

CHANGING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY DIMENSIONS: PAKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE ARTICULATED AT SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

By

Ghazala Yasmin Jalil

Research Fellow

Arms Control & Disarmament Centre, ISSI

Edited by

Malik Qasim Mustafa

June 12, 2023

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

SPECIAL
SESSION 3

IISS
Shangri-La Dialogue
2023

20
YEARS
#SLD23

Nuclear Dimensions of Regional Security



On June 2, 2023, the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC), Gen. Sahir Shamshad Mirza, shared a comprehensive perspective on regional and global security while speaking at the 20th Asia Security Summit Shangri-La Dialogue. He talked about the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity; a resurgence of great-power rivalry; a global trend towards rearmament; and weakening of arms control and nuclear dimensions of regional security, especially Asia-Pacific and South Asia. These issues are of immense importance and merit focused, detailed attention.

Regional Security

In the context of South Asia, the Chairman JCSC said that it “presents unique and complex security challenges due to the peculiar character of the China-India-Pakistan equation. It is the only region where three contiguous nuclear powers share physical borders with alarmingly low warning times between them.”¹ This requires a very high level of efficiency and reliability in mutual communication along with robust command and control structures, especially during times of heightened tension. India and Pakistan have conflict-prone relations spanning over 70 years and have fought several wars over the unresolved issue of Kashmir. India also has conflict-prone relations with China and the troops of the two sides have had clashes along the contested border since 2020. This makes security more complex for the three nuclear-armed countries that share borders. While these countries have

¹ Statement by Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC), Gen. Sahir Shamshad Mirza at The 20th Security Summit the Shangri-La Dialogue, June 2, 2023 by International Institute of Strategic Studies.

handled their nuclear capabilities with care in the past, the same cannot be guaranteed for the future.

In Asia-Pacific, Gen. Sahir said that the nature of strategic anxieties is different since it lies at the intersection of superpowers' interests. Here, the superpower competition is likely to get intensified and besides defence and security are likely to spill over trade, investment, and technologies. Indeed in Asia-Pacific there is increasing tension between a rising China and the U.S. along with its allies. This tension is changing the security dynamics in the region. The U.S. has strengthened its military alliances in the region and is increasing its military presence. There are also several alliances forming such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) which includes Japan, India, U.S. and Australia; and the AUKUS comprising the U.S., UK, and Australia. These groupings are evidently anti-China in nature and will exacerbate tensions in the region. Gen. Sahir expressed apprehension that the region is "essentially emerging as an arena for nuclear security tension between the resident and the non-resident nuclear powers."² He outlined several implications for the strategic stability of the broader Asia-Pacific region including eschewing of balance between deterrence and arms control; rearmament becoming the new normal; application of non-proliferation regime as a tool of foreign policy objectives; ignoring hotbeds of conflict and shunning of conflict resolution; and technological competition that poses increased security risks.

Pakistan's Nuclear Capability as Harbinger of Peace

The security dynamics in Asia-Pacific are also having a spill-over effect in South Asia. India is pivotal to the U.S. strategy to 'counterbalance' China. Consequently, the U.S. and India are deepening defence and technology cooperation as well as information and technology-sharing agreements.³ This not only impacts the balance of power in South Asia but also increases the Indian influence in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond. Moreover, India is indulging in massive conventional build-up⁴ that is accentuating conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan. The CJCS also highlighted the danger: "The growing conventional asymmetries proportion bears the potential of a strategic miscalculation. This seriously disturbs the strategic balance with attendant implications on the strategic stability in South Asia."⁵ He further pointed out that Kashmir is the "unresolved core issue"

² Ibid.

³ The series of information sharing and high technology transfer agreements like the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) undermine Pakistan's security.

⁴ For details see Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "India's Conventional Military Buildup: Implications for South Asian Strategic Stability" Issue Brief, April 18, 2023, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/IB_Ghazala_Apr_18_2023.pdf

⁵ Statement by Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS)

that is a major impediment to an enduring peace in South Asia and “probably the most dangerous nuclear flashpoint on earth.”

The Chairman JCSC also spoke about the impetus behind Pakistan's nuclear program in three succinct points: “Our strategic program was and continues to undeniably be need-driven and not prestige driven. Inexorable circumstances pushed us to the direction of a nuclear program to meet the clear and the pressing need of our national security.”⁶ Secondly, “given our zero expansionist designs programme is totally defensive”; and thirdly, it is “meant to deter war or escalation of an unintended conflagration.”⁷ For 25 years, India and Pakistan have not had a full-scale war. This vindicates the point that nuclear weapons have averted major wars. The two countries came to a close encounter in 2019, but it did not escalate. The point was brought home that “there is no space for military conflict between two nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable states.”⁸ Also, by contrasting Pakistan's nuclear program as not prestige-driven, he pointed to India's nuclear program that is prestige-driven and an essential ingredient to its ambitions of attaining major power status. In contrast, Pakistan's nuclear capability is purely defensive and security-driven. Pakistan's perspective on seeking nuclear deterrence for defensive purposes only was underscored succinctly.

