

Conceptualizing India-Pakistan Competing Counterforce Strategies and Possibility of Conflict in South Asia

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As India and Pakistan embark on developing more warheads, they will require more sophisticated delivery systems to the assigned targets. Since nuclear weapons tests in May 1998 just twenty-four years ago, the South Asian strategic environment has significantly changed. Both India and Pakistan strive for successful completion of their triad deterrent forces with all ranges of delivery systems. This paper explores the changing deterrent force patterns in South Asia and conceptualizes competing counterforce strategies in order to find out how such strategies raise the prospects of serious conflicts between India and Pakistan in general and challenge the South Asian deterrence stability in particular. To this end, the paper concludes that if India and Pakistan convert most of their deterrent nuclear forces while being ready to be deployed for action, the prospects for miscalculation and inadvertence get higher. However, if these South Asian nuclear rivals largely practice nuclear restraint, non-weaponized deterrence, and prevent a bigger Cold War type arms race through the establishment of some form of strategic restraint regime, then the possibility of nuclear conflict gets lower and serious conflicts in turn could likely be prevented in South Asia.

Keywords: India and Pakistan, nuclear weapons, war-fighting strategies, sophisticated delivery systems, possibility of conflict in South Asia

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1. Introduction

Since the induction of nuclear forces in South Asian, India and Pakistan are not fighting bigger wars because of the fear of escalation to a nuclear level.¹ Nevertheless, many believe, as part of nuclear pessimism narratives, that there exists a risk of limited war between the two sides because of the structural and organizational weaknesses each side may have when it comes to their nuclear deterrent forces and command and control mechanism.² Yet, many still would show their concerns that even limited war could conflagrate into major conflicts escalating to the nuclear level.³ Therefore, they conclude that there is no such guarantee that limited nuclear war may remain limited without embodying the element of escalation. One of the reasons for this escalation could be the growing

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- 1 Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: Norton 2003); Glenn Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," in *Balance of Power*, ed. Paul Seabury (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing 1965), 185-201; Michael Krepon, "The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation Control in South Asia," in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia*, eds. Michael Krepon, Rodney W. Jones, and Ziad Haider (Washington D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2004), 1-24; Sumit Ganguly, "Nuclear Stability in South Asia," *International Security* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 45-70; Devin T. Hagerty, *The Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation: Lessons from South Asia* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998); Sumit Ganguly, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington D.C.: University of Washington, 2006).
 - 2 Scott D. Sagan, "The Perils of Proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons," *International Security* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1994): 66-107; S. Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (California: Stanford University Press, 2007).
 - 3 Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (eds.), *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Peter R. Lavoy (ed.), *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Feroz Hassan Khan, Ryan Jacobs, and Emily Burk (eds.), *Nuclear Learning in South Asia: The Next Decade in South Asia* (Monterey California: Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), 1-132; Feroz Hassan Khan, "Going Tactical: Pakistan's Nuclear Posture and Implications for Stability," *Proliferation Papers* 53, September 2015, Institut francais des relations internationales (IFRI), 1-47.

conventional asymmetry (for many in Pakistan) that tends to grow between India and Pakistan, especially after the US-India strategic partnership including the growing India-Russia strategic partnership—that is, but more hypothetically, India would continue to expand and modernize its conventional force capability as part of its escalation dominance strategy vis-à-vis Pakistan. Here, escalation dominance relates to state A potential increase of modernized conventional and nuclear forces to outpace the state B in dominance thereby be able to hit as many targets as the state B during serious crisis as part of the planned state A counterforce strategy. In other words, simply, it is to keep the dominance with an increasing number of credible forces in its favor against the adversary. In doing so, Pakistan would increase its reliance on nuclear forces by producing effective countermeasures against its adversary to offset the perceived growing security threat as part of Pakistan's balancing of the escalation dominance strategy perceived here. That said, both India and Pakistan potentially appear to be locked in making counterforce strategies that endanger the risk of serious conflicts in South Asia. For example, on the one hand, India's conventional force modernization and its strides to successfully complete its nuclear triad aim at power projection and escalation dominance perceived here while preparing its military muscles to fight a limited war as part of the Indian military strategy of Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) against Pakistan without provoking Pakistan to lower its nuclear threshold. On the other hand, Pakistan develops battlefield nuclear weapons (*Nasr*) in response to the CSD in order to prevent Indian offensive strike force advances against Pakistan without letting India to trigger its nuclear strategy of massive retaliation.⁴

