

US and Strategic Stability in South Asia: A Pakistani Perspective

Malik Qasim Mustafa*

Abstract

The dynamics of strategic stability in South Asia are facing tremendous challenges. The troubled bilateral relations of India and Pakistan and external influence of the US are undermining the prospects of strategic stability in South Asia. The growing Indo-US nexus is making India an arrogant regional player, who wants to dominate the region at its own terms. Pakistan, in order to maintain a stable deterrent relationship, has been following unilateral strategic restraints and wanted to pursue bilateral strategic restraints to improve wide-ranging confidence building measures with India. A discriminatory and biased approach by the US is making Pakistan vulnerable against Indian hegemonic ambitions. Based on this assumption, the paper argues that the US policies of engagement in South Asia did not help promote strategic stability. However, the US can play a positive role in strengthening strategic stability in South Asia by following an unbiased and balanced approach. This paper is aimed at finding answers to questions related to the nature and impact of the US engagement on South Asian strategic stability, and prospects of the US role to stabilise strategic relationship between India and Pakistan.

Keywords: Strategic Stability in South Asia, US Policy towards South Asia, India, Pakistan, Indo-US Defence Cooperation, Indo-US Nuclear Deal.

Introduction

The nature of existing threats to strategic stability in South Asia can be broadly divided into two categories i.e., internal challenges and external pressures and influences. The internal challenges mainly arise out of deep-rooted antagonistic relations and nuclear competition between India and Pakistan. Whereas the external pressure and influence exerted by the

* The author is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.

US directly impact dynamics of strategic stability in South Asia and indirectly complicate its internal dynamics, too. After the overt nuclearisation of South Asia in 1998, it was expected that the inherent dangers of nuclear weapons would compel India and Pakistan to improve the parameters of strategic stability to ensure peace and security in South Asia.¹ But the evolving internal and external challenges to strategic stability have made South Asia volatile and unstable with possibilities of limited conflict escalating into a full-scale nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

The role of the US has always been a very significant factor in political, economic and security dynamics of South Asia. Its initial engagement during the Cold War period in South Asia was to contain the expansion of communism. Similarly, to pursue its broader geo-political interests in the post-Cold War era and particularly after 9/11, the US enhanced its engagement with Pakistan to fight its war against terrorism and formed its strategic partnership with its natural ally, India, to contain increasing influence of China. The US, on the one hand, followed a policy of denials, restrictions and pressures against Pakistan. While on the other hand, US-India strategic partnership, US-India 10-year Defence Framework Agreements, the Indo-US nuclear deal to make India as an exception at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) for the international nuclear trade, US efforts for India's entry into the NSG and its advocacy for India's permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have complicated India-Pakistan deterrent relationship.

The central theme of this study revolves around the assumption that in order to ensure lasting peace and security in South Asia the US should play a positive role. Since it can exert a greater degree of influence over South Asian nuclear powers, therefore, it can help avoid a limited, conventional and nuclear war between India and Pakistan. By following a balanced and constructive approach, it can help Pakistan and India to resolve their deep rooted territorial issues like Kashmir, water issues, issue of terrorism and non-state actors. US support for strategic restraint regime, pressure for a meaningful arms control, confidence building

¹ Naeem Salik, 'Strategic Stability in South Asia: Challenges and Prospects, Nuclear Paper Series, Islamabad Papers, The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, February 2016, 1, <http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Nuclear-Paper-Series-No.-3.pdf>.

measures and equal nuclear mainstreaming of India and Pakistan will lead towards greater stability in the region. Therefore, a stable strategic environment in South Asia will not only ensure lasting peace, but it will also help to promote objective of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. Based on this premise, this research paper is aimed to explore answers of following questions: What are the contemporary challenges to strategic stability in South Asia? How the US has been engaged in this region? and What should be the role of the US in promoting strategic stability in South Asia?

A review of existing literature clearly demonstrates that the US engagement in South Asia was aimed at pursuing its broader geo-political interests in the region. Mehraj Uddin Gojree, Frank G. Wisner, Polly Nayak, and Teresita C. Schaffer write about the US engagement in South Asia from its broader geo-political objectives.² Whereas official US documents like the National Security Strategy (NSS) of the US, Congressional research reports, US-India defence framework agreement all are aimed at highlighting strategic instability in the South Asian region. However, literature on a constructive and balanced US approach to strengthen strategic stability in South Asia is missing. Therefore, an analysis of this paper will help to explore various possible prospects of the US engagement in South Asia to strengthen strategic stability in the region.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section briefly explores and identifies major contemporary challenges to the strategic stability in South Asia. The second section looks into an overview of the US engagement and its

² Mehraj Uddin Gojree, "The U.S. Interests and Policies towards South Asia: From Cold War Era to Strategic Rebalancing," *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities* 2, no. 4 (April 2015): 5-12; Frank G. Wisner II et al., "New Priorities in South Asia: U.S. Policy Toward India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan," Chairmen's Report of an Independent Task Force Cosponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society (USA: Council on Foreign Relations, November 2003); Polly Nayak, "US Security Policy in South Asia Since 9/11-Challenges and Implications for the Future," (DTIC Document, 2005), <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA445096>; Teresita C. Schaffer, "India and Its South Asian Neighbours: Where Does the U.S. Fit In?," in *The Second Modi-Obama Summit: Building the India-US Partnership*, Brookings India Initiative (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2015), 7-9.

impact on India-Pakistan deterrent relationship. The third section explores the prospects of the US engagement to strengthen strategic stability in South Asia.

