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## THE NUCLEARIZATION OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN AND THE QUEST FOR PEACE IN SOUTH ASIA: RESPONSE AND APPREHENSIONS OF THE WEST

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### Introduction

In contemporary global politics, possession of nuclear armaments by a state is considered as one of the most sensitive issues. Owing to the destructive capacity which a state can achieve after acquiring nuclear weapons, world powers not only show their concern but respond with threats of sanctions and diplomatic isolation to the country seeking to build or acquire them. The risk of nuclear proliferation becomes a critical issue in case a developing country aspires to become a nuclear power.

The world was aghast by an unprecedented catastrophe when the United States – the only state which has so far used its nuclear weapons – dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan nearing the end of the Second World War which killed several thousand people. The after effects of the nuclear bombs lingered in the country for several decades, causing harm to humans, animals and the environment on a large scale. Though many more countries developed nuclear weapons after the Second World War no state has ever used it against another.

During the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union, both superpowers embarked upon a relentless nuclear arms race to gain ascendancy over each other. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was the high point of their stand off when the world moved very close to the brink of a nuclear war between the two ideological rivals. As a result of this “eye-ball to eye-ball” situation, public perceptions about nuclear weapons became very negative in Europe and the US. The presence of nuclear weapons became an incentive to reduce the threat of war. Hence, peace movements against war and nuclear weapons started, particularly in the late sixties, when the Vietnam War was in a very critical stage. Subsequently, the two rival superpowers initiated confidence-building measures to avoid war, defuse hostilities and build mutual trust. At the societal level, strong public and elite support for Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) helped to

strengthen negotiations between the two adversaries. Organizations devoted to peace also put enormous pressure on the superpowers.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of wise decision making and probably the deterrence factor of nuclear weapons, the two superpowers realized that war was not an option.

While several summits had been held between the two superpowers from the mid 1950s onwards, covering a variety of political, economic and military issues, after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 these summits were mostly aimed at nuclear arms reduction. As a result of this diplomacy both powers successfully completed and signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I and the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in May 1972. Negotiations on SALT II began in 1975 and the treaty was signed in 1979. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was signed in December 1987.<sup>2</sup>

During the Cold War, besides the Soviet Union, which successfully tested its nuclear weapons in 1949, Britain, France and the People's Republic of China too acquired nuclear power status. These four nuclear powers were also permanent members of the UN Security Council, the institution mainly responsible for maintaining world peace. It was decided by the US and the other four nuclear powers that they would not allow the entry of more countries in the nuclear club. Thus the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was signed in 1968 with the provision that it would be reviewed after every five years. Despite the NPT, today along with these five nuclear states, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel also possess nuclear weapons. South Africa after the removal of the white regime in the early 1990s, voluntarily renounced its aspiration to become a nuclear weapons state. Germany and Japan, two great economic powers, with considerable political clout, owing to the treaties they signed with the Allied powers at the end of the Second World War, have undertaken never to build nuclear weapons. In May 1998, India detonated a nuclear device in Rajasthan and in a tit-for-tat response, Pakistan followed suit.

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<sup>1</sup> Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, "CBMs and South Asia", in Dipankar Banerjee (ed.), *Confidence Building Measures in South Asia* (Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 1999), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Mark R. Amstutz, *International Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to World Politics* (USA: The McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 1999), 284.

Though Israel officially maintained that it did not possess nuclear weapons, in 2006, because of an apparent slip of the tongue during an interview, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert refuted his own country's claim and revealed to the world that Israel had acquired nuclear weapons. In the case of Israel, the Western powers showed no adverse reaction. Currently, Iran has been accused by the world powers of moving closer to creating a nuclear device. However, Tehran repeatedly denies these allegations and maintains that its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes, in particular to meet the country's growing energy demands.

As indicated earlier, a number of initiatives have been taken by the world powers to stop nuclear proliferation and prevent states from developing nuclear arms. However, despite the horrors that nuclear weapons can unleash and the peril of harsh economic sanctions by the international community, four countries – India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea are now de facto nuclear powers.

This paper is an attempt to analyze Pakistan's narrative on its nuclear programme. The framework of research in this paper is drawn from the Realist strand of thought in international relations. The paper also discusses the apprehensions of the West and its response to Pakistan's nuclear programme, and offers some recommendations for maintaining peace in South Asia.