However, it is imperative to know how these counterforce strategies could trigger a bigger arms race, lift the nuclear moratorium, shatter the nuclear taboo, dismantle the nuclear restraint, and create mutual vulnerabilities that neither side would like to undertake; they would be

4 Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang, "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities," *International Security* 43, no. 3 (Winter 2018/19): 7–52 (see 13-15).

unacceptable risks both at the tactical and strategic levels that eventually could bring ruin to all and victory to none. Arguably, in a perceived nuclear weapons use scenario, victory belongs to none as both the parties potentially destroy each other. Considering these, much depends on the security leadership of India and Pakistan as to how they need to evaluate the changed strategic environment since much has been revamped after two decades of South Asian nuclearization. That being noted, if India and Pakistan tend to convert most of their deterrent force to nuclear capable force while ready to be deployed for action, the prospects for miscalculation and inadvertence get higher. However, if the South Asian nuclear rivals understand that they are locked by mutual vulnerabilities and, thereby, largely practice nuclear restraint, nuclear moratorium, and non-weaponized nuclear deterrence in order to prevent a bigger Cold War type arms race through the establishment of Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR), then the possibility of nuclear conflict decreases and serious conflicts in turn could likely be prevented in South Asia.

The remainder of this article conceptualizes India-Pakistan competing counterforce strategies and the possibility of conflict in South Asia. In doing so, the first section analyzes the competing strategies in South Asia. This section discusses the causes and consequences of Indian military strategy of CSD for limited war. Section two finds out the effective countermeasures Pakistan produces in response to the CSD. Also, it critically evaluates the rationale of Pakistan's strategy of filling the deterrence gaps and balancing the escalation dominance conceived here. The last section further critically unpacks South Asian competing counterforce strategies in order to explore the possibilities of conflict in South Asia.

2. Competing Military Strategies in the Sub-Continent: India's Search for Offensive Strike Strategy

It has been Pakistan's military strategy to sustain at least rough military parity against its rival in which Pakistan has been quite successful

in its pre-nuclear period free from military conflicts with exception of the 1971 war that led to the creation of an independent Bangladesh.⁵ During that period, Pakistan successfully retained some military advantages against India for at least three plausible reasons. One, it has always been successful in deploying and mobilizing its military forces quickly against its adversary at the common border to counter, deter, and even frustrate the Indian forces. Two, due to Pakistan Cold War alliances with the US and its allies against the spread of the Soviet Union, Pakistan has been able to exploit the third party role to fight its adversary well during its short wars against them, though the kind of military assistance many in Pakistan hoped for, but was not delivered to the level that the Pakistani leadership expected. Three, it would take many days for Indian offensive military forces to reach the Pakistani border during a serious crisis that in turn would put Pakistan in an advantageous position.

In the post-nuclear period, the dynamics of warfare resulting from serious crises have been changed for at least two plausible imperatives: 1) the induction of nuclear weapons in South Asia has added an advantage to Pakistan to offset its conventional weakness. Indian leadership would show military restraint against Pakistan because of the fear of military escalation to a nuclear level; 2) the third-party role, say by the US, has become even more active at least to manage the serious crises between India and Pakistan such as the Kargil episode in 1999, the Twin-Peaks incident in 2001-2002, and the Mumbai attack in 2008 because of the danger of military escalation to the nuclear level. This fear continues to exist in South Asia as India "searches for ways to circumvent the stability-instability paradox and achieve escalation dominance."⁶ In particular, India has been looking to overcome this existing dilemma to craft such a

5 John H. Gill, "India and Pakistan: A Shift in the Military Calculus?," in *Strategic Asia 2005-06: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005), 237.

