

South Asian Stability-Instability Paradox: Another Perspective

Dr. Adil Sultan*

Abstract

South Asian strategic concepts are generally analysed in the backdrop of the Cold War model. Conclusions inferred from this comparative analysis could help bring out valuable lessons, but also lead to incorrect assumptions, as there are several similarities and dissimilarities between the two models. The 'Stability-instability paradox' was one of the several concepts evolved during the Cold War period to explain why 'stability' at the strategic level between the two Super Powers led to 'instability' at the lower levels of the conflict. This paradox continues to remain a subject of intense debate in South Asia as well, essentially to explain various regional crises in the post-nuclearization period. This article challenges some of the commonly held perceptions and aims to provide an alternative perspective on South Asian 'stability-instability paradox', essentially to develop better understanding of the impact of nuclearization on the South Asian strategic stability.

Keywords: South Asia, Strategic Stability, Deterrence, Cold Start, War Fighting Doctrines, Existential Threat.

The nuclearization of South Asia in 1998, followed by a limited war in 1999 and a prolonged military stand-off in 2001-02, generated intense debate on the impact of nuclearization on South Asian strategic stability. Several scholars explained this apparently heightened frequency of crises between the two arch rivals as a consequence of nuclear weapons, wherein nuclear weapons might have provided stability at the strategic level but may have opened space at the lower spectrum of conflict for pursuing limited objectives i.e., stability-instability paradox. On the other hand, there is a dominant view that the existence of nuclear weapons had indeed restrained both India and Pakistan from moving up the escalation ladder and

* The author has a PhD from Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) Islamabad, Pakistan. He also teaches as a Visiting Faculty Member at the National Defence University (NDU), and a former Visiting Fellow at Henry L. Stimson Centre Washington D.C.

may have reduced the incentive for the two arch rivals to engage in a military conflict.¹

This article aims to revisit various military crises post 1998, and analyses the evolving war fighting concepts of India's 'Cold Start' and 'Proactive Operations' in the backdrop of the stability-instability paradox - with the objective to identify the relevance of this concept between India and Pakistan.

The first part of the article discusses the current debate on the issue of legitimacy of nuclear deterrence and argues that while nuclear weapons might have reduced military utility for major powers, but the concept of deterrence is very much active and relevant in the South Asian context. The next part is built upon discussing the concept of strategic stability; its relevance in South Asia; and how the stability-instability paradox came into play during different crises post 1998 that may have encouraged India to develop the war fighting military strategy of 'Cold Start' and 'Proactive Operations'.

The introduction of new doctrines by India and the resultant response from the Pakistani side, has triggered an intense debate on the impact of Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) on strategic stability, and also the problems associated with command and control of these short range missiles. This article, therefore, attempts to briefly address some of these issues, and also highlights future trajectories that involve the introduction of ABM and submarine-launched ballistic missile systems by India, and its impact on South Asian strategic stability.

How Relevant is Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia?

The end of the Cold War led to an interesting but important debate on the continued utility of nuclear weapons for deterrence stability. The events of 9/11 reinforced the long held view by deterrence pessimists that nuclear weapons were not necessarily essential for national security objectives. Some considered the "whole idea of nuclear weapons as out of step with today's global threats, understanding of power and notions of human rights and rule of law."² Does this mean nuclear weapons are no longer relevant in the contemporary security debate?

The question of the legitimacy of nuclear weapons was also reviewed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1996, when the ICJ was

¹ India-Pakistan Joint Statement of June 18, 2004 issued after Foreign Secretaries level talks recognized that the nuclear capabilities of each other constitute a factor of stability, Available at <http://meaindia.nic.in/jshome.htm>.

² James E. Doyle, "Why Eliminate Nuclear Weapons?" *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, vol. 55, no. 1, (February-March 2013): 7-34.

requested for an advisory opinion on the legality of the ‘threat’ or ‘use’ of nuclear weapons in ‘any’ circumstance under the international law. After exhaustive deliberations, the ICJ concluded:

[T]he threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law; However, in view of the current state of international law, and elements of fact at its disposal, the Court cannot conclude definitely whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in a[n] extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which very survival of a State would be at stake.³

Notwithstanding this inconclusive judgment on the issue of legality of nuclear weapons, the ICJ nevertheless, gave its ruling on the implementation of Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that obligates NPT nuclear weapon states to ‘pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion’ nuclear disarmament agreements under international control.⁴ Contradictory to this ICJ verdict, almost all NPT nuclear weapon states not only continue to maintain their nuclear inventories but are also in the process of upgrading their nuclear deterrents to counter unforeseen threats in the future. These negative trends and the continued reliance on nuclear deterrence by major nuclear powers is a major source of discord amongst NPT signatories — both the nuclear weapon states (NWS) and the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS).