Major Challenges to Strategic Stability in South Asia

With the passage of time, the dynamics of strategic stability, instead of becoming strong and mature, has turned out to be more complex and fragile. It has been facing numerous internal and external challenges, which are not only confined to traditional aspect of maintaining a strategic forces balance, but also revolve around historical, social, political and economic aspects. Since the purpose of this study is to highlight the impact of the US actions on already established challenges to strategic stability in South Asia, the paper will briefly list these challenges. Some of the most important challenges are briefly listed below:

- Deep rooted territorial disputes, Kashmir, Siachen, and Sir-Creek, especially the Kashmir issue can become a possible nuclear flash point between India and Pakistan;
- Growing role of non-state actors and violent and extremist groups across the borders;
- Increased border tensions, repeated violation of Line of Control (LOC) and working boundary;
- Growing nuclear arms race and technological advancement in nuclear weapons development and their delivery systems;
- Indian Ballistic Missile Defence Programme and increased fear of missile race;
- Growing doctrinal imbalance and development of provocative limited war fighting strategies;
- Increased chances of cyber warfare;
- Growing conventional asymmetry and increased Indian defence spending;
- Absence of strategic restraint regime and nuclear risk reduction centres (Pakistan follows unilateral strategic restraints like its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing.);
- Absence of arms control measures at conventional and nuclear levels.

- Escalatory nature of India-Pakistan relations and absence of escalation control mechanism and institutional crisis management mechanism, growing mistrust and limited confidence building measures.
- Growing international discrimination against Pakistan and granting exceptions and special waivers to India. Efforts to induct India into the NSG and to give a permanent seat at the UNSC;
- Disruption of 2004 Composite Dialogue process and suspension of Comprehensive Dialogue process;
- Growing involvement of Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) to destabilise Pakistan internally.³

Above mentioned challenges are not based on assumptions only but number of events, incidents and official and media statements are evident of these instability factors. These challenges have complicated India-Pakistan relations and become source of constant tension within the region as well. Pakistan has been making repeated efforts to restore peace and build trust with India for the larger interest of stability within the region but India never showed any interest to create peaceful and stable environment in the region. Pakistan being a responsible nuclear state follows restraints and focuses only to safeguard its legitimate security interests, whereas India forms strategic alliances, signs nuclear deals, and adopts provocative doctrines and policies which creates imbalance and tension in the region. In addition to this, the issues of non-state actors, extremism and terrorism are also swiftly eroding prospects of a stable deterrence relationship between India and Pakistan, which makes the region volatile and unstable with a chance of a limited conflict escalating into a full-scale nuclear war.

US Engagement in South Asia and Strategic Stability

Since the end of the World War II, there were different phases of the US involvement in the South Asian region. Sometimes it was ranked low in the US foreign policy priorities and was considered a “strategic

³ “Indian Spy Admits RAW Destabilising Pakistan,” *Express Tribune*, March 30, 2016, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1075353/indian-spy-admits-raw-destabilising-pakistan/>; ‘The RAW Factor’, *Pakistan Observer*, March 31, 2016, <http://pakobserver.net/2016/04/01/the-raw-factor/>.

backwater;”⁴ and sometimes it became the region of the highest importance and was considered vital to the core US foreign policy interests.⁵ During the Cold War era, the US viewed South Asia from its geo-strategic position with reference to region’s close proximity to former Soviet Union, China, and to vital sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean.⁶ The US, in order to contain expansion of communism, utilised Pakistan as its proxy against the Soviet Union. However, its relations with India remained problematic due to India’s close affiliation with the Soviet Union. At that time, the US termed its relationship with India as two democracies opposite to each other in terms of geographically, politically, and economically.⁷

After the end of the Cold War, on the one hand, the US-Pakistan relations were deteriorating as Pakistan was no-longer required to be used as a proxy against Russia. For the US, Pakistan’s nuclear programme started to appear as a major cause of concern. In the same realm, Pakistan faced US foreign aid cut-offs, sanctions, and freezing of major weapon system sales due to the growing concerns over its nuclear weapons development. While on the other hand, the US started to view India as a renewed opportunity to enhance its defence and trade relations and a major market for its commercial interests. At that time, India was also looking for new partners to modernise its ageing armed forces and wanted to enter into the international market economy by liberalising its own economy. In 1995, the US signed Agreed Minutes on Defence Relations with India and marked the start of a new era of US-India defence cooperation.⁸

In the meantime, the US-Pakistan relations kept on deteriorating but progress on US-India relations was slow, too. The 1998 nuclear tests by

⁴ Janne Nolan, *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century* (Brookings Institution Press, 2010). 448.

⁵ K. Alan Kronstadt et al., “India: Domestic Issues, Strategic Dynamics, and US Relations,” Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, September 1, 2011), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33529.pdf>

⁶ Gojree, “The U.S. Interests and Policies towards South Asia: From Cold War Era to Strategic Rebalancing.”

⁷ Frank G. Wisner II et al., “New Priorities in South Asia: US Policy toward India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan,” 14.

⁸ “Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship,” June 3, 2015, <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2015-Defense-Framework.pdf>.

