

*IPRI Journal XIII, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 42-62*

## **Deterrence Stability, Security Doctrines and Escalation Control in South Asia**

**Khurshid Khan\***

### **Abstract**

Deterrence stability is a theoretical concept. There are tangible and intangible factors that affect the concept. If nuclear deterrence fails, escalation control becomes the paramount factor, but there is no reliable remedy once a crisis transitions to hostilities. Fortunately, despite the trust deficit between the US and the former Soviet Union, a credible nuclear triad was seen as a guarantor of deterrence and stability. But, the Cold War nuclear deterrence model cannot be replicated fully in the South Asian context because of many factors. Nonetheless, both India and Pakistan have already recognized the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence. It is primarily because of this factor that the two countries could avert going to war over several serious crises that surfaced over the past 40 years. Unfortunately, the emerging political and security scenarios in the region do not fully ensure that nuclear deterrence will remain effective in the medium to long term. India's offensive security doctrine backed by its nuclear weapons is a serious setback to the existing nuclear deterrence stability in South Asia. In view of India's massive investment in the defence sector, it is highly unlikely that Pakistan will be able to match India in the coming years. There is yet another phenomenon of 'No War No Peace' which has existed in South Asia with varying intensity during the last few decades? We are witnessing a synchronized use of economic, psychological, diplomatic, political, information, intelligence and military tools by India against Pakistan which is only causing frustration, a factor that may lead to brinkmanship. However, India and Pakistan have no other option but to resolve their outstanding disputes in the interest of their development and prosperity.

**Key Words:** South Asia, Deterrence, Strategic Stability, Crisis Stability, Arms Race, India-Pakistan

---

\* Brig. Muhammad Khurshid Khan, Director, Centre of Excellence for Fourth Generation Warfare and Director Internal Studies, Institute of Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad.

## Introduction

The phrase deterrence stability is a theoretical concept, which cannot be measured in tangible terms. Concerning the term deterrence, Henry Kissinger once remarked, “Deterrence occurs above all in the minds of men.”<sup>1</sup> Ideally speaking, nuclear deterrence between two nuclear weapon rival states should help stabilize the region but it needs to be understood that stability is also dependent on a number of other tangible and intangible factors such as the existing level of conventional forces and the security doctrines of the respective nuclear states. If the security doctrine is designed to fight a conventional war, even of a limited nature (a la India’s Cold Start strategy) it will be injurious for the very spirit of nuclear deterrence.

If nuclear deterrence fails because of any reason including the internal and external factors, crisis management and escalation control become paramount factors. Yet, there is no reliable recipe for escalation control once a crisis transitions to hostilities between nuclear-armed states.<sup>2</sup> According to Michael Quinlan, “The possibility of escalation arises as soon as fighting starts, not just when nuclear use starts”.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, despite the trust deficit between the US and the former Soviet Union, a credible nuclear triad was seen as a guarantor of deterrence and stability and accordingly, considerable investment was dedicated to that triad of forces throughout the Cold War to ensure there was no single point of failure. Thus, despite the repeated crises including the ‘Cuban Missile Crisis’, nuclear deterrence remained intact through the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

Bernard Brodie’s famous dictum after the advent of nuclear weapons that “Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Micheal Krepon, et al., *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia* (Washington D. C: Stimson Center, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons-Principles, Problems, Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 62, 66.

<sup>4</sup> Robert P. Haffa, Jr., et al., *Deterrence and Defence in the Second Nuclear Age* (Analysis Center Paper, L. A California: Northrop Grumman Corporation, March 2009), 3,

<http://www.northropgrumman.com/.../Deterrence-and-Defence-in-seco.pdf>; (accessed September 14, 2011), and Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, 60.

win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them”<sup>5</sup>, has been the foundation of strategic thought during the Cold War, and continues to remain relevant in the South Asian context as well. Nevertheless, the Cold War nuclear deterrence model cannot be replicated fully in the Indo-Pakistan framework because of their high stakes being two collocated nuclear states. Unlike the US and former Soviet Union that remained engaged in proxy wars across the globe, India and Pakistan lack the flexibility of undertaking adventures, howsoever limited in scope and intensity.

In the Indo-Pakistan perspective, both sides have recognized and occasionally expressed the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence. One of the early conceivers of India’s nuclear deterrence, K. Sundarji, predicted that nuclear deterrence would add stability and peace and that “the only salvation is for both countries to follow policies of cooperation and not confrontation...A mutual minimum nuclear deterrent will act as a stabilizing factor... The chances of conventional war between the two will be less likely than before.”<sup>6</sup> It is because of the nuclear factor that since the late 1980s, despite a number of very serious crises including India’s force mobilization during 1987 and later on during 2001-02, war has been prevented.

It is also encouraging that both India and Pakistan are extending greater cooperation as a Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) since the 1980s and have agreed on a number of arms control measures with a view to enhancing communication, imposing checks on the behaviour, and strengthening the security of the two sides through economic, political and social co-operation.<sup>7</sup> The CBMs specific to nuclear activities where both sides have signed a number of bilateral agreements prove that they are

---

<sup>5</sup> Barry Scott Zellen, “Bernard Brodie: A Clausewitz for Nuclear Age”, *Security Innovator*, January 1, 2009, <http://securityinnovator.com/index.php?articleID=15954&sectionID=43>; (accessed September 14, 2011), Thomas G. Mahnken and Joseph A. Maildo, eds., *Strategic Studies: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 181; “Deterrence”, <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/history/cold-war/strategy/index.htm> (accessed October 22, 2012); Sudha Raman, *Nuclear Strategy the Doctrine of Just War* (New Delhi: Manas Publishers, 2006), 13.

