

Dialogues With Decision Makers

Islamabad, Pakistan
January 9-10, 2007



IPPNW Delegation: Tipu Sultan, President, Pakistan Doctors for Peace and Development; Ali Afridi, PDPD; John Loretz, Program Director, IPPNW; Inga Blum, 5th year medical student, NWIP.

January 9

*Mohammedmian Soomro
Chair, Pakistan Senate
(Meeting in office, continued over lunch)*

Dr. Sultan and John Loretz made brief presentations about the PDPD and IPPNW missions and current priorities. Noting the recent op-ed piece by Schultz, Kissinger, Perry, and Nunn, calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, Mr. Soomro reflected that, like Robert McNamara, these writers came to their conclusions too late in their careers to do anything about it. Mr. Soomro described Pakistan's nuclear capability as strictly for deterrence against India; said that Pakistan had been forced to acquire nuclear weapons by India; and claimed that deterrence had worked to prevent India from attacking Pakistan. He suggested that Pakistan had sufficient nuclear weapons for this purpose and that more weapons were not being added to the arsenal.

Mr. Soomro agreed with Dr. Sultan's assessment that about 60% of state spending is for the military, while about 1% or less goes to health. He said that the latter needs to increase – and is increasing – while military spending will be maintained at present levels without needing to increase. Only a small portion of defense spending is for nuclear weapons programs, but he declined to say how much. In answer to Inga Blum's question about the biggest problem facing Pakistan, he said it was lack of resources, and added that Pakistan's nuclear weapons protect the resources it has.

Mr. Soomro disagreed strongly that Pakistan and India are replicating the US-Soviet confrontation of the Cold War, which he said was a rivalry for world domination. Pakistan is just trying to defend itself against a much larger, stronger, neighbor. He implied that India might have additional motives related to prestige and status, but that Pakistan's nuclear capabilities were not influenced by such interests. He reconfirmed that

Pakistan supports a Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty, but only one that is global and comprehensive.

When asked by Inga Blum about Pakistan's recent purchase of new F16 nuclear-weapon-capable aircraft, Mr. Soomro said the deal had been completed some time ago, but was only being fulfilled now because of some delivery problems. He would not speculate as to whether the same purchase would have been made in the current political environment.

He had just returned from Delhi for meetings to discuss improving relations and said they are improving, but not yet to the point where military spending can be reduced or nuclear disarmament can be considered. JL asked what specific confidence-building measures (CBMs) had been discussed, and what his assessment was. Mr. Soomro noted progress in CBMs related to trade and communications.

He discounted the possibility of accidental nuclear war between Pakistan and India, despite the very short warning times, expressing confidence in the "absolute professionalism" of the people managing the system. He said that, speaking from his background in nuclear physics, mistaking a missile attack for something else was "not possible."

He agreed that Pakistan shares a responsibility to disarm, but only in the context of multilateral discussions without accusations and double standards. In these multilateral discussions the security concerns of countries should be honestly discussed.

Muhammad Nasir Khan, Minister of Health
Mrs. Afzal, Director General of Health
Executive District Officer of Health

This was a very energetic and free-ranging discussion. Mr. Nasir expressed total admiration for IPPNW and its mission. JL described the Aiming For Prevention program and IPPNW's goals with respect to the UN Programme of Action. Mr. Nasir said he would be happy to work with us to secure public health representation on Pakistan's national commission, although he did not have any specific information about the composition or activities of the commission.

On nuclear issues, he argued that the dangers posed by nuclear weapons is unacceptable, expressing his allegiance to humanity and the Earth above all else. But he also supported the notion that if your neighbor has a gun, you must also have a gun to protect yourself. He recognized the limits of the analogy, given the inherent nature of nuclear weapons, but felt it was unavoidable nonetheless. Either no country can have nuclear weapons or all countries can have them.