### **Realism as a framework of study**

By applying the Realist method, one can understand more easily why states opt for nuclear weapons. For the Realists, the sovereignty and security of states is fundamental. To uphold their sovereignty and to protect themselves from internal and external aggression, states create and maintain security mechanisms. The security of states and broader international security are firmly rooted in the traditions of power politics.<sup>3</sup> Realists accord immense importance to national security and state survival.<sup>4</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to say that the territorial integrity of a state and its survival are of prime importance in the Realist discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68.

To safeguard their territories and thwart aggression, states develop their armed forces and build up weaponry.

One of the most influential contemporary Realists is Hans J. Morgenthau, who argues that “international politics like all politics is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim”.<sup>5</sup>

Realists are rather pessimistic about human nature and the concept of global governance. They claim that there is actually no global governance and owing to its absence most of the time there is anarchy. Realists believe that “there is a system of sovereign and armed states facing each other. World politics is an international anarchy”.<sup>6</sup> In this scenario, where states’ security cannot be guaranteed, it is imperative for states to develop efficient armed forces to counter the threat to their territorial integrity and sovereignty. If they have an edge over others in military might, states can more easily maintain their security.

Seventeenth century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes emphasizes not only on military power but also on international law. His contention, as quoted by Jackson and Sorenson is that “states can also contract treaties with each other to provide a legal basis for their relations. International law can moderate the international state of nature by providing a framework of agreements and rules that are of advantage to all states”.<sup>7</sup> However, Hobbes also points out, “international law is created by states and it will only be observed if it is in the security and survival interests of states to do that; otherwise it will be ignored”.<sup>8</sup>

In contemporary Realist thought, Thomas Schelling is an important proponent of strategic realism. According to Schelling, when serious diplomatic and military issues arise, leaders are often compelled to take strategic decisions, ignoring moral choices. Strategic realism, according to Schelling, “focuses centrally on the foreign policy decision making. When state leaders confront basic diplomatic and military issues they are obliged

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<sup>5</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Sixth Edition (USA: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1985), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

to think strategically – i.e. instrumentally – if they hope to be successful”.<sup>9</sup> By emphasizing on the instrumental nature of decisions, Schelling asserts that state leaders set aside their moral choices and take decisions which are required in the given circumstances.

Pakistan developed its nuclear weapons programme in response to India’s nuclear ambitions. Pakistan, a state much smaller in size and population and lacking in strategic depth, felt that it had to create deterrence against India. Moreover, India, after successfully conducting its nuclear tests in 1998, made taunting remarks against Pakistan. In such circumstances, the civilian and military leadership of the state considered it necessary to respond by nuclear tests, irrespective of the moral implications of the decision. The step was necessary to correct the balance of power.

In the realist discourse, it is essential for a state to maintain its supreme authority over its territory, in other words sovereignty. A state must also be able to deal effectively with domestic and international threats. These essential objectives can only be achieved through a well thought out national security strategy. The primary aspect of national security is military security. Military security agenda, in the words of Barry Buzan “revolves largely around the ability of governments to maintain themselves against internal and external military threats, but it can also involve the use of military power to defend states or governments against nonmilitary threats to their existence, such as migrants or rival ideologies”.<sup>10</sup> According to Buzan “security is about survival”.<sup>11</sup>

When India conducted its first nuclear tests in Pokharan in 1974, Pakistan also embarked upon the mission to develop nuclear weapons. The two countries have a more than six decades old history of animosity and fought three major wars in a brief post-independence period of just twenty four years; they were also engaged in three prolonged low intensity wars – Rann of Kutch, Siachen and Kargil. Considering the deep-rooted mutual hostility and paranoia, Pakistan found it necessary to adopt the nuclear path for its very survival. Equipped with a nuclear arsenal, India could create military asymmetry, with an adverse impact on South Asian security. This situation evoked a genuine fear in Pakistan of an attack by India and necessitated

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 21.

that it secure itself against the threat from its eastern neighbour, and restore the balance of power by starting its own nuclear programme.

### **The security dilemma and Pakistan's nuclear tests**

While vulnerable states have little choice but to increase their military capacity and equip themselves with more and more weapons for protection from potential aggressors, such actions inevitably evoke reactions, for when one state takes action to improve its security by increasing its military might or entering into alliances with other states, it leads other states to adopt similar measures, as they too feel threatened.

This is called a security dilemma and the term was first coined by German scholar John H. Herz in 1951.

Each state which enters into this cycle claims that its acquisition of armaments is a defensive measure. However, these defensive measures are considered as a threat by the other states who in reaction try to enhance their own military power. This vicious cycle often drags states into heightened tensions, paranoia and conflict. Pakistan also faces such a dilemma; though as a much smaller country than its hostile eastern neighbour, its sense of insecurity is not unjustifiable.