6 Evan Braden Montgomery and Eric S. Edelman, "Rethinking Stability in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and the Competition for Escalation Dominance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1-2: 159-182 (see 164).

military strategy that would enable them to take military action against Pakistan: a) without intimidating Pakistani security leadership to use its nuclear forces and b) without letting the third party to intervene before the perceived Indian military punitive action.

3. Cold Start for Limited Strikes: India's Competing Strategy for Escalation Dominance

Prior to India's Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) and even the "Sunderji Doctrine," Indian military strategy since its independence fundamentally remained what Indian former Defense Minister George Fernandes would illustrate as "a non-aggressive, non-provocative defense policy based on philosophy of defensive defense."⁷ Later, the Indian military strategy relied much on the "Sundarji Doctrine" throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s for keeping its conventional escalation dominance against Pakistan. This conventional military doctrine comprised of seven defensive "holding corps" near the Pakistani border aimed for having several infantry divisions for static defense, mobile mechanized divisions, and a small number of armored units. The holding corps deployed closer to the Pakistani border was merely aimed at keeping an eye on Pakistan's advances and possible penetration into the Indian side while its three offensive "strike corps" were later to be deployed from the center of India during serious war-like crises between India and Pakistan.⁸ Nevertheless, Indian military leadership observed the limitations of the "Sunderji Doctrine" on account of at least three plausible factors. First, due to the enormous size of the Indian three strike corps mobilizing and maneuvering closer to the Pakistani border, the third party had already intervened to put significant pressure on the Indian side to show restraint. Second, the Indian offensive strike corps lacked a strategic surprise against Pakistan.

7 George Fernandes, "The Dynamics of Limited War," *Strategic Affairs* 7 (October 2000).

8 Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 158-190 (see 159-160).

That is, by the time the Indian forces got to the common border, the Pakistani offensive corps had already been placed to confront Indian forces. Third, the Indian holding corps lacked offensive power which remained a source of concern for their military. Despite the deployment of these forces, they primarily remained static and were, therefore, unable to carry out offensive strikes against Pakistan. This further undermined the credibility of the Indian "Sunderji Doctrine" when the Indian military leadership observed the same during Operation Parakarm in response to the Indian parliamentary attack in 2001.⁹

While realizing the limitations of India's primitive military strategy during both the Kargil (1999) and the Twin-Peaks incident (2001-2002), Indian security leadership started to plan for an alternative military strategy that would enhance its offensive strike corps closer to the Pakistani border for a quicker mobilization of Indian offensive military forces. Many in India may contemplate that India has been developing the CSD because of the perceived terrorism threat that India believes is emitting from Pakistan which India considers as one of the top agenda points in formal or informal meetings with the Pakistani interlocutors. However, the Indian military leadership unveiled this new strategy called the CSD in April 2004. The CSD would overcome the weaknesses of the Indian primitive "Sunderji" military doctrine. The new military strategy is crafted for couple of key reasons to overcome the past military doctrinal weaknesses. One, the Indian military forces failed in the past to embark upon offensive strikes against Pakistan. That is, by the time the Indian forces reached the common border for offensive action, the international community, say, the US, would have already intervened to manage the conflict between India and Pakistan.

Such episodes have happened in the past conflicts between India and Pakistan. With the development of CSD, the Indian military leadership not only intends to inflict significant military strikes against Pakistan to cause damages to Pakistani armed forces before the international community