The ICJ advisory opinion also signifies the inherent conflict in the global nuclear deterrence debate. The ICJ opinion that takes into consideration the states’ right for self-defence did not conclude that the ‘threat or use of nuclear weapons’ under extreme circumstances, would be unlawful especially if ‘very survival of a State is at stake.’ But who defines ‘extreme circumstances’ under which states could justify possession of their nuclear deterrent? Many deterrence advocates agree that nuclear weapons indeed present a paradox: on the one hand, the possession and potential use of nuclear weapons can never truly be morally justified; but on the other hand, maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent is a ‘necessary evil’. Michael Quinlan, nevertheless, was reluctant to term these weapons as ‘evil’. Justifying the use of nuclear weapons on moral grounds he had earlier stated;

³ For details see <http://www.un.org/law/icjsum/9623.htm>

⁴ “103, The Legality of Nuclear Weapons,”: ICJ Advisory Opinion, United Nations, July 8, 1996, http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/ArmsControl_NEW/nonproliferation/LNW/NP-LNW.html >

If the alternative was to risk defeat by an aggressive, nuclear-armed totalitarian adversary, then nuclear possession and use was justified under specific conditions and within certain limits.⁵

It is a well known fact that all nuclear states justify possession of nuclear weapons on the basis of national security considerations, but it is difficult to quantify what kind of threat would legitimize the possession of nuclear deterrent. One could, however, argue that states facing ‘existential threat’ may be morally justified to maintain deterrence capability; and since these weapons are to be used only ‘in an extreme circumstance of self-defence’, therefore, deterrence capacity of such states would have greater legitimacy and credibility than of those that have lesser security justification.

For example, if existential threat was the major driver for the US to develop and maintain massive deterrent capability during the Cold War period, this may no longer be true after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Similarly, it would be hard to imagine any such threats faced by other nuclear states: France, UK, Russia, China; or even India, as neither China nor Pakistan has the intent or the potential to challenge the very existence of India as a state. On the contrary, Pakistan and Israel could possibly be the only two nuclear weapon states that face existential threats from their immediate neighbourhood thus providing greater legitimacy and credibility to their respective nuclear deterrents.

Deterrence Stability in South Asia

Strategic stability could be defined as a “state of affairs in which countries are confident that their adversaries would not be able to undermine their nuclear deterrent capability.”⁶ Strategic stability as a concept itself has never been controversial. All states and especially nuclear powers strive to maintain strategic stability against their perceived adversaries by maintaining a balance in their weaponry and employment strategies.

As there are no tools to measure how much or what strategies would be sufficient to maintain balance of power;⁷ strategic stability therefore

⁵ Tanya Ogilvie-White, *On Nuclear Deterrence: The Correspondence of Sir Michael Quinlan*, (London: IISS, 2011), 64.

⁶ Pavel Podvig, “The Myth of Strategic Stability”, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, October 31, 2012.

⁷ According to explanation provided by Waltz about Balance of Power theory, states are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination. For more details see Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Politics*, (Boston: Mc Graw Hill, 1979), 116-118.

remains an abstract concept, interpreted mainly by states on the basis of their own threat perceptions as well as the adversary's capabilities. Efforts to restore strategic stability by one actor could thus be perceived as destabilizing by the other, thus forcing it to take remedial measures of its own. If remain unchecked, this cycle of action-reaction phenomenon may eventually end up in an arms competition.

The strategic stability debate in South Asia acquired a new dimension after India's nuclear test of 1974 which altered the fragile military balance in India's favour. Pakistan's security planners at that time seemingly were left with mainly two options; either to accept India's perpetual dominance and forego its claims over Kashmir that had been the cause of major wars between the two South Asian neighbours in 1948, 1965 and 1971; or else, develop its own nuclear deterrence to restore the strategic balance in the region. The second option apparently seemed more difficult for a resource-deficient country like Pakistan but it afforded greater security as a preventive against future wars with India.

