Fifteen Years, Four Crises

Sometimes events move so rapidly that no one has time to be surprised. That was the case in South Asia in the years between 1987 and 2002. Developments were rapid and unpredicted—perhaps unpredictable—coalescing in what seemed one long India-Pakistan crisis punctuated by periods of peace. The crises approached serious proportions on four occasions: during India's "Brasstacks" military maneuvers (1986–87), increased turmoil in Kashmir (1990), the Kargil conflict (1999), and a subsequent border confrontation (2001–02). Each could have escalated to large-scale conflict. Each was also linked, in one way or another, to the introduction of nuclear weapons into the arsenals of India and Pakistan that took place after their 1998 nuclear tests (but that may have occurred as early as 1990). The goal of this book is to examine the underlying causes and effects of these four crises, along with the subsequent peace process.

Each crisis had a distinct history. Briefly:

—The crisis of 1987 was sparked by a massive Indian military exercise named Brasstacks that took place just as Pakistan, the United States, and other states were engaged in countering the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Pakistan responded with a countermove, and the crisis escalated to a point just short of war. Although India eventually retreated from its provocative stance, Pakistan asserted that India had been deterred. In retrospect, it is clear that the crisis accelerated the nuclear programs of both states. Misreading these events, the United States reassured both sides that there was nothing to be alarmed about.

—The 1990 crisis over Kashmir was a multifaceted affair related not only to some movement of military assets but also to political turmoil in both

India and Pakistan. No less important was a massive uprising against Indian misrule in the Indian parts of Kashmir, which drew Pakistan's support. Played out in the international context of a fading Soviet Union, uprisings in Eastern Europe, and the Palestinian Intifada, the crisis ended, with some American facilitation, when both sides recognized that no significant military activity was likely.

—The 1999 Kargil conflict originated when Pakistani-supported *jihadis* (Islamic militants) and regular units moved across the Line of Control (LOC)—the de facto border—in the contested state of Jammu and Kashmir. The two militaries fought from May to July in the mountainous Kargil sector northeast of Srinagar, Kashmir's capital. Tensions mounted over the question of when and how India might escalate the mini-war, which put the world on alert since both India and Pakistan had tested nuclear devices in May 1998 and subsequently declared themselves to be nuclear weapon states. The crisis was defused, and significant escalation across the LOC was averted in part because of U.S. President Bill Clinton's personal intervention.

—The 2001–02 border confrontation, from December 2001 to October 2002, was precipitated by a massive Indian military mobilization following two major terrorist attacks. India and Pakistan were close to war on at least two occasions, although no organized fighting took place. The crisis ended when India announced the withdrawal of its forces from the border and claimed that its demands on Pakistan had been met; the United States contributed to its resolution in some measure, through sustained talks with both India and Pakistan.

These crises have important global implications, the first and most alarming being their nuclear dimension. The nuclear tests of 1998 and declaration of nuclear power by both states persuaded many outsiders that South Asia, especially Kashmir, had become a nuclear flashpoint and the most "dangerous place in the world."[1] Second, the crises contradict several important theories of international politics, notably the notion that democracies and nuclear weapons states are reluctant to go to war against each other. Third, in view of India's and Pakistan's respective positions as a rising Asian power and a militarily powerful Islamic state—and hence their potential role in shaping the world order—their management of these crises could serve as one indicator of their future relationship with one another as well as with other states. And fourth, these crises yield some important doctrinal and strategic lessons, not only for the two South Asian states but also for other regions and potential pairs of nuclear-armed rivals. Indeed, South Asia provides at least three, perhaps more, examples of crisis behav-

ior between nuclear-armed states, to add to the few case studies of such behavior thus far.

An objective record of these crises and analysis of their consequences can go a long way toward improving "learning" from crisis to crisis and enhance the institutional memory of regional policymakers and also outsiders. An understanding of these still-recent events will help the policy community and wider public, present and future, avoid repeating the mistakes of others, accepting the possibility that they may always invent new mistakes.

Whether India, Pakistan, and sympathetic outside powers actually "learn" the lessons of each crisis, they cannot help but be influenced by the experience of having gone through four different ones. As Kierkegaard wrote, history is lived forward but understood backward: the four crises form part of the very identities of India and Pakistan, identities that have changed since they became nuclear weapons states, especially since the Kargil and 2001–02 crises.

