

Pakistan's emerging nuclear posture: impact of drivers and technology on nuclear doctrine

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Introduction

The development of short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile ‘NASR’ (Hatk IX) by Pakistan has evoked a sharp response from the West as well as neighboring India. The new missile system that could fall under the category of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) is possibly designed to counter India’s evolving war fighting concepts of Cold Start and Pro-Active operations, which are apparently aimed at exploring space for a limited objectives war, while remaining below Pakistan’s perceived nuclear threshold.

The new technological achievements have raised interesting questions about Pakistan’s nuclear use doctrine. Is Pakistan lowering its nuclear threshold to deny India the space for a limited military operation, or moving towards a strategy of graduated military options, or possibly a ‘flexible response options’? While it may be premature to draw such inferences, as Pakistan continues to maintain deliberate ambiguity in its nuclear use doctrine, however, the cardinal principle of Pakistan’s nuclear policy remains hinged to deter all forms of aggression, mainly from India.

Pakistan’s efforts to counter-balance India’s military developments, including India’s new war fighting concepts through its nuclear capability, could be understood by analyzing various factors that drive the nuclear programme of both India and Pakistan. Pakistan’s refusal to subscribe to a “No First Use” (NFU) nuclear policy and India’s declaration of an ‘NFU’ – aimed at retaining high moral position - could possibly be due to this little understood relationship between states’ nuclear drivers and nuclear doctrines. In order to understand Pakistan’s evolving nuclear posture, in view of India’s new war fighting concepts, it may be useful to analyze nuclear drivers and its impact on Pakistan’s strategic thinking.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first section provides the theoretical basis for states’ decision to pursue a nuclear weapons programme; Pakistan’s rationale for acquisition of nuclear weapons, and

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the management of the programme despite technological and financial resource constraints. The second section tries to establish a relationship between nuclear weapons and deterrence in the South Asian context and the lessons learnt from the past crises. The final part deals with Pakistan's quest for assured deterrence in view of the recent Indian doctrinal and military developments.

Nuclear motivations: theoretical perspective

Why do states develop nuclear weapons? The answer to this proliferation puzzle¹ provides an understanding of major nuclear drivers, and the role that nuclear weapons are assigned in military strategies of individual states. There are several countries that have the capacity - in terms of technical know-how, manpower and material resources – but have preferred not to pursue the acquisition of nuclear weapons.² Technology and material resources are therefore not the only factors, but could be major determinants in achieving national objectives, once a decision is taken to develop nuclear weapons.

Deterrence optimists argue that states pursue nuclear weapons mainly to counter security threats, while deterrence pessimists attribute nuclear proliferation mostly to national, cultural or individual traits, influencing decision making processes.

Nuclear motivations of individual states are intrinsically linked with the securitisation and desecuritisation³ processes that are mainly affected by developments at regional as well as at the global levels. Deterrence optimists argue that states pursue nuclear weapons mainly to counter security threats, while deterrence pessimists attribute nuclear proliferation mostly to national, cultural or individual traits, influencing decision making processes. States are also rational entities and generally behave according to the prevalent international norms.

In the early 1960s, states' choices were mostly guided by security considerations of Cold War politics. Proliferation was therefore an acceptable practice but not an established international norm, and thus did not end up into an 'epidemic'⁴ or the 'domino theory'⁵ of the twenty-first century. By the end of the 20th century, apart from the five NPT nuclear weapon states, there were only three additional nuclear weapon states; Pakistan, India and Israel. North Korea subsequently also joined the club by giving up its NPT obligations. Out of these four established nuclear

weapon states, Israel and Pakistan are believed to have developed nuclear weapons out of security considerations, whereas countries like India, North Korea and possibly Iran embarked on the nuclear path mainly for 'nuclear symbolism'.⁶

It is also a well known fact that states mostly seek, or at least justify, their nuclear acquisitions, once they are faced with a significant military threat to their security that apparently cannot be met through alternate means. Once these threats are removed, most will prefer to remain non-nuclear.⁷ Nevertheless, other than security considerations there are several factors that could possibly guide nuclear motivations of aspirant states, such as prestige, domestic political considerations, or a combination of two or more factors that Scott Sagan has termed 'multicausality'.⁸

The realist paradigm stipulates that states, once taken as unitary actors, seek nuclear weapons because their security, which is precarious in an anarchic world – demands it.⁹ And, in this nuclear age, to deter potential attackers, the gold standard of deterrence is nuclear.¹⁰ This, however, may be more relevant for asymmetric states that are unable to maintain conventional parity with their adversaries. According to this school of thought, regional and international environment are major determinants that could impact security perceptions of an individual state. The role of individuals in shaping threat perceptions and suggesting corrective measures, however, remains mostly overshadowed. Jacques Hymans has tried to bring out the psychological dimension of individual decision-makers, and other influential people who could affect policy processes that could lead towards nuclearization or even denuclearization of a country.

