

December 22, 1976

**Policy Planning Division, Ministry of External Affairs,
'Notes on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in South
Asia'**

Citation:

"Policy Planning Division, Ministry of External Affairs, 'Notes on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in South Asia'", December 22, 1976, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PN Haksar Papers, Subject File No. 89

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/133995>

Summary:

Analysis of and proposed response to Pakistan's nuclear-weapon-free zone proposal.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Ministry of External Affairs (Policy Planning Division), SECRET, Copy No. 8

Notes on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in South Asia

Distinction between peace zone, nuclear-free zone, and NWFZ. Indian Ocean zone of peace first discussed in 1964 on Ceylonese initiative - in non-aligned Conference - we have always supported - the NWFZ proposal in our area is new result of our 1974 peaceful nuclear explosion. Pakistan's resolution in General Assembly based on following arguments:

- All countries of region had already proclaimed opposition to the acquisition of nuclear weapons or introduction into the region - this common denominator could be basis of a NWFZ

- India in particular had done so both before and after her PNE

- During Assembly debate the Five weapon states had indicated support

- Military alliances and "treaties of friendship" in other parts of the world had not prevented establishment of such zones

- Proximity of nuclear weapon powers need not be inhibiting factor; only defence against nuclear weapon powers would be multilateral action to form zones by smaller states

- These reasons make it possible for UN to take action for initiating discussions

Our opposition was based on following arguments: □ We always had had a positive approach to the concept of such zones and supported similar proposals elsewhere

- But it was necessary that suitable conditions should exist in a particular region

- Also the initiative of and the agreement to form the zone should be from the region

- Any individual proposal for the creation of such a zone has to be considered on its merit. No general formula exists

- In South Asia no consultation had taken place

- Our firm view that regional arrangements cannot be imposed from outside; they have to "mature" in the region

- South Asia cannot be treated in isolation for creating a zone; it is a sub-region of the larger region of Asia and the Pacific; security environment of the whole region should be taken into account

- Nuclear weapons now exist in the regions of Asia and the Pacific

- Military bases exist in the India Ocean

Because of these reasons, the sub-region of South Asia is inappropriate for the establishment of a zone. This requires further discussion from within the region. The UN should wait for an initiative from the states of the region who could only determine what would be an appropriate region of Asia taking into account its special features and geographical context.

II

The Pakistan proposal has been endorsed by some Asian countries. Sri Lanka has been very vague. Bhutto utilized his visit to Colombo last year to canvass support for his proposal with Sri Lanka's acquiescence. We should expect complete support to Pakistan's position from Bangladesh. Nepal's zone of peace for itself is different and she may not support the proposal but would happily go along with any idea to embarrass India.

To understand the Ceylonese, Bangladeshi and Nepalese reaction, it is necessary to

analyze two earlier proposals for NWFZs. In Africa, the proposal has now been on the anvil for several years but has not got off the ground because of lack of enthusiasm and behind-the-scenes manoeuvres of France and the Big Powers. But one positive reason behind the demand for a zone in Africa is the fear of South Africa becoming a nuclear power. In the Middle East also, there is a proposal which has also not materialized because of Arab pre-occupations. Here again, the only genuine reason for Arab anxiety is the possibility of Israel manufacturing nuclear weapons.

In our region, it is the same logic, of course, in a rather fuzzy manner: India's position, policy and general influence are so different from Israel and South Africa. Hence the rather lukewarm support Pakistan is getting.

Our tactics should be to refuse to be stampeded by such essentially tepid and non-committal support to the zone concept. The fact of the matter is that the idea of a NWFZ has never been enthusiastically adopted in any part of the world except in uninhabited regions like the Antarctic and the deep sea bed. Where populated regions are involved, we have single example of the Latin American treaty which is a very special case because of the U.S. nuclear umbrella on the one side and because of the absence of nuclear ambitions at the time of the signature of the Treaty in Latin American countries. Even such a treaty, however, has well known lacunae. Of these, some are:

- Refusal of Cuba to join
- Refusal of US and France to accept treaty jurisdiction in their possessions in the area
- Refusal of USSR to sign the protocol because of several factors
- Argentina, Brazil, and Chile have expressed their reservations. Bahamas, Cuba, and Guyana have not signed the Treaty.

