



CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES

Exploring the Meaning of Strategic Stability in the South Asian Context

Sameer Ali Khan

Senior Research Associate

Working Paper

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June 2023

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AIR MARSHAL FARHAT HUSSAIN KHAN (RETD)

Edited by:

SARAH SIDDIQ ANEEL

Layout

HIRA MUMTAZ

All correspondence pertaining to this publication should be addressed to CASS, through post or email at the following address:

Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies

✉ cass.thinkers@casstt.com

☎ +92 051 5405011

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Abstract

The concept of 'strategic stability' was originally defined during the Cold War to refer to a stable relationship between two nuclear-armed adversaries, where the likelihood of a crisis escalating to the use of nuclear weapons was minimised. However, the term has become outdated in the current context, with nine nuclear-armed states, varying threat perceptions, and differing understanding of the concept. South Asia, in particular, has its own unique understanding of strategic stability. This Working Paper examines the different approaches to strategic stability taken by the United States, India, and Pakistan, and argues that re-envisioning this concept could help reduce tensions and pave the way for future arms control, risk reduction, and achieving stability in a region where nuclear weapons exist amidst numerous outstanding disputes.

Keywords: South Asia, Nuclear Deterrence, Strategic Stability in South Asia, Arms Race in South Asia, Second-Strike Capability.

Introduction

The term, 'strategic stability', was introduced in the formative years of Cold War. It was essentially defined as a situation where neither side had an incentive to use nuclear weapons. The concept governed the entire negotiations that led up to the conclusion of various bilateral and multilateral arms control agreements which were aimed at preserving mutual vulnerabilities. Even though with difficulty, the concept governed a dyadic deterrent relationship between the United States (US) and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The deterrence and arms race dynamics of the two antagonists overshadowed capabilities and policies of other Nuclear Weapon States (NWSs). However, in the post-Cold War era, deterrence postures of other NWSs have come to the fore and the term has been interpreted by these states according to their unique threat perceptions and operating environments.

Since the concept of strategic stability and associated factors reasonably explained the deterrence dynamics of Cold War antagonists, South Asian dynamics are also explained through the same lens. This is because both India and Pakistan have used these terms and paradoxes from the Cold War to explain their deterrence postures. For instance, in its 2003 nuclear doctrine, India declared that 'nuclear retaliation to a first-strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.'¹ This particular framing has led observers to assume that this policy is comparable to the first US nuclear strategy. Similarly, Pakistan has used the term 'strategic stability' in various press releases of its National Command Authority (NCA). However, there are no official explanations of what constitutes 'strategic stability' for Pakistan.

This *Working Paper* shall examine the original definitions of 'strategic stability' and evaluate their relevance in the South Asian scenario while attempting to decode the official statements from the two nuclear rivals in this regard. This shall enable a contextual explanation of this term in the South Asian region. While Pakistan and India frequently refer to terms and concepts of the Cold War; follow-up explanations of these concepts are never provided. This situation leaves observers to understand the context through a Cold War lens where these ideas originated from. This leaves room for miscommunication of the intent and rationale behind certain strategic

¹ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "India's Nuclear Doctrine Debate," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 30, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/india-s-nuclear-doctrine-debate-pub-63950>.

developments as is ostensibly the case with Indian pronouncement of massive retaliation.²

Other than the obvious differences in the South Asian scenario, vis-à-vis the Cold War model, a glaring difference is the existence of outstanding disputes between the two nuclear armed neighbours. Therefore, the paper will also attempt to explore how the power differential, between India and Pakistan, affects the resolution of festering disputes. This requires dwelling into the question of dynamics of arms race stability and its emerging challenges. While there exists a semblance of stability, the region is prone to crises at the same time. The next part of this paper will explore the likelihood of a crisis and its escalatory potential. The last section will logically recommend how crisis escalation may be avoided and strategic stability achieved.

Strategic Stability in the Cold War

The term 'strategic stability' was coined during the Cold War and there are varying explanations of what it entails. A bilaterally agreed framework of the concept enabled the US and former USSR to formalise their deterrent relationship and pursue arms control arrangements. While tracing the origins and applications of the term 'strategic stability' throughout the Cold War, Acton, citing the observations of Edward Warner who represented the US Secretary of Defense in the New Strategic Arms Treaty (New START) talks, summarises that the term has been used in three distinct ways:

- 'Most narrowly, strategic stability describes the absence of incentives to use nuclear weapons first (crisis stability) and the absence of incentives to build up a nuclear force (arms race stability);
- More broadly, it describes the absence of armed conflict between nuclear-armed states;
- Most broadly, it describes a regional or global security environment in which states enjoy peaceful and harmonious relations.'³

Various definitions and explanations of the term during and after the Cold War fall in 'most narrow,' 'more broad,' and 'most broad,' categories. One such broad explanation of the term explains it as 'a situation in which no party has an incentive to use nuclear

² James M. Acton, "Reclaiming Strategic Stability," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 5, 2013, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/02/05/reclaiming-strategic-stability-pub-51032>.

³ Ibid.

weapons save for vindication of its vital interests in extreme circumstances.¹⁴ This explanation seems to fall in the ‘most broad’ category with subjective words like ‘vital interests’ and ‘extreme circumstances’ which would vary for different states. Moreover, this definition qualifies any situation as that of ‘strategic stability’ so long as the adversaries are not using nuclear weapons.

Alternatively, the explanation that ‘the [stable] relationship between the US and the Soviet Union as long as both sides knew that each could respond in a devastating way to a nuclear attack by the other,’¹⁵ is less broad. Unlike Colby, Holloway identifies survivable retaliatory capabilities as a specific requirement for strategic stability. Under these circumstances, a state has to have means to be able to respond to its adversary in a ‘devastating’ manner after having absorbed the adversary’s nuclear attack. These means were later found in the form of submarine-based assured second-strike capability which is considered a stabilising factor to date.

The concern around a surprise first-strike was so central in early Cold War thinking that Thomas Schelling noted, ‘We live in an era in which a potent incentive on either side – perhaps the main incentive – to initiate total war with a surprise attack is the fear of being a poor second for not going first.’¹⁶ For Schelling, there was a high possibility of a state launching a damage-limiting first-strike if it believed that nuclear war had become imminent. Under such a scenario, the state would be attempting to reduce the damage that it was likely to receive – by degrading the adversary’s nuclear forces – if the adversary was able to strike first.