India and Pakistan, resulted in imposition of the US sanctions on both the states, but these sanctions were later gradually lifted. Despite displeasure over nuclear tests, the US wanted India to be the linchpin of the US policy in South Asia.⁹ In the wake of 1999 Kargil conflict, the US also sided with India and the US President, Bill Clinton's visit to India in 2000, opened a new chapter of engagement between the US and India. Both the states signed a joint 'Vision' statement and the US designated India as a big emerging market.¹⁰ Overall, the phases of low and high of the US engagement in South Asia and strategic relevance and irrelevance continued, the US did not care much about arms race, growing tension between India-Pakistan relations and strategic stability in the region.

After the event of 9/11, South Asia once again came under the radars of US foreign policy's vital objectives which broadly revolved around following mentioned issues;

- To consolidate US ties with India and secure the moderate Muslim state of Pakistan;
- To influence major regional developments according to its interests;¹¹
- To find new partners and allies to fight US' 'War on Terror' to pursue this objective Pakistan became a strategic choice for the US;
- Making South Asian nuclear weapons more safe and secure, and address proliferation concerns ;¹²
- To prevent terrorist groups and organisations from getting hold of Pakistani nuclear weapons;
- To combat extremism and religious militancy in Pakistan;

⁹ Polly Nayak, "US Security Policy in South Asia Since 9/11-Challenges and Implications for the Future."

¹⁰ Ashley J. Tellis, "Opportunities Unbound: Sustaining the Transformation in US-India Relations," (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), 3, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/opportunities_unbound.pdf.

¹¹ Wisner II et al., "New Priorities in South Asia: US Policy toward India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan."

¹² Sharon Squassoni, "Nuclear Threat Reduction Measures for India and Pakistan," Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, February 17, 2005), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL31589.pdf>.

- To avoid the chances of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan developed after the 2002 military standoff;¹³
- To consider India as an “indispensable partner” and as a counter weight to China’s growing clout.¹⁴
- To develop a strategic partnership with India based on shared values and convergent geopolitical interest;¹⁵

The US, once again, started to view Pakistan from global security perspective, nuclear non-proliferation and to stabilise it to get its support and cooperation on war on terror.¹⁶ India viewed Pakistan’s increased importance to fight this war with great suspicion.¹⁷ However, the US and India started to reorient their relationship. India was characterised as “world’s largest democracy with shared security interest,” “natural partner,” “nascent great power,” and “indispensable partner.” Therefore, India emerged as a dominant actor in the US foreign policy objectives. The US, in its NSS-2002, expressed its commitment to transform its bilateral relation with India based on its common interest.¹⁸

During post 9/11 phase, the US started to transform Indo-US relations in the following ways:

- The January 2004 Next Step in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) initiative in three key areas: civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programme and high technology trade.¹⁹

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kronstadt et al., “India: Domestic Issues, Strategic Dynamics, and US Relations.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard P. Cronin, K. Alan Kronstadt, and Sharon Squassoni, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Proliferation Activities and the Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission: US Policy Constraints and Options,” Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, 24 May 2005), 1, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL32745.pdf>.

¹⁷ Wisner II et al., “New Priorities in South Asia: US Policy toward India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan,” 15 and 16.

¹⁸ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” (The White House, Washington, September 2002), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organisation/63562.pdf>.

¹⁹ Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, “United States-India Joint Statement on Next Steps in Strategic Partnership,” <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/36290.htm>.

- On June 28, 2005, the US and India signed the New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship for the next ten years;²⁰
- The July 2005 India-US deal to reset India-US relations opened US and the international market for India for nuclear trade.²¹ The Deal went through despite Indian Defence Minister, Parnab Mukherjee, made claim in December 2006 that India would “keep its options open to conduct nuclear tests” in the future.²² On December 18, 2006, President Bush signed law H.R. 5682, the Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006.²³ Respectively on August 1, 2008 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and on September 6, 2008 the NSG approved the deal;
- In 2006, US initiated “Strategic Dialogue” with India and after five rounds of the dialogues, in 2015, the US and India elevated the status of Indo-US Strategic Dialogue to the Indo-US Strategic and Commercial Dialogue;²⁴
- In January 2007, the US sold its USS Trenton, a decommissioned American amphibious transport for US\$44 millions to India and it became the second largest ship in the Indian navy;²⁵
- In 2012, the joint initiative Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) was signed to focus on bilateral defence trade.²⁶

²⁰ “New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship,” 28 June 2005, <http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/3211/2005-06-28%20New%20Framework%20for%20the%20US-India%20Defense%20Relationship.pdf>.

²¹ “It’s Done: India Signs Nuclear Deal with the US,” *Rediff News*, October 11, 2008, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/oct/11deal.htm>

²² K. Alan Kronstadt, “India: Chronology of Recent Events,” Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, February 13, 2007), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21589.pdf>.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Bureau of Public Affairs Department of State. The Office of Website Management, “US-India Strategic and Commercial Dialogue,” September 21-22, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/in/strategicdialogue/>.

²⁵ Kronstadt, “India: Chronology of Recent Events.”