9 Ibid., 163.

intervenes, but also the CSD would greatly aim at preventing Pakistan from escalating the conflict to a nuclear level.¹⁰ Two, the CSD aimed at converting Indian three major strike forces from the center into eight "integrated battle groups" (IBGs) advancing closer to the Pakistani border so that they could successfully launch offensive strikes from different unknown locations day and night against Pakistan. These IBGs will in turn get support from the Indian Naval and Air Forces who are seeking to "amass firepower rather than forces."¹¹ Three, the CSD that is being developed by the contemporary Indian military considers specifically "the speed" that the Indian military offensive strikes could be carried out against unpredicted locations of Pakistan from seventy-two to ninety-six hours from the time the order is undertaken for such an offensive. The element of speed is being associated with the CSD so that the Indian military undertakes rapid operations while preventing a) its civilian government, b) international community, and c) the Pakistani armed forces to halt these types of operations against different locations in Pakistan.¹² Four, since the induction of the nuclear revolution prevents both India and Pakistan to fight bigger wars involving the risk of nuclear forces, the CSD would aim for a concessionary strategy against Pakistan in terms of making significant territorial gains 50km-80km deep inside Pakistan so that India could utilize these occupied locations to achieve their military and political objectives as part of designed post-conflict negotiations without inciting Pakistan to use its nuclear forces.¹³ However, Ludwig speculations about the India's military advancement deep into Pakistani territory holds that it could engender the risk of quick responses from the Pakistani side across the border, and a potential escalation of conflict intended or unintended could become unacceptable to both the parties because of the border proximity.

10 *Ibid.*, 164.

11 *Ibid.*, 164-165.

12 *Ibid.*, 165-166.

13 *Ibid.*, 165.

4. Critical Assessments of India's Military Strategy for Escalation Dominance: Does a CSD Offensive Strike Provoke the Risks of Conflict?

The preceding conceptual framework on Indian military offensive strikes could confront a couple of significant obstacles in the Indian military strategy of escalation dominance largely emitting out of the CSD development, although Indian military strategy through the operationalization of the CSD is to initiate offensive strikes on different locations in Pakistan that in turn could increase the risk of bigger conflicts between India and Pakistan, particularly when the major issues still remain unresolved.

First, although many elements with regard to the Indian military offensive doctrine still remain classified, it is not clear how Indian military strategy would successfully bypass the Indian civilian government, prevent the international community, particularly the US, from successfully and timely intervening between a possible Indian and Pakistani conflict since the US has matured its conflict management mechanism for the South Asian region. Also, the US interest will continue to stay in the Southern Asian region, particularly after the gradual rise of China as part of China's Belt-and Road Initiative (BRI). The continuous Chinese geo-economic and its future geo-strategic interests in the entire Southern Asian region make the Chinese role somewhat guaranteed in order to prevent both India and Pakistan from initiating bigger wars that in turn would not be in the interest of either China or the US.¹⁴

Given this, China's role in the future India-Pakistan crisis may increase. However, compared to China, the US has been much more active

¹⁴ For a recent analysis on the future role of China in the South Asian crisis situation, see Yun Sun and Hannah Haegeland, "China and Crisis Management in South Asia," in *Investigating Crises: South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics, and Trajectories*, eds. Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland (Washington D.C.: Stimson Center, 2018).

in managing the crises between the nuclear rivals of South Asia. The US interest continues to grow despite its military withdrawal from Afghanistan for a variety of factors: the increasing US-India strategic partnership, the QUAD, and more recently the Russia-Ukraine military crisis. Therefore, since China currently does not appear to be active in terms of playing its crisis management initiatives in South Asia, its gradual build-up as a regional power could provide China an incentive to play a significant part by helping India and Pakistan to manage if not resolve the complex South Asian issue. Because of China's growing geo-economic interest in the broader Southern Asian region, any serious crisis between India and Pakistan will not be in China's interest.

Second, when it comes to Indian military IBGs as part of CSD for offensive strikes on different parts of Pakistan, the Indian military leadership might be less tolerant and more provocative and confident to launch limited offensive strikes against parts of Pakistan given the improved mechanism of the CSD (i.e. interconnectedness of the Indian armed forces, reduced timeliness by mobilizing its forces, and limited war for limited gains without willing to provoke Pakistani security leadership to use nuclear weapons).¹⁵ However, the Indian military strategy may not secure an ideal condition for accumulating all these significant components of the state's security leadership. The absence of one or two key components could largely discourage the Indian military from carrying out successful limited strikes that in turn could undermine the credibility of the so-called CSD. In this context, Montgomery and Edelman argue that the Indian military CSD might confront, "very serious obstacles as it attempts to implement its doctrine for limited conventional warfare, including shortages in the hardware necessary for rapid offensive operations, bureaucratic constraints." Moreover, such imperatives have "hindered key acquisition programs, inter-service rivalries that have inhibited cooperation between air and ground forces, and questions about the adequacy of Indian military training for combined arms maneuver