Gerson identifies that ‘the threat of surprise attack was the catalyst to the line of thinking that ultimately led to the concept of strategic stability.’¹⁷ The same fears of surprise attack were the primary motivating factor in nudging the US and USSR to explore cooperative arrangements for ensuring a stable deterrent relationship. One such attempt was the US President Eisenhower’s proposal in 1955 to open up air spaces to reconnaissance by the other side to allay fears of an impending surprise

⁴ Elbridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson (eds.), *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations* (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2013), 55, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Reclaiming_Strategic_Stability.pdf.

⁵ George Bunn and David Holloway, “Arms Control without Treaties? Rethinking U.S.-Russian Strategic Negotiations in Light of the Duma-Senate Slowdown in Treaty Approval,” (paper, Center for International Security and Arms Control, Stanford, 1998), <https://fsi9-prod.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/rum.pdf>.

⁶ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1960), 231.

⁷ Michael S. Gerson, “The Origins of Strategic Stability: The United States and the Threat of Surprise Attack,” in *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations*, ed. Elbridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2013), 1-46, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Reclaiming_Strategic_Stability.pdf.

attack.⁸ While initially opposed by the Soviet Union, this proposal eventually provided the basis for the 'Open Skies Treaty' that served to reassure both sides that the other was not preparing for a surprise attack.

In his seminal work, '*Strategy of Conflict*', Schelling argues that it was important for the US to not only be able to look at Soviet nuclear forces for any signs of preparations for a surprise attack but also to reciprocally facilitate similar access to Soviets vis-à-vis US nuclear forces.⁹ This would reduce the sense of vulnerability that either side faced with respect to its nuclear forces. The essence of a stable deterrent relationship, in his reckoning, was based on ensuring the invulnerability of retaliatory forces and vulnerability of society at the same time.

These explanations are essentially centred on fear of a first-strike in a relative environment of peace. The psychological factors that could lead to a first-strike were discussed under the concept of crisis stability which focused on mitigating psychological pressures that could lead a crisis to spin out of control and result in use of nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Another associated term, 'arms race stability', referred to either side ensuring that its qualitative and quantitative modernisation of nuclear forces complemented mutual vulnerability rather than gaining strategic superiority.¹¹

These narrow interpretations of strategic stability are referred to as 'weapons oriented' strategic stability where balance, or lack thereof, in nuclear forces [number of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, vulnerability of nuclear forces, Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) systems, basing modes and doctrine etc.] is seen as impacting the likelihood of war.¹² Walton and Gray argue that even though military balance is a factor in maintaining peace, it's only one aspect in a larger context that includes all major factors affecting the relationship between two security communities.¹³ The two argue that, 'Cold War-era conceptions of strategic stability have little salience in the 21st Century security environment,' especially if only the US and Russian nuclear arsenals are considered. Accordingly, they call for broadening the debate on strategic stability

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict: With a New Preface by the Author*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 231.

¹⁰ Gerson, *The Origins of Strategic Stability*, 49.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² C. Dale Walton and Colin S. Gray, "The Geopolitics of Strategic Stability: Looking Beyond Cold Warriors and Nuclear Weapons," in *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations*, ed. Elbridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2013), 86, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Reclaiming_Strategic_Stability.pdf.

¹³ Ibid., 102.

by adding the political context instead of restricting it to balance of nuclear (and military forces) force.

While there is merit in such an approach, Acton argues that the term is most useful under its narrow definition to assess how the fear of an adversary carrying out a first-strike could force the other to change its nuclear posture.¹⁴ Such resultant changes in posture can be often destabilising if they manifest in higher alert levels (e.g., launch on warning or launch on launch) which are susceptible to misperceptions and miscalculations. Underscoring the grandiose expectations attached to the term strategic stability, Acton suggests use of the term ‘deterrence stability,’ while referring to the former in its narrow scope. This is not unusual, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. Such an approach could enable study of mutual vulnerabilities and their impact on crisis and arms race stability.

In the post-Cold War environment where the US also seeks strategic stability with China, both the narrow and broad interpretations of strategic stability pose different sets of challenges. While a narrow scope can possibly enable multilateral arms control arrangements similar to those between the US and Russia, the apparent qualitative and quantitative disparities in Chinese nuclear forces compared to the US or Russian forces could be an impediment. However, there are interesting new proposals (e.g., ALL START) that recommend transparency at current levels rather than seeking to balance the scales on qualitative and quantitative aspects first.¹⁵ A broader scope, for strategic stability, on the other hand, is likely to bring everything on the discussion table without the prospects of progress on any single issue.

Strategic Stability in South Asia

With contending interpretations of strategic stability even between the US and Russia, it is difficult to expect convergences between the relatively new entrants into the nuclear club like India and Pakistan. Scholars have pointed out that the term is not indigenous to South Asia and was largely a product of international concerns regarding the likelihood of a pre-emptive nuclear war in the region.¹⁶ Hence, it faces problems with internalisation.

¹⁴ Acton, “Reclaiming Strategic Stability.”

¹⁵ John Mecklin, “All START: A Proposal for Moving beyond US-Russia Arms Control,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 16, 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/2023/03/all-start-a-proposal-for-moving-beyond-us-russia-arms-control/>.

¹⁶ Sadia Tasleem, “Pakistan’s View of Strategic Stability: A Struggle between Theory and Practice,” in *The End of Strategic Stability? Nuclear Weapons and the Challenge of Regional Rivalries*, ed.

Indian and Pakistani scholars and officials frequently refer to the term 'strategic stability' while discussing the bilateral relationship in the nuclearised environment. With a narrow understanding of strategic stability, one would assume that the certain surprise first-strike scenarios or vulnerabilities of nuclear forces are being discussed. However, that is not usually the case. The term is used in myriad ways without definition of its scope in the India-Pakistan context. While it is understandable that the scholarly debate is likely to remain inconclusive, any substantial progress on bilaterally addressing the stability questions requires consensus between the two states, nonetheless.