It is the countries like China which have no interest in the region who have been most enthusiastic. A rapid survey of the other earlier proposals during the last 20 years shows that the NWFZs have no realistic prospects of being accepted. This is because of four basic problems:

- What should be the degree of denuclearization? This means arguments about the NPE(T?), IAEA safeguards about nuclear power reactors, etc
- Geographical extent
- The eternal problem of verification
- The responsibilities of extra zonal states; for example USSR in North Europe, China in South Asia, France in Latin America, etc

III

Well known precedents for the Pakistan's South Asia proposal are:

- Central Europe - Rapacki Plan in 1957-1959
- The Balkan Zone Plan 1957-59
- Mediterranean Plan in early 1960s
- North Europe - Finnish Plan in early 1970s. All these have been supported by the Soviet Union though the Soviet Union has shown not much enthusiasm for the first three, in recent years
- China's suggestion in the late 1950s for a zone for Asia and the Pacific. They have not referred to it after they became a nuclear state

No need to go into the details; all of these have come to nothing because of the parallel negotiations on the PTB and NPT shifted the weight of the problem to Great Power negotiations. We had always been in principle in favour of the zones but this support became affected by our opposition to the NPT as being unequal on the question of horizontal and vertical proliferation and the discrimination on peaceful use.

An attempt to study the general question of creation of these zones was initiated by Finland in 1975 and the Secretary-General appointed an experts' meeting at Geneva. Their conclusions are non-committal and they have not been able to agree to any serious question. In fact, apart from Pakistan on South Asia, it is only Finland which seems to be pressing for a zone in North Europe. While their views have been listened to with a respect and no one has opposed the Finns, it is interesting to see that not a single Nordic neighbor has supported the idea. They have been silent. The reason is self-evident. They feel that such a zone will give a totally unreal sense of security against the background of Big Power nuclear deployment all around them. Precisely the same thing is being repeated in our area. China has now become a major nuclear weapon state. The U.S. navy's presence in the Indian Ocean and the proximity of Soviet nuclear installations in Asia make our region as vulnerable to nuclear attack from weapon states in the larger region today, almost as much as the states in Europe were in the 1950s. The same reasons which militated against the success of these proposals in Europe then now exist in South Asia.

Even in those regions where such compulsions are not strong like Africa and the Middle East, the proposals are still being very tentatively discussed between the states or between the States and the UN Secretary General

Nothing has happened to introduce an element of urgency about this question in South Asia as Pakistanis are trying to put out

There is some confusion between NWFZ in South Asia and the NWFZ in India Ocean – the second proposal is different from the Pakistani proposal but could well merge with it – A Tanzania-Mozambique communiqué has asked for making Indian Ocean a NWFZ; the Mozambique constitution specifically talks of “defending the principle of transformation of the Indian Ocean into a de-nuclearized and peaceful zone.”

These ideas from the East African littoral states derive from the fear of South Africa but could be exploited by not merely Pakistan but also the Soviet Union because of its clash of interests with the US and its opposition to new nuclear states (weapon or otherwise) during the coming years. (It must be remembered in this context that the latest developments about the seven (and now fifteen) powers meeting in London about the export of nuclear materials has confirmed what has been only an impression until now – that the Soviet Union's attitude is practically indistinguishable from that of the US and UK on the need for taking the most drastic measures possible to stop nuclear proliferation).

Conclusion

NWFZs as such are only second-best solutions in a world of ICBMs and other long-rang projectiles. This is the reason why most proposals on the creation of these zones have not got off ground. While people are naturally unwilling to oppose them, there is a general disinclination to discuss proposals in serious terms. The Pakistanis have not concealed that their interest derives from their feud with India and not from global principles.