Both India and Pakistan formally became nuclear weapon states in 1998, but the nuclear factor was also visible during the military crisis of the mid-80s. In 1986-87, India's decision to carry out major military manoeuvres in the form of 'Exercise Brasstacks', designed to launching conventional attack across the international border, was contained effectively partially due to nuclear signalling from the Pakistani side.⁸ How effectively these nuclear threats were communicated and what impact it had on India — is a matter of deeper analysis, but the very fact that both countries had some capability attracted significant international attention that also contributed towards diffusing the crisis. The concept of strategic stability was, therefore, introduced for the first time in South Asia after the Exercise Brasstacks of 1986-87.

Nuclear deterrence may also have played some role during the Kashmir crisis of 1990, when India was restrained by the international community from raising the stakes for fear of a conventional conflict turning into a nuclear one. During the subsequent crises of 1999 and 2001-02, the role of nuclear weapons became more prominent, as both neighbours by that time had formally declared themselves as nuclear weapon states. During the Kargil Crisis of 1999, India and Pakistan may have been compelled to restrain their conflict due to the existence of their

⁸ During the crisis of 1986-87, reportedly Pakistani officials conveyed implicit nuclear threats by stating that Pakistan had acquired nuclear weapons capability, and if needed nuclear weapons could also be assembled on a short notice. These statements were mostly conveyed through media and thus cannot be ascertained whether it had any impact on the outcome of the crisis.

deterrence capability. Similarly, during the ‘twin-peak’⁹ crises of 2001-02, India despite massive mobilization was deterred from crossing the international border due to fear of nuclear retaliation from Pakistan.

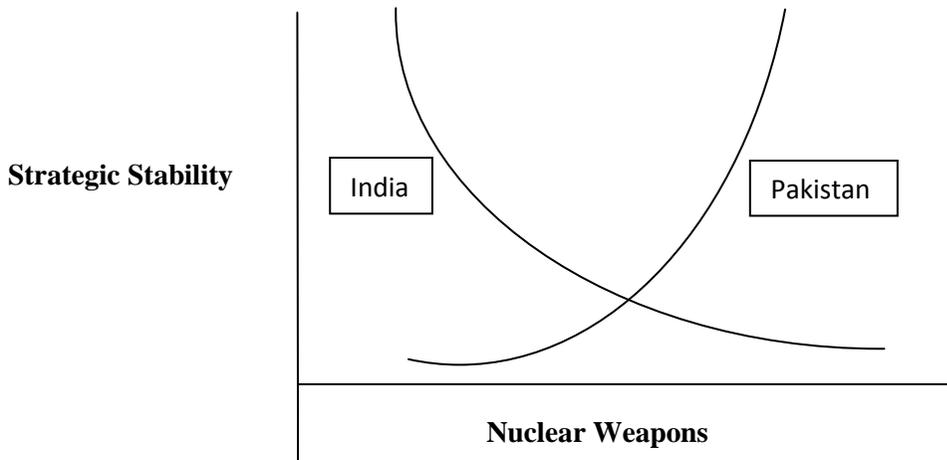
Summing up this behavioural change post 1998 nuclearization, Peter Lavoy wrote: “the presence of nuclear weapons has not altered the desire of India and Pakistan to ‘win’ crises but it has strengthened their interest in avoiding war.”¹⁰ Paul Kapur, on the contrary remains less optimistic about deterrence stability in the region. According to him, “nuclear weapons not only destabilized South Asia in the aftermath of nuclear tests; they may damage the regional security environment in the years to come.”¹¹

These divergent views also reflect perceptible differences on the nature of strategic stability as a concept. Stability, especially amongst asymmetric nuclear powers, such as India and Pakistan would most likely be viewed differently. Being a bigger power, strategic stability could be construed ‘positive’ by India — only when it is able to maintain its military dominance in the region, and if this dominance is challenged by other smaller states, like Pakistan — it could be construed as ‘negative’ stability from the Indian perspective. On the other hand, nuclear weapons that helped Pakistan to restore strategic balance and neutralize its conventional vulnerability vis-à-vis India, would be seen as positive. One could therefore conclude that the impact of nuclear weapons on strategic stability between two conventionally asymmetric powers would be different i.e. negative for a country having conventional military advantage (India) and positive for a country with conventional disadvantage (Pakistan), as indicated below:

⁹ 2001-02 crises are also sometimes referred to as ‘twin peak’ crises because of another attack by militants on an Indian military cantonment during the summer of 2002, once Indian forces were already at the border.