In one of the early interpretations of the term in the South Asian context, Kapur defined it as, 'the probability that conventional conflict will escalate to the nuclear level.'¹⁷ This interpretation is more cautionary in the sense that it highlights the reality that conventional conflicts in South Asia are bound to carry with them the potential risks of nuclear use. Moreover, it does not confine itself to the narrow bounds of strategic stability that require invulnerability of retaliatory nuclear forces. He argues that, 'a low likelihood of nuclear escalation would reduce the ability of Pakistan's nuclear weapons to deter a conventional attack.'¹⁸ Conversely, it can be argued that a higher likelihood of nuclear escalation should increase Pakistan's ability to deter India's conventional aggression. Such an understanding of strategic stability would be in line with that of Colby who proposes discriminate and controlled nuclear options to 'give each side the ability to impose limited but very real harm, while also increasing the number and type of discrete steps one could take between supine inaction and total nuclear attack.'¹⁹

While there is no reference to the term or concept of 'strategic stability' in India's official communications, a well-known Indian analyst and former military officer, Brig. Gurmeet Kanwal (late) defined the term as 'a product of deterrence stability, crisis stability, and arms race stability in the context of a hostile political relationship between

Lawrence Rubin and Adam N. Stulberg (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 67, Kindle Edition.

¹⁷ S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (October 2005): 127–52, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228805775124570>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁹ Elbridge A. Colby, "Defining Strategic Stability: Reconciling Stability and Deterrence," in *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations*, ed. Elbridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2013), 58, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Reclaiming_Strategic_Stability.pdf.

two nations; for example, an unresolved territorial dispute.²⁰ This definition of strategic stability appears to be similar to those of the Cold War with technicalities of deterrence; as Holloway notes that during Cold War strategic stability was essentially seen in technical terms.²¹ Both, Kanwal and Holloway, concur that ‘crisis stability’ and ‘arms race stability’ are essential elements of strategic stability but Kanwal mindfully notes the existence of outstanding disputes which have been at the heart of all India-Pakistan crises.

On the Pakistani side, strategic stability, as a term, is frequently used in political statements and those of its National Command Authority (NCA). However, the explanations or definitions of the term in the Pakistani context are not as many as the references to the term itself. Its earliest interpretation appear in Khan’s article who defines it in the South Asian context as, ‘ensuring the safety, security, and survivability of nuclear weapons under all conditions - peace, on alert in crisis, and war.’²² While the references to safety and security appear to be time-specific to 2003 when A.Q. Khan’s proliferation activities were exposed and there were concerns about the security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, the reference to survivability seems to come from the Cold War experience of ensuring invulnerability of retaliatory forces. This is supported by his explanation where he writes: ‘Stability implies comprehensively configuring the command, control, communication, and intelligence systems that guarantee a retaliatory second-strike capability, which the adversary must perceive as credible. According to deterrence theory, having a credible second-strike capability will reduce the incentive of potential opponents to strike first during a crisis.’²³

This understanding of second-strike capability as an essential element of strategic stability is indicative of learning from the Cold War experiences. Moreover, US engagement with India and Pakistan, following the 1998 tests, played a role – albeit limited – in shaping their nuclear policies.²⁴ A similar iteration on the role of second-strike capability in preserving deterrence came from Ambassador Zamir Akram. In an interview on the role of nuclear asymmetries, he pointed out that, ‘We need to enhance our own capabilities so that we have sufficient fissile material for what we would then

²⁰ Gurmeet Kanwal, *Strategic Stability in South Asia: An Indian Perspective*, report (Albuquerque: Sandia National Laboratories, 2017), <https://www.sandia.gov/app/uploads/sites/148/2021/07/sand2017-4791-2.pdf>.

²¹ Bunn and Holloway, “Arms Control without Treaties?”

²² Feroz Hassan Khan, “Challenges to Nuclear Stability in South Asia,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 10, no. 1 (March 2003): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700308436917>.

²³ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁴ Tasleem, “Pakistan’s View of Strategic Stability,” 71.

feel is a credible second-strike capability, or credible deterrence capability.²⁵ This is reflective of a thinking from the Cold War where a balance in terms of nuclear forces and their survivability was seen as essential for strategic stability.

Similar to Ambassador Akram's perspective on the role of a balance in nuclear forces, Pakistan's NCA has also indicated that the country's position on a treaty banning further production of fissile materials – the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) - would be dictated by the objectives of strategic stability.²⁶ The NCA also identifies 'massive arms build-up in the conventional domain, nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean Region and plans for the development / deployment of BMD,' as sources undermining strategic stability in South Asia.²⁷ This, indicates that a balance – not necessarily parity – in conventional and nuclear forces plays an important role in maintaining strategic stability from the Pakistani perspective.

Unlike the above mentioned narrow interpretations of strategic stability in the South Asian context, the head of Pakistan's Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs Branch at the Strategic Plans Division views the concept in a broader context. Zahir Kazmi explained strategic stability in the South Asian context as, 'a situation ... in which Pakistan has the confidence that India is serious in resolving the territorial disputes and that Indian strategic partnerships with the developed world are not at the cost of Pakistan's security. Likewise, India's confidence in Pakistan's willingness to resolve bilateral disputes without alleged indirect strategy.'²⁸ In the same paper, Kazmi also highlights that 'an assured second-strike capability would enhance the credibility of deterrence amongst these two rational actors.'²⁹

Based on this definition, Tasleem asserts that for Pakistan, 'strategic stability' at the political level means resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, while at the operational level, it translates into maintenance of strategic balance to deter war.³⁰ This preference for resolution of outstanding disputes also appears in another of Kazmi's iteration of strategic stability where he defines it as, 'A fruit of relationship

²⁵ Ambassador Zamir Akram, Interview by Arms Control Association, *The South Asian Nuclear Balance*, December 2, 2011, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2011-12/south-asian-nuclear-balance-interview-pakistani-ambassador-cd-zamir-akram>.

²⁶ Inter Services Public Relations Pakistan, "16th NCA Meeting," press release, January 13, 2010, <https://ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail?id=1110>.