Global Security Challenges and Way Forward

The CJCS made several points regarding challenges to global security that need a closer examination. He said that “Chatter over nuclear weapons has uncomfortably increased around the globe.”⁹ This is essentially true. In the last decade or so there has been a trend towards developing new nuclear weapons. Both major powers, the U.S. and Russia, have indulged in massive nuclear modernization and have also developed new nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Moreover, since the major powers are indulging in a new arms race, it has weakened the norm against the development and use of nuclear weapons and has had a domino effect across the world with other countries also pursuing armaments and nuclear weapons. With North Korea advancing its nuclear program, no caps on Iran's uranium enrichment, and the ongoing Ukraine conflict where Russia is pitted against the U.S. and its Western allies, the possibility of nuclear use has been a constant fear. The Doomsday Clock

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The U.S. Nuclear Posture review 2018 includes plans to develop new intercontinental ballistic missiles, new long-range bombers, and ballistic missile submarines as well and new tactical nuclear weapons. Similarly Russia, Russia has also laid out plans for an array of new nuclear weapons in March 2018 including hypersonic missile, a nuclear-power cruise missile and a nuclear-powered underwater drone.

maintained by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists since 1945 has been moved to 90 seconds to midnight in 2023, signifying that the world is dangerously close to catastrophe.¹¹

Another point further stressed by the CJCS was that “rearmament has become a new normal.”¹² This point is not only validated by the great powers trend towards a nuclear arms race, a race to develop offensive systems in outer space, but also an apparent rising trend of the pursuit of conventional armaments across the world. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data global military expenditure reached a new high of US\$2240 billion in 2022. The U.S., China, Russia were the top three countries with India at fourth place at US\$81.4 billion in military expenditure.¹³ Also, the five largest arms importers of major arms during the period 2018–22 were India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Australia and China while the five largest arms exporters were the US, Russia, France, China, and Germany.¹⁴ Thus, there is a definite trend towards rearmament across the globe. This is likely to give rise to yet more arms races and poses an enhanced challenge to global security.

This has been accompanied by the selective application of non-proliferation principles. The CJCS alluded to “an application of non-proliferation regime as a tool to secure foreign policy objectives.”¹⁵ This can be seen in the case of the AUKUS agreement under which Australia would be provided nuclear-powered submarines. This goes against the non-proliferation principles since in theory the nuclear fissile material can be used for weapons purposes.¹⁶ However, since Australia is a U.S. ally and important as a counterbalance to Chinese influence, non-proliferation rules are selectively applied. The same goes for the U.S. support for India’s membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and an India-specific waiver in 2008 under which NSG member states were allowed to do nuclear trade with India. Indeed, Gen. Sahir pressed the view that “Selective application of rule of law will only drift us away from maintaining a rules-based order.” This is detrimental to the non-proliferation regime as well as the sanctity of international law that has served well over the decades.

¹¹ John Mecklin, “A time of unprecedented danger: It is 90 seconds to midnight,” January 24, 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>

¹² Statement by Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS).

¹³ “World military expenditure reaches new record high as European spending surges,” April 24, 2023, <https://www.sipri.org/news/2023/world-military-expenditure-reaches-new-record-high-european-spending-surges-0>

¹⁴ Pieter D. Wezeman, Justine Gadon and Siemon T. Wezeman “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2022,” March 2023, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf

¹⁵ Statement by Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS).

¹⁶ See Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, “AUKUS: A Diplomatic Crisis or a Pandora’s Box of Proliferation?” Issue Brief, Sep 28, 2021, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Final_IB_Ghazala_Sep_28_2021.pdf

This trend has been accompanied by visible erosion of the non-proliferation regime – bilateral and multilateral. In 2019, the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was terminated.¹⁷ The last remaining U.S.-Russia bilateral treaty the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) has been suspended. The U.S. withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, which put caps on the Iranian nuclear program. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has not made any substantive progress in years. The Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) has been in limbo for decades while the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) does not enjoy wide membership. There is no progress on the much-needed arms control legislation in outer space, emerging technologies, or the cyber security domain.

Together, these trends present an alarming picture of regional and global security. In such a scenario what is the need of the hour? Several things are required:

- There is a need to preserve existing arms control mechanisms, to devote sincere efforts to reducing nuclear risks and negotiate new arms control arrangements. This has to be pursued at the global and regional levels. Especially a Strategic Restraint Regime in South Asia is vital to reduce nuclear risks.
- There is a need to develop a comprehensive legal regulatory regime for emerging and disruptive technologies that could increase nuclear risk.
- In Asia-Pacific, there is a need to avoid arms races and crisis instability. Stakeholders should find ways to extend both formal and informal rule-making. Dialogue needs to be increased at every official level, semi-official and non-governmental level, ie. Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues.
- There is a need to pursue conflict resolution and build strategic stability. To achieve this goal, decision-makers must act responsibly, resolve disputes and meaningfully engage in arms control.

In essence, as the Chairman JCSC effectively underscored, regional and global security is threatened by increasing great-power competition, the pursuit of rearmament, new nuclear arms races, weakening of bilateral and multilateral arms control, increased risk of nuclear use, and conflicts like the Ukraine that threatens the entire globe. In the face of such daunting challenges, there is a dire need to pursue sincere arms control, avoid rearmaments, shun nuclear arms races, pursue conflict

¹⁷ It was the cornerstone of European security which required the U.S. and the Soviet Union to eliminate and forswear all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 km.

resolution, strengthen dialogue and diplomacy, and adopt a sagacious approach to deal with the unique challenges brought upon by the breath-taking march of technology.