²⁶ “US-India Defence Technology and Trade Initiative,” <http://www.acq.osd.mil/ic/DTTI.html>; ‘Fact Sheet: US-India Defence Relationship’ (Us Department of Defence), <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/US-IND-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

The DTTI allowed US-India defence acquisition system, co-development and co-production of military weapons system;²⁷

- In 2013, the US and India signed Joint Principles for Defence Corporation;²⁸
- In January 2015, in order to give momentum to US-India defence ties, the Pentagon established its first ever country cell, the India Rapid Reaction Cell (IRRC).²⁹
- On June 3, 2015 the US and India revised their New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship for the next ten years;³⁰
- On March 22, 2016, to institutionalise DTTI and IRRC and to enhance defence and security cooperation with India, the US introduced the US-India Defence Technology and Partnership Act to the US Congress.³¹ The Act will amend the US Arms Export Control Action in order to accommodate India's status as an equal partner like other US treaty allies and closest partners.³²

During the Modi-Obama Summit in Washington held in September 2014, India made its efforts to limit the US role in India-Pakistan relations including Kashmir issue and tried to strengthen its bond with the US in the Indian Ocean region to contain China's growing presence.³³ The omission of Pakistan from Modi-Obama summit joint statement was a deliberate effort on the part of Indian leadership as they

²⁷ K. Alan Kronstadt and Sonia Pinto, "India-US Security Relations: Current Engagement," Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, November 13, 2012), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42823.pdf>.

²⁸ "Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship."

²⁹ "Pentagon Cell to Push India Trade Ties," *Hindu*, September 15, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/pentagon-creates-india-rapid-reaction-cell/article7655766.ece>.

³⁰ "US, India Sign 10-Year Defence Framework Agreement," *US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE*, <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/604775/us-india-sign-10-year-defense-framework-agreement>.

³¹ George Holding, *Text - H.R.4825 - 114th Congress (2015-2016): US-India Defence Technology and Partnership Act*, 2016, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4825/text>.

³² "US Amending Law to Grant India Status of Closest Partner: Pentagon Official," *Express Tribune*, April 5, 2016, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1078995/us-amending-law-to-grant-india-status-of-closest-partner-pentagon-official/>

³³ Teresita C. Schaffer, "India and Its South Asian Neighbours: Where Does the US Fit In?," 7-9.

were trying it for decades to limit the role of any outsider power in interfering in Pakistan-India relations.³⁴

The US defence cooperation helped increase unchecked growth of Indian military dominance. From 2004-2014, India has increased its defence budget by almost 164.5 per cent.³⁵ According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) recent estimates of top 15 biggest defence spenders in the world, in 2013, India was ranked at number 9;³⁶ in 2014 it was ranked at number 7;³⁷ and in 2015 it jumped to number 6.³⁸ The Indian defence spending trend is threatening regional peace and impacting strategic stability as it is increasing conventional asymmetry vis-à-vis Pakistan. The US viewed India as a major market for its high-tech military equipment and to promote its interest in South Asia. After more than four decades, the US is trying to take a lead after Russia to become a top arms supplier to India.³⁹ According to SIPRI's recent estimates, from 2011 to 2015, India has received around US\$ 2,771 million worth of military equipment from the US, whereas, during the same time frame, Pakistan received only \$US 893 million worth of military equipment from the US.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Malik Qasim Mustafa, "India's Defence Spending Trends From 2004-2014: A Status without Human Development," *Strategic Studies* 34, no. 2 & 3 (Summer & Autumn 2014): 94-113.

³⁶ "The 15 Countries with the Highest Military Expenditure in 2013," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*, 2013, http://www.sipri.org/googlemaps/milex_top_15_2013_exp_map.html.

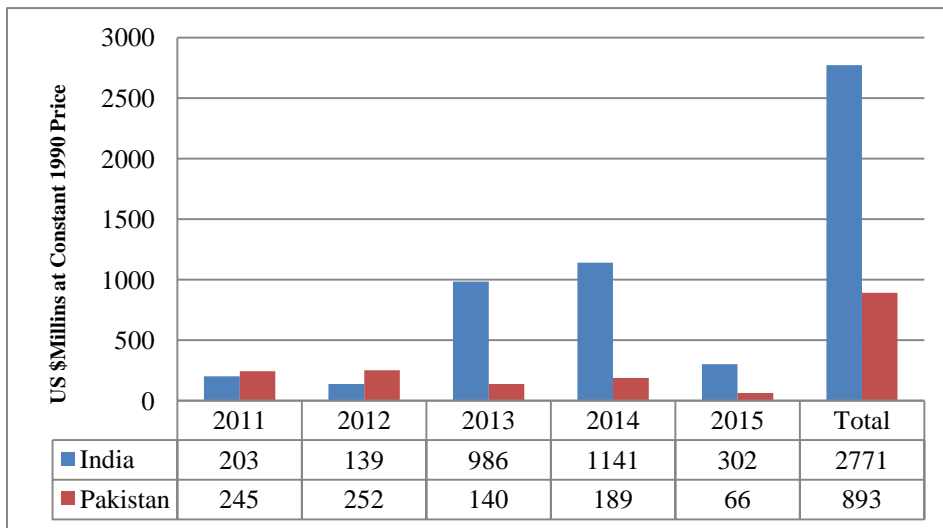
³⁷ Sam Perlo Freeman et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2014," SIPRI Fact Sheet (Sweden: Stockholm International peace Research Institute (SIPRI), April 2015), <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1504.pdf>