²⁷ Inter Services Public Relations Pakistan, "23rd Meeting of the National Command Authority," press release, December 21, 2017, <https://www.ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=4459>.

²⁸ Zahir Kazmi, "SRBMs, Deterrence and Regional Stability in South Asia: A Case Study of Nasr and Prahaar," *Quarterly Journal of the Institute of Regional Studies* xxx, no.4 (2012), 75, <http://irs.org.pk/journal/4RSAutumn12.pdf>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁰ Tasleem, "Pakistan's View of Strategic Stability," 81.

between India and Pakistan that encompasses the political conditions, security circumstances, doctrines and force postures that mutually preserve peace, prevent crises [and] escalation, and resolve disputes to reduce risk of a war – especially a nuclear exchange.³¹

It appears that both Indian and Pakistani views on strategic stability range from narrow (or weapons oriented) to broader ones. While the former seems to be informed from the Cold War experience, the latter takes into account the peculiar South Asian realities of existing disputes and power differential between the two states. Looking at South Asian strategic stability in technical terms would be using outdated tools of the Cold War to explain a unique South Asian situation.

The primary driving factor behind the narrow construct of strategic stability was the perceived imminent threat of a ‘bolt from the blue’³² nuclear first-strike. However, if the trajectory of past South Asian crises is considered, it is likely to start at the conventional level with potential for upward escalation. Relatively lower readiness levels of nuclear forces, where India and Pakistan are known to be keeping nuclear warheads separate from the delivery systems, also point to the unlikelihood of such an eventuality in South Asia. This is the most important factor that distinguishes South Asian construct of strategic stability from that of the Cold War.

South Asian Idiosyncrasies

Whether India and Pakistan agree on a narrow or broad interpretation of strategic stability, any productive and useful equation governing their relationship has to provide for resolution of outstanding disputes. Outstanding disputes, especially Jammu and Kashmir, have continued to characterise Pakistan-India relations pre- and post-nuclearisation. This situation has caused Jammu and Kashmir to be recognised as the nuclear flashpoint³³ rather than the threat of either side attempting a disarming first-strike. In the absence of the nuclear factor, Pakistan and India have fought three wars, and following the nuclearisation have faced at least three serious crises with Indian Jammu and Kashmir dispute at the core.

³¹ Zahir Kazmi, “South Asian Strategic Stability a Pakistani Perspective,” (remarks, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, April 4, 2017, YouTube), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFs1W4kU3Mo>.

³² Bill Prochnau, “There’s No Escaping ‘Bolt Out of the Blue’,” *Washington Post*, April 29, 1982, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/04/29/theres-no-escaping-bolt-out-of-the-blue/d65ca530-4124-40c9-8a39-a9a55ae8a7e5/>.

³³ Owen Bennet-Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), xii.

Both countries have historically had varying degrees of power in terms of economy, military and their international clout. These asymmetries in power continue to exist and are even increasing in some domains. As compared to the current Indian defence budget of USD 72 billion, Pakistan's defence budget stands around USD 11 billion; making the former's defence budget about seven times that of the latter.³⁴ Likewise, India's military hardware and number of military personnel far outnumber those of Pakistan. Furthermore, India is nine times a larger economy as compared to that of Pakistan's. However, nuclear weapons are seen as great strategic equalisers. This has been evident more so in case of these two countries where nuclear weapons prevented escalation of crises³⁵ with otherwise immense power differential.

A noted Pakistani expert and former Director of Pakistan's Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs Branch, Dr Naeem Salik while providing a way forward on deterrence stability and confidence building notes that, 'any measure which is forced upon one party or the other, or which serves the interest of one side or the other, and not both equally is doomed to failure.'³⁶ While Pakistan does not appear to aspire playing a role at the global level, Indian pursuit of nuclear capability was arguably aimed at securing a permanent seat in the United Nations' Security Council (UNSC).³⁷ Currently, there appears to be a greater support for India's membership of the UNSC with the US as a leading supporter of its bid. Also, an exceptional waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation agreement are means 'of bringing India into the fold of the non-proliferation regime.'³⁸ The situation seems to be further playing in the latter's favour with its membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA).

While these aspects of national power appear to be favouring India; the mere fact that Pakistan is a NWS, is likely to prevent imposition of any unacceptable solution for outstanding disputes. The only factor that can push Pakistan and India to amicably resolve their issues would be a realisation on either side that the possibility of these disputes ever leading to use of nuclear war is an undesirable outcome for either side.

³⁴ Aamir Khan, "Country's Defence Budget Allocation Mere Pennies compared to India," *Express Tribune*, June 6, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2360232/countrys-defence-budget-allocation-mere-pennies-compared-to-india>.

³⁵ Adil Sultan, "South Asian Stability-Instability Paradox: Another Perspective," *IPRI Journal* XIV, no. 1 (2014), 21-37, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Article-no.-2-dr.-Adil.pdf>.

³⁶ Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 255.

³⁷ Amina Afzal, "Point: The South Asian Nuclear Trajectory – From Reluctance to Readiness," *South Asian Voices*, December 22, 2014, <https://southasianvoices.org/point-reluctance-to-readiness/>.

³⁸ Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence*, 187.

This realisation can also be advanced by a mutual understanding that continuation of an uneasy relationship is far outweighed by the prospects of an environment of peaceful co-existence and accompanying cooperation.

Dynamics of Arms Race Stability and Emerging Challenges

Arms race stability has been identified as one of the two key ingredients of strategic stability (in the Cold War perspective) with the other being crisis stability.³⁹ It has been defined as '[a situation where] each side's arms developments were manifestly designed to conform to the enduring reality of mutual vulnerability rather than as plausible attempts to gain strategic superiority.'⁴⁰ While the Cold War rivals were innovative with development of new strategic technologies, the two South Asian rivals are only picking and choosing components of their nuclear forces. The new NWSs seem to be looking at the utility – or lack thereof – of certain weapon systems according to their own understanding of their usefulness in the Cold War and their relevance to the situation they are in.