Several scholars, notably Sumit Ganguly and Devin Hagerty, have taken a somewhat different approach to India-Pakistan crises, expanding the list of critical events.[2] They include Pakistan's claim in 1982 that India might launch a preventive attack against Islamabad's nuclear program and the diplomatic flap surrounding the 1998 nuclear tests. While these events are discussed in this book, we do not consider them as critical as the four crises of 1987, 1990, 1999, and 2001–02.

This book is our fourth in a series of studies of crises in South Asia. The first two dealt with the Brasstacks crisis and the Kashmir-related 1990 crisis; the third, a report written under the auspices of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), examined the Kargil crisis of 1999 and the subsequent border confrontation crisis of 2001–02.[3] The singular feature of these studies is our attempt to both reflect and reconcile different perspectives of the same crises. The Brasstacks project followed a chapter-by-chapter, country-by-country approach, informed by the methodology of Akira Kurosawa's film, *Rashomon*, in which the same incident is narrated in different ways by different observers from different vantage points.[4] In tackling the Kashmir-related 1990 crisis, we had more ambitiously sought to mold our various perspectives into a synthesized account. The USIP study reverted to the format of the Brasstacks book.

In this volume, we summarize the regional conflict and attempts at peace-making (chapter 2), synthesize the separate perspectives on each crisis (chapters 3–6), and then examine the subsequent peace process and policy implications (chapter 7). Box 2-2 (in chapter 2) provides a chronology of the four crises and other important regional events. The rest of this chapter sets

out a taxonomy of crisis and a set of related questions, which together provide a comparative framework for examining South Asia's multiple crises.

What Is a Crisis?

The term "crisis" derives from the classical Greek *krisis,* meaning "judgment" or "decision." Some trace its sense of impending danger to the Chinese pictogram for "crisis," erroneously believed to contain the symbols for "danger" and "opportunity." Without doubt, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis reinforced this meaning of the term, linking it to a period of acute tension between states that threatens to break out into major war. As defined by scholars Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, "an international crisis is a sequence of interactions between the governments of two or more sovereign states in severe conflict, short of actual war, but involving the perception of a dangerously high probability of war."[5]

Crises need to be distinguished from "emergencies." In the social sciences, the latter term, along with the related form "complex emergency" introduced in the late 1980s, usually carries humanitarian overtones. Furthermore, writes the distinguished social scientist Craig Calhoun, "the idea of crisis suggests a determinant turning point that, commonly, the idea of emergency does not. Emergency suggests instead a similar urgency, but not a similar directionality or imminent resolution."[6]

As interpreted by policymakers, crises begin with an action or threatened action by a given party that could imperil an important national interest, a country's status in the international community, or their own office, thus creating an environment of high risk. In such circumstances, they believe time is of the essence in their response, which makes crisis decisions qualitatively different from their other decisions.[7]

Thus far a comprehensive definition has eluded scholars, most of whom have tackled single cases rather than attempting to *compare* crises. As Charles Hermann pointed out in one of the earliest and most sophisticated crisis studies, the term can refer to the state of mind of decisionmakers at a particular moment as well as to the potential consequences for a political system or even for the international order.[8] In Hermann's view, "a crisis is a situation that creates an abrupt or sudden change in one or more of the basic systemic variables," such variables being an alliance, or a state-actor, or the international system itself.[9]

For Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, a crisis is the perception by seniormost decisionmakers of "a threat to one or more basic values, along

with an awareness of finite time for response to the value threat, and a heightened probability of involvement in military hostilities."[10] When two or more adversaries are in such a situation and engage in disruptive interaction, Brecher notes, there is an international crisis.[11] By these definitions, surprise is not a necessary component of crisis, and the time span involved is only very loosely of a limited nature (perhaps months or even a year), because the key determinant of an international crisis is a heightened perception of the possibility of an armed clash between two (or more) states. Brecher also merges state and international crises into a unified model consisting of four stages or periods: onset, escalation, deescalation, and postcrisis consequences. Movement from one stage to another, he says, is a change in level that can be triggered by an act, event, or environmental development that alters (that is, increases or decreases) an actor's perception of threat, time, or likelihood of war. Using this model and his crisis data set, Brecher investigated the impact of factors such as decisionmaker stress, regime type, and geography on how crises unfold.

Another useful distinction to consider, noted by Israeli scholar Yehezkal Dror, is that between policymaking in an adverse environment and policymaking in normal circumstances.[12] On that basis, the India-Pakistan relationship might be considered a protracted conflict of the sort between the United States and the Soviet Union during the cold war and between the Arabs and Israelis since 1947. While a protracted conflict does not equate with a crisis or a war, it does contribute to the "proneness" to crisis or war.