³⁸ Sam Perlo Freeman et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2015," SIPRI Fact Sheet (Sweden: Stockholm International peace Research Institute (SIPRI), April 2016), <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1604.pdf>

³⁹ "US Becomes India's Biggest Arms Supplier," *Business Standards*, February 25, 2014, http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/us-becomes-india-s-biggest-arms-supplier-114022500023_1.html

⁴⁰ "TIV of arms exports from United States, 2011-2015," SIPRI, Generated April 2, 2016, http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

Table No.1
US Arms Exports to India and Pakistan: 2011-2015



Source: TIV of arms exports from United States, 2011-2015,” SIPRI, Generated April 2, 2016, http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php

More recently, the launch of Indo-US joint DTTI in 2012, signing of Joint Principles for Defence Corporation in 2013, an India specific cell IRRC at Pentagon in 2015, revision of 10 year Defence Framework Agreement with India in 2015 and introduction of the US-India Defence Technology and Partnership Act to the US Congress in 2016 are meant to strengthen India-US defence cooperation. There are reports that India is also asking the US to provide him latest drone technology to monitor Pakistan and China.⁴¹

Overall, in the defence cooperation filed, both the US and India are aiming at;

- Regular exchange of military and government officials, and a close collaboration with public and private defence producers including foreign subsidiaries of US defence industry;

⁴¹ “ India in Talks to Buy US Predator Drones, Has Eye on China, Pakistan,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-usa-drones-idUSKCN0X51CB>

- New high-tech and sophisticated weapons manufacturing, including new rifles close support aircrafts, and othe cooperatin to strengthen Indian navy;⁴²
- To conduct service specific military exercises, to enhance training and education and exchange of intelligence;
- Collaboration in missile defence;
- Non-proliferation measures.⁴³

The Indo-US nuclear deal tacitly recognising India's nuclear weapons status projected it as a responsible nuclear power. The deal has also ended India's isolation for international nuclear trade. The US contravened its non-proliferation laws and helped India made an exception for the IAEA and NSG. But India resisted to adhere to any major instruments of international nuclear non-proliferation regime and continued to maintain its path of modernising its nuclear weapons complex. Despite India's negative credentials of non-proliferation and nuclear safety and security, the US is working hard to clear all hurdles in providing US-made nuclear power reactors to India.⁴⁴ The US, even in its NSS-2015, clearly supported India's Act East policy as a rebalance of Asia and the Pacific and is determined to continue to strengthen its strategic and economic cooperation with India.⁴⁵ However, in NSS-2015, the US paid only lip service to promote strategic stability in South Asia.⁴⁶

With reference to Pakistan, the US followed totally a pressure-oriented policy. When Pakistan became a key player to fight US War on Terror', the US once again forced Pakistan to fight another kind of proxy against those "strategic assets" which were initially utilised to contain the

⁴² Stephen Cohen and Michael O'Hanlon, "Enhancing US-India Defence Cooperation," in *The Second Modi-Obama Summit: Building the India-US Partnership*, Brookings India Initiative (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2015), 39-41.

⁴³ "Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship."

⁴⁴ Robert Einhorn and W. P. S. Sidhu, "Operationalising US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation," in *The Second Modi-Obama Summit: Building the India-US Partnership*, Brookings India Initiative (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2015), 51-53.

⁴⁵ "National Security Strategy" (The White House, Washington, February 2015), https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

expansion of communism. The US applied its pressure on Pakistan by terming it as a “safe haven for terrorist and extremist groups,” and as the “world’s most rapid proliferator of nuclear weapons technology.”⁴⁷ The US, initially in 2003, tried to appease Pakistan by making it an effective partner and waiving off US\$1 billion loan. Later in 2004, the US granted Pakistan a non-NATO Ally status and formed a security alliance with it and allowed it to purchase military equipment from the US. As leverage, the US started to utilise its drone strikes against the militants hiding in Pakistan which resulted in collateral damage. The US turned its relation with Pakistan into a strategic partnership in 2006. However, during these years, mistrust started to grow between the US and Pakistan when US air strikes killed around 11 soldiers of the Frontier Corps.⁴⁸ The US again tried to appease Pakistan through 2009 Kerry-Lugar Bill by granting US\$7.5 billion non-military aid. Unlike India, Pakistan-US strategic dialogue was initiated very late in March 2010 — so far six minister-level meetings of the US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue have been held, the latest one held in February 2016.⁴⁹

In US-Pakistan relations, the issue of Raymond Davis, the 2011 Abbottabad operation to hunt down Osama Bin Laden, and the 2011 Salala incident when the US Army’s air strike resulted in killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers, widened Pak-US rift.⁵⁰ Pakistan ordered the US to vacate its Shamsi Air Base, halted NATO supplies and raised concerns over the US drone strikes. The US started to consider Pakistan as an ineffective partner and started to demand of “do more” from it.⁵¹ The US also claimed that Pakistan has received around US\$ 32 billion in economic, security and Coalition Support Fund (CSF) reimbursements in the past 15 years. There is a different claim from Pakistani side as it has mainly utilised the US assistance in its fight against terrorism and the aid even did not compensate the economic damage, worth more than \$100 billion, which Pakistan suffered in the past 15 years. Currently, the US is

⁴⁷ K. Alan Kronstadt, “Pakistan-US Relations,” Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, 24 May 2012), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41832.pdf>.