Nuclear developments in this region are governed by differing objectives on either side as Dalton and Tandler note, 'India and Pakistan are indeed racing toward their respective national security objectives, but they are running on different tracks and chasing vastly different goals.'⁴¹ They also identify China as the primary factor behind India's strategic developments and that Indian and Pakistani missile testing patterns do not portray a semblance of arms race in the classical sense.⁴² This is further corroborated by the fact that the number of their missile tests are not comparable. For instance, India conducted 15 tests of nuclear capable missiles during 2022 as compared to Pakistan's single test during the same time period.⁴³ Likewise, India is estimated to have a potential of developing over 2600 nuclear weapons using the huge stockpiles of fissile materials and associated facilities available outside the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.⁴⁴ Pakistan, on the other hand,

³⁹ David Holloway, "Strategic Stability and U.S.-Russian Relations," *Russian Center for Policy Studies*, December 6, 2011, <http://www.pircenter.org/media/content/files/10/13538686602.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Elbridge A. Colby, "Defining Strategic Stability: Reconciling Stability and Deterrence," in *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations*, ed. Elbridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2013), 49, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Reclaiming_Strategic_Stability.pdf.

⁴¹ Toby Dalton and Jaclyn Tandler, "Understanding the Arms Race in South Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 2012, 1, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/south_asia_arms_race.pdf.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Tanzeela Khalil, Senior Research Associate, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad in discussion with the author (February 12, 2023).

⁴⁴ Mansoor Ahmed, "India's Nuclear Exceptionalism: Fissile Materials, Fuel Cycles, and Safeguards," (paper, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy

is estimated to have about 200 nuclear weapons.⁴⁵ Therefore, the quantitative difference between nuclear developments on either side becomes quite apparent.

These differences indicate that Pakistan is not seeking to match India weapon for weapon per se. The installed Indian capacity for its unsafeguarded nuclear reactors is over 39 times that of Pakistan's.⁴⁶ Despite this huge difference, there appears to be no visible attempt on part of the latter to decisively surmount these asymmetries – notwithstanding the fact that such an approach is not desirable in the first place. This could be indicative of a recognition on Pakistan's part that the greater number of Indian stocks of fissile materials are, in fact, necessitated by the China factor. Additionally, the noticeable difference in numbers of missile tests contradicts the earlier held perceptions of tit-for-tat missile testing dynamics between India and Pakistan.⁴⁷ Conversely, Pakistan's restraint in strategic developments, e.g., not competing with India in the domain of ICBMs, lesser number of missile tests, and not pursuing a missile defence capability can be seen as a factor of chronic economic issues constraining strategic developments. However, it is more likely that these restraints are well-considered and self-imposed as one of the NCA meeting expressed concerns over 'the destabilising massive arms build-up in the conventional and strategic domains' but asserted that, 'Pakistan will take all measures to ensure the strategic stability in the region without entering into an arms race.'⁴⁸ This notion of self-restraint is further corroborated by the remarks of Advisor to Pakistan's NCA, Lt. Gen. (Retd) Khalid A. Kidwai, who maintained that, 'Pakistan will maintain peace and security in South Asia at the lowest levels of deterrence with a conscious decision of not getting into an arms race.'⁴⁹

While South Asia may not be experiencing an arms race in the traditional sense, there are other technological and doctrinal advancements that present their own challenges.

School, Cambridge, 2017),

<https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/India%27s%20Nuclear%20Exceptionalism.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Ahmed, "India's Nuclear Exceptionalism."

⁴⁶ Sameer Ali Khan, "South Asia's Nuclear Elephant: Origins and Expanse of Strategic Asymmetries," *ResearchGate*, November 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356555000_South_Asia's_Nuclear_Elephant_Origins_and_Expanse_of_Strategic_Asymmetries.

⁴⁷ Rose Gordon, "India, Pakistan Trade Tit-for-Tat Missile Tests," *Arms Control Association*, April 2003, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2003-04/news/india-pakistan-trade-tit-tat-missile-tests>.

⁴⁸ Sanaullah Khan, "National Command Authority Expresses Concern over 'destabilising' Arms Build-Up in the Region," *Dawn*, September 8, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1645247>.

⁴⁹ Sadia S. Kazmi, "Two Days International Conference: Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Stability in South Asia," Strategic Vision Institute, November 7, 2018, <https://thesvi.org/svi-two-day-international-conference-report-november-6-7-2018-nuclear-deterrence-and-startegic-stability-in-south-asia/>.

For arms race stability to be maintained, the development of new weapon systems should be based on the understanding of mutual vulnerability rather than seeking strategic superiority. South Asian nations have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the Cold War. However, the pursuit of technologies such as the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system, Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), and the inclination towards developing comprehensive nuclear first-strike options suggests a reluctance to acknowledge the reality of mutual vulnerabilities.

BMD was a technology that was experimented during the Cold War. The purpose of introducing the technology was to defend against the imminent threat of Soviet ballistic missiles through employment of a layered system that would detect, track and destroy incoming missiles and warheads.⁵⁰ However, the technology still fails to provide any reasonable security against incoming missiles.⁵¹ Nonetheless, its potential to induce a false sense of security within the possessor state remains unchanged, and therefore, it can move the possessor towards taking reckless decisions. India is not only developing its indigenous BMD system but has also acquired the Russian S-400 system that claims to offer defence against both aerial (drones, fighter aircraft, cruise missiles etc.) and ballistic targets.⁵² If deployed along its border with Pakistan, India can potentially intercept delivery systems from both of Pakistan's nuclear force components, namely the air and sea-based forces consisting solely of cruise missiles.⁵³ Such a formidable capability could be extremely destabilising for the region given Indian ambitions of achieving the capability to conduct successful pre-emptive counterforce operations and its politico-military elite's view of this system as a game-changer and means to 'effect a behavioural change.'⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Theodore A. Postol, "Why Missile Defense Won't Work," *Frontline*, April 2002, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/missile/etc/postol.html>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ajeyo Basu, "India receives Third S-400 Squadron from Russia, will hit Deeper inside China, Pakistan," *First Post*, February 28, 2023, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/india-receives-third-s-400-squadron-from-russia-will-hit-deeper-inside-china-pakistan-12220092.html>.

