SANDNet Weekly Update, January 11, 2000

Recommended Citation

SANDNet, "SANDNet Weekly Update, January 11, 2000", SANDNet, January 11, 2000,
https://nautilus.org/sandnet/sandnet-weekly-update-january-11-2000/

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INDIA

1. CTBT Domestic Political Movement

The Indian government's reported process of concensus-building among all political parties regarding the CTBT continued this week. Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav told Prime Minister Vajpayee that India should not sign the CTBT unless it is recognized as a nuclear weapons state. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet advised that "India should not sign the CTBT until nuclear weapon states agree upon a time frame to eliminate the weapons." Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi and former prime minister Narasimha Rao both urged a "go slow" approach toward the CTBT.

Following a secretary-level meeting between Iran and Pakistan in Lahore, both countries' representatives spoke of warming bilateral relations. A 2,760 km gas pipeline project between the countries is scheduled to be commissioned in the near future.

2. CTBT: United States Negotiations

A US official was quoted as saying that signing the CTBT would not deny India the right to maintain a nuclear deterrent. The statement was seen by some analysts as the first indication that the United States is willing to consider acknowledging India's claim to nuclear weapon status. A spokesman in the Indian prime minister's office responded cautiously, saying that "not much significance can be attached to this statement by an unknown source." The Indian press also reported apparent US/Russian plans to continue testing hydrogen bombs in a manner allowed under the CTBT.

3. CTBT News Analysis and Editorial Comment

Muchkund Dubey, in The Hindu, argues strongly in favor of CTBT ratification on the grounds that international diplomatic and economic gains would outweigh other issues. R. Ramachandran, in Frontline, analyzes recent U.S. inducements and concludes that they are not as substantial as some media reports suggest. K. Subrahmanyam, in the Times of India, supports the idea that India should be recognized as a nuclear power and suggests that the United States appears to be inching toward such recognition; however, he also observes that the CTBT will face more severe challenges to the regime from non-nuclear states if India enters as a nuclear power.

4. Military Acquisitions

India's Chief scientific advisor, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, put forth a bold vision of indigenously produced fighter aircraft as well as an antiballistic missile system. In the shorter term, "sources in the Indian Army" suggested that India may purchase a weapons-locating radar from Ukraine for use in Kashmir. The Pakistani army reportedly used a similarly designed radar system during the Summer 1999 Kargil conflict.

PAKISTAN

1. CTBT: Domestic Political Movement

In a statement that received more attention in the Indian than the Pakistani Press, Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar said, "Not signing the treaty has identifiable costs, but not benefits. Signing the CTBT has no identifiable costs even though the benefits, too, are more intangible than concrete... [nonetheless] If India does not sign, Pakistan will retain the right to conduct tests." Leaders of three political parties, the Jamaat-I-Islami, the Awami Qiadat Party, and the PAI, quickly criticized Sattar's statement. Sattar himself recanted on the statement, saying that reports that Pakistan was committed to signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) by mid-January were "`mischievous." He acknowledged that the military regime was trying to build a consensus in the country on the issue. An analytic article by Afzal Mahmood in Dawn evaluates the options facing Pakistan in light of the Indian government's apparent movement on the CTBT.

2. Growing Cooperation with Iran

Following a secretary-level meeting between Iran and Pakistan in Lahore, both countries' representatives spoke of warming bilateral relations. A 2,760 km gas pipeline project between the countries is scheduled to be commissioned in the near future.

3. Financial Stability and International Relations

On December 28, Dawn reported that a US$3.3 billion debt recheduling agreement between Pakistan and Paris Club countries faces the risk of being declared null and void because Pakistan has failed to negotiate comparable recheduling terms with non-Paris Club creditor countries. The following day the Pakistan government termed the news report "highly misleading" but Dawn stuck by its story. Japan reiterated that it would not restore "normal economic relations" with Pakistan until Islamabad signed the CTBT. Russia rescheduled US$40 million in loans to Pakistan and wrote off an addditional US$ 57 million.

SRI LANKA

1. Elections and Civil War

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga was inaugurated for a second term following national elections last week. Despite a sharp decline in support, especially among the Tamil population, Chandrika used her inaugural address to warn Tamil separatists that "the days of terror on the island are numbered, and that number is small." The days following Chandrika's inauguration were marked by heavy fighting between government and LTTE forces in the Elephant Pass area.