15 Montgomery and Edelman, "Rethinking Stability in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and the Competition for Escalation Dominance," 172.

warfare, among other potential roadblocks."¹⁶

Ladwig has already pointed out these issues confronting the CSD when it comes to its development and deployment against parts of Pakistan.¹⁷ Drawing from the conventional theoretical framework that eventually may fail despite the technological incentives, Ladwig predicts that dispersal, camouflage discipline, use of cover and concealment tactics including that of rough terrain, heavy forests, urban sprawl, and rough weather conditions are some of the major obstacles the Indian military CSD could confront.¹⁸ In doing so, this could increase the possibility of new conflicts in South Asia.

Third, given the credible existing literature depicting structural and natural obstacles that the CSD could confront in its initiation of limited offensive strikes against Pakistan, it becomes ambitious and questionable as to how the Indian military CSD would maintain the speed associated with the CSD by penetrating deep into Pakistani territory (i.e. 50km-80km) and holding different unknown locations in Pakistan in just about 72 to 96 hours without provoking Pakistani security leadership and a likely intervention from the international community. That being stated, it is up to the Indian military and civilian security leadership whether or not it is worth taking risks that in turn could engender major military escalation in South Asia. If the Indian security leadership realizes the significant weakness confronting the so-called CSD, it will certainly weigh the cost and benefit analysis before undertaking CSD for limited offensive strikes. Amidst the existing obstacles that the Indian military planners could continue to face for the foreseeable future with regard to its planned CSD, the offensive strikes against Pakistan could create the risk of major wars, large scale Pakistani military mobilization, and quick intervention of international

16 Ibid., 173.

17 Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," 184-190. Also, see Walter C. Ladwig III, "Indian Military Modernization and Conventional Deterrence in South Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (May 2015): 729-772.

18 Ibid., 735-741.

community blaming India for undertaking risks of preemptive strikes against parts of Pakistan. While forecasting major risks of escalation, the same military and civilian leadership in India would certainly bide their time to evaluate the emerging dilemma, that is, weighing between the perceived obstacles and ambitious Indian military strategy for offensive strikes against Pakistan. On the one hand, if the cost is too high, as it appears to be particularly when India observes Pakistan's changing nuclear strategy and its reliance on short range battlefield nuclear weapons to plug the deterrence gaps, then the Indian security leadership, while monitoring the changing strategic environment both at the strategic and tactical level, is expected to show restraint as it did in the previous serious crises between India and Pakistan because of the fear of escalation. On the other hand, if the Indian security leadership finds gaps in Indian military advantage, then they could exploit these gaps for undertaking military strikes without expecting bigger military escalation. Nevertheless, India would also expect Pakistan to produce effective countermeasures against the possible gaps the Indian security leadership explores, thereby raising the cost for Indian military offensive strikes, but then much depends on how successful Pakistani security leadership remains while correctly monitoring and judging the Indian military strategy for finding space for limited offensive strikes against Pakistan, not specified in the CSD. That being noted, the proposed IBGs from three units into eight could put Pakistani security leadership into trouble to closely monitor all the IBGs on a day-to-day basis.¹⁹

In sum, the aims of Indian military CSD remains ambitious for offensive strikes. Learning lessons from the past serious crises between India and Pakistan and taking advantage of India's military strategy of CSD, the CSD for limited strikes would involve speed, Indian naval and air forces, and eight offensive IBGs advances closer to the Pakistani border that in turn would enable Indian military leadership to undertake the possible limited offensive strikes at the time of their own choosing without letting the

19 Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," 167.

international community to intervene timely and provoking Pakistan to use its nuclear forces. Nevertheless, this remains ambitious and problematic despite the proposed advantages the Indian military CSD could have over Pakistan.²⁰ The ambitious CSD could have broader implications for regional stability especially when it increases the possibility of potential risks of escalation. This will be discussed later. First, it is imperative to understand how Pakistan could utilize its intelligence and reconnaissance assets by producing effective countermeasures to deter, disperse, and even defeat the perceived Indian military strategy for offensive strikes. This will be discussed next.

