It augurs well for this Pugwash meeting on South Asian Security that it has been preceded by the recent volley of conciliatory overtures between India and Pakistan. The peace initiative by the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Vajpayee has been met with a warm response from the Pakistani Prime Minister Mr. Jamali who has invited the former to visit Islamabad.

It is too early to be overly optimistic about where these initiatives might lead. But any thaw in Indo-Pak relations must be used, apart from other things, as an opportunity for reducing the danger of nuclear weapons in South Asia. President Musharraf has already upped the ante in the recent round of initiatives by calling for a no-war pact with India followed by steps towards de-nuclearisation of the sub-continent. But in its present form this call has not found immediate acceptance from the Indian side for a variety of reasons including the presence of China as a nuclear neighbor - a factor that introduces a major asymmetry between India and Pakistan in their security requirements.

Therefore full de-nuclearisation of South Asia is perhaps still a distant goal. But in the present atmosphere of conciliatory moves, some early steps that would be conducive to eventual de-nuclearisation should be attempted. The first step, in our view, is to put a cap on the size of the nuclear arsenal on both sides. At present, most reports suggest that each side already has several dozen weapons. Nevertheless they see themselves as being only at some incomplete phase in the build up of their respective nuclear arsenals. Apart from establishing full fledged Command and Control structures and missile detection systems, each sides is continuing to enlarge its inventory of nuclear weapons and the missile systems to deliver them. In this they seem to be going ahead as fast as resources and technology would allow. There is, understandably, no precise information available in the public domain about the ultimate levels of nuclear capability that each country in the subcontinent is aiming for. But one can get some idea by looking at the objectives listed in the Draft Report of India's Nuclear Doctrine. In sec. 3 the Doctrine declares that "India's nuclear forces will be …..based on a triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles and sea-based assets…” with "… multiple redundant systems …". Such a spread out arsenal in all three sectors of the services, with redundancy built in, would lead one to expect an
arsenal of over a hundred nuclear weapons.

While Pakistan has not put out a formal nuclear doctrine it is likely, if one goes by statements of their governmental and military leadership that they will, in their own way, aim for a similar matching nuclear build-up.

As a first step towards eventual de-nuclearisation, one must stop this continuing growth in the number of weapons in S.Asia. Needless to say, this can only be done by a broad consensus between people with different shades of opinion on the nuclear issue. There are many in the subcontinent who, like me, believe that nuclear weapons are not essential for national security. But there are others, perhaps many more, who genuinely feel that nuclear weapons are a necessary evil. Their concerns must be addressed if such a consensus is to be evolved to stop and reverse the onward march of nuclearisation.

Let me begin with the Indian side. The Indian government has declared that its nuclear arsenal is meant only for purposes of deterrence. The logical underpinnings of the concept of nuclear deterrence are shaky. Nevertheless let us overlook that for a moment and broadly accept the notion, just for the sake of argument. But even those who believe in the importance of deterrence must re-examine the question of whether such a large arsenal of over a hundred bombs is really needed. The strategy of deterrence relies on possessing an assured and convincing nuclear capability to inflict \textit{unacceptable damage} to the other side which, it is argued, would deter them from attempting a nuclear first strike. But such deterrence does not require that your arsenal match that of your adversary, but only that it be capable of inflicting damage which is unacceptable to any rational leadership. Now, just a couple of modest 15-20 kiloton weapons dropped on Lahore or New Delhi would kill lakhs of people in either city. Surely, that should already be "unacceptable damage" to even a remotely responsible leadership. A leadership that finds this "acceptable" is beyond the pale of rationality and cannot be relied upon to feel deterred by the prospect of even a larger attack. In other words, a successful attack on a major city with a couple of 20 kiloton weapons should already inflict unacceptable damage. It is not clear why meaningful deterrence calls for dozens, let alone hundreds of weapons, even after taking into account some redundancy to offset survivability and missile defense factors. It is far better to spend money and technology on survivability and accuracy of a small truly minimal arsenal than to just go ahead and keep making more weapons just because the required fissile material and technology is available.

The situation with regard to the Pakistani nuclear is even more worrisome in that they have not, unlike India, foresworn First Use. There is also the oft-heard view that the Pakistani nuclear program is meant not just to deter an Indian attack, but also to offset India's superiority in conventional military strength. Whether such superiority exists in any significant sense can be debated, but even if it were to be true, going nuclear was a very dangerous way to go about compensating for it. It is as much in Pakistan's interests as it is India's to stop further growth in their nuclear capability and eventually work for a nuclear free South Asia.

The fact that China, France and the UK have weapons in the hundreds is no reason
for us in South Asia to aspire for the same. The size of their arsenal was determined decades back during the Cold War in the context of the tens of thousands of weapons that the US and USSR had, which in turn was based not on deterrence alone but mixed in with wild ambitions of winning nuclear wars and decimating entire continents.

To return briefly to the China factor in South Asia, the presence of neighboring China as a major nuclear power certainly makes full de-nuclearisation a complicated matter for India. Much more time will be needed to work out an acceptable and viable formula. But as far as capping the arsenal at some small size is concerned, the preceding arguments about it being sufficient to inflict unacceptable damage should hold just as much with regard to China as it does for India and Pakistan.

Lastly, some people who abhor nuclear weapons may be unhappy with the suggestions made above on the grounds that we seem to be endorsing a nuclear arsenal in South Asia, as long as it is small. That is not so. Our view is that having no nuclear weapons at all anywhere is the safest alternative. But it is a fact of life that there are already dozens of weapons in both India and Pakistan and more are in the pipeline. They will not disappear overnight and cannot be wished away. Before eliminating them totally one must first work towards stopping their growth.

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