According to Hymans, leaders with deep-seated 'national identity conception' (NIC) will be more inclined and have the 'will' to cross the nuclear threshold.¹¹ These 'oppositional nationalists' view their nation as 'us against them' and regard their nations as equal or superior to others. For oppositional nationalists, "the decision to acquire nuclear weapons is not only a means to the end of getting them; it is also an end in itself, a matter of self-expression."¹² One such example of a leader with deep-seated NIC could be Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who saw nuclear weapons not only as a means. to correcting the strategic imbalance, but also a matter of national prestige.

The neo-realistic paradigm that also takes into account structural influences on international relations theory, emphasizes that "regime type, domestic politics, and personalities are of no consequence, and all that really matters is an understanding of the balancing dynamic in which one

state's pursuit of nuclear weapons begets another.¹³ Waltz has been more explicit in explaining the balance of power syndrome, stating that "states exist in an anarchical international system and must therefore rely on self-help to protect their sovereignty and national security."¹⁴

National security and sovereignty provide the most parsimonious explanation for nuclear proliferation for most nuclear weapon states. None of the states would be able to justify their nuclear acquisitions other than the reasons that are perceived to be threatening vital national security interests. Comparative analysis and study of various nuclear drivers, however, enables us to make clear distinction between real and the professed threats. Case studies of various nuclear weapon states reveal that only Pakistani and Israeli nuclear weapon acquisitions could be termed the logical outcome of defensive responses to conventional security threats.¹⁵

Expanding the debate, William Potter has added several other factors that could possibly lead towards the nuclear path¹⁶ such as deterrence, warfare advantage, bureaucratic and domestic politics, technological momentum, weakening of security guarantees, etc. These drivers do not necessarily work together at one time, and could also vary depending upon changes in regional or international security environment as well as the adversary's relative military capability.

Taking into considerations most of these factors, a more comprehensive explanation for states' decisions to acquire nuclear weapons is given by Scott Sagan, which is based on three different models and best explains nuclear drivers of individual countries.¹⁷ The 'security model' helps states to justify their nuclear acquisitions citing external security threats, more specifically nuclear threats. The second model is the 'domestic politics model' which explains how nuclear weapons help preserve domestic and bureaucratic interests, and the third model; 'the norms model', explains a state's decision to proliferate or not, mainly as a symbol of modernity and identity.

Understanding Pakistan's nuclear motivations

The nuclear programmes of Pakistan and India provide interesting case studies. Pakistan, relatively a small country with a deep sense of insecurity, developed nuclear weapons mainly to deter military aggression from India, and therefore nuclear weapons continue to play the central role in Pakistan's military strategy. India, with a conventional military advantage, developed nuclear weapons primarily to enhance its political stature within the region and beyond. Though India continues to justify its

nuclear acquisitions by projecting China as a major security concern, the history of Indian nuclear programme suggests that the country embarked on the nuclear weapons path much before China became a nuclear weapon state in 1964.

Pakistan started its nuclear programme mainly for peaceful purposes, which was later transformed into a nuclear weapons project only to retain an 'option policy'.¹⁸ There are several factors that eventually forced Pakistan to move from an 'option policy' towards nuclear weapons development. First, the knowledge that India is on a nuclear weapons path by diverting civil technology and material acquired, mainly from Canada and the US, for military purposes. Second, if India becomes an uncontested nuclear power, that would decisively shift the balance of power in the region, which was unacceptable for Pakistan, especially since both countries had outstanding disputes to be resolved. Third, Pakistan's alliance with other major powers and membership in the CENTO and SEATO could not guarantee its security against India. Fourth, Pakistan had lost one half of its territory in the 1971 War, and unless remedial measures were taken, the repetition of a similar debacle could not have been ruled out. And, finally, the nonproliferation regime that is subject to political interests of major powers would continue to have different standards for different countries.