<sup>6</sup> William H. Lewis and Stuart E. Johnson, eds., “Proliferation of WMD and the Security Dimensions in South Asia: An Indian View,” in *Weapons of Mass Destruction: New Perspectives on Counter proliferation* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1995), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Shaun Gregory, “Rethinking Strategic Stability in South Asia”, *SASSU Research Report 3* (September 2005).

serious and do not want to leave the nuclear related matters to chance.<sup>8</sup> However, nuclear deterrence in the Indo-Pakistan environment might not be maintained for very long because of India's ambitious plans to develop a state of the art conventional force.<sup>9</sup> The US desire to make India — a major player in South Asia to balance out China is another factor of insecurity for Pakistan and overall instability in South Asia.

In this backdrop, this paper aims at understanding, the complex phenomenon of deterrence stability, security doctrines and escalation control in South Asia. The study intends covering the subject in the following sequence: one, a brief account of deterrence theory and stability, two, relationship between security doctrine vis-à-vis deterrence stability. Three, is the existing level of deterrence stability. Four, the core causes leading to crises escalation having implications for escalation control and finally, recommended options to maintain and enhance stability in South Asia. For the purpose of this paper, the study remains focused on nuclear deterrence, which has been used in formulating the nuclear strategies of the two superpowers during the Cold War period and remains of interest to South Asia.

The opinions expressed in this paper are that of the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views of the institution he works with. The study focuses on the factors that lead to uncertainty about nuclear stability in South Asia.

### **Understanding Deterrence Theory and Stability**

Deterrence as a concept has roots in human behaviour relating to security and its management in human society. However, the concept has narrowed down and become specific after the invention of nuclear weapons and now deterrence refers to nuclear weapons in the discourse about international security. In general, deterrence refers to creating risks that prevent the opponent from engaging in hostile action. For deterrence to work, the risk must be disproportionately higher than any possible gain. Thus the states in possession of nuclear weapons clearly understand what action is to be refrained from.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> "India, Pakistan agree to extend nuclear risk reduction pact for 5 years", *Hindu*, February 21, 2012, Mariana Baabar, "Pak, India agree to minimize N-accidents", *News International* (Islamabad), December 22, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> *Economic Times*, (February 15, 2010), <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/5575728.cms>, (accessed December 12, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, 20, 23.

The development of nuclear weapons was a key contributor to the prominence of the deterrence theory in the post-Cold War period. During 1945, realizing the devastating impact of nuclear weapons, British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, stated that the need to avert war, rather than have to wage it, had acquired a new and special cogency.<sup>11</sup> Taking a similar position, another British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, said that, “the odd thoughts that annihilating character of nuclear weapons may bring utterly unforeseeable security to mankind,...It may be that when the advance of destructive weapons enable everyone to kill anybody else no one will want to kill anyone at all.”<sup>12</sup>

Glenn Snyder also defines deterrence as “the power to dissuade.” Alexander George and Richard Smoke define it as, “simply the persuasion of one’s opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action... outweigh its benefits”. Thomas Schelling calls deterrence “a threat... intended to keep an adversary away from doing something.” Bernard Brodie, in his seminal chapters on nuclear strategy in *The Absolute Weapon* in 1946, made the expectation of “huge devastation of...peoples and territories” one of the central tenets of deterrence.<sup>13</sup>

Even in the post Cold War era, the term ‘deterrence stability’ continues to be debated in the scholarly world especially in the context of ‘Korean Peninsula’ and ‘South Asia’. As pointed out earlier, Bernard Brodie’s magisterial injunction at the dawn of the nuclear era seems still valid even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He rules out war and winning and suggests that the chief purpose of a military establishment must be to avert the war, meaning nuclear deterrence must work. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that deterrence would succeed forever which depends on rational behaviour of the actors.<sup>14</sup> The psychological framework of deterrence decides the

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>12</sup> Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Engene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics: Trends and Transformation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 349, 350.

<sup>13</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, “Deterrence and Defense,” reprinted in Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, eds., *The Use of Force: International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: University Press of America, 1983), 129. Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 11; Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 69; Bernard Brodie, “The Development of Nuclear Strategy,” in Steven E. Miller, *Strategy and Nuclear Deterrence: An International Security Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Kegley and Wittkopf, *World Politics*, 350.

behaviour of the deterree and the deterred.<sup>15</sup> Deterrence is a concept for operating upon the thinking of others; it therefore, entails some basic presumptions about the behaviour of the other side, especially during the time of crisis.<sup>16</sup> The thinking of the other side also entails the factor of 'rationality and irrationality' of the leaders of the nuclear weapon states. Deterrence thus, operates on the rational fear that the other side would not act rationally once it has suffered severe losses.<sup>17</sup>

Theoretically, if nuclear deterrence is to succeed, certain physical and psychological preconditions have to be fulfilled: One, a threatening nation has to be capable and willing to use its nuclear weapons. The capability must be sustainable; there must be no way for the opponent to eliminate the deterrent capability of the threatening nation. Strategists call this "second-strike capability," a retaliatory move which enables a state to protect its forces from destruction through a first strike.<sup>18</sup> Two, credibility, which means the opposite side believes that whatever you say you mean it. Therefore, the threatening nation must have the plans and the readiness necessary to demonstrate that it can deliver on its "message" by conveying willingness to use retaliatory nuclear forces. Most importantly, both nations must believe that there is a real probability that the threatening nation will indeed perform the promised action, if required.<sup>19</sup>

Third, communication — that means the opposite side is told in clear terms that if you do not behave in a certain manner, the consequences would be serious. The threatening nation must successfully communicate to the opponent the price it will have to pay for attempting to achieve an unacceptable objective. In the final analysis, successful deterrence also depends on psychological components: communication and perception.<sup>20</sup> In simple terms, X can deter Y by threatening to use nuclear weapons if Y creates serious security problems for X. The concept relies on the idea of mutually assured destruction, provided both sides possess nuclear weapons. But who will guarantee that the deterrence would work if Y decides not to take the threat seriously, and undertakes an adventure on the assumption that X will not implement the threat. Therefore, if deterrence stability is to

---

<sup>15</sup> Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 37-40.