Needless to say, one cannot ignore the effect of new technologies, especially the globalization of media (such as CNN, Al-Jazeera, and the BBC), on the perceptions and management of international crises. These developments have revolutionized not only the reporting of international crises but also the interactions of governments in crises. According to Carnes Lord, "*The* problem of the post–Cold War security environment from the perspective of crisis management may be said to be the relaxed level of tensions between all the major powers. The effect of this is to widen the gap between normal and crisis modes of national security decisionmaking, making it more difficult both to anticipate crises and to take them seriously as they develop."[13] However, he also points out, in South Asia the incentives to do so are lower, and the United States cannot be expected to bring to the table a comparably sophisticated strategic assessment. As demonstrated by U.S. intelligence's surprise at India's nuclear tests in the spring of 1998, little can be taken for granted. Lord's conclusion may be less relevant in a post-9/11 environment since American interest in the region has grown dramatically

as a result of the tests, 9/11, the 2001–02 crisis, a new strategic engagement with New Delhi, a revived one with Pakistan, and a military presence in Afghanistan.

Some attempts have also been made to *measure* a crisis quantitatively and qualitatively. Brecher and Wilkenfeld's International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project included accounts of 412 crises that occurred between 1929 and 1992, a list of their sources, a table of the beginning and end dates for each crisis, the participants (including third parties involved), and the highest level of violence.[14] The authors examined several other variables as well, including which state initiated or "triggered" the crisis, the triggering event, the most salient threat perceived during the crisis, the principal conflict-management technique employed by each participant, the type of outcome, and each state's satisfaction with the outcome.

Important data have also been compiled by the Correlates of War (COW) Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) project.[15] To ensure high reliability, the COW project followed strict operational definitions of indicators. For example, its definitions of militarized disputes (and militarized interstate crises) are based on the observed presence of threats, displays, or uses of force, and its variables are limited to directly observable phenomena: beginning and end dates, participants, incidents depicting the threat, display or use of force, highest level of force used, and outcome.

Employing a comparative approach, we drew upon such data where possible to measure crisis intensity and duration.[16] We used an index that measures press coverage in two English-language papers in the United States, India, and Pakistan (see chapter 3 and the appendix). In detecting the presence of a crisis, we have also taken into consideration the views of contemporaneous policymakers and political elites, an approach that captures different judgments of whether there was a crisis, its severity, and the policy implications for the states involved.

Crisis Taxonomy

A book on the evolution, resolution, and consequences of regional crises cannot avoid some discussion of their taxonomy. We distinguish between simple and compound crises, for example, a notion introduced in our earlier study of the events of 1990. A simple crisis is one in which a commanding strategic idea prompts one side or the other to take deliberate, perhaps provocative, action. By contrast, compound crises grow out of several simultaneous subcrises, which in concert lead policymakers in one or more coun-

tries to believe that they are on the verge of a real crisis and hence to respond accordingly.

One notable quality of simple crises is that the side taking the initiative may or may not intend to create a crisis, and furthermore that the result may be of a different magnitude than anticipated, as in some of the crises examined in this book. In a compound crisis, one side or the other (or both) may reach a point at which they conclude that even though no major crisis was intended, there is some advantage in pressing forward. The classic fictional depiction of such an event is found in Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove,* in which a U.S. Air Force general sees an inadvertent crisis as an opportunity to destroy the Soviet Union's nuclear capability. As this book shows, South Asia has had unintended crises that have been overtaken by events, with things getting out of hand in a near replay of the "Guns of August" syndrome.

It is well to remember that compound crises result from a combination of many variables or events—often domestic political events, but also intelligence errors, systemic perceptual distortions, technical breakdowns, and accidents. Compound crises would thus seem more likely to occur under inefficient and highly complex political and military systems. In "tightly coupled" political and military systems, observes Scott Sagan, a break in one link of the chain might trigger a catastrophic event—perhaps an accidental release of a nuclear weapon, or even a nuclear war.[17] However, very loose systems have their risks as well, and the cumulative effect of several small mistakes in a loosely coupled political/strategic system can also lead to a crisis, as may have been the case in 1990.