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These factors reinforced Pakistan's security perception vis-à-vis India, and encouraged Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto to launch the nuclear weapons programme which was "predominantly security driven, and based on the statements of leadership and senior government officials - mainly India-centric."¹⁹ When India tested its nuclear device in 1974, Prime Minister Bhutto described it as a threat to Pakistan's security, and said;

A more grave and serious event has not taken place in the history of Pakistan. The explosion has introduced a qualitative change in the situation between the two countries.²⁰

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issue was not the intentions, but the capability, particularly when a PNE was technologically indistinguishable from a weapon test. In his reply to Gandhi, he also stated; "Pakistan has a reason for unique anxiety because no two among the five nuclear-weapon states have ever been involved in the kind of confrontation and unresolved disputes, which have bedevilled India-Pakistan relations."²¹ In his letter to Prime Minister Gandhi, Mr Bhutto further stated:

It is a question not only of intentions but of capabilities ... It is well established that the testing of a nuclear device is no different from the detonation of a nuclear weapon. Given this indisputable fact, how is it possible for our fears to be assuaged by mere assurances which may in any case be ignored in subsequent years? Governments change as do national attitudes. But the acquisition of a capability, which has direct and immediate military consequences, becomes a permanent factor to be reckoned with. I need hardly recall that no non-nuclear weapon state, including India, considered mere declarations of intent as sufficient to ensure their security in the nuclear age.²²

Statements made by Bhutto during various speeches were mostly aimed to stir public sentiments, and a result of India-specific threat perception. He was a kind of leader with deep-seated "national identity conception (NIC),"²³ – who viewed the world as 'us against them'. Therefore, once it was clear that India was on its way to building nuclear weapons, Bhutto reportedly said; "If India developed an atomic bomb, we too will develop one even if we have to eat grass or leaves or remain hungry, because there is no conventional alternative to the atomic bomb."²⁴

Despite Bhutto's nationalist intent, many Western scholars allege that he wanted to build an 'Islamic bomb'. This appears to be part of the effort to generate undue alarm about Pakistan's nuclear programme. As Salik writes; "no one ever talked about the Jewish bomb, the Christian bomb or even the Hindu bomb - even though some of the writings after the 1998 tests by India had referred to India's "decision to go ahead with the nuclear tests as a means of claiming recognition for Hindu civilization's rightful place in the world."²⁵

After India's nuclear test of 1974, acquisition of nuclear bomb became a national imperative for Pakistan's political survival - a new source of 'salvation' and a way of restoring lost immortality in the form of nuclearism.²⁶ From then on, nuclear weapons became part of political religion for successive civil and military leadership in Pakistan.

Pakistan's nuclear pursuits were mainly guided by its security fear vis-à-vis India. With long-standing disputes, limited resources to match Indian conventional military capability, and lack of support from its principal ally, the U.S., during various crises reinforced Pakistan's India-specific threat perception, and made the nuclear weapons pursuit a national imperative which no successive leadership could reverse. In fact,, the growing conventional asymmetry and the salience of nuclear deterrence during various crises reinforced Pakistani conviction that nuclear weapons are the only guarantors for its national security. Several factors contribute to a state's nuclear choices, but in Pakistan's case, the concern about national security has been the chief catalyst.²⁷

The salience of nuclear weapons in Pakistan's security policy and the fact that it has played vital role during various crises with India, has provided successive leaders an opportunity to claim credit for successful nuclear stewardship. There exists a unique national consensus on the nuclear issue, cutting across political divide and enjoying the support of all segments of society.²⁸ No government in Pakistan can afford to go against the public perception, as is reflected in Pakistan's position on various nonproliferation issues such as the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Nuclear weapons and deterrence in South Asia

Bernard Brodie's famous dictum after the advent of nuclear weapons that the "chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on, its chief purpose must be to avert them,"²⁹ has been the raison d'être of strategic thought during the Cold War. Absence of major wars between the two former Cold War rivals provided a degree of legitimacy to the arguments offered by deterrence optimists that 'nuclear weapons with more countries could lead to increased stability.' This claim, however, did not remain uncontested. Deterrence pessimists argue that nuclear proliferation indeed decreases and not increases international security.

To provide better understanding of the role of nuclear weapons and their impact on international politics, Colin S. Gray has identified four major differences between the pre-nuclearized and the nuclearized world.³⁰ First, no nuclear weapon state or a non-nuclear state would attempt a military campaign against a nuclear power to achieve a total victory. Second, no nuclear or non-nuclear power would dare to press a military campaign against a close ally of a nuclear power to achieve total victory. Third, due to high cost of nuclear war, political and military

campaign against a nuclear power would be conducted with extreme caution. And, finally, nuclear weapon states do not go to war with each other due to the fear of unlimited implications. This also explains the role of nuclear weapons, which is not only to prevent the use of nuclear weapons against each other, but “the imperative has been to prevent all wars between the major powers, not just nuclear war.”³¹