<sup>16</sup> Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Raman, *Nuclear Strategy the Doctrine of Just War*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons, Prospects*, 23; Raman, *Nuclear Strategy the Doctrine of Just War*, 14, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

be achieved, both sides need to be very articulate and rational in their approach and behaviour. More importantly, a balance must be maintained that would deter both from undertaking adventures.

P.K. Huth, another renowned theorist, explains four key factors for consideration under the rational deterrence theory: one, the military balance; two, signalling and bargaining power; three, reputation for resolve; and four, national interests at stake. There is another strong argument that the prevention of war is not the only aim of deterrence. In addition to that the defending states must be able to resist the political and military demands of the opposing side which is preparing to impose war on a country trying to defend its nation. Avoidance of conflict at the cost of diplomatic concessions demanded by the potential aggressor under the threat of war cannot be termed successful deterrence.<sup>21</sup>

There is yet another approach to deterrence theory. Chinese scholar Sr. Col. Yao Yunzhu views that for a state adopting a no-first-use policy and intending not to waste too much money on unusable weapons dependence on opaqueness as a deterrent can also be a wise choice. He further explains that one can achieve deterrence through the certainty of prospective costs outweighing prospective gains, as well as through the uncertainty in cost or gain calculations. Deterrence works not only to reverse the enemy's original intention, but also to prevent him from forming such an intention for lack of information. He says, "Comparing China with the US, one sees that the former places more emphasis on taking advantage of uncertainty in implementing deterrence, while the latter realizes more deterrence value by a show of force."<sup>22</sup> To summarize, it seems appropriate to quote David Krieger who holds that "in the world of nuclear deterrence theory, beliefs are everything. What the leaders of a country perceive and believe is far more important than the reality."<sup>23</sup>

The Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system pursued by some countries does have the potential to affect the deterrence stability currently maintained between the relevant states. In such scenarios, if country A believes that it has a perfect defence against country B, then country B may

---

<sup>21</sup> P.K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debate", *Annual review of Political Science*, 2 (1999): 25-48.

<sup>22</sup> Sr. Col. Yao Yunzhu, "China's Perspective on Nuclear Deterrence", *Air and Space Power Journal* (Spring 2010), <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj10/spr10/yao.html> (accessed September 12, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> David Krieger, "Nuclear Deterrence, Missile Defenses and Global Instability", April 2001, [http://www.wagingpeace.org/.../00\\_krieger\\_nuclear-deterrence](http://www.wagingpeace.org/.../00_krieger_nuclear-deterrence) (accessed September 12, 2011).

also believe that it has lost its deterrent capability against its rival country. The BMD maintained by one country is likely to trigger new arms races, which may increase instability. It was because of the concerns for growing instability of nuclear deterrence to the point where it might break down, that led the US and Soviet Union to agree in 1972 to place limits on defensive missile forces in the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The same has been unilaterally annulled by the US in order to build a national ballistic missile defence, needed to protect itself against so-called 'rogue states'.<sup>24</sup> India, too, is aspiring to have a shield against incoming missiles fired from a distance of up to 5000 km range. India already claims that its BMD shield can tackle the incoming missiles from ranges upto 2000 km,<sup>25</sup> which is causing concerns for deterrence stability in South Asia.

Finally, it is important to point out that the concept of nuclear deterrence is not a sole means to prevent wars among states as highlighted by many scholars. Despite the fact that the US enjoyed nuclear monopoly during the initial four years after World War II, the Soviet Union was very tough in post-war negotiations, culminating in the 1948 showdown over access to Berlin. History proves that nuclear weapons could not give their possessors a decisive military advantage over each other as seen in the case of both the US and the Soviets. The case of Israel is particularly striking. It could not deter wars in Middle East despite having nuclear weapons. In fact, they failed twice: neither Anwar Sadat, the leader of Egypt, nor Hafez al-Assad, the leader of Syria, was deterred.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "India to have shield from missiles of 5,000 km range", *News International* (Islamabad), June 17, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War 1945-1950* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), especially Chapters 2 and 3; McGeorge Bundy, "The Unimpressive Record of Atomic Diplomacy," in Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis, eds., *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996); It might be argued that since Israel, which has a long-standing policy of not commenting on whether it has a nuclear weapons program, did not announce the existence of its nuclear weapons, that this is not a failure of deterrence, but merely of knowledge. You can't be deterred by weapons you don't know exist. It seems likely that Egyptian and Syrian intelligence services, however, would have been aware of Israel's nuclear program (if for no other reason than it would be in Israel's interest to quietly pass word of the existence of the weapons to those it was trying to intimidate). Even if the Egyptian and Syrian intelligence services were not reporting the existence of the Israeli weapons program, press reports were relatively widespread by 1973. In January, United States Government has been conducting its Middle East policy on the assumption that Israel either possesses an atomic bomb or has the



### **Relationship between Security Doctrine and Deterrence Stability**

There are three inter connected factors: deterrence stability, security doctrine, and escalation control. This study attempts to establish the linkage between them. It is believed that the security doctrine sets the parameters irrespective of the other two factors' stability. If the security doctrine is designed to fight a war, the other two factors are correspondingly affected especially when the two belligerents have asymmetry in their conventional forces.

