



RATIONALE FOR STRATEGIC STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA

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Possession of nuclear weapons and the dangers associated with its intended, unauthorised or accidental use are itself enough to provide a rationale to establish and maintain a stable deterrent relationship between two nuclear adversaries. However, in the South Asian region, home to two hostile nuclear powers i.e., India and Pakistan, this rationale is not working effectively. Since 1998, despite Pakistan's efforts to improve the parameters of strategic stability, the Indian actions are making it complex and fragile. India is not only pursuing an active nuclear and missile programmes, but it is also modernising and expanding its conventional forces and adopting aggressive conventional and nuclear war-fighting doctrines. From its Clod Start Doctrine (CSD), also known as 'proactive strategy' to its shift from its already vague No-First Use (NFU) policy to a pre-emptive counterforce first strike, all these actions are destabilising regional strategic stability. A further analysis of the latest developments in Pakistan-India bilateral relations suggest that following major challenges are impacting the strategic stability in South Asia.

Deep-rooted Territorial Disputes, Non-state Actors and Involvement of RAW

The major stumbling block between Pakistan and India relations are unresolved territorial disputes like Kashmir, Siachen, and Sir-Creek. The Kashmir dispute is still considered a possible nuclear flash

point between both the nuclear neighbours. In addition to this, the Indo-Pak relations are further deteriorated by the role of non-state actors and violent extremist groups across the borders. This has resulted in increased border tensions, and India has repeatedly violated the Line of Control (LOC) and Working Boundary. According to Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs “in 2017 to date, the Indian occupation forces have carried out more than 900 ceasefire violations along the LoC and the Working Boundary, as compared to 382 ceasefire violations in 2016.”¹ Furthermore, the growing involvement of the Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) to internally destabilise Pakistan, is also threatening prospects of peace between India and Pakistan. Over these issues, India has been threatening Pakistan and there are fears that any misadventure by India could escalate into a nuclear exchange.

India’s Conventional and Nuclear Threat Postures

The Indian military and government officials are constantly threatening Pakistan with its so-called ‘surgical strikes,’ launching of a ‘limited war’ and ‘counterforce first strike’ to destroy Pakistan’s nuclear weapons capability. On October 5, 2017, the Indian Air Force Chief Marshal, B. S. Dhanoa, has threatened that the Indian Air Force (IAF) can target Pakistan’s nuclear sites and can carry out surgical operations.”² In addition to this, India is already considering to shift from its already vague NFU posture to a first use or pre-emptive strike to totally deny Pakistan any chance of using nuclear weapons. In 2016, the Indian Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar, stated that India should not bind itself to a NFU policy.³ India wants to pre-empt Pakistan with a full ‘comprehensive counterforce strike’ ‘Escalation Dominance’ or a ‘Splendid First Strike.’ This shift is aimed at completely disarming Pakistan of its nuclear weapons.⁴ It will increase nuclear forces alert and readiness status on both sides. It will enhance the chances of accidental or unauthorised use from both side, and any miscalculations will provide no time and chance to avoid a nuclear exchange between Indian and Pakistan. Therefore, such a threat scenario would compel Pakistan to take countermeasure as Pakistan views its nuclear weapons as a guarantee of its territorial integrity and survival vis-a-vis the Indian intentions.

¹. Press Release by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, “Ceasefire Violations by India on 4th October 2017, Strong Protest Lodged by Pakistan Foreign Office,” October 4, 2017, www.mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?mm=NTQ2OA,,

². “IAF Chief BS Dhanoa Asserts India’s Capability to Fight Two-front War, Acknowledges Chinese Presence in Chumbi Valley,” *First Post*, October 6, 2017, www.firstpost.com/india/indian-air-force-capable-of-targeting-pakistan-nuclear-sites-fighting-two-front-war-says-air-chief-bs-dhanoa-4112203.html

³. “Why Bind Ourselves to ‘No First Use Policy’, Says Defence Minister Parrikar on India’s Nuclear Doctrine,” *Times of India*, November 10, 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Having-a-stated-nuclear-policy-means-giving-away-strength-says-Parrikar/articleshow/55357107.cms>.

⁴. Ibid.

Indian Military Modernisation and Increase in the Indian Defence Spending

The recent Indian arms acquisitions are aimed at modernising its armed forces and to emerge as a dominant military power in the region. It is estimated that India's overall global ranking of military spending has been increasing; in 2014, it was moved up to number 7; in 2015, it jumped to number 6 and in 2016, as India's military expenditure grew by 8.5 per cent to \$55.9 billion, it became the 5th largest defence spender in the world. According to SIPRI, India ranked No. 1 among top 20 largest arms importers from 2012-2016. This has resulted in increase of Pakistan conventional asymmetry vis-a-vis India and it is fuelling nuclear and conventional arms race in the region.