The nuclear tests which were conducted by India in May 1998, pushed Pakistan to conduct similar tests to counter the Indian threat. Considering the long and unrelenting history of hostilities between India and Pakistan, the latter had no choice but to conduct a series of nuclear tests on May 28, 1998 despite the enormous international pressure on it to desist from taking such a step. Other than nuclear arsenals, both countries also compete in developing their delivery systems and conventional forces.

### **Nuclearization of India and Pakistan; response and apprehensions of the West**

When India conducted its nuclear tests, the European Union and the US imposed sanctions on India and pressurized Pakistan's leadership to refrain from conducting tests.<sup>12</sup> As pointed out earlier, Pakistan needed nuclear arms to deter a nuclear or conventional attack by India. Islamabad therefore decided to conduct a series of nuclear tests on May 28, 1998.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://cns.miis.edu/archive/country\\_india/wreactpk.htm](http://cns.miis.edu/archive/country_india/wreactpk.htm).

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal enhanced its security instead of making it more vulnerable. However, it is a fact that due to this arms race, a major part of the country's resources are being utilized for defence rather than economic uplift. A part of the resources spent on defence could have been utilized for the social sector to alleviate poverty, illiteracy and ill-health.

Way back in 1974, India had conducted its first nuclear test in Pokharan, nicknamed "Smiling Buddha". Soon after this test, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto held a press conference in Lahore on May 19, 1974 and demanded a nuclear umbrella from the West to protect Pakistan against any potential Indian nuclear attack.<sup>13</sup> The two countries had already fought three major wars and the memories of all three wars including the most recent one, of 1971, were still fresh in the minds of the Pakistani people. The last one in particular was most painful for Pakistan, for during this war Pakistan lost its eastern wing. In this scenario, the then Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto declared his firm resolve to build nuclear weapons, even if the people of Pakistan "had to eat grass". Mr. Bhutto, true to his word, launched Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme in earnest, and it was continued by his successors, including General Zia-ul-Haq with great diligence. Pakistani scientists were able, within a few years, to develop a nuclear device. However, this was a perilous path for Pakistan to follow.

In this dangerous nuclear arms race in South Asia, the fact is generally ignored that it was Pakistan which took the initiative for nuclear non-proliferation in the region. Pakistan proposed to make South Asia a nuclear free zone, in 1972. It put forward a proposal to denuclearize South Asia in the 16<sup>th</sup> UN Atomic Energy Conference held in Mexico in September 1972. Pakistan's representative in this conference, Munir Ahmad Khan, asked South Asian countries to make the region a nuclear free zone through a treaty.<sup>14</sup> This was quite predictably opposed by India.

An aspect which must not be ignored with regard to the constant expansion of India's nuclear arsenal is the China factor. Though Sino-Indian relations have greatly improved since the eighties, the border issue

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Lyon, *Conflict between India and Pakistan: An Encyclopedia* (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 194.

<sup>14</sup> Mr. Munir Ahmad Khan's speech at PAEC Medal Award Ceremony on 20 March 1999. Visit at [www.pakdef.org/forum/topic/8506-munir-ahmad-khan-speech-pakistan-nuclear-history/](http://www.pakdef.org/forum/topic/8506-munir-ahmad-khan-speech-pakistan-nuclear-history/).

between the two countries has not been resolved and the two remain rivals in the military field. Thus, India has developed nuclear weapons not only to intimidate Pakistan but also to maintain balance of power vis-à-vis China. Regarding Pakistan's nuclear tests of May 1998, the fact must also be considered that there is no example in history in which a country (in this case, India) after conducting nuclear tests deliberately provoked its rival to also conduct tests. This aspect of the matter has been ignored by world powers.

Evidently, India wanted to divert the international pressure towards Pakistan. While world powers offered considerable monetary support to Pakistan to halt its march towards nuclearization, Islamabad was rightly concerned that no solid security guarantees were offered to the country. Conventional weapons and monetary assistance, it was believed in Islamabad, would not contribute to strengthening the country's security against a big neighbour possessing nuclear weapons. In security discourse, conventional weapons and monetary support are not an alternative for unconventional forces, particularly when both adversaries have already fought several wars.