Defining deterrence in the South Asian context

According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘to deter’ is ‘to discourage or turn aside or restrain by fear; to frighten from anything; to restrain or keep back from acting or proceeding by any consideration of danger or trouble.’ Deterrence has been described as a coercive strategy, used as a ‘deterrent’ to persuade the adversary that it must not act for fear of the consequences if they do.³²

Based on the proscribed objectives of nuclear weapons, deterrence could possibly be placed in two categories, i.e., narrow and broad. If the intent is to deter a particular type of military operation, this would be called ‘narrow deterrence’.³³ For example, if Pakistan is developing tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) to deter India’s cold start doctrine, it could arguably be described as ‘narrow deterrence’. On the contrary, if the objective of a state’s nuclear capability is to deter an all-out war, it would be categorized as ‘broad deterrence’. Or else, a state could possibly be aiming to achieve ‘assured deterrence’, i.e., to deter all forms of aggression by developing deterrence at tactical level (against limited incursions), the operational level (to deter sizeable military offensive), and strategic (to prevent an all-out war). This interaction of various levels of capability within overall deterrence may helpfully ease the weight that would fall on some of the levels if they had to be taken in isolation,³⁴ and could thus possibly lead to assured deterrence.

One might argue that the development of TNWs to deter limited operations could be destabilizing in a volatile region like South Asia, as it could possibly lower the nuclear threshold and increase chances of a nuclear war. But, providing space for a limited war is more dangerous as non-nuclear is the likeliest route to a nuclear war. Therefore, war prevention needs to operate at all levels of military conflict between nuclear-capable states³⁵ and not only at the strategic level.

That raises another important question: how do we communicate the intent? Is there merit in declaring ‘red lines’ which could provide an opportunity to the adversary to press for a military campaign while remaining below the declared red lines? In a stable deterrence relationship, like that of Cold War, such communication was possible as both states had parity at strategic levels. But, in the case of South Asia where a conventionally weaker party, Pakistan, chooses to offset Indian conventional military advantage through a hybrid of military strategy, involving mix of conventional and nuclear capability, declaration of ‘red lines’ may not be either possible or feasible.

In theory one might argue that deterrence and use of nuclear weapons are two different issues; however, in reality these are interconnected.

But, not clearly articulating nuclear threshold raises another paradox, explained by Michael Quinlan as:

The more seriously the possessor is believed capable of using the armoury, the less likely it is that others will cause or allow circumstances to arise challenging its use. And, the converse is also true.³⁶

Therefore, if deterrence has to be strengthened in the South Asian context, the message by Pakistan should be what Quinlan suggests for any nuclear weapon state that “we will do whatever we find necessary to achieve our aim – preferably, the minimum necessary, but not less.”³⁷ The general perception that nuclear weapons are intended only for the purpose of deterrence, and not for use, may not hold good for a region like South Asia, where incentives for a nuclear use out-number the disincentives, especially if the conventional imbalance is increasing to one party’s favour.

In theory one might argue that deterrence and use of nuclear weapons are two different issues; however, in reality these are interconnected. One might argue that use of nuclear weapons actually nullifies the very rationale of deterrence. But can we conclude that nuclear weapons are intended only for deterrence purpose and not for actual use? With such an assurance, how will it affect strategic choices of a deterree? Therefore, as Quinlan sums up, no matter how remote we judge the possibility of a nuclear use, these weapons deter only by the possibility of their use, and by no other route. And, “nuclear state is a state that no one can afford to make desperate.”³⁸

Lessons from the past crises

Since the acquisition of nuclear capability in mid-eighties, Pakistan is believed to have used its limited deterrent capability mainly to deter India from launching a conventional war against it. Exercise ‘Brasstacs’³⁹ was the first occasion when Pakistan reportedly communicated its willingness to respond with nuclear weapons. How real the threat of nuclear retaliation was, and what kind of nuclear weapons Pakistan had at the time - is a subject that may merit deeper analysis. The resolve to use nuclear weapons was, nevertheless, demonstrated effectively by Pakistan – no matter how limited the capability was.

Nuclear weapons did play a role in deterring India from launching an all-out war against Pakistan, and also attracted major powers to intervene and defuse the crisis. That brought in a new dimension in Pakistan-India strategic equation. For Pakistan, nuclear weapons became the central part of its military strategy, an effective tool to deter India, and also to overcome increasing conventional asymmetry vis-à-vis India.

