatic service, and media; international diplomats and journalists; as well as to key domestic audiences. Statesmen and generals also have incentives to present confusing messages during a crisis in an effort to keep the adversary off-balance. Managing these competing interests while preventing messaging that causes an unintended escalation is an important but extraordinarily challenging task for national leaders.

Finally, interagency coordination is an enduring challenge for all governments. Even during the best of times, coordinating complex government bureaucracies in the formulation and implementation of policy is difficult. Periods of crisis strain government bureaucracies at a time when nimble and coordinated responses to complex challenges are most needed. Uncoordinated or poorly coordinated strategies during a crisis can inadvertently cause a crisis to escalate. Facilitating interagency cooperation is a vital but complicated task for heads of state and principals in the midst of a crisis.

Nuclear-tinged crises are fraught with risk. Even the most able leaders during a crisis cannot confidently expect to control outcomes. Mitigating risks between two nuclear rivals is possible, but eliminating those nuclear risks entirely may well be impossible. Given the enduring challenges which confronted national leaders during the 2001-2002 standoff, India and Pakistan's nascent peace process, initiated in 2003, gives hope that peace and prosperity can replace crisis and confrontation in South Asia. From crisis comes opportunity: At the close of his interview, Brajesh Mishra was quick to point out that, "it is only after the mobilization of 2002 that the peace process could begin. This was the realization: Having gone to the brink, a more rational view prevailed."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Brajesh Mishra, November 7, 2006.

# APPENDIX A

## **About the Author**

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