⁵³ Sameer Ali Khan, "S-400 Deployment in South Asia and the US' Regional Interests," *C/SS Insight* VII, no.2 (2019): 36-61, <http://journal.ciss.org.pk/index.php/ciss-insight/article/view/12>.

⁵⁴ Shishir Gupta, "If We had Rafales, We'd have Shot down 4-5 Pakistani Jets after Balakot: IAF Ex-Chief Dhanoa," *Print*, February 12, 2020, <https://theprint.in/defence/if-we-had-rafales-wed-have-shot-down-4-5-pakistani-jets-after-balakot-iaf-ex-chief-dhanoa/363080/>; "Miracle Would Have Been Possible if IAF Had Rafale Jet, Says Rajnath Singh," *News 18*, March 26, 2019, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/miracle-would-have-been-possible-if-iaf-had-rafale-jet-says-rajnath-singh-2078891.html>; and "If India had Rafale Jets, Recent Outcomes would have been Different: PM Narendra Modi," *India Today*, March 2, 2019, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/newsindia/if-india-had-rafale-jets-recent-outcomes-would-have-been-different-pm-narendra-modi/ar-BBUhZbe?li=AAggbRN>.

The CSD is another area that reflects lack of learning from Cold War experiences in hopes that nuclear-armed adversaries can fight a conventional war. The doctrine envisages a limited conventional incursion into Pakistan under the assumption that such an act would not breach the country's perceived nuclear threshold.⁵⁵ Likewise, pre-emption was a concept that had been mulled over throughout the Cold War. However, neither side could ensure the success of carrying out a comprehensive first-strike. Expecting to achieve what the US or USSR could not achieve, despite immense technological prowess, against a nuclear-armed adversary with contiguous geography is a dangerous tendency. Prospects of a successful Indian first-strike are also hindered by the fact that all of Pakistan's land-based nuclear delivery systems are road mobile and it has already demonstrated its version of a credible second-strike capability with the testing of its Babur-3 cruise missile.

The narrow definitions of strategic stability and arms race stability, referred to in the context of Cold War in the previous section, indicate two things, i.e., the situation is unlikely to be stable if any side expects a surprise attack and the situation can also be unstable because the states may use nuclear weapons fearing that the other side's surprise first use may render their weapons useless.⁵⁶ Therefore, the key determinants for arms race stability may be:

1. absence of surprise attack from the adversary,
2. non-existence of 'use it or lose it' dynamics, and,
3. no technological or political developments creating temptations for either side to pursue a first-strike.

This discourse on strategic stability emerged in the aftermath of World War II in which the US became involved due to the events at Pearl Harbour, which notably constituted an unexpected and unforeseen surprise attack. Therefore, early nuclear thinking and discourse heavily focused on the possibility of a surprise attack. Therefore, any policy or development that creates temptations for a first-strike and creates a 'use it or lose dilemma' for the other side can, hence, be categorised as destabilising.

In South Asian context, the BMD system is a threat to arms race stability in the technological domain. This is primarily because of the well-documented arguments that the system can induce a sense of invulnerability in the possessor state and incite

⁵⁵ Sultan, "South Asian Stability-Instability Paradox."

⁵⁶ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 240.

reckless behaviour.⁵⁷ Consequently, India is likely to be more inclined towards pre-emption.⁵⁸ Since this technology can create an incentive for going first, causing the adversary to expect a surprise attack creating 'use it or lose it' dynamics, this technology needs to be identified and treated as a destabilising development.

On the doctrinal side, India's CSD and a prospective strategy of comprehensive first-strike⁵⁹ will prompt Pakistan to prepare against the threat of a surprise attack. The CSD envisages fighting a limited conventional war under the nuclear umbrella. As observed by Sir Michael Quinlan, 'non-nuclear is the likeliest route to a nuclear war.'⁶⁰ In the recent years, there have been indications that India may also choose to move towards counter-force nuclear operations.⁶¹ Such a strategy would also create 'use it or lose it' dynamics for Pakistan' and hence' would be a destabilising policy.

During the Cold War strategic stability was defined largely in technical terms, as a function of the relationship between the strategic nuclear forces on either side, but a crucial political assumption was built into this definition: it was taken for granted that a hostile political relationship existed between the two sides. Each assumed that the other might launch a first-strike if it believed that it could prevent, or render ineffectual, a retaliatory strike. Many (though by no means all) analysts in the US and Russia believe that a new concept of strategic stability is needed. Because deterrence is grounded in the presumption of enmity, the concept of strategic stability helps to define the US-Russian relationship as one in which suspicion and mistrust play an important role.

Factors Contributing to the Escalatory Potential of India-Pakistan Crises

Wars and conflicts in South Asia have been recurrent and have persisted before and after overt nuclearisation. Since South Asian nuclearisation, Pakistan and India have

⁵⁷ Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "Indian Missile Defence Development: Implications for Deterrence Stability in South Asia," *Strategic Studies* 35, no. 2 (2015), 29-46, <http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Ghazala.35-No.2.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Khalid Banuri, "Missile Defences in South Asia: The Next Challenge," *South Asian Survey* (2004), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/097152310401100203>.

⁵⁹ Vipin Narang, "Plenary - Beyond the Nuclear Threshold: Causes and Consequences of First Use," (paper presented at Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference, Washington, D.C., March 20, 2017), <https://youtu.be/ChdTSSRIXB8>.

⁶⁰ Quoted in, Adil Sultan, "Pakistan's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Impact of Drivers and Technology on Nuclear Doctrine," *Strategic Studies* 31, no. 4/32, no. 1 (Winter 2011 & Spring 2012), 147-167.

⁶¹ Sameer Ali and Tanzeela Khalil, "Debating Potential Doctrinal Changes in India's Nuclear Ambitions," *IPRI Journal* XVIII, no. 2 (2018): 53-77, <https://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Article-3-8-Aug-2018.pdf>.

seen three major crises in 2001-02, 2008, and 2019. Several terrorist attacks in India, like Pathankot (2016) and Uri (2016), were blamed on Pakistan and followed charged rhetoric. Non-State Actors (NSAs) are likely to continue instigating instability in the region.⁶² Pakistan is seen by some analysts as using sub-conventional warfare to internationalise unresolved bilateral disputes.⁶³ Likewise, India's role in fomenting terrorism, especially in Balochistan, is seen by Pakistan as a policy tool to induce instability within its borders.⁶⁴ It appears that the lack of political will to resolve outstanding disputes is covered up by a blame game that essentially defines the history of Indo-Pak relations.