The 1998 nuclear tests led to formal integration of nuclear weapons in military strategies of both India and Pakistan. India, with a conventional advantage, preferred to maintain a high moral position and declared a No First Use (NFU) doctrine. Pakistan, being a relatively weaker party in the Pakistan-India dyad, did not subscribe to an NFU policy, and continues to view nuclear weapons as an insurance against Indian conventional attack by threatening it with a nuclear response to inflict unacceptable damage – a variant of Cold War’s strategy of massive retaliation.

1999 Kargil crisis

The Kargil war was the first military crisis after the nuclearization of South Asia. Nuclear weapons played a significant role in this crisis, but largely through threat and bluster.⁴⁰ Despite strong statements threatening each other with nuclear weapons, the actual capabilities on both sides remained doubtful. India’s former Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh believes that; “a nuclear angle to this [Kargil] conflict simply did not exist.”⁴¹ That was also later corroborated by Indian government’s Kargil Review Committee Report, which is silent regarding any nuclear threats being operative during the hostilities, despite devoting an entire chapter to the nuclear background to this crisis.⁴²

Interestingly, most of the reports of missile mobilization and mating of warheads emanated from Western sources based on intelligence leaks

from within the U.S. Administration. In one of the accounts presented by Bruce Reidel, who is said to be present at the 4th July meeting between President Clinton and Prime Minister Sharif at Blair House, later wrote that Pakistan had readied its nuclear arsenal for a war with India during the Kargil crisis,⁴³ but there is no other evidence to validate his claim. Former President Pervez Musharraf, who was also the Army Chief at the time, has also termed the accusation of nuclear use by Pakistan as 'preposterous', because, according to him, in 1999, Pakistan's nuclear capability was not yet operational.⁴⁴

Some of the lessons that could be drawn from the first nuclear crisis in the post-1998 period are: one, deterrence remained effective without actually operationalizing the nuclear command structures; two, even if Kargil crisis had a nuclear dimension, it remained limited mostly to war-gaming of nuclear deterrence without operationally deploying nuclear assets on both sides; three, both sides demonstrated a degree of restraint, India by not crossing the LoC, and Pakistan by not launching air operations, and, finally; some of the scholars believe that Kargil conflict revealed the limits of nuclear deterrence to demarcate, if not deter, Pakistan-India conflict.⁴⁵

2001- 2002 crisis

The 2001-2002 crisis was the first real test of nuclear brinkmanship. India struggled for one long year to get out of 'strategic paralysis', it was deterred from crossing the Line of Control (LoC) as rational calculus on the basis of cost-benefit analysis did not go in India's favour.

Unlike the earlier Kargil crisis, the nuclear war rhetoric during the 2001-2002 crisis was clearly evident. Within a few days, nuclear brinkmanship spiralled and both sides issued terse statements. From the Pakistani side, Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar made an implicit threat: "Pakistan does not seek war, local or general, conventional or nuclear."⁴⁶ Another major feature of the crisis was that both sides carried out series of missile tests for signalling and deployed their nuclear forces as part of general mobilization, but there seemed to be no panic, especially on the Pakistani side.⁴⁷ Some Indian analysts are of the view that the Indian government lost its nerves during the crisis, as it did not have enough confidence in its conventional military capability.⁴⁸

Operation Parakram's failure to achieve its objectives brought in important lessons to be learned by India's military planners. First, an all-out war with Pakistan is not possible without risking nuclear retribution

against major Indian cities. Second, full military mobilization for achieving limited political objectives is neither feasible nor economical, and would be difficult to justify. Third, to meet similar challenges in the future, India needed to reconfigure its force structure, which should have quick reaction time and be capable of achieving limited political objectives without disturbing stability at the strategic level.

Evolution of Cold Start Doctrine (CSD)

From early 1980s, the Sundarji doctrine remained the dominant military ideology for India's military planners. According to this doctrine, the bulk of Indian military formations was employed along the western border to defend possible incursions from the Pakistan side. These formations, which were mostly defensive in nature, were to hold ground and allow sufficient time for the offensive formations located in central parts of India to mobilize and launch a counter-attack. That would be possible after Indian air force would at least ensure air superiority, if not an air supremacy.⁴⁹

This war-fighting doctrine conceptualized in the early eighties had failed to integrate the impact of nuclear weapons on South Asian strategic thought. Consequently, limitations of this doctrine were exposed in Operation Parakram that was launched on December 18, 2001, with an objective to punish Pakistan after militants had attacked Indian parliament in New Delhi. Indian leadership, however, remained in a state of 'strategic paralysis'.⁵⁰ It took almost one year for the Indian political leadership to decide that they could not afford to use their conventional military instrument to achieve limited objectives without fearing nuclear reprisal from Pakistan.