¹⁰ Peter Lavoy, “Managing South Asia’s Nuclear Rivalry: New Policy Challenges for the United States,” *The Nonproliferation Review* (Fall-Winter 2003): 91.

¹¹ S. Paul Kapur, “Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia,” *International Security*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 73.



It is also important to understand that India with its burgeoning economy can afford to spend substantial resources to develop its conventional and nuclear capability that may not necessarily be Pakistan specific, but it does affect the latter's security calculus. During recent years India's defence expenditures have seen sharp upward trajectory that makes it difficult for smaller countries like Pakistan to continue to maintain even rough conventional parity. For the year 2012-13 alone, India's defence expenditure is in the range of US \$ 38.5 billion as compared to Pakistan's defence budget of US \$ 5.82 billion.

The existence of unsettled disputes and the history of military crises makes it difficult for Pakistan to de-securitise itself from India. Nuclear weapons therefore offer a viable alternative to maintain effective and credible deterrence relationship vis-à-vis India that has growing ambitions to emerge as a regional and global power. The following table provides a comparison of Pakistani and Indian defence allocations since 2000, which also clarify why nuclear deterrence remains economically viable for Pakistan to help maintain strategic stability in the region.

**Comparison of Pakistani and Indian Defence Allocations:
2000-2013**

Year	Defence Budgets (Bn US \$)		Comparison of Pakistan's Defence Budget with India's	
	Pakistan	India	Ratio	Percentage
2000-2001	2.18	12.04	1 : 5.51	18.10%
2001-2002	2.19	12.60	1 : 5.75	18.18%
2002-2003	2.43	13.54	1 : 5.57	17.94%
2003-2004	2.77	16.5	1 : 5.95	20.455
2004-2005	3.33	19.4	1 : 5.82	17.16%
2005-2006	3.74	20.2	1 : 5.41	18.51%
2006-2007	4.15	21.9	1 : 5.27	18.94%
2007-2008	4.47	23.53	1 : 5.26	18.99%
2008-2009	4.21	24.71	1 : 5.86	17.03%
2009-2010	5.15	28.9	1 : 5.61	17.82%
2010-2011	5.25	32.75	1 : 6.23	16.03%
2011-2012	5.75	36.5	1 : 6.34	15.75%
2012-2013	5.82	38.5	1 : 6.62	15.11%

This data is based on the information available in various open sources

South Asian Crises and the Role of Stability-Instability Paradox

The nuclearization of South Asia in 1998 that was followed by two military crises of 1999 and 2001-02 generated an intense debate about the impact of nuclear weapons on South Asian strategic stability. While nuclear optimists were of the view that nuclear weapons had brought stability to the region; whereas, the two crises in a quick succession led several others to highlight the inevitability of stability-instability paradox, i.e. stability at higher levels due to the existence of nuclear weapons could generate instability at lower levels of violence. This, however, is a generic explanation and a more

elaborate definition has been provided earlier by Glen Snyder, which states that:

[T]he greater the stability of 'strategic' balance of terror, the lower the stability of the overall balance at its lower levels of violence. The reasoning is that if neither side has a 'full first-strike capability,' and both know it, they will be less inhibited about initiating conventional war, and about the limited use of nuclear weapons, than if the strategic balance were unstable. Thus firm stability in the limited use of nuclear balance tends to destabilize the conventional balance and also to activate the lesser nuclear 'links' between the latter and the former.¹²

This concept was evolved during the Cold War once both Super Powers were engaged in proxy wars against each other without threatening the equilibrium at the strategic level. It may have some important lessons for South Asia and therefore could be useful to revisit major military crises in the post-1998 period, to understand the role of nuclear weapons in the regional stability dynamics.