In case of nuclear weapons, the number of weapons is unlikely to matter much, unless it is influenced by other factors like the presence of an ABM defence system, asymmetry in conventional weapons and assured second-strike capability. That means, the concept of mutual deterrence requires the reciprocal cancellation of options for war at any level between the rival states.<sup>27</sup> If nuclear deterrence has to work, the belligerent states must have the capability to fight at different levels before the nuclear factor comes into play.

Thus, escalation control and deterrence stability can be stabilized only when the two sides have balanced conventional forces and no-one is extraordinarily powerful to think that it could get away after having caused the desired damage to its rival state. The thinking that the aggressor state might get away after causing the desired damage is extremely dangerous as it leads to misunderstanding between the rival nuclear-armed countries. Escalation is neither a physical process like chemical chain reaction nor a sequence of random events like outcome on a gambling machine. It is a matter of interactive choices by people. Therefore, it has to be considered in human and political terms, not just as a military matter or a technical issue.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, deterrence stability and escalation control also depend on careful and correct assessment of distinctive historical, political, cultural and geographic circumstances that shape nuclear behaviour in particular regions. However, meaningful analysis cannot be made in the face of minimum communication or miscommunication between nuclear

---

component parts available for quick assembly. See also Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 327-328, 337-338; and Avner Cohen and Willam Burr, "Israel Crosses the Threshold," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (May/June 2006), 22-30.

<sup>27</sup> Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons, Prospects*, 59.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

countries.<sup>29</sup> Thus, to summarize, while other factors are important, the security doctrine of rival states would continue to play the decisive role in maintaining deterrence stability and escalation control. It is believed that it was because of this reason that the US continued to refine and adjust its nuclear strategy to avoid communicating threatening signals to the former Soviet Union at any stage except for the initial decade when the US enjoyed nuclear hegemony over the latter.

### **Deterrence Stability in South Asia**

The stability/instability paradox, a corollary of the nuclear deterrence theory, states that nuclear weapons create stability at the macro level when the two rival states have matching capabilities. But the confidence that the conflict will not escalate to a nuclear level, creates instability at the micro level. The debate about strategic stability in South Asia has been revolving around the nuclear paradigm developed during the Cold War. As a matter of fact, the nuclear factor would remain central to the stability in South Asia, but there are other features, both kinetic and non-kinetic in nature, that have direct relevance in the contemporary security situation in South Asia. It had little or no relevance in the relationship between the US and USSR as they enjoyed internal political stability and homogeneity. Thus, the debate about strategic stability in South Asia should not remain confined within narrow politico-military terms. There are other non-kinetic factors like the socio-economic and, political situation that affect and condition the core politico-military relationship which must figure in defining deterrence stability in South Asia.

This line of thought has been reinforced by Graham and Hagerty who have identified the differences between the Cold War model and the contemporary politico-security situation in South Asia. In terms of geopolitics, the main dissimilarities are the long common border between the two nuclear rival states, the proximity of the two capitals and more

---

<sup>29</sup> “Deterrence Stability” (with particular reference to the South Asian Context), *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, Article 1757 (February 20, 2011): 1, [www.claws.in/index.php?action=master&task=758&u\\_id=36](http://www.claws.in/index.php?action=master&task=758&u_id=36) (accessed September 14, 2011); Devin T. Hagerty, “Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia”, *International Security* 20, no.3 (Winter 1995/96): 114; and Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons, Prospects*, 65.

significantly, the absence of an agreed political dispensation that explains the stalemate on the Kashmir dispute.<sup>30</sup>

The unconfirmed reports of missiles, presumably with nuclear warheads, that were being redeployed and operationally readied during the latter two crises between India and Pakistan strengthen the perception that the security environment in South Asia is unpredictable and unstable. The past crises escalated but deterrence failure was averted because the pattern of crisis development and escalation control was uniform in all these cases. Events which would have been utterly incomprehensible in the US-Soviet context, such as the involvement of non-state actors in activities like the attack on the Indian Parliament or the eye-ball to eye-ball confrontation of more than one million troops, have taken place in South Asia. Similar events may happen again in future because of a number of tangible and intangible factors.<sup>31</sup>

Fortunately, the crises since 1972 have not turned into real conflict except in the Kargil case, but that too, was contained before it could escalate to general war. This pattern of recurrent crises but successful escalation control might well be a South Asian contribution to strategic deterrence theory. Deterrent optimists in South Asia point directly to western experience to bolster their case. The former Indian Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh, wrote, "If deterrence works in the West ...by what reasoning will it not work in India?"<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, would deterrence continue to work in future? This seems unpredictable especially when India's conventional and nuclear arsenal continues to grow exponentially forcing Pakistan to put increasing reliance on its nuclear deterrence? The author endorses Rifaat's point of view who says, "India and Pakistan have sought to stabilize their nuclear equation by pursuing the path of nuclear risk reduction and war avoidance.

---

<sup>30</sup> Hagerty, "Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia", 114; and Haider K. Nizamani, *The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Cohen, "Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War in South Asia: An Unknowable Future" (paper presented to the UNU Conference on South Asia, Tokyo, Japan, May 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Peter R. Lavoy's review essay of the debate between Sagan and Waltz, "The Strategic Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation," *Security Studies* 4, no. 4 (Summer 1995): 695–753; "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 5 (1998): 43; and P.R. Chari, "Nuclear Crisis, Escalation Control, and Deterrence in South Asia", *Working Paper* August 2003, [http://www.beta.stimson.org/southasia/pdf/escalation\\_chari.pdf](http://www.beta.stimson.org/southasia/pdf/escalation_chari.pdf) (accessed September, 2011).