Among other fact factors, the Indian decision to mobilize its full war machinery may have been influenced by the events of 9/11 and the U.S. decision to declare an all-out war against the perpetrators of the attack on U.S. mainland. By drawing an analogy between the two events, India did manage to generate some international sympathy, but failed to utilize its military tool to extract political concessions from Pakistan.

The most significant cause that contributed to India's failure to launch a conventional attack was long mobilization time of its strike corps which took almost three weeks to assemble. That allowed Pakistan to take effective counter-measures, and also afforded opportunity to the international community to intervene and defuse the crisis. "The delay created enough of a gap between mobilization and commencement of

military operations for India's political leadership to lose its nerve. Such weakened resolve could have subsequently been responsible for India's decision to back down in the face of international pressure.”⁵¹

To overcome this impediment, Indian army chief unveiled in April 2004 the new Cold Start concept.⁵² The objective is to develop the capability to launch a conventional strike in the shortest possible time to achieve limited objectives without disturbing Pakistan's nuclear threshold. By keeping war objectives limited, Indian military planners hope to deny Islamabad the justification to respond massively against Indian cities.

The CSD envisages reorganizing strike corps into at least eight smaller division-sized integrated battle groups (IBGs) that combine mechanized infantry, artillery, and armour on the pattern of Soviet Union's operational manoeuvre groups.⁵³ These IBG's would mobilize swiftly to make ingress into the Pakistani territory 50-80 kms deep within a short time period of 72-96 hours, like the German blitzkrieg of 1940 against the French.

In the past, Pakistan had been using its nuclear deterrent mainly to prevent an all-out war with India. Lessons from the previous Pakistan-India crises suggest that the threat to inflict unacceptable damage may have deterred India from expanding the scope of crises and thus ensured stability at the strategic level. India's CSD, however, aims to exploit perceived gaps at the operational and tactical levels, and thus posits new challenges for Pakistan.

Pakistan's earlier posture of responding massively with nuclear weapons to cause unacceptable damage appeared to be a disproportionate response, especially against limited incursions by Indian troops. On the other hand, if Pakistan did not respond, that could discredit its nuclear deterrent. In a Pakistani perspective, these perceived gaps at the operational and tactical levels were, therefore, needed to be plugged - to deny India the space to launch limited military operations in the form of CSD. NASR provides Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA) additional options during the times of crisis, other than retaliating with full force.

Pakistan's quest for assured deterrence

The South Asian security dilemma is unlike the Cold War model. There are some distinct characteristics that differentiate the development of strategic thought between the two super powers of the Cold War period, and the South Asian regional powers. However, the nature of nuclear

weapons and their potential to influence security policies of possessor states are intrinsically similar, thus narrowing the gap in strategic thinking of nuclear weapon states, irrespective of their overall power potential. It could, therefore, be useful to review the development of nuclear strategies during the Cold War period; to bring out similarities and understand South Asian strategic thought, which is still evolving due to various ongoing military-related developments in the region.

Unlike the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, the conflict between India and Pakistan is not of two competing ideologies, but struggle by a less fortunate, in terms of resources and geo-political compulsions for survival, and an effort by the more fortunate one to emerge at least as a regional, if not a global power. However, there are similarities in strategic thought that developed during the Cold War and the one evolving in the South Asian region. For example, Stephen Cohen has argued that “Present-day Pakistani nuclear planning and doctrine … very much resemble American thinking of the mid-1950s with its acceptance of first-use and the tactical use of nuclear weapons against onrushing conventional forces.”⁵⁴ According to Cohen, “unclassified Pakistani military publications do include discussions of scenarios in which Islamabad orders tactical nuclear weapons to be used as warning shots, nuclear tests to be used as a signal of resolve, or a single weapon to be used against invading Indian armoured divisions.”⁵⁵

Cohen may be partially correct in drawing an analogy between U.S. and Pakistani strategic thought process. There is, however, one fundamental difference between the two. The United States made the transition from one nuclear use doctrine to the other mainly to maintain its edge over the Soviet Union, both in terms of superior concepts and capability. Pakistan on the other hand seems to be moving from a strategy of deterring an all-out war to a more flexible response option. In addition to strategic-level deterrence capability, Pakistan aims to build credible deterrence at the operational and tactical levels, which could possibly be described as a ‘Strategy of Assured Deterrence.’