Growing Indo-US Strategic Partnership

The growing Indo-US strategic partnership is also emerging as a major threat to strategic stability in the South Asian region. Ranging from the Indo-US nuclear deal to declaring India as an 'indispensable partner' and accommodating India as major defence partner through Defence Technology Trade Initiative (DTTI) and concluding the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the US is gradually making India an arrogant power, which would reduce the chances of cooperation with its nuclear neighbour, Pakistan. To strengthen this growing Indo-US defence partnership, both sides have concluded more than \$15 billion in defence trade, including the transfer from the US to India of C-130J and C-17 transport aircraft, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, Harpoon missiles, Apache and Chinook helicopters, and M777 light-weight Howitzers. With the support of the US government, the US defence industry has provided India with proposals for F-16 Block 70 and F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter aircraft."⁵ In addition to this the sale of 22 Sea Guardian drones, with an estimated cost of around US\$2 billion, to India has also been cleared from the US for India.⁶ The US has already managed to secure exceptions and special waivers for India at the IAEA and the NSG. The US efforts are also underway to secure India's entry into the NSG and a permanent seat at the UNSC. This kind of discriminatory approach is titling the strategic balance in the Indian favour and it will ultimately impact the strategic balance in South Asia.

⁵ "Enhancing Defence and Security Cooperation with India: Fiscal Year July 2017," a Joint Report to Congress in accordance with section 1292 of the National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017(Pub. L. 114-328) submitted jointly by the Department of Defence and Department of State on enhancing defence and security cooperation with India.

⁶ "Sale of Drones Worth \$2 Billion to "Cement" India-US Bilateral Ties," *NDTV*, August 19, 2017, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/sale-of-drones-worth-2-billion-to-cement-india-us-bilateral-ties-1739394>.

Lack of Institutional Mechanisms

The absence of strategic restraint regime, arms control measures, nuclear risk reduction centres, escalation control mechanism, crisis management mechanism and limited confidence-building measures are adding to this growing strategic instability.

Pakistan's Position

Whereas Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability is purely defensive and aimed at deterring India from any kind of aggression against Pakistan. Pakistan has been deliberately maintaining a policy of ambiguity and flexibility. It has always succeeded in maintaining a stable deterrence with an aim to restore strategic balance in the South Asia region. Pakistan has repeatedly offered many proposals and initiatives to restore peace, to build trust, and to arrest nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan. However, India has paid no attention to any of the Pakistani proposals. Pakistan has always taken steps to ensure lasting deterrence stability in the region, but India's actions are aimed at creating an unstable strategic environment.

A Way Forward

The Indian intentions and actions have complicated deterrence stability in the region. Its recent conventional and strategic re-adjustment will bring severe implications for South Asian strategic stability. India's irrational behavior and its reliance on military means to settle its issues with Pakistan could result in a limited war leading to a full-scale conventional war, involving a nuclear response at any level of the spectrum of conflict. Pakistan, being a responsible nuclear weapon state is well aware of its threat perceptions vis-à-vis India. But it wants to achieve stable deterrent relationship and is willing to settle all its outstanding issues with India through dialogue as the window of dialogue between Pakistan and India is always open. It is only by building trust that both states can create enough space to accommodate all pending and emerging issues. Pakistan is already flexible enough to come to a negotiation table; India too needs to show some flexibility in order to promote regional peace and stability. In order to ensure deterrence stability, following are some recommendations:

- i. The international community should understand and respect Pakistan's genuine security concerns. They should follow a balanced and constructive approach. A similar objective approach should also be adopted to accommodate Pakistan and India simultaneously for their entry into the NSG and other multilateral export control regimes.

- ii. There is a need to promote strategic restraint regime, arms control and conventional force balance in South Asia. In the past, Pakistan has offered numerous nuclear and conventional CBMs and offered to establish a strategic restraint regime in South Asia. Both states should establish a mutual strategic restraint regime in South Asia; establish more concrete nuclear CBMs; 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.
- iii. There is a 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 to establish connectivity, but it will also help to build trust and confidence among adversaries like India and Pakistan. Iran-Pakistan (IP) Gas Pipeline, Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CEPEC) project all are examples to promote regional economic integrity.
- iv. Need to address the role of non-state actors and terrorism: Pakistan is already 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.

A stable strategic environment in South Asia will not only ensure lasting peace, but it will also help to promote the objective of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.