The year 2019 serves as a notable case demonstrating the profound impact of charged rhetoric on regional stability. The suicide bombing in Pulwama, carried out by Adil Ahmad Dar, an indigenous boy from Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, resulted in the death of 44 Indian paramilitary security personnel. Dar's parents attribute his radicalisation to alleged torture inflicted upon him by Indian security forces, revealing a complex interplay between socio-political factors and extremist ideologies. Furthermore, the incident sparked debates and raised concerns among senior Indian military officials, who question the authenticity of their own government's claims regarding the incident. Lt. General D.S. Hooda, commented that 'It is not possible to bring such massive amounts of explosives by infiltrating the border.'⁶⁵ This scepticism underscores the significance of unbiased investigations and the need for accurate information to understand the multifaceted nature of such crises.

Despite clear evidence suggesting otherwise, Pakistan was falsely blamed, leading to an escalation of the situation. On 26 February 2019, India violated Pakistani airspace, prompting a response that resulted in the downing of two Indian fighter aircraft and the subsequent capture of an Indian pilot.⁶⁶ It is worth noting that prior to this incident,

⁶² Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence*, xi.

⁶³ George Perkovich, "The Non-Unitary Model and Deterrence Stability in South Asia," *Stimson Center and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 13, 2012, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/George_Perkovich_The_Non_Unitary_Model_and_Deterrence_Stability_in_South_Asia.pdf.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson," press release, October 5, 2017, <http://www.mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?mm=NTQ3Mg>.

⁶⁵ Maria Abi-Habib, Sameer Yasir and Hari Kumar, "India Blames Pakistan for Attack in Kashmir, Promising a Response," *New York Times*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/15/world/asia/kashmir-attack-pulwama.html>.

⁶⁶ Sana Ali, "Timeline: Events leading up to the Feb 2019 Pak-India Aerial Combat," *Dawn*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1536224>.

analysts Perkovich and Dalton had argued that an Indian airstrike, although not without risks, would be less escalatory and unlikely to provoke a Pakistani response.⁶⁷

Another significant factor in this crisis was the greater risk appetite of the Indian leadership, along with a willingness to let the situation escalate further.⁶⁸ This raises concerns about future crises, as India may explore alternative measures to ‘punish’ Pakistan, given the high likelihood of a similar Pakistani response.⁶⁹ The recurrence of such crises, coupled with dangerous doctrines and capabilities and the absence of crisis management mechanisms to address such scenarios, highlights the urgent need for dispute resolution mechanisms to prevent the repetition of such precarious situations.

As outstanding disputes fester, the blame game on both sides is expected to go unabated and their possible responses to such sub-conventional incidents may vary. Notably, the Indian government has demonstrated a tendency to swiftly attribute terrorist incidents to Pakistan. This attribution, in turn, creates domestic pressure on the government to deliver a robust and fitting response, thereby heightening the risks of conflict escalation. According to the Governor of IIOJ&K, Satya Pal Malik, Pulwama attack was ‘a result of systemic failure, involving gross security and intelligence lapses,’ and that ‘the tragedy was exploited for political gains.’⁷⁰ The Indian claim to carry out surgical strikes against Pakistan after the Uri attack is one case in point that enabled Indian Prime Minister Modi to gain domestic political mileage. This pattern of blame attribution and subsequent domestic pressures highlights the complexities surrounding crisis management in the region. The attribution of terrorist incidents to Pakistan can fuel public sentiment and nationalist fervour, intensifying expectations for a forceful response. The Indian government’s willingness to engage in such attributions and the subsequent pressure to act in a befitting manner increase the potential dangers of conflict escalation, especially in the absence of effective dispute resolution mechanisms.

⁶⁷ George Perkovich and Toby Dalton, *Not War, Not Peace: Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2016), 58.

⁶⁸ Saima Aman Sial, “Lessons Learnt from the Balakot Strikes: The View from Islamabad,” *South Asian Voices*, March 7, 2020, <https://southasianvoices.org/lessons-learnt-from-the-balakot-strikes-the-view-from-islamabad/>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “PM Modi, NSA Doval Silenced Me on Security Lapses leading to Pulwama Attack’: Former J&K Governor Satya Pal Malik,” *Hindu Frontline*, April 16, 2023, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/pm-modi-nsa-doval-silenced-me-on-security-lapses-leading-to-pulwama-attack-former-jk-governor-satyapal-malik/article66743512.ece>.

Conversely, Pakistan's threshold to absorb a sub-conventional incident appears to have increased in recent times. Restraint at the conventional level has been the defining character of the country's response to Indian sponsored terrorism. It is also encouraging to note that no political party within Pakistan stresses upon the need to wage war against India after any terror incident even when Pakistani agencies indicate Indian involvement. On the contrary, the domestic Indian audience and media tend to put pressure on their government to 'punish' Pakistan.⁷¹ This predicament has been identified by Perkovich and Dalton where they note that, 'Indian leaders are trying to find alternatives that could simultaneously satisfy domestic demands to punish Pakistan...'⁷² In the aftermath of Uri attacks, Indian media was seen as 'baying for blood.'⁷³ Such a situation can be extremely destabilising and increase the potential for escalation. It was only recently that an attack, which was initially blamed on Pakistan, was later claimed by indigenous Kashmiri freedom fighters.⁷⁴ In a situation where there is an unprecedented tendency to blame every act of terrorism on Pakistan, India's influential media serves as a catalyst creating further pressure for revenge. This reduces the space for any investigation before seeking to punish Pakistan – not realising the consequences of attempting such a strategy against a nuclear-armed state.