⁴⁸ “Timeline: History of US-Pakistan Relations,” *Dawn*, 4 July 2012, Web Edition, <http://www.dawn.com/2012/07/04/timeline-history-of-us-pakistan-relations/>.

⁴⁹ ‘US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue’, *US Department of State*, Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, (February 29, 2016), <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/253777.htm>.

⁵⁰ “Timeline.”

⁵¹ Kronstadt, “Pakistan-US Relations,” ‘Timeline.’

considering reductions in its financial assistance to Pakistan. It has become critical over Pakistan's progress of military operations against terrorism and extremist organisations, future of major weapons sales to Pakistan⁵² and growing Chinese influence in Pakistan especially after the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

On defence cooperation, the US has not signed any ten-years defence cooperation agreement, similar to Indo-US Cooperation Agreement, with Pakistan. The US only provided those weapons systems which were useful to fight counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations, and which were never meant to fight a war with India. From 2004-2014, some of the weapon systems provided by the US under Foreign Military Financing (FMF) includes four P-3 C Orion maritime patrol aircraft (three of which were destroyed in 2011 by terrorists), surveillance radars, Cobra attack helicopters and C-130 Hercules transport aircraft.⁵³ Whereas Pakistan bought 18 F-16C/D Block 52 Fighting Falcons and related bombs and missiles systems from its own national funds. Pakistan also received some military hardware under CSF, Excess Defence Articles (EDA), and Frontiers Corps and Pakistan Counterinsurgency Fund.⁵⁴ Pakistan has utilised these military equipment against counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations and never meant to destabilise strategic stability in South Asia.

On nuclear front, the US always viewed Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme with discontent and utilised different tools, pressure of sanctions and aid cut-offs. However, the US never realised driving force behind Pakistan's nuclear weapons development i.e., India's growing conventional superiority and its nuclear weapons programme. After the 9/11 incident, concerns were raised over safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear assts and fears of proliferation of nuclear weapons technology to other counties. Pakistan has made every effort to address concerns of the international community, particularly the US. Pakistan established its

⁵² K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan-US Relations: Issues for the 114th Congress," Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, 14 May 2015), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44034.pdf>.

⁵³ "Major US Arms Sales and Grants to Pakistan Since 2001," Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, May 4, 2015), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/pakarms.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

National Command Authority (NCA) and made its exports control laws in harmony with other multilateral export control regimes. The 2014 Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) report described Pakistan as the ‘most improved’ country among nine nuclear-armed states and as a state better at safeguarding its nuclear materials than India after having boosted physical protection of nuclear material and weapons.⁵⁵ During the 2014 NSS, President Obama praised the safety and security of Pakistan’s nuclear assets as an example for the world to follow.

On January 13, 2015, in a joint statement of US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry expressed full confidence in Pakistan export control system, its nuclear security and proactive engagement with the international community including hosting of IAEA training activities at its Nuclear Security Centre of Excellence and Pakistan’s active participation in the NSS.⁵⁶ In December 2016, US Ambassador to Pakistan, Richard Olsen stated that “Pakistan has ‘made considerable progress in its non-proliferation efforts,” and expressed confidence in nuclear security.⁵⁷ In February 2015, the US Defence Intelligence Agency Director, Vincet Stewart further added that “Pakistan continues to take steps to improve the security of its nuclear arsenal.”⁵⁸ In February 2016, in a joint statement at the sixth US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, the US again acknowledged efficiency of Pakistan's export control system and its proactive engagement with the international community.⁵⁹ In April 2016, during the Fourth NSS, Obama once again appreciated Pakistan’s steps in the nuclear security

⁵⁵ Talha Ahmad, “2014 report: Pakistan ‘most improved’ in nuclear security, India not so,” *Express Tribune*, January 11, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/657377/2014-report-pakistan-most-improved-in-nuclear-security-beats-india/>

⁵⁶ “US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement,” US State Department, Office of the Spokesperson, Washington, DC, January 13, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/01/235881.htm>

⁵⁷ Paul K. Kerr and Mary Beth Nikitin, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapons,” Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, 12 February 2016), 17, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL34248.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Paul K. Kerr and Mary Beth Nikitin, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapons,” Congressional Research Service (The Library of Congress, February 12, 2016), 17, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL34248.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, “US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement,” Media Note, *US Department of State*, (March 1, 2016), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/03/253857.htm>.

domain, especially country's ratification of the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM).⁶⁰

Recently, the US has raised concerns and expressed suspicions over expansion of Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability and development of new types of delivery systems, its full-spectrum deterrence capability, durability of Pakistan's nuclear safety and security efforts, and, outsider and insider threats to Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme.⁶¹ However, the US has never looked at the reasons behind the development of Pakistan's tactical or battle field nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. The US has totally ignored the development of Indian Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) also known as Proactive Strategy, which was aimed at finding gaps between Pakistan's nuclear thresholds and to launch limited conventional war to immediately harm Pakistan's conventional and strategic capability. Pakistan has developed its battle field nuclear weapons and their short-range delivery system in order to ensure its deterrence capability at all levels as full-spectrum deterrence capability. Pakistan has developed this comprehensive deterrence capability to plug any gaps which India might exploit to wage a limited war with Pakistan.