The development of deterrence at various tiers apparently intended to force the adversary to deescalate and avoid hostilities, has some similarities with U.S. Joint Advanced Warfighting concept of ‘Flexible Deterrence Options’ (FDOs). While the U.S. concept involves various elements of national power, the military FDOs in the U.S. concept include “readiness posture, alert status, and force protection measures; heightened intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; show of force actions; public diplomacy and strategic communications.”⁵⁶ To operationalize

deterrence at different tiers to assure its credibility, in view of India's evolving military doctrines, Pakistan may have to incorporate some elements of the U.S. concept.

Some of the statements attributed to Pakistani nuclear planners reveal that there also exists inherent flexibility and ambiguity in the nuclear doctrine to provide for various contingencies, even though Pakistan had maintained that it would only contemplate the use of nuclear weapons as a last resort measure. For example, in an interview Lt Gen Khalid Kidwai; the head of Strategic Plans Division responsible for nuclear planning and implementing decisions taken by Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA); reportedly stated that nuclear weapons would be used only "if the very existence of Pakistan as a state is at stake." While describing the range of contingencies, he said that nuclear weapons are aimed solely to deter India. In case that deterrence fails, these will be used if; India attacks Pakistan and conquers large part of territory (space threshold); India destroys a large part either of its land or air forces (military threshold); India proceeds towards economic strangulation of Pakistan (economic threshold); and finally, if India pushes Pakistan into political destabilization or creates large-scale internal subversion in Pakistan (domestic destabilization).⁵⁷

These contingencies outlined by Gen Kidwai as early as 2001 indicate that while massive retaliation remains an option to deter India's all-out conventional attack, "there are options available in the nuclear response."⁵⁸ The recent missile test of short range surface-to-surface multi-tube ballistic missile HATF IX (NASR), with a range of 60 km, carrying a warhead of appropriate yield and accuracy, and with shoot and scoot attributes; could possibly be viewed as part of options that Pakistan continues to develop in response to evolving threats from India.

The new missile system, according to Lt Gen (Retd) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, is aimed at "consolidating Pakistan's strategic deterrence capability at all levels of the threat spectrum,"⁵⁹ which, besides tactical, also includes the need to deter at operational and strategic levels. The NASR missile is "apparently designed to carry low-yield or sub-kiloton nuclear weapons for destroying strong Indian armoured thrusts inside Pakistani territory",⁶⁰ that could be in the form of India's new doctrine of Cold Start. According to one analyst, "NASR provides Pakistan the value-added for deterrence which is best described by borrowing Thomas Schelling's terminology 'rationality of irrationality'. NASR is a continuation of the uncertainty in the mind of enemy about the exact

nature of Pakistan's response, coupled with an ambiguous No First Use (NNFU) posture which makes Pakistan's deterrence effective.”⁶¹

While NASR could be termed a battlefield missile, Pakistan also recently declared that its other short-range missile system HATF II (Abdali), which is undergoing validation and technical improvements, “provides Pakistan with an operational-level capability.”⁶² Knowledgeable sources conversant with South Asian military lexicon argue that from a Pakistani perspective, tactical-level forces would constitute India’s mechanized/armoured brigades and infantry divisions, the operational-level could include mechanized/armoured divisions, strike corps and corps-plus size forces, and strategic-level forces could comprise two or more strike corps. Since Pakistan already had sufficient deterrence capability at the strategic level, the recent missile tests aimed at plugging gaps at operational and tactical levels, now covers the full spectrum of threat in the wake of operationalization of India’s Cold Start and proactive war fighting concepts.

Pakistan's decision to develop these systems that fall under the definition of tactical nuclear weapons is aimed at restoring the credibility of its nuclear deterrent that was being discredited through India's Cold Start and proactive operations doctrine.

Commenting on these new developments, some of the analysts have raised concerns on the impact of short-range missiles on strategic stability, command and control of these battlefield nuclear weapons, etc., in the South Asian region. Such questions are not without merit, but may not be relevant in the present context. Pakistan’s decision to develop these systems that fall under the definition of tactical nuclear weapons is aimed at restoring the credibility of its nuclear deterrent that was being discredited through India’s Cold Start and proactive operations doctrine. The second criticism is on command and control problems associated with battlefield nuclear weapons, as that may require delegation of authority to lower-level field commanders at some point during a crisis. However, such delegation of authority is also necessitated for nuclear-capable submarine force which India is likely to develop in the near future with Russian help.

The development of short-range missiles does not necessarily mean that Pakistan would use these weapons for fighting a nuclear war. The sole purpose of these remains deterrence of aggression. However, the

capability to deter military offensive at different levels provides more flexibility to the decision makers by freeing him of the ‘use or loose’ dilemma. India’s new war-fighting concepts seemed to challenge the credibility of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence by exploring space below nuclear threshold at strategic level. In response to limited military incursions by the Indian forces, the threat to destroy Delhi or Mumbai seemed incredible and disproportionate. And, failure to deter even limited aggression would have discredited Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence, both domestically and in future crises with India.

