

**CRITICIZING INDIA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM
BEARS A HIGH PRICE**

by

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**THE
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President Clinton's most adamant critics concede that he is a master at maintaining political support among a smorgasbord of interest groups. Now, with the explosion of five nuclear devices by India, he has reached out to two more constituencies—the anti-all-things-nuclear crowd and the disarmament vote. But, there is a downside to this shot-from-the-hip condemnation of India.

First, let's deal with economic sanctions. Will they have any impact on India's behavior? The answer is a resounding, Yes! Whatever goodwill had been built up in India since the end of the cold war will be severely eroded as will America's ability to influence India's policy in other areas important to our national interests. And American prestige will be further damaged when economic sanctions are shown to have little, if any, long-term effect on the Indian economy.

No matter what appeals or threats the United States might make, it is a certainty that Pakistan will accelerate its nuclear weapons program either overtly or covertly, or both. This leads to an interesting question: If both India and Pakistan have nuclear arsenals, is conflict between them more or less likely, remembering (that the two countries have fought three wars since their independence from Great Britain. Based on the incontrovertible fact that peace in Europe between 1948 and 1990 -- some 42 years -- was maintained, not by a balance of conventional forces between NATO and the Soviet bloc, but by the realization that any conflict could escalate into a nuclear war. Nuclear weapons kept the peace in Europe and there is no reason why a nuclear armed India and Pakistan would not adhere to the same reasoning.

The CIA recently reported that 13 of the People's Republic of China 18 long-range missiles are aimed at U.S. cities. Even the most benign interpretation of this fact must conclude that the PRC considers the United States its most likely long-run enemy. The PRC attitude is not unlike Japan's view of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Nor can any rational argument be made that the PRC's rapid expansion of its conventional military forces is anything but a desire to be the dominant power in East Asia. If one considers that a mutual non-aggression pact between Russia and China is likely, if not already in place, the question is what counterweight or possible counterweight exists to thwart PRC hegemony in East Asia?

Japan is a U.S. ally but the extent of its involvement in a Sino-U.S. conflict is still questionable. But what other consideration might influence PRC calculations as it weighs its expansionist policies? One might be the existence of a nuclear-armed, democratic India, a country which has already fought a border war with the Peoples Republic of China.

President Nixon played the China card in our Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union, although such was always officially denied. In May of 1998, the United States discarded the "India card." And for what? Fleeting applause from a worldwide audience that has proven to be fickle..

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