New Delhi's advocacy of no-nuclear first use against Pakistan will not be a credible confidence building measure unless accompanied by efforts to address the issue of conventional military imbalance between the two nuclear adversaries.<sup>33</sup> It may be said though that during the past crises neither side was subjected to a level of pressure justifying the use nuclear weapons as the 'red lines' were never crossed. The emerging security scenario in the region, therefore, demands that accumulation of disproportionate military strength be avoided if the threat of nuclear war is to be averted and a more predictable security relationship ensured.

India and Pakistan have been unable to achieve anything in terms of bilateral structural arms control. However, they have managed to agree on a number of operational arms control measures, commonly understood as CBMs. The objectives of the CBMs are to reassure each other of the nonaggressive intentions and reduce the possibility of misrepresentation in respect to certain activities. They also minimize the likelihood of inadvertent escalation of hostile acts in a crisis situation and finally, they help in narrowing the scope of political intimidation by stronger powers. The recent past experiences of Kargil and 2001/2002 escalation seem to have provided the impetus for constructive engagement on nuclear risk reduction by India and Pakistan. The process culminated in a joint statement calling on both sides to take certain measures including the conclusion of an agreement on the pre-notification of missile flight-testing and up-gradation of hotlines at various levels.<sup>34</sup>

The two sides' decision to extend the validity of a bilateral 'Agreement on Reducing the Risk from Accidents Relating to Nuclear Weapons' for another 5 years indicates how co-located nuclear weapons states should behave while dealing with matters such as this. This agreement was signed during 2007 for an initial duration of five years.<sup>35</sup>

The above arguments notwithstanding, in a recent move, two well-known South Asian experts, George Perkovich and Michael Krepon of

---

<sup>33</sup> Rifaat Hussain, "Nuclear Doctrines in South Asia", *SASSU* (December 2005): 3, [http://www.sassi.uk.com/pdfs/rifaathussain\\_RR4.pdf](http://www.sassi.uk.com/pdfs/rifaathussain_RR4.pdf) (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Michael Krepon, "The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation Control in South Asia", in Michael Krepon and Chris Gagné, eds., *The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia* (Washington DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center, June 2001), 3 [www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research.../ESCCONTROLCHAPTER1.pdf](http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research.../ESCCONTROLCHAPTER1.pdf) (accessed October 3, 2011); and Gregory, "Rethinking Strategic Stability in South Asia."

<sup>35</sup> "India, Pakistan Agree to Extend Nuclear Risk Reduction Pact for 5 Years"; Mariana Baabar, "Pak, India Agree to Minimize N-accidents".

Stimson Center (Washington D.C.), have focused their work on the common theme of maligning Pakistan. Without taking Pakistan's concerns into consideration, both have targeted Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA) on the plea that it is predominantly a military hierarchy which holds the nuclear weapons key. In their view the political leadership has a minimal role in decision making concerning the development and the use of nuclear weapons. They are also critical of Pakistan's nuclear strategy, its development of tactical nuclear weapons and the role of its intelligence agencies, especially the ISI.<sup>36</sup>

It is obvious these articles have been written to promote the Indian case totally ignoring India's 'Cold Start' strategy, its drive for an ABM system, its conventional military build-up including its air force and navy and its thrust to achieve indigenous 'second strike' capability. Most importantly, the Indo-US nuclear deal and the resultant flexibility that India is likely to enjoy in dealing with the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG), which would help India in making qualitative and quantitative improvement in its nuclear weapons programme. Above all, they have also overlooked that over 80 per cent of India's armed forces are Pakistan specific and deployed accordingly. His lack of seriousness becomes apparent when Perkovich tries to comfort Pakistan by saying: "Pakistan should not worry about India's growing conventional capabilities." This amounts to asking a country to lower its guard and ignore the massive military build-up along its eastern border.

### **Crises Escalation in South Asia: Core Causes**

In fact, South Asia remains one of the most dynamic places in the world with a host of unresolved issues including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. These issues continue to cause instability in the region. Therefore, the presence of nuclear weapons in the region makes it more volatile and risky. Thomas writes that US officials have called South Asia the most dangerous place on earth. This view was voiced by the US President, Bill Clinton, prior to his visit to South Asia in March 2000. On October 11, 2001, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told reporters again that

---

<sup>36</sup> George Perkovich, "Non-Unitary Model of Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: A Critical Review", *Stimson Center*, [www.stimson.org/.../perkovich-on-non-unitary-model-and-deterr...](http://www.stimson.org/.../perkovich-on-non-unitary-model-and-deterr...); (accessed December 21, 2012), and Krepon, "Pakistan's Nuclear Strategy and Deterrence Stability."

Kashmir “is the most dangerous place in the world.”<sup>37</sup> Yet one may say that like the US and Russia, South Asia is fortunate that nuclear deterrence has worked till date. But deterrence to be sustained needs balance encompassing all, both in terms of conventional and non-conventional means. The case on ground is different.

In the emerging political, strategic and security environment, India seems to be trying to assume a leading role on the behest of the US not only in South Asia but beyond also. Accordingly, India is sparing no effort to develop both its conventional and nuclear arsenals and has thus already out balanced Pakistan especially in relation to conventional forces, which is an important factor in maintaining deterrence stability. As pointed out earlier, in the absence of an agreed dispensation in relation to a number of unresolved problems, of which Jammu and Kashmir is the most serious, stability seems unpredictable in the foreseeable future.