Kargil Crisis

The Kargil Crisis of 1999 that some also term as a limited war is rooted in the unresolved Kashmir issue, which has also been the source of three full fledged wars between India and Pakistan in 1948, 1965 and 1971.¹³ After the end of 1971 war during which Pakistan had to face a humiliating defeat at the hands of India, both countries agreed to resolve their outstanding disputes, including Kashmir on the basis of the 1972 Simla Accord. The issue as to who would have the control over Siachin glacier was, however, left unaddressed by merely stating that beyond the map coordinate NJ 9842 location the boundary would proceed thence north to the glaciers. No one at that time had anticipated that both neighbours could once again go to war with each other over such a barren land covered with snow.

On April 13, 1984, India launched 'Operation Meghdot' to establish its claim and control over Siachin Glacier, and managed to occupy 1000 square kilometres of total area. During subsequent years, Pakistan launched several operations to reclaim the occupied territory but could not succeed, as most strategic posts had been reinforced by India. Kargil was only one of the several military operations conducted by Pakistan since the mid-80s,

¹² Glen Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," in *The Balance of Power*, ed. Paul Seabury (San Francisco, Chandler Books, 1965), 199.

¹³ For details on Kashmir conflict see Robert G. Wirsing, *India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: On regional Conflict and Its Resolution*, (New York: St. Martin's, 1994).

essentially aimed to force India to withdraw from the glacier that Pakistan maintains is part of its territory. According to Paul Kapur, Kargil operation was mainly designed to threaten India's position at Siachin.¹⁴ Pakistan's former President Musharraf, in one of his interviews had also stated that:

Kargil was fundamentally about Kashmir, where the Indians occupy Pakistani territory, for example at Siachin. Emotions run very high here on this issue. Siachen is barren wasteland, but it belongs to us.¹⁵

According to Ambassador Jalil Abbas Jilani, former Director General for South Asia at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the current Pakistan's Foreign Secretary:

Siachin was perhaps more important factor underlying the Kargil operation. Without Siachin, he argued, Kargil would not have taken place.¹⁶

Looking at the historical context of Siachin that led to the Kargil conflict in 1999, one may conclude that the 1999 military crisis was not an outcome of stability-instability paradox. This conclusion is based on several factors. First, Kargil was one of the several limited military operations launched by Pakistan since mid-80s to reclaim Siachin glacier. It had no or little relevance to 1998 nuclear tests and was planned much earlier. Secondly, if India had not overreacted, Kargil conflict would have been one of the several limited conflicts over Kashmir in which the international community remained unfazed in the past, including India's occupation of Siachin glacier in 1984. Third, since Pakistan had formally attained nuclear weapon status only in 1998, therefore, it is highly unlikely that it had any operational nuclear capability at that time. Fourth, one year of nuclearization is a very short time to experiment with stability-instability paradox and contemplate a limited war under the nuclear shadow.

It can however be argued that although nuclear weapons were not the cause of the Kargil conflict, but the presence of nuclear weapons did have an impact on the behaviour of both India and Pakistan, as both were restrained from moving up on the escalation trajectory. According to P.R. Chari, "while India was deterred from extending the conflict into other sectors, as it did during the wars of 1965 and 1971, Pakistan in turn was forced not to use its Air Force..." Nuclear weapons, according to Chari, may have ensured that "the two leaderships acted with circumspection and

¹⁴ Kapur, "Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia," 76.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

terminated the hostilities in an orderly manner, although American pressure indubitably catalysed this process.”¹⁷

In sum, the Kargil crisis was not an outcome of South Asian nuclearization, but nuclear weapons did play a crucial role in limiting the conflict. One may also argue that the presence of nuclear weapons provided India the space and the confidence to inject massive conventional military potential, knowing well that the war would not escalate across the international borders. Based on these conclusions, India might have been encouraged to develop new concepts like the ‘hot pursuit’ etc.

2001-02 Military Stand-off

On December 13, 2001, a group of Kashmiri militants attacked Indian parliament in New Delhi that India alleged was perpetrated by Pakistan based elements thus warranting military retaliation. In response to the attack by non-state actors, Prime Minister Vajpaae ordered the launching of ‘Operation Parakaram’ that involved massive military mobilization. An ‘informal war’¹⁸ had the potential to spiral into a formal war for the fifth time between the two South Asian neighbours over Jammu and Kashmir.