The question of proliferation of nuclear weapons technology is over now. Dr. A. Q. Khan's episode has completed its shelf life. A robust export control system is in place now and effectiveness of Pakistan's export control mechanism is no less than other multilateral export control regimes. As far as Pakistan's nuclear safety and security reforms are concerned, Pakistan has earned its recognition of a responsible nuclear weapons state by the international community. It gives top priority to the safety and security of its nuclear assets and no power can sabotage Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Pakistan is constantly improving its nuclear safety and security standards. Its strategic organisations have been ensuring a fool proof system to ensure preventions of any takeover over by the outsider threat. Through its Personal Reliability Programmes (PRP), it has also ensured to deal with the insider threats to its nuclear weapons programme.

⁶⁰ "Pakistan's Steps for Nuclear Security Appreciated by Obama," <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2016/04/04/national/pakistans-steps-for-nuclear-security-appreciated-by-obama/>.

⁶¹ Kerr and Nikitin, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons."

With reference to its broader foreign policy objectives in South Asia, the US still considers that the greatest threat to global security is the terrorists getting hold of nuclear weapons from countries like Pakistan.⁶² President Obama, at the conclusion of the fourth and final NSS which was held at Washington, desired to see progress in India Pakistan nuclear relations. He indicated that in terms of development of their military doctrines they should not continuously move in wrong direction.⁶³ The US' Strategic partner, India, has responded to Obama's remarks very critically as India's External Affairs Ministry termed it "lack of understanding" of India's defence posture on part of the US.⁶⁴

Arguments, facts and issues highlighted above clearly indicate that the US' engagement in the South Asian region is mainly driven by its broader geo-political interests. Since 9/11, the US has been only paying lip service to promote strategic stability in South Asia. Time and again, the US has showed fears and concerns over the possibility of a nuclear war between the two South Asian adversaries, but its engagement, particularly with India, has always been detrimental to the dynamics of the regional strategic stability. It is unwilling to help solve the deep-rooted territorial disputes between Pakistan and India. It even contravened its own laws and policies to establish all sorts of cooperation with India – which includes major weapons system sales, which made it an exception for international nuclear trade, and its willingness to make it an exception again for NSG membership and a permanent member of the UNSC. However, mere concerns will not help improve strategic stability in South Asia. A balanced and cooperative approach is required to do this. In the following section, the paper will attempt to analyse future prospects that how the US can help promote strategic stability in the South Asian region.

⁶² Anwar Iqbal, "Obama Asks Pakistan, India to Stop Moving in "wrong Direction." *Dawn*, April 3, 2016, Internet Edition, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1249664>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "US Lack Understanding of India S Defence Posture: MEA on Obama's Comments | Latest News & Updates at Daily News & Analysis," *Dna*, April 5, 2016, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-us-lack-understanding-of-india-s-defence-posture-mea-on-obama-s-comments-2198369>

Prospects of Strategic Stability in South Asia and of the US Role

The US, along with the international community, is unwilling to understand Pakistan's legitimate security, energy and economic needs. This is reflected in its repeated denials to Pakistan over its demand for an Indo-US nuclear deal. Although the US recognises Pakistan's energy needs, it does not respond positively to Pakistan's demand of a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement. During the US President, George W. Bush's visit to Pakistan in March 2006, he explicitly made it clear to Pakistan that "...Pakistan and India are different countries with different needs and different histories."⁶⁵ He further added that Pakistan should not expect a similar nuclear deal any time soon and raised the US concerns over nuclear proliferation and terrorism.⁶⁶ Most recently, without recognising Pakistan's legitimate security concerns, western think tanks particularly American ones have been coining ideas of limiting Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability and generating negative propaganda against Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability.⁶⁷

Despite this, Pakistan has been fighting war against terrorism and continuously suffering socially and economically. The US is even critical of Pakistan's efforts to maintain a stable strategic balance in South Asia and never supported Pakistan's offers ranging from Nuclear weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in South Asia to a regional test ban treaty⁶⁸ and a mutual rollback of nuclear weapons programme to development of a full-spectrum deterrence to avoid conventional and nuclear black mailing from India. Pakistan is an equally responsible key regional player and a nuclear power. It has always respected international norms and values

⁶⁵ "Bush Says Pakistan Cannot Expect Nuclear Deal Like One With India," *New York Times*, March 4, 2006, internet edition, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/04/international/asia/bush-says-pakistan-cannot-expectnuclear-deal-like-one.html?_r=0

⁶⁶ "Bush Rules out a Nuclear Deal with Pakistanis," *New York Times*, March 5, 2006, internet edition, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/world/asia/bush-rules-out-a-nuclear-deal-with-pakistanis.html>

⁶⁷ Toby Dalton and Michael Krepon, "A Normal Nuclear Pakistan" (Stimson Center and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015), <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/NormalNuclearPakistan.pdf>; Mark Fitzpatrick, *Overcoming Pakistan's Nuclear Dangers* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁶⁸ Malik Qasim Mustafa, "CTBT: A Critical Evaluation from a Pakistani Perspective," *Strategic Studies* 33, no. 3 & 4 (2013), <http://issi.org.pk/?p=1871>

based on a non-discriminatory approach. Likewise, Pakistan supports a stable South Asia and has been doing its best to maintain that balance. However, it is equally concerned about the US tilt towards India. The US, by pursuing a balanced and non-discriminatory approach, can help this region become more stable and prosper. In this regard following are some recommendations to strengthen strategic stability in South Asia:

Need to Understand and Respect for Genuine Security Concerns of Pakistan and India: For Pakistan, the only major external threat to its national security and territorial integrity originates from India. Pakistan nuclear weapons programme is solely aimed at deterring India both at nuclear and conventional levels. Whereas India consider itself a major regional player with global aspirations. Its nuclear weapons programme is status-driven. Kashmir dispute represents a possible nuclear flashpoint between India and Pakistan. The US should understand these indigenous regional dynamics between India and Pakistan. Solution of major issues should be the top priority of US foreign policy objectives in South Asia. The US should also respect genuine security concerns of Pakistan and should not follow a policy which is detrimental to dynamics of strategic stability in South Asia. The US support for India's permanent membership in the UNSC and its efforts to make India as an exception for NSG membership will harm strategic stability in South Asia. A recent statement by the US Defence Secretary, Ashton Carter, that the US engagement with India is more strategic and serious than Pakistan, which is not going to work in favour of maintaining stability in South Asia.⁶⁹ The US should follow a balanced and constructive approach in this region to bring India and Pakistan closer to each other and should not exploit their weakness to achieve its own interest in this region.

Need to Promote Arms Control and Conventional Force Balance: In the South Asian scenario, the absence of an arms control measure and a mechanism to maintain conventional

⁶⁹ “ Indo-US Ties More Serious than Pakistan, Says US Defence Secretary,” <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indo-us-ties-more-serious-than-pakistan-says-us-defense-sec/1/638630.html>

force balance is missing. These two measures will not only build trust among adversaries but it will also help to promote strategic stability. The US has firsthand experience of such measures and mechanisms in past. It can influence India and Pakistan to adopt such measure to build confidence and ensure a stable strategic environment in South Asia. The US could play a crucial role in the South Asian region by facilitating India and Pakistan to discuss nuclear restraints and can use its diplomatic power to induce a serious nuclear arms control dialogue.⁷⁰ It could be argued that sooner or later India and Pakistan will have to be accountable to the international community for their nuclear behaviour. This presents a good opportunity for the US to adopt meaningful arms control measures and maintain conventional force balance.

Need to Promote Regional Economic Integrity: Regional economic integrity is a key to help South Asian states to attain progress and prosperity. This will not only help establish connectivity but it will also help build trust and confidence among adversaries like India and Pakistan. Iran-Pakistan (IP) Gas Pipeline, Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, and CPEC all are examples to promote regional economic integrity. The US, instead of applying its influence against regional economic integrity, should economically help India and Pakistan through joint economic projects to build trust and confidence.

Need to Promote Strategic Restraint Regime in South Asia: Pakistan and India lack trust and the spirit to initiate both Comprehensive and Composite Dialogue Process, which is eroding chances of peace in the South Asia region. Pakistan has offered numerous nuclear and conventional CBMs and offered to establish a strategic restraint regime in South Asia. The US can influence India to establish a mutual strategic restraint regime in South Asia, more concrete nuclear CBMs,

⁷⁰ Mario E. Carranza, *India-Pakistan Nuclear Diplomacy: Constructivism and the Prospects for Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament in South Asia*, Studies on Weapons of Mass Destruction Series (London: ROWMAN, 2016).

Nuclear risk reduction mechanism and conflict prevention mechanism. Such steps will enhance strategic stability in South Asia and will also help promote the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Need to Address the Role of Non-State Actors and Terrorism:

The role of non-state actors and the issue of terrorism is a major bilateral irritant between Pakistan and India. If India blames Pakistan for attack on the Indian Parliament, Mumbai attacks, Pathankot attacks then capturing of RAW operatives from Pakistan is equally destabilising for lasting peace in the region. Pakistan has already been fighting its war against terrorism and assured its support and cooperation to India to address the issue of non-state actors and terrorism. However, the trust deficit between India and Pakistan is the main hurdle. The US can bridge that trust deficit and can influence Pakistan and India to root out this menace from their bilateral relations.

Although these steps are not that easy to initiate and implement but a right step by the US in this direction would not only help to promote strategic stability in the region, but it will also enhance peaceful cooperation between India and Pakistan, which would be equally beneficial for lasting peace and security in the South Asian region.

Conclusion

Trust and confidence building measures, absence of arms race and reduction in conventional asymmetry, stable political environment and economic integration can build a stable deterrent relationship between India and Pakistan. This would not help to avoid chances of nuclear war, but it would definitely serve as a key to achieve lasting peace and prosperity in South Asia. Existing US foreign policy objectives and geopolitical interests in the South Asian region has been accelerating conventional and nuclear arms competition between India and Pakistan. The already troubled relations coupled with nuclear arms competition could ultimately lead towards conventional war escalating into a nuclear one. Through a constructive and balanced approach, the world's sole super power, the US can contribute towards reducing the chances of a

nuclear war between India and Pakistan. In this regard the US, especially under the new leadership, should reconsider its policy towards South Asia which should be aimed at promoting a stable environment in the region, but not at making countries like India, the only player to decide the fate of South Asia. The US should also consider Pakistan as an equal important player in this region and as an equal responsible nuclear power.