There is a strong argument that India’s pursuit of conventional/nuclear weapons should not be equated with that of Pakistan because in South Asia, nuclear dynamics between India and Pakistan exhibit both bipolar and multi-polar features. The pursuit of bipolar balance and stability between India and Pakistan is a complicated task in the framework in which India is seeking to balance China and quite possibly even the US, while China on its side is concerned about balancing the Indian, Russian and the American factors. This has been succinctly brought out by Shaun Gregory.<sup>38</sup>

However, in practical terms, the ground realities are quite different. India’s reappraisal of the strategic environment is often oblivious of Pakistan’s concerns and apparently remains focused on China. There is no denying the fact that India’s mobile conventional forces are Pakistan centric, which cannot be used against China due to geographical limitations. Since the introduction of the so called Cold Start doctrine by India, deterrence in South Asia has become more delicate. The concept based on pre-emption can also trigger a nuclear conflict. During a round table discussion held in July 2011, to discuss S. Kalyanaraman’s paper, “The Indian Military Response to Threats from Pakistan, 1949-2010”, it was revealed that in essence, “the Cold Start would mean attacking first and

---

<sup>37</sup> Raju. G.C. Thomas, “Afghanistan, Kashmir, China and the Territorial Questions in South Asia,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Gregory, “Rethinking Strategic Stability in South Asia”; Lowell Dittmer, *South Asia’s Nuclear Security Dilemma: India, Pakistan and China* (New York: M. E. Sharpe Press, January 2005); and, Arpit Rajan, *Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: China, India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004).

mobilizing later...” However, the Cold Start doctrine contains within itself the seeds of escalation in a nuclear environment.<sup>39</sup>

It is true nuclear weapons are political weapons, and must not fail but in case of Pakistan, nuclear weapons have a role to deter the war and not only the nuclear war as viewed by India. Probably, introduction of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) by Pakistan as a defensive measure is a clear signal for India not to pursue its Cold Start doctrine. However, what could be India's objective of developing TNW. Is it contemplating using these weapons against China? Alternatively, will it still be used against Pakistan, which has no offensive designs? Thus, despite clear signals and demonstrated capability and credibility from Pakistani side, India views that a conventional war under the nuclear overhang is still possible.

While Pakistan has been blamed for its support to the Kashmiri freedom fighters in the past because of the nuclear factor, India's footprints in Balochistan's unrest are visible for the last many years. Additionally, India has an opaque nuclear doctrine that contemplates employing nuclear weapons in first strike mode if its forces are attacked with even biological or chemical weapons 'anywhere'. There is no ambiguity in what 'anywhere' means. This is another factor, which employs that the Cold Start doctrine has full backing of nuclear weapons. It is a proposition that is both dangerous and full of risk.<sup>40</sup>

Contrary to India's war fighting strategy, the central theme of Pakistan's nuclear policy is to act in a responsible manner and to exercise restraint in conduct of its deterrence policy. Pakistan's nuclear policy guidelines are security driven and are specific to the threat perception. Pakistan believes in retaining a 'minimum credible nuclear deterrence' as a cornerstone of its national security policy. Pakistan will also retain an adequate conventional military force in order to maintain and if possible to raise its nuclear threshold. Pakistan believes that the deterrence capability is the anchor of peace and assurance of its stability and security. Nonetheless, the present comfort level of nuclear deterrence is unlikely to be maintained in view of India's ambitious plans to outnumber Pakistan in both conventional and nuclear weapons domain.

---

<sup>39</sup> S. Kalyanaraman, "The Indian Military Response to Threats from Pakistan, 1949-2010", *Round Table, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis* (July 8, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Khurshid Khan, "Limited War under the Nuclear Umbrella and its Implications for South Asia", *Stimson Center*, May 1, 2005, 16-18, <http://www.stimson.org/essays/limited-war-under-the-nuclear-umbrella-and-its-implications-for-south-asia/> (accessed October 3, 2011).

Nuclear stabilization also draws adequate strength and back-up support from conventional forces. It is believed that the conventional military balance is fast changing in India's favour. India plans to spend billions of dollars on its armed forces and bulk of its defence budget is spent on Pakistan specific forces.<sup>41</sup> In the latest development, as highlighted by Rajat Pandit, "India plans to induct over 200 5th Gen swing-role fighters from 2022 onwards.... India will eventually spend around \$35 billion on this futuristic fighter project over the next 15-20 years...."<sup>42</sup>

India's 84 per cent of land forces have a bias towards Pakistan. The modernization of the land forces in the last one decade in the fields of airborne and space-based military surveillance, battlefield surveillance and wide area communication is Pakistan specific and numerically outweigh it roughly by 6 to 1 ratio. In terms of the offensive potential, India for its western front has three army 'strike corps' formations, each corps counts on sizeable contingents of air support as well. In the naval forces domain, about 78 per cent of its naval forces are Pakistan specific from location, training and employment standpoint. While traditionally air power has no boundaries which should dictate its specific employment; however, India's air force employment, and its developmental strategy remains Pakistan-centric. The deployment of Su-30, the most sophisticated aircraft of the time near the Pakistan border is a case in point.