In order to address this credibility dilemma, Pakistan apparently has developed response options that offer choices to decision makers in Islamabad other than retaliating with full force against counter-value targets in India. Introduction of tactical nuclear weapons has inherent challenges of command and control during crises, and could possibly lead to increased instability in the region, especially once India contemplates counter-counter-measures to discredit Pakistan’s operational and tactical deterrence capabilities. Despite this realization, recent declarations by Pakistan’s leadership do indicate that giving up tactical nuclear weapons is no more an option – as long as India continues to pursue offensive limited war-fighting doctrines against Pakistan.

Conclusion

The development of strategic thought and military capability is intrinsically linked to the threat the national leadership perceive to its national security. Almost all states justify their nuclear developments or existing holdings due to varying security concerns, but in reality, there are very few that rely on nuclear deterrence for their survival, and Pakistan is one of these countries.

Nuclear weapons play a central role in Pakistan’s military strategy. With increasing conventional imbalance, and India’s attempt to challenge the credibility of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent at the strategic level by exploring space for a limited objectives war, Pakistan’s reliance on the nuclear weapons has further increased.

Pakistan’s quest for ‘Assured Deterrence’ by developing what could possibly be termed ‘Flexible Deterrence Options’ (FDO) through tactical- and operational-level deterrents, may help restrain India from launching a military operation, but it could also increase the dangers of a nuclear war in the region.

The instability injected in the South Asian strategic environment due to India's evolving concepts of Cold Start and proactive operations may have been neutralized for the time being. However, if India reacts to these new counter-measures by Pakistan, and in response also develops tactical nuclear weapons of its own, that would only heighten the nuclear competition in the region, thus threatening regional stability.

It is therefore imperative that instead of exploring space for limited military operations, which would lead to spiralling of crisis, and could possibly end up with a nuclear use; both India and Pakistan should consider discussions on measures such as conflict resolution, nuclear and missile restraint, including ballistic missile defence system, and conventional military balance.

Notes & References

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- ² Munir Ahmad Khan, "Nuclearization of South Asia and Its Regional and Global Implications" (*Regional Studies*, Autumn 1998, Vol. XVI, No. 4), p. 4.
- ³ Barry Buzan and Ole Waever have defined the term "as the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat." Likewise, desecuritisation has been defined as "a process by which a political community downgrades or ceases to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and reduces or stops calling for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat. The process can be directly discursive addressing the definition of the situation; more often it is indirect, where a shift of orientation towards other issues reduces relative attention to the previously securitized issue." See, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 489-491.
- ⁴ Mitchell B. Reiss, "The Nuclear Tipping Point: Prospects for a World of Many Nuclear Weapons States", in Kurt M. Campbell, et al., (eds), *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2005, p.4.
- ⁵ CIA Director George Tenet used this phrase in his testimony before Senate Select Committee on February 11, 2003. See, Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Current and Projected national Security Threats to the United States: hearing before the Committee on Intelligence*, S.Hrg. 108-161, 108 Congress 1 Session, February 11, 2003.
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Pakistan's emerging nuclear posture: impact of drivers and technology on nuclear doctrine

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- ⁸ Ibid., p.3.
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- ¹¹ Jacques E.C. Hymans, "Theories of Nuclear Proliferation: The State of the Field", *The Nonproliferation Review*, November 2006, Vol. 13, No.3, p.455.
- ¹² Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.12.
- ¹³ Ibid., p.13.
- ¹⁴ William C. Potter & Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, op.cit., p. 92
- ¹⁵ For detailed study, see, Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979.
- ¹⁶ Sagan, op.cit., p.4.
- ¹⁷ William C. Potter, *Nuclear Power and Nonproliferation: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Massachusetts: Oelgeschlager, Gun & Hain Publishers, 1982, pp. 131-144.
- ¹⁸ Sagan, op. cit., p.4.
- ¹⁹ This term has been repeatedly used by Chakma to explain that while Pakistan was a reluctant entrant in South Asian nuclear competition, at the same time, it took a conscious decision to keep its option of developing nuclear weapons in the future, if and when India manages to build a nuclear weapon. See, Bhumitra Chakma, *Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 13.
- ²⁰ Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.68.
- ²¹ Z. A. Bhutto's statement in the National Assembly of Pakistan on June 7, 1974, *The Pakistan Times*, Rawalpindi, June 8,1974, p.1.
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