A leading American newspaper claimed that between May 11, 1998 when India conducted its tests and May 28, 1998 when Pakistan carried out its tests, a high-level Pakistani delegation led by the foreign minister went to Beijing to request for its nuclear protection in case of nuclear aggression by India. The Chinese however termed it as a routine meeting between the two foreign ministers. Diplomats in Islamabad believed that Pakistan was seeking a guarantee of nuclear protection from its friend in case of an Indian attack. Upon his return, the Pakistan foreign minister made the surprising announcement that "China would not impose economic sanctions should Pakistan conduct a nuclear test".<sup>15</sup>

After its seven successful nuclear tests in Chaghi, Balochistan, sanctions were imposed on Pakistan by the European Union and the US. The already weak economy of Pakistan nose-dived. It was not until 9/11 and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan, which created a situation in which Pakistan once again became a frontline state, this time in America's 'war on terror', that the economy of Pakistan began to show signs of improvement.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/21/world/chinese-delegation-seems-to-deny-pakistan-a-nuclear-umbrella.html>.



While Pakistan's nuclear programme is considered India-centric, India's nuclear weapons are perceived as a deterrent against China as well as Pakistan. One of the objectives of the US-India civil nuclear agreement signed in 2008, it is said, is to counter Chinese ambitions and influence in Asia as a whole and South Asia in particular. There are both economic objectives as well as political ones behind the move.

On the economic front, India is considered a huge market by the West for investment, trade and other economic related matters. While the Europeans remain cautious over any nuclear deals or agreement, no concern as such was shown by the EU on this agreement between India and the US. A prime reason for lack of opposition is that India has already obtained the title of a "responsible" power from the US.

On the other hand, Pakistan's nuclear programme has always evoked suspicions. The West's apprehensions regarding Pakistan are owing to several reasons. While India is a secular country with a Hindu majority, Pakistan is a Muslim country where there is growing Islamic sentiment. Pakistan is also blamed for having allowed the proliferation of large networks of militant organizations which are involved in terrorism related activities in all neighbouring countries, including Iran and China. Apart from India and Iran, Pakistan's "all-weather" friend China too has been unhappy about the infiltration of saboteurs of Pakistani origin who are fomenting unrest in its restive Xinjiang region, which has a large Muslim Uighur minority. In 2011, with the outbreak of violence in Xinjiang, particularly its capital Kashghar, in which many lives were lost, Chinese authorities directly blamed Pakistan-trained militants for creating trouble in the region.<sup>16</sup> Earlier in 2010, Abdul Haq al Turkistani, leader of a group called the Turkistani Islamic Party (TIP) who called for attacks on China to avenge the latter's treatment of Muslims, was killed in North Waziristan in a US drone attack.<sup>17</sup> Terrorists operating from Pakistani soil have been allegedly involved in periodic killings of Iranian border guards and soldiers at the Iran-Pakistan border. Iran has repeatedly pressured Pakistan to take concrete measures against terrorists and their terror networks, particularly near the Iran-Pakistan border areas.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://tribune.com.pk/story/221828/china-blames-xinjiang-unrest-on-terrorists/>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.dawn.com/news/963902/militant-leader-killed-in-n-waziristan-drone-strike>.

The Pakistanis are generally a peaceful nation; it was owing to the western policy of promoting *jihad* to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan, that militancy began to make inroads in the country. Socio-economic problems and illiteracy further promoted the *jihadi* culture. The American policies of counter-terrorism have also strengthened the militant elements, instead of weakening them. Support for the militant groups in the Afghan *jihad*, terrorism and sympathy for terrorists, have, over the years taken roots in the country. During the Afghan war against Soviet occupation and throughout the civil war which started soon after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan supported the *jihadi* groups which were backed by the United States and generously funded by the Gulf Arab countries. With a large Afghan refugee population, the network of *madrassas* which provided recruits to fight in Afghanistan and widespread indoctrination, extremism made inroads in Pakistan. Militancy and violence against minorities, particularly Shias, became endemic. Scores of people have lost their lives in suicide bombings and target killings across Pakistan in the past two decades. The then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton too, acknowledged that the US had funded *jihadi* groups in Pakistan during the Afghan war and encouraged the Salafi brand of Islam to defeat the Soviet Union. She acknowledged that the United States had contributed to the problems which Pakistan is facing today.<sup>18</sup>

The National Action Plan (NAP) which the Government of Pakistan introduced after the Peshawar massacre, in which militants stormed the Army Public School and killed more than 150 people, mostly students, is a serious effort to root out the menace of terrorism in Pakistan. However, earlier, only half hearted measures were adopted to deal with the terrorist outfits, with the result that their hate preaching and indoctrination has become quite deeply embedded in the vulnerable sections of society. The recent hangings of terrorists and convicts (a few associated with military services) prove that even within the military ranks there were maverick extremist elements. On the political front, in the recent past, incumbent governments did not hesitate to enter into alliances with banned sectarian outfits to bag votes in elections.<sup>19</sup> In fact in many cases, state security was provided to the leaders of many banned terrorist organizations. This matter

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.dawn.com/news/847153/us-created-taliban-and-abandoned-pakistan-says-hillary>.