The recent developments on the eastern border are sufficient proof that in India's hegemonic designs the stability of the region is not that important. India has recently signed a strategic accord with Afghanistan during President Karzai's last visit to India on the heels of Burhanuddin Rabbani's assassination. The massive two-month long winter exercises along Pakistan's border, the third of its kind during the last year in a row, is part of the overall scheme of things which aims at destabilizing its neighbour. Somehow every step that India takes apparently to 'protect' its national interest has the propensity to lead towards uncertainty and instability in the region.<sup>43</sup>

There is another significant factor that affects regional stability. In South Asia the issue of conferred equality remains a major obstacle given

---

<sup>41</sup> *Economic Times*, February 15, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Rajat Pandit, "IAF Practices for Twin-Front Contingency against China, Pak in biggest War-Game", *Times of India*, (April 15, 2013), [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-04-15/india/38555217\\_1\\_squadrons-rafale-fighters-iaf](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-04-15/india/38555217_1_squadrons-rafale-fighters-iaf) (accessed April 16, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Waqar Ahmed, "Development on Eastern Border Alarm Pakistan", *News International* (Islamabad), October 9, 2011.



Pakistan's insistence on 'sovereign and equal' status and India's perception of itself as a regional hegemon – a role it is being encouraged to assume by the US and its allies who are helping it build armament industries and develop nuclear technology to achieve this predominant position. India's inordinate ambition seems to be in the way of her considering the stability factor on which regional peace depends. Pakistan's promotion of a bilateral strategic restraint regime, for example, has fallen victim to these developments. Consequently, the asymmetry continues to grow and it should not be hard to imagine if by another decade Pakistan, with neither the intention nor the resources to match India, is confronted with a serious conventional inequality vis-a-vis its big neighbour.<sup>44</sup>

Rodney W. Jones has a point in believing that in South Asia the structural factors — either side's defence resources or capabilities, geography, and strategic depth, characteristics of military systems and organization, and availability of external allies — are especially conducive to military instability, accentuation of crises, and potential nuclear escalation. These factors add up to an acute imbalance of military power to Pakistan's disadvantage, a condition that is more likely to worsen than improve.<sup>45</sup> Under such circumstances, some workable arrangements need to be evolved to avoid confrontation and check crisis situations getting out of hand.

India's ambition to develop its ABM system to protect its mega cities against incoming missiles is another factor that has implications on deterrence stability.<sup>46</sup> As earlier pointed out, India is developing shield against incoming missiles fired from a distance of up to 5000 km range. It says it already possesses defence against missiles of 2000 km range.<sup>47</sup>

The ABM system seems good for optics, having a psychological value. However, it is doubtful if it can ensure that a missile attack on a

---

<sup>44</sup> Subrata Mitra, "The Reluctant Hegemon: India's Self-Perception and the South Asian Strategic Environment", *Contemporary South Asia* 12, no. 3 (September 2003): 399-417; and Maleeha Lodhi, "Security Challenges in South Asia", *Nonproliferation Review* (Summer 2001): 118-124.

<sup>45</sup> Rodney W. Jones, "Nuclear Stability and Escalation Control in South Asia: Structural Factors", in Micheal Krepon et al., ed. *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia* (Washington D.C: Stimson Center, 2004), 27.

<sup>46</sup> Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, "FMCT: Policy Option for Pakistan", *National Development and Security* 9, no. 4(Summer 2001); and Rahul Bedi, "Indian BMD Shield Could be in Service by 2001," March 17, 2009, <http://www.janes.com.news.defense>, (accessed April 16, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> "India to have shield from missiles of 5,000 km range", *Times of India* (New Delhi), July 16, 2013.

mega target would totally fail and every missile will be stalled before hitting ground. Lack of such guarantee renders a costly ABM system of doubtful value. Nonetheless, its psychological value would still have to be considered by the other side in its 'minimum credible nuclear deterrence' arrangement. Pakistan would thus be looking for more efficient weapons to maintain the credibility of its attack.

A lot has already been said about the Indo-US nuclear deal. For others, it may have commercial implications but for Pakistan and possibly for China, it has strategic implications. In fact the 123 Agreement has given India everything it had struggled for since 1974.<sup>48</sup> The deal would free up India's domestic ore to make additional nuclear weapons. Most importantly, free access to nuclear technology would enable India's nuclear faculty to make qualitative improvement in their nuclear weapons. It would not be possible for the US to stop the intangible transfer of nuclear technology to India even if it wanted. The improvement of India's nuclear arsenals would thus have negative implications for both nuclear deterrence and escalation control in South Asia.

The proposed ban on fissile material through a cut off treaty is another factor that has regional implications. The Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty — which Pakistan prefers to call a Fissile Material Treaty — that applies freeze on the fissile material at the existing level, does not take the existing stocks into account. The proposed treaty gives blanket cover to keeping as much fissile material as they may have to produce additional nuclear weapons without transparency. The proposed treaty would thus, not only freeze inequalities but also enhance the gap in terms of both quantity and quality, which would place Pakistan at a strategic disadvantage. The proposed treaty is a virtually Pakistan specific instrument. Therefore, Pakistan's principled stance expressed at the various sessions of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and elsewhere should be given due weight.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> "India Should Have Nuclear Attacks Submarines: France,"

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jhrNyEq2is6k4KZqjgZTMNBUGVog> (accessed April 16, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Ambassador Zamir Akram, "Treaty banning only future production of fissile material 'unacceptable': Pakistan, United Nations, CD Geneva on March 03, 2011, October 13, 2010. CD Proceedings of August 2009, 2010 and 2011; NCA statement on Pakistan's position on FMCT; Fozia Afridi, "Pak Stance on FMCT", *Pakistan Observer*, June 27, 2010; Momin Iftikhar, "FMCT — Fending Off Coercive Agendas", *News International* (Islamabad), October 30, 2010; Ray Acheson, "The Conference on Disarmament in 2009: Could do Better", *Disarmament Diplomacy*, no. 91 (Summer 2009); Eric Auner, "Pakistan Raises

Another phenomenon that is being experienced in South Asia and that needs to be mentioned is the state of 'no war no peace' which has prevailed from time to time in the last few decades. It has acquired a new and graver dimension for Pakistan especially after 9/11. Pakistan has been the target of a synchronized use of economic, psychological, diplomatic, political, information, intelligence and military pressures by India. This state has enhanced the space for sub conventional and irregular warfare aimed at bleeding the enemy by patronising militancy in troubled regions, by promoting extremism through exploitation of religious and sectarian strife especially in economic hubs and targeting vital state institutions as well as arousing international sensitivities in respect of threats to strategic assets and interests. This kind of non-kinetic war cannot be prolonged as it endangers regional stability. At least the looming nuclear factor does not warrant it.