Several nuclear pessimists were quick to label it as an outcome of the stability-instability paradox, charging Pakistan for launching sub-conventional attacks against India and thus exploiting the space at the lower spectrum of the conflict. How relevant is this assumption - is a matter of deeper analysis and needs to be understood as non-state actors have no role to play in the stability-instability paradox, as has been explained by various scholars.

According to the definition of the stability-instability paradox provided by Glen Snyder, strategic stability between two nuclear powers could provide incentive to engage each other at the conventional level that may also include limited nuclear use. The non-state actors on the other hand are essentially state-less entities; their actions cannot be attributed to a state, unless owned specifically by a state. These issues merit serious attention, especially once both adversaries are nuclear weapon states.

In this background, India’s response to the 2001 attack on its Parliament could be considered as a disproportionate response that may have resulted in nuclear exchanges between the two South Asian adversaries. This also brings out another question. Is it possible that the Indian leadership was not aware of the consequences of launching a

¹⁷ Sumit Ganguly & S. Paul Kapur, eds. *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behaviour and the Bomb* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 156.

¹⁸ Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru used this phrase once to describe India-Pakistan rivalry over Kashmir, *Ibid*, 144.

conventional attack against Pakistan — a nuclear weapon state, or was it a well calibrated coercive strategy by India to achieve limited political objectives without actually crossing the international borders — also known as ‘compellence’ strategy.

Praveen Swami has identified several factors that may have encouraged the Indian leadership to order Operation Parakaram in response to the 2001 incident. First, Prime Minister Vajpae understood that military victory could not be guaranteed; second, he also knew that limited military strikes would not produce desired dividends, especially once there was a danger of escalation with unintended consequences including the possible use of nuclear weapons; and third, PM Vajpae allowed military build up and chose “to use this coercive tool as a prop for his diplomatic strategy.”¹⁹ These conclusions are not without merit because according to him once India’s Army Chief asked for the objectives of Operation Parakaram from his Prime Minister, he was told; “we will tell you later”.²⁰

Massive military mobilization with lack of clarity amongst top military commanders indicates that it was more of a coercive strategy by the political leadership, as Indian “mobilization was never intended as anything other than a threat.”²¹ According to India’s former Army Chief General S. Padmanabhan:

India’s war threat was, by this time, no longer credible. Criticizing the long mobilization, he said that India’s objectives, degradation of the other force, and perhaps the capture of disputed territory in Jammu and Kashmir...were more achievable in January, less achievable in February, and even less achievable in March. By then, the balance of forces had gradually changed.²²

Another aspect that may have emboldened India to embark upon a risky compellence strategy against another nuclear weapon state is India’s bid to draw comparison between the militant attacks on its Parliament with terrorist attacks of 9/11 — without realizing that India is not the US. India nevertheless, may have mobilized its military with a confidence that the existence of nuclear weapons in the region would preclude the possibility of a full military engagement, as is apparent from the statement made by

¹⁹ Ibid., 150.

²⁰ V.K. Sood and Pravin Sawhney, *Operation Parakaram: The War Unfinished* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), 62.

²¹ Ganguly & Kapur, *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behaviour and the Bomb*, 150.

²² Praveen Swami, “General Padmanabhan Mulls over Lessons of Operation Parakaram,” *Hindu*, February 6, 2004, <http://www.hindu.com>.

India's Defence Minister, who stated; "I do not really fear that the nuclear issue would figure in a conflict."²³

According to Rajesh Basrur, India followed a two-pronged compellence strategy in the 2001-02 crisis.

Bilaterally, it threatened Pakistan with war if it did not concede to Indian demands to end cross-border terrorism. Simultaneously, India put the United States under pressure to twist Pakistan's arm for the same purpose.... The more serious problem for India was that it could not follow through on its threat because it ran straight into the problem of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Compellence was overridden by deterrence.²⁴

Based on the evidence, several lessons could be drawn from the 2001-02 crisis. First, non-state actors have no role in the stability-instability paradox, but the militant attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001-02 may have been exploited by the Indian leadership in the post 9/11 international environment, to justify its military mobilization. Second, the presence of nuclear weapons prevented the crisis from escalating and stability at the strategic level may have encouraged India to use its conventional military capability as a compellence tool against Pakistan. One could therefore argue that the stability-instability paradox may have come into play between the two South Asian nuclear powers, but from the Indian side.