For policy purposes, it is important to know whether a crisis is inadvertent or deliberate, and also whether it is likely to have wider ramifications. Different kinds of crises are also more (or less) apt to draw outsiders into playing the role of go-between or facilitator. Generally, compound crises can be more readily defused if properly understood, although figuring out exactly what went wrong may be exceedingly difficult. To complicate their resolution, crises are not necessarily bilateral. In the several India-Pakistan crises over Kashmir, for example, various Kashmiri groups (on both sides of the LOC) have been parties to the crisis, which on closer examination are not monolithic entities either.[18] Once able to distinguish between a simple and compound crisis, policymakers would surely be in a better position to develop a strategy to ameliorate or terminate it.

Some types of crises, as just mentioned, draw the attention of the international community. The most alarming aspect of South Asia's crises to

outsiders has been the nuclearization of India and Pakistan, which from 1990 onward has made all of the region's crises inherently "nuclear," whatever their origin. Some outsiders have also been stirred to respond to crises involving terrorism, religious identity, or sectarianism. Turmoil in Kashmir after 1989, for instance, persuaded radical Islamists to place the region on their agenda and drew jihadis from around the world into the conflict. Terrorism has had less impact than nuclearization, however, with the result that India was initially unsuccessful in persuading outsiders to see it as a legitimate basis for a crisis response—particularly during the 2001–02 crisis.

SEVEN LINES OF INQUIRY

The case studies of this book follow seven lines of inquiry. However, the questions are handled somewhat differently in each case, as appropriate to their relevance to the structure of the crisis.

Origin and Typology

When we categorize these crises by origin, development, and termination, we find the crisis of 1990 stands apart from the others: it was a surprise to those involved and comprised several elements, whereas the others were more the product of calculation or a response to a dramatic episode. This line of investigation raises a number of questions. To what degree did these crises have a common origin, such as the participants' long-standing strategic rivalry or their Kashmir dispute? Were some more idiosyncratic than others; and did different factors, such as domestic political developments or the emergence of new technologies or doctrines, play a different role in each crisis? As the crises evolved, how did decisionmakers, operating under time constraints, identify specific political and strategic concerns, and what actions did they think were necessary to protect and advance these important interests even as they were calculating the gains and risks that might flow from crisis escalation? Finally, why did these crises end? Was it because policymakers became exhausted, outsiders intervened, or the parties involved arrived at a calculated assessment of gains and losses?

In brief, we are interested in whether these four crises followed similar or different trajectories. If crises have different origins, and perhaps different life cycles, are different strategies available to anticipate or understand them, and to formulate policies to resolve them?

Perception and Crisis

Perceptions of these crises differed across India, Pakistan, and other states and in some cases changed as the crisis evolved. For example, some regional policymakers railed against the characterization of South Asia as the most dangerous place in the world or Kashmir as a "nuclear flashpoint," whereas others were quick to apply such terms after only a single event had occurred. Since the four crises took place over a relatively short period, a comparative analysis could lead to a more refined theory of crisis and make it possible to recognize an actual "flashpoint." Suppose that one or both parties in a crisis differ as to the seriousness of the events at hand, and that outsiders view them still differently. If there is a "flashpoint," however defined, does it have discrete implications for the detection and management of a crisis in such a region?

The Strategic Environment

These four crises took place in the context of *three* different international environments: (a) for Brasstacks, the backdrop was the cold war; (b) for the 1990 and Kargil conflicts, it was the immediate post–cold war period, and (c) for the border confrontation crisis, it was the post-9/11 world. Did the changing international environment have a direct bearing on these crises? Specifically, were they connected in any way with America's changing relations? In 1987 Washington was a close ally of Pakistan, but by 1990 it had distanced itself from the region. Then in 1999, after the nuclear tests, it began a new rapprochement with India, and by 2001–02 it again saw Islamabad as an important ally, this time in the "war on terrorism."

"Going Nuclear"

Another important line of inquiry pertains to the nuclear factor. These crises took place at very different stages of South Asia's nuclearization: Brasstacks (1987), *before* India and Pakistan had manufactured nuclear weapons; the 1990 crisis, *just as* both countries were beginning to develop crude nuclear devices; and the 1999 and 2001–02 crises, *after* both had declared, tested, and perhaps deployed nuclear weapons. Several of these crises involved the threat of the use of nuclear weapons, and one—Brasstacks—had a major impact on nuclear planning in the region. Did nuclear weapons lead to any of these crises or cause it to intensify? Did

they help to resolve the crisis or temper state behavior? How did the introduction of nuclear weapons shape outsiders' perceptions of South Asia as a crisis zone and thus their involvement? Also, did the possession of nuclear weapons enhance the political authority of the governments that controlled them, and how were nuclear weapons (and missiles) symbolically deployed by India and Pakistan?