Surviving the first strike to be able to retaliate is another matter to think about in a situation like South Asia's where deterrence has held but remains tenuous. Bruce G. Blair says that "Despite tall claims made by former Soviet Union and the US about efficacy of their command and control systems, the factual position was that the military commanders of both sides were not sure whether their command and control systems would survive a first strike."<sup>50</sup> Both Pakistan and India claim about the robustness of their command and control systems but no-one can guarantee that either side would survive the first strike to strike back. The dread of false alarms when the reaction time is just six to eight minutes is palpable indeed. India and Pakistan with common boundary just cannot replicate the Cold War Model.

Nonetheless, both sides could achieve and maintain crisis stability because there has been some kind of balance in both conventional as well as nuclear forces. But the way the strategic security environment is changing in India's favour, maintaining 'crisis stability' which is supposed to be robust enough to exercise control over unanticipated threats to core norms, values and interests, characterized by time urgency and the risk of

---

New Issues at Stalled CD," *Arms Control Today* (March 2010); Jaya Ramachandran, "Disarmament: Stalemate Stalls UN Conference," *IDN-In-depth News Service*; The Press Release: "Conference on Disarmament Adopts Programme of Work after Twelve Years of Stalemate", May 29, 2009, issued by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG); and Maleeha Lodhi, "Retaining strategic stability," *New Nation, Bangladesh's Independent News Source*, January 31, 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce G. Blair, *The Logic of Accidental War* (Washington D.C: Brooking Institution, 1993), 168-218.

imminent escalation to the nuclear level, could be a real challenge. The involvement of a third party to restore crisis stability is fruitful only when one of the two states is not badly imbalanced. Therefore, both India and Pakistan being two responsible nuclear weapons states must be mindful of such scenarios that might inadvertently lead to instability/uncertainty in the region.

### **Proposed Policy Options**

The author proposes the following measures to help in achieving strategic stability in South Asia.

Nuclear weapons are political weapons, if deterrence fails that means nuclear weapons have failed. Therefore, both sides may give up the options of TNW and let the nuclear weapons play their role at the strategic level as a factor of stability. For this to happen, the stronger party will have to make greater shift in its security doctrine.

The 'Limited Conventional War' envisioned in the Cold Start doctrine under the nuclear overhang is a flawed strategy and could work if Pakistan were not a nuclear armed state. India will have to rethink it.

Pakistan is unlikely to enhance its military budget due to its economic constraints. India has to assure Pakistan that its upcoming military might is not Pakistan specific.

India should give up its upcoming ABM defence system as it is not likely to make any material difference in case of war.

There is also a need to address the instability-inducing elements in the nuclear calculus that make escalation more likely. These include command and control procedures and nuclear postures, mismatched views on what qualifies as "limited war", use of dual-use missiles, absence of any agreement to bar pre-emption; and absence of well-structured nuclear risk reduction centres.

The FMCT being Pakistan specific needs a review on the lines of FMT proposed by Pakistan, which takes into account existing stockpiles and prevents their misuse.

The covert war India is waging against Pakistan through Afghanistan by fuelling unrest in Balochistan and creating a 'No War No Peace' environment, must be avoided for long-term peace and stability in the region.

Regional and national stability depend on resolution of regional issues, lowering of demands and accommodation by all stake holders and holding of constructive dialogue. Additionally, the US must persuade India

that without resolving the core issues with Pakistan it would continue to struggle for regional supremacy.

A cooperative and constructive approach without disturbing conventional and nuclear deterrence capability by the three regional countries namely China-India and Pakistan will guarantee the peace and prosperity of South Asia.

### **Conclusion**

The fact remains that each Indo-Pakistan crisis implies increased tensions, tit-for-tat brinkmanship, and an inherent risk of escalation. The obstacles to progress are clear but the will on either side is nonexistent. They have managed the past crises but fortune may not work every time. A permanent peace cannot be achieved through conflict containment and management through third party, which is a dangerous proposition, which may not work every time.

The prospects of world peace are linked with a stable South Asia. Therefore, it is the collective responsibility of the international community to come forward and help this region in resolving their outstanding disputes. The prescriptions for arms control and CBMs must be fully cognizant of the structural obstacles to their agreement and implementation and must focus on addressing those obstacles. The conception of strategic stability must be broadened from a narrow politico-military focus to one, which links military, political, economic and social issues. Sustainable strategic stability means non-military issues which must also get due importance while considering the unresolved disputes.

It must be recognized that the Cold War model cannot be fully replicated in South Asia. Thus, enhancing co-operation in any aspect of the Indo-Pakistani relationship is extremely important to augment the stability of the nuclear relationship which neither side should undermine. It is encouraging that both India and Pakistan are extending greater cooperation in the nuclear field and both sides are expected to keep their nuclear weapons in de-mated form to avoid unintended and accidental use.■