In addition, Operation Parakaram also brought in some other important lessons for India: an all-out war between the two nuclear weapon states is no longer possible, and if instability at the lower spectrum of a military conflict is to be exploited more effectively in the future, India would have to reduce its military mobilization time from weeks to a few days. This eventually led India to introduce new doctrines in the shape of Cold Start and Pro Active Operations.

India's Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) & Stability-Instability Paradox

Since the early 80s the Indian military had been locked in the Sundarji Doctrine that envisaged major military mobilization and launch of multipronged conventional offensive against Pakistan. This doctrine, however, did not take into account the changed strategic stability environment post 1998 that may have deterred the Indian military to

²³ "We Could Take a Strike and Survive. Pakistan Won't: Fernandis," *Hindustan Times*, December 30, 2001.

²⁴ Rajesh M. Basrur, "South Asia's Cold War: Nuclear Weapons and Conflict in Comparative Perspective," (New York: Routledge, 2008), 62.

operationalize the Sundarji Doctrine during the 2001-02 crises. Consequently, in April 2004, the Indian Army Chief unveiled a new concept in the form of Cold Start.²⁵ The objective was to develop a capability to engage Pakistan at the lower spectrum of violence without crossing Pakistan's perceived strategic nuclear threshold. The stability-instability paradox was once again being put into practice by India.

The CSD envisaged reorganizing strike corps into at least eight smaller division-sized Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) that combine mechanized infantry, artillery, and armour on the pattern of Soviet Union's operational manoeuvre groups.²⁶ These IBG's would mobilize swiftly to make ingress into the Pakistani territory 50-80 kms deep within a short time period of 72-96 hours.

CSD posited a new challenge for the credibility of Pakistan's strategic deterrent. Massive nuclear retaliation against limited Indian military incursions could be viewed as a disproportionate response. On the other hand, allowing India space to launch limited objectives operations could discredit Pakistan's nuclear deterrent. Therefore, to restore stability at the lower rungs of crisis, it became obvious that Pakistan needed to plug this perceived gap and achieve "full spectrum deterrence capability to deter all forms of aggression,"²⁷ and to deny India the space to exploit the stability-instability paradox by launching limited objectives campaigns while remaining below Pakistan's strategic threshold.

In response to these new developments, Pakistan developed and tested its short range missile system 'NASR' (Hatf IX) in April 2011, with an objective to have 'assured deterrence' for a full spectrum threat, i.e. tactical, operational and strategic levels. This evolving nuclear strategy could be termed as 'Flexible Deterrence Options'²⁸ that aims to provide a proportionate response rather than massive retaliation against India.

According to Lt Gen (R) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, the 'NASR' missile system is aimed at "consolidating Pakistan's strategic deterrence capability at all levels of the threat spectrum,"²⁹ which besides tactical, also includes the need to deter at operational and strategic levels. While NASR

²⁵ Walter C. Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Waters?: The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 162-63.

²⁶ Y.I. Patel, "Dig Vijay to Divya Astra: A Paradigm Shift in the Indian Army's Doctrine," *Bharat Rakshak Monitor*, vol. 6, no. 6 (May-July 2004), <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/MONITOR/ISSUE6-6/patel.html>.

²⁷ ISPR Press Release, http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=2361

²⁸ This term is coined by the author and is not an officially declared concept.

²⁹ ISPR Press Release, http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?0=t-press_release=1721.

could be termed as a battlefield missile, Pakistan also has developed other short range missile system HATF II (Abdali) that “provides Pakistan with an operational level capability.”³⁰

These new developments have led several analysts to raise concerns on the impact of short range missiles on strategic stability, command and control, and safety and security aspects. Such questions are not without merit, however, these need to be analysed factually and on the basis of information shared by Pakistan about the existing security and safety protocols that it maintains to handle its nuclear weapons and facilities.