Avoiding Crisis Escalation and Achieving Strategic Stability

As has been discussed in the previous sections, the likely trigger of a conflict or crisis could well be a terrorist activity by NSAs. However, these are only manifestations of an uneasy relationship owing to a history of hostility that is, in turn, a result of outstanding disputes. While the two states can continue to fight the symptoms; peace is unlikely to be achieved unless core issues are addressed; otherwise, crises and its escalation will continue as an imminent possibility. In this regard, Pakistan and India need to honour the confidence and trust building measures that they have already

⁷¹ "Modi Govt Under Pressure to Strike Pakistan after Uri Attack," *Livemint*, September 20, 2016, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/2ZNSsS2pGYkp65lYsAE3CM/Modi-govt-under-pressure-to-strike-Pakistan-after-Uri-attack.html>.

⁷² George Perkovich and Toby Dalton, "It Will Take More than Force for India to Win the Terror Endgame," *Wire*, September 19, 2016, <https://thewire.in/66817/art-of-peace-eschewing-indo-pak-violence/>.

⁷³ Prem Shankar Jha, "A Military Attack on Pakistan Will Lead to India's Worst Nightmare," *Wire*, September 24, 2016, <https://thewire.in/68370/a-military-attack-on-pakistan-will-lead-to-indias-worst-nightmare/>.

⁷⁴ Bharti Jain, "Uri Terror Attack: Two-Point Breach helped Terrorists Access Army Camp," *Times of India*, September 19, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Uri-terror-attack-Two-point-breach-helped-terrorists-access-Army-camp/articleshow/54398809.cms>.

agreed to. However, for durable peace, the two states will have to move towards dispute resolution sooner or later.

None of the crises between India and Pakistan have been resolved till date, they have only been managed – with the underlying causes still unaddressed – because of realisation by both sides that any further escalation would be self-defeating.⁷⁵ While such a situation creates optimism about the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence, it simultaneously reinforces the observations of crystallisation of outstanding disputes. It is for both sides to realise that deterrence cannot be expected to always limit crises and conflicts. Such an approach would not be devoid of risk in a nuclearised environment.

Conflict resolution should now be a priority over crises management. There should be verifiable Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) resulting in abandoning of the three factors which negatively affect crisis and arms race stability, i.e., BMDs, CSD and a prospective strategy of comprehensive first-strike. While resolution of outstanding disputes may be a tall order, it is important to institute mechanisms to reduce volatility and increase predictability in the interim period. Whether India and Pakistan agree to a narrow or broader interpretation of strategic stability is going to determine their inclination towards prospective bilateral and multilateral arms control arrangements. This would be in line with the Lahore Declaration signed between India and Pakistan in 1999. The two states agreed to engage in consultations over nuclear doctrines, reducing the risks of a nuclear war, identifying and establishing appropriate communication mechanisms, and consultations on disarmament and non-proliferation issues.⁷⁶

Conclusion

It appears that strategic stability in the South Asian context is clearly distinct from how the concept came to be originally defined. While there are very limited explanations of this concept from an Indian and Pakistani perspective; these perspectives do indicate the realisation that unlike in the Cold War, the two South Asian rivals have to address outstanding disputes as well. If the core issues are resolved, it is unlikely that these two states will find confrontation as the only way forward. The symptoms of an uneasy

⁷⁵ P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 188-189.

⁷⁶ "Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of India and Pakistan," *United Nations Peacemaker*, February 21, 1999, <https://peacemaker.un.org/indiapakistan-memorandum99>.

relationship cannot be permanently tackled without addressing the underlying causes. Nuclearisation of the region has made it dangerous to attempt resolution of these issues through use of force because of the inherent dangers of escalation.

Unlike the classical strategic arms race of the Cold War, Pakistan and India do not exhibit similar level of competition in terms of expansion in their nuclear forces. However, the two states need to be more careful in selection of their strategic inventories and policies. If arms race stability is to be increased, the two states will have to steer clear of developing the technologies and policies which have proven to be destabilising during the Cold War and would be equally destabilising for this region. In this regard, India must realise the limitations of the BMD system in general, and the consequences of its deployment in the region in particular, since it negatively affects the state of mutual vulnerabilities. Alternatively, the two sides need to engage in a meaningful dialogue to clearly spell out the scope of such deployments as was the case in the Cold War. As has been discussed earlier, Indian political leadership appears to face more domestic pressure for not using available force in dealing with Pakistan, a BMD system is likely to create similar pressures in the strategic domain.

On the policy side, CSD and adopting a comprehensive first-strike strategy can be two most destabilising policies. A limited war against Pakistan can potentially trigger the state's use of nuclear weapons in its defence. Likewise, if India adopts a comprehensive first-strike strategy, it will create a 'use it or lose it' dilemma for Pakistan. The obvious remedial measures against such pressures can be both risky and destabilising. Therefore, it is imperative that considering use of force, to resolve outstanding issues, is ruled out in the first place.

Given the visible power differential, the imposition of any solution is unlikely to be effective. It is essential that any solution to the ongoing disputes is worked out and agreed upon by the legitimate stakeholders, as solutions imposed from external sources are bound to fail.⁷⁷ Simultaneously, there is a pressing need to amicably address and resolve the outstanding disputes. The potential for escalation in future crises cannot be dismissed. Considering the possibility of nuclear involvement, the associated risks outweigh any potential gains, emphasising the imperative to pursue peaceful resolution mechanisms.

The South Asian situation warrants a different model of strategic stability. Given the outstanding disputes and their potential to trigger crises, mere technical and Cold War

⁷⁷ Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence*, 255.

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guided understanding of strategic stability does not augur well for maintenance of durable peace. Pakistan and India need to educate their masses on the consequences of a possible war and potential use of nuclear weapons. This will enable broader support for dispute resolution and unilateral peace overtures.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sameer Ali Khan is a Senior Research Associate at the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Islamabad, where he is working on issues relating to emerging and disruptive technologies and their impact on national and international security. Prior to joining CASS, he was serving as Assistant Director (Research) at the Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs (ACDA) Branch of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division (SPD). Previously, Mr Khan has been a Visiting Research Fellow at the South Asia Center of Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C.; the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterrey; and the Cooperative Monitoring Center (CMC), Albuquerque. Besides working on issues related to nuclear doctrines, command and control, safety and security, non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, he has also worked on cyber security and militarisation of outer space. Mr Khan holds a Masters degree in Strategic and Nuclear Studies from the National Defence University (NDU), Pakistan.

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