<sup>19</sup> <http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/national/21-Jun-2010/25-ppp-mnas-won-polls-with-ssp-s-support-ludhianvi>.

was highlighted during the recent protests held by civil society organizations in Pakistan.

These developments have not gone unnoticed in the Western capitals. In order to gain the trust of European and world leaders and also for the sake of its own security, Pakistan has to seriously pursue its campaign against militant groups which are now posing a threat even to the state apparatus.

Pakistan's oscillation between military and civilian rule also causes apprehensions in Europe. European leaders are concerned about the underdeveloped political process in Pakistan. With rogue elements and widespread *jihadi* networks having penetrated the society and polity of the country, the danger of nuclear weapons getting into wrong hands cannot be entirely ruled out. The American drone attacks to decimate the al-Qaeda leadership inside Pakistan has increased the risk that these weapons might slip into the hands of terrorists. However, the successful transfer of power from one civilian government to another has been hailed by European leaders as a healthy development for democracy and governance, which, it is hoped, would also help in rooting out terrorism.

Despite the apprehensions of Europe, Pakistan successfully gained the European Union's GSP-plus status in 2013 and positive results have now started appearing. The export of textiles to the European Union increased by more than one billion dollars from January 2014 to October 2014 as compared to the same period of the year 2013.<sup>20</sup> The GSP-plus status has given free access to Pakistani products in the European markets.

However, energy shortage in the country is a major impediment in generating more growth in the industrial sector. Pakistan can meet its growing electricity and gas demands by getting cheap oil and gas from neighbouring Iran but due to the imposition of sanctions on that country and Western pressure, Pakistan has so far been unable to benefit from Iran's plentiful energy resources. Since Iran and the world powers have agreed on the framework of a nuclear deal in April 2015, Pakistan can take the opportunity to renew its long-delayed joint plan with Iran to construct a Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. With the gradual easing of economic sanctions

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.dawn.com/news/1162476/exports-to-eu-increased-by-1bn-under-gsp-plus-status-minister>.

against Iran, Pakistan can import cheap gas from its neighbour which can then be used to boost its industrial production.

Another major concern of the world powers is that of nuclear proliferation. While the Dr. A.Q. Khan network scandal was hyped in the Western media, the news that a container carrying uranium was stolen in India in September 2008 was almost ignored. Three weeks after the theft, Madhu Khoda the chief minister of the Indian province of Jharkand revealed that "it was not highly enriched but neither was it just a yellow cake". A year earlier Indian police had also arrested two uranium thieves in Assam.<sup>21</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Considering the long history of India's animosity towards Pakistan and the three major Indo-Pakistan wars, besides three low-intensity, limited wars, Pakistan considers it imperative to enhance its military capabilities and maintain nuclear deterrence against its eastern neighbour. Calculating the threat that was posed by a nuclear India, Pakistan felt that its security could only be assured by building its own nuclear arsenal and a delivery system. Thus from time to time, Pakistan has upgraded and tested its missiles, which are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. The latest test of the medium range Ghauri missile was successfully carried out in April, 2015.

If peace and stability are to be assured in South Asia, sidelining or isolating Pakistan is not the best way of achieving it. Considering the history of South Asia marked by conflicts and wars, giving preference to one nuclear state and isolating the other is not a wise policy on the part of the big powers. The policy of favouring one over the other is likely to back-fire. The West must accept the reality of Pakistan as a nuclear state. For long term peace in South Asia there must be an end to discrimination of any sort at the international level.

Pakistan, on the other hand, must also make efforts to gain the trust of the Western countries. In response to the Western apprehensions and to maintain its own stability, Pakistan must adopt earnest measures and policies to eradicate terrorism. Any sort of support to notorious terrorist networks, which have been wreaking havoc in Pakistan must now end

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<sup>21</sup> M. R. Kazimi, *A Concise History of Pakistan* (Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2009), 297.

completely. A mature political system, with regular free and fair elections and good governance can help improve Pakistan's reputation and status in global politics.