There is a commonly held misperception that due to the nature of TNWs, these weapons would be pre-delegated to the local field commanders for effective utilization, and thus pose the risk of unauthorized use. Several official pronouncements have strongly refuted such assumptions. Senior Pakistani decision makers, on several occasions have reiterated the fact that the control of all nuclear weapons, including the short range TNWs would remain centralized with the National Command Authority (NCA)³¹. Pakistan has also declared that it has established a National Command Center (NCC) which has a fully automated Strategic Command and Control Support System (SCCSS) that enables the decision makers at the NCC to have round the clock situational awareness³² of all strategic assets during peace time and especially in times of crisis. As per the official statements, all deployments/ employments would be centrally monitored and controlled by the NCC.

Based on these official pronouncements, it is apparent that unlike the NATO concept which required deployment of US origin TNWs on a European continent, Pakistan does not have to pre-deploy or pre-delegate the launch authority for TNWs. This needs to be understood keeping in view the geographical limitations, which permit moving the TNWs from storage sites to forward locations within a few hours and does not require days. There is therefore no additional value for placing TNWs at the disposal of local commanders before time, and thus obviates the possibility of misuse by a field commander.

³⁰ ISPR Press Release,

http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?0=t-press_release&id=1689

³¹ Pakistan established its National Command Authority (NCA) in February 2000, which is led by the Prime Minister. It is a politico-military set-up with a balanced representation that takes all decisions with respect to employment and deployment of nuclear weapons. The authority for launching nuclear weapons rests only with the NCA, and would not be delegated to any lower commander. For more details on the NCA, see Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence* (Karachi: Oxford University Press), 234-238.

³² ISPR Press Release, November 28, 2012,

http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=2208

Is Pakistan Moving towards Nuclear War Fighting?

The recent developments do not necessarily indicate that Pakistan is contemplating a nuclear war fighting doctrine. These weapons apparently would be used by Pakistan, as per the axiom by Michael Quinlan describing essentially the NATO's concept that nuclear weapons would be used; "as late as possible and as early as necessary".³³ It may also be incorrect to assume that the short range TNWs would be used by Pakistan for the purpose of nuclear signalling, or a step towards nuclear escalation ladder. Full spectrum deterrence capability mainly affords a menu of options to the Pakistani decision makers either to order a proportionate response at the tactical or operational levels, while retaining the option of retaliating massively through strategic weapons. This is different from the NATO concept of nuclear war where several tiers of nuclear capability were developed that essentially afforded space for strategic pauses and political bargaining during the escalation process.

Future Trajectories

The on going military developments in India, that include the introduction of ABM systems in the region and developing a second strike capability in the form of submarine launched ballistic missiles, could once again lead to deterrence instability. The ABM system in the South Asian regional environment does not offer protection from the incoming missiles due to short flight trajectories. Instead, this could possibly lead to false sense of security by the possessor thus providing incentive to launch pre-emptive or disarming strikes. Notwithstanding the lesser value of ABM systems, the introduction of this capability would add compulsion on Pakistan to take possible remedial measures to re-restore strategic stability in the region. One such option could be to simply increase the number of its delivery systems rendering ABM systems ineffective.

Likewise, India's acquisition of submarine launched ballistic missile capability could also adversely affect the strategic stability in the region. While in the long run, Pakistan may have to develop its own version of submarine capability to restore strategic stability, however, in the short term it could consider increasing the ranges of its missile systems that could offer greater reach within India, while offering more options for dispersion and concealment against possible disarming strikes by India.

³³ Michael Quinlan, *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons: Principles, Problems, Prospects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40.

Conclusion

Unlike the emerging global trends, nuclear deterrence continues to remain relevant and active in South Asia due to the existence of long outstanding disputes that had been a source of several wars and military crises between the two South Asian nuclear neighbours. Introduction of nuclear weapons may have brought stability to the region by preventing an all out war, but at the same time, it could be a source of instability at the lower end of the conflict, that may have led India to contemplate new war fighting doctrines such as the Cold Start and Proactive Operations. In response, Pakistan has developed conventional and nuclear responses 'to deter all forms of aggression; however, if new technologies like the ABM systems and submarine launched ballistic missiles are introduced into the region, it would further destabilize the region as 'stability-instability' paradox could turn into 'instability-instability' paradox, i.e. instability at full spectrum of the conflict. ■