He supported the principle that investments in health, education, and development are the basis of security, and that Pakistan needs to make improvements in these areas. But he pointed to substantial increases in the health budget during his tenure -- from US \$3.4 billion USD in his first year up to \$18 billion in his 4th year. (Tipu commented later that the numbers Mr. Nasir cited may be correct, but that there has been no evidence of improved services on the ground.)

The minister is a very strong supporter of a reformed UN, without Security Council veto power, and with real democracy. He speculated that nuclear weapons would be banned soon after such reforms were implemented, because the overwhelming majority of countries wants them gone.

Mr. Nasir was a bit of a conspiracy theory enthusiast, going off into tangents about the Kennedy and King assassinations, J. Edgar Hoover, Marilyn Monroe, and 9/11. The only relevance of this is that he also seemed to believe that the US had already used tactical nuclear weapons in Lebanon (DU?) and elsewhere, and had suppressed the evidence.

January 10

Pervez Hoodbhoy
Chair, Department of Physics
Quaid-e-Azam University

Pervez spent a good two hours with us, covering a range of topics related to Pakistan's nuclear programs, other military policies, and politics in general. We brought him up to date about ICAN, the London conference, AFP, and IPPNW's work in the region.

He told us that the army, particularly the retired officers' corps, has gone into private business ventures in a big way, owning banks, insurance companies, oil companies, even bakeries. They use the profits to feather their nests and to fund projects of their own. It does not appear that the profits are going into weapons, but the political and social implications are disturbing nonetheless, with the army owning 30-40% of the economy.

He gave us a powerpoint presentation with a close analysis of the US-India deal and how it will enable India to increase its nuclear arsenal, as well as a paper on Israeli plans for taking out Iranian nuclear reactors. He noted that part of the US-India deal makes India a partner in any contingency plans to intervene in Pakistan should Musharaff leave in a way that creates instability.

JL asked him about the Khushab reactor. Albright's estimates, he said, were overstated and had been effectively rebutted by the US State Department. There is still no evidence that Pakistan has made plutonium weapons.

Tariq Osman Hyder, Additional Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mohammad Kamran Akhtar, Director (Disarmament), Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Hyder repeated what seems to be Pakistan's official mantra: Pakistan's nuclear weapons are just enough to provide a minimum deterrent, and are a stabilizing factor with India. Pakistan adheres to the UN/international norm of equitable security for all countries at a minimum level of armament, and believes this is the prerequisite for a nuclear-weapons-free world. Pakistan intends to keep the moratorium on nuclear testing. He said IPPNW should be speaking out more about the problem that some nuclear weapon states are giving non-nuclear weapon states access to nuclear weapons (an apparent reference to NATO and US nuclear "burden sharing"). He supported the idea of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones in other regions, but insisted that their presence in South Asia had prevented India and Pakistan from going to war. Strategic meetings in the UN Conference on Disarmament are needed to bring about multilateral disarmament.

He said that CBMs are working, and referred particularly to the hotline between the two foreign secretaries that is now in place, and supplements the already existing hotline between military operations officers, which has been upgraded. There is also a prohibition against attacks on nuclear facilities, and a provision for advance notification of missile tests.

Pakistan opposes missile defenses, and would like to have a common understanding with India on dealerting. Pakistan's own policy remains that nuclear weapons should be dealerted, though he was unwilling to comment on reports that warheads and delivery systems are currently disassembled.

Mr. Hyder objected strenuously to IPPNW's position on nuclear energy, and insisted that there is no inherent connection between commercial nuclear power and nuclear weapons. He said that the US should have offered Pakistan the same deal on nuclear energy assistance that it offered to India. He noted that Pakistan has much better compliance with IAEA safeguards than India.

He seemed to express a contradictory complaint that, on the one hand, IPPNW should not be distracted from its primary mission by engaging with the small arms issue but, on the other hand, that doctors who oppose nuclear weapons on humanitarian grounds should be saying more about Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, etc.