BANGLADESH

1. Border Dispute

A relatively low-level meeting between Bangladesh and Indian military officials led to the apparent

resolution of an ongoing border dispute between the countries. The resolution is yet to be ratified formally by either government.

2. MiG Purchase

Two MiGs purchased from Russia, completely outfitted, arrived in Dhaka. Bangladesh is also discussing the purchase of Chinese aircraft.

AFGHANISTAN

1. Afghanistan-Iran Relations

Following a five-day visit by Afghanistan's ousted president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, to Iran, the Taliban sought direct negotiations with Iran to end hostile relations between the two countries.

SOUTH ASIA NUCLEAR RELATIONS

1. Nuclear List Exchange

In what the Times of India describes as an "annual ritual under a bilateral agreement," India and Pakistan exchanged lists of their nuclear installations to protect them against aerial attack.

KASHMIR CONFLICT

1. Pakistani Position

Pakistan Chief Executive Musharraf said that Kashmir issues could be negotiated separately from a general discussion of all outstanding Pakistan-India concerns: "If there is a dialogue with India, it will be on Kashmir ... At least negotiations on Kashmir must start ... I want to reiterate that there is a change in the policy with India." Many political parties in Kashmir welcomed Musharraf's statement.

2. US Role in Negotiations

In an interview on CBS 60 Minutes-II, President Clinton said that the Kashmir situation is "the most dangerous in the world." Separately, talks between India and the United States led the two sides to consider setting up a joint working group on counter-terrorism. This working group was reported in the Indian press as an approach to Indian security concerns from sources such as Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. It was reported in the Pakistani press as an effort to stop "alleged Pakistani involvement in Kashmir and checking international terrorism like the hijacking of the Indian aircraft."

HIJACK CRISIS

1. Pakistani Press Commentaries

A DAWN editorial describes the decision of "the Indian government, the media and a whole phalanx of so-called analysts and commentators to fill the air-waves with innuendo and allegations directed at Pakistan" as "the height of cynicism."

M.H. Askari suggests that India's and also Pakistan's unfounded allegations toward one another generated unhelpful tension.

Kuldip Nayar writes that "Whether the hijackers of Indian Airlines plane were Pakistanis or Afghans, there is no doubt that they are from an Islamic militant group. They are the ones who are giving a bad name to Islam."

Tanvir Ahmad Khan argues that India has been "more shrewd" than Pakistan at understanding and capitalizing on US interests in the South Asia region.

2. Indian Press Commentaries

The Times Of India editorializes that "...India has to bear in mind that [the hostages'] freedom has been secured at a cost ... The cost can be minimised ... if the nation will wake up to the harsh realities of its security environment."

By placing the hijack crisis in a broader context, Dileep Padgaonkar finds cause for Indian optimism.

The HINDU editorial board explains why, "instead of seizing the initiative or wearing down the hijackers through the process of negotiations, the Centre has unfortunately been responding sluggishly to the fast-paced developments."

Inder Malhotra chronicles seven stages during which the hijack crisis was mishandled.

T. Sreedhar provides some useful recent historical analysis regarding the Taliban and its relations with Pakistan and India.

Amit Baruah writes that "The Indian case of Pakistan abetting, supporting and training militants in Kashmir is a very strong one. At every opportunity, India must remind Pakistan and the rest of the world about this fact. But that should not prompt a propaganda campaign that could have unforeseen implications in relations between the two countries."

This HINDU editorial focuses on a variety of criticisms of the Indian government's handling of the crisis.

Prem Shankar Jha opens his long, two-part essay with the following statement: "Since Mr. Jaswant Singh decided to accompany the three released terrorists to Kandahar and bring back the released hostages himself, we can assume that the Government regards the end of the hostage crisis as a feather in its cap. The truth is rather different. India has just been handed its most serious psychological defeat of the entire Kashmir war. Worse still, it has been humiliated before the eyes of the entire international community."

V. R. Raghavan concludes an extensive analysis by stating: "Involving the people in governance is the need of the times ahead. That involves greater public accountability of the government apparatus. It means building people's confidence in the political leadership's greater concern for the common man than for the privileged segments."

Harkishan Singh Surjeet, (general secretary, CPI-M) writes that, "While securing the release of over 150 traumatised passengers, the Vajpayee Government compromised severely the national interest."

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