Some other factors to consider here are the fear of conventional retaliation, the costs of escalation, obstacles to increasing the ante created by outsiders, and policymakers' inherent cultural, moral, or political resistance to intensifying the crisis. It is also important to determine whether the crises precipitated a process of *learning* about the strategic character of nuclear weapons, and how this learning affected the course of the crises. The great paradox surrounding nuclear weapons is that it is very hard even to imagine them being used, yet their effectiveness as instruments of deterrence depends on the credibility of a state's capability (and willingness) to employ them. How do decisionmakers and strategic communities come to learn this ground truth of the nuclear era? Did the crises accelerate this learning process?

Further, how did these crises shape Indian and Pakistani attitudes toward their obligations as a nuclear weapons power? If an international norm regarding such obligations exists, it does not countenance threats, confrontation with other nuclear weapons states, or a provocative policy toward states without such weapons. Equally important, it suggests active engagement with the arms control process and a commitment to transparency.

Limited War and Escalation

South Asia is clearly a useful test-bed for theorizing about the transition from crisis to conventional and nuclear conflict and about escalation control. Events there seem to have followed the cold war model of deep and persistent conflict, nuclearization, and limited war. Despite the apparent danger that India-Pakistan crises might cross the nuclear threshold, the idea that limited wars can be fought within the framework of nuclear deterrence has gained currency in India. According to George Fernandes, India's defense minister at the time of two of the crises, "Pakistan did hold out a nuclear threat during the Kargil War last year. But it had not absorbed the real meaning of nuclearisation; that it can deter only the use of nuclear weapons, but not all and any war. . . . [S]o the issue was not that war had been made obsolete by nuclear weapons, and that covert war by proxy was

the only option, but that conventional war remained feasible though with definite limitations."[19]

India and Pakistan have conducted proxy wars and sub rosa operations against each other and fought a limited war. Hence the widespread convictions regarding the irrationality of the other side has not dampened the belief that limited conflicts can be fought and will not escalate to general war and a nuclear exchange. Is this optimism justified? Did nuclear weapons act as a deterrent, inhibiting the two nations from escalating their conflict to all-out war? Is there, as some have argued, a strategic space for conventional conflict between nuclear use and low-intensity conflict?

Specifically, what do these cases reveal about India's and Pakistan's understanding of the relationship between nuclear and conventional weapons, especially about their conception of the escalatory process—how many rungs do they see on the escalatory ladder, in what order, and pertaining to what risks? How do they view "firebreaks" or even "redlines"? Although to outsiders the two may appear to be a tightly coupled nuclear pair willing to rush up the escalation ladder once a conflict begins, both seem confident that they can manipulate and manage this process, that they understand each other well, and that escalation is controllable.

Politics and Decisionmaking

The often-blurred link between domestic politics and foreign policy also merits attention. What impact did domestic politics have on the origin or evolution of the four crises? Did the crises in turn affect domestic politics?

During the research for this book, we often heard key decisionmakers complain that they "were driven by events." Was this true of *all* of the parties to the crises, and what do these crises reveal about national decision-making styles? Who actually made the decisions during these crises? Was the crisis the product of a calculated decision initially focused on strategic or tactical goals? Did closed and restricted decisionmaking invite errors of perception and analysis? Did the decisionmaking system of military-dominated Pakistan differ significantly from that of civilian-dominated India? In a crisis, the quality and timeliness of intelligence is disproportionately important—how good was Indian and Pakistani intelligence, and that of other countries, notably the United States? Answers to these questions might inform the long-standing academic debate over the conditions under which democracies go to war, especially since one of these crises (Kargil, 1999) did involve a limited war.

Policy Implications

Finally, did these crises make it easier for India and Pakistan to embark upon a process of normalization? Obviously, the lesson a state "learns" from a crisis may not necessarily be the right one or may not be one that advances its own security without creating a more unstable or insecure environment. Did India and Pakistan learn the right lessons, or does South Asia's nuclear balance remain fragile—a point in dispute between American and South Asian security analysts? Since the two countries remain at odds, one or the other (or conceivably both) must have learned the wrong lessons from the 1998 tests and subsequent events. All in all, some might be tempted to ask whether it is even realistic to expect generic "one-size-fits-all" recommendations for crisis resolution and management that transcend the banal and the obvious.