5. Pakistan's Search for Effective Countermeasures: Filling Deterrence Gaps

It is interesting to note the cognitive biases when it comes to competing strategies between India and Pakistan. On the one hand, India's military leadership finds space for limited offensive strikes with greater speed and lethality against several locations in Pakistan. India would most likely expect the timely intervention by neither the international community nor Pakistan's nuclear responses against the offensive deployment of the CSD. In this context, the former Indian military Chief Gen. V.P. Malik argued that "space exists between proxy war/low-intensity conflict and a nuclear umbrella within which a limited conventional war is a distinct possibility."²¹ In a similar vein and more recently while exposing the existence of CSD, India's General Bipin Rawat in an interview that the "Cold Start doctrine exists for conventional military operations." He further , "Weaknesses can only be overcome if you accept the strategy... If you don't accept the strategy, then you will let your weaknesses limit you."²²

20 Ibid., 166-167.

21 Quoted in Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," 168.

22 Quoted in Zafar Khan, "India's Cold Start Doctrine: Not So Ambiguous," *South Asian Voices*, January 26, 2017, <https://southasianvoices.org/indias-cold-start-doctrine-not-so-ambiguous/>.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, Pakistani security leadership would be under tremendous pressure to rely on its nuclear forces for deterrence purposes in order to discourage the operationalization of the CSD for offensive strikes that in turn could spiral out of control. In the similar context, while offsetting the growing conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan, Peter Lavoy illustrates:

Predictably, Islamabad is likely to view India's recent modernization efforts as a significant threat to its security. India's military modernization program has led to a growing disparity between the Indian and Pakistani conventional military capabilities. A particularly grave concern is that if India pursues its policy to achieve technical superiority in ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) and precision targeting, this will provide India the capability to effectively locate and efficiently destroy strategically important targets in Pakistan. The result of this growing divergence in the two states' conventional capabilities will be either a regional arms race—as Pakistan desperately attempts to keep pace with India so as to deter a preventive strike from India—and/or a lowering of the nuclear threshold for Pakistan—if it fails to keep up the conventional arms race with an economically powerful India and therefore needs to rely on its nuclear arsenal for a deterrent.²³

Lavoy's conceptualization on India's conventional force modernization and deterrent force capabilities reflect that amidst the perceived conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan, particularly when it comes to Indian conventional forces modernization, including that of its potential for increasing its deterrent forces, the Pakistani security leadership will be compounded with worries and concerns. Moreover, the US-India nuclear deal and the US's growing strategic

partnership with India will create a strategic environment where India will attempt to exploit this opportunity for escalation dominance

23 Peter Lavoy, "Islamabad's Nuclear Posture: Its Premises and Implementation," in *Pakistan's Nuclear Future: Worries beyond War*, ed. Henry D. Sokolski (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 158-159.

while Pakistan will remain under significant strategic pressure to rely on nuclear forces for its ultimate survival. Given the heightening concerns of the Indian military CSD in Pakistan, especially when the Indian military leadership has recently argued that the CSD exists and that India has been working on its development and possible deployment, Pakistani security leadership explores different options both at the strategic and tactical level. However, it is imperative to unpack further in order to understand the rationale of Pakistan's possible responses as it embarks upon producing effective countermeasures against the CSD.

6. Reliance on Nuclear Forces: Balancing Indian South Asia

Many in Pakistan believe that as India modernizes its conventional forces, including that of its nuclear capability, Pakistan will in turn closely monitor the changing strategic environment emitting out of the perceived strategic dilemma Pakistan confronts and will therefore relies on its nuclear forces as a last resort for its ultimate survival. Also, many in the West and within Pakistan would commonly agree that one of the primary reasons for the nuclear reliance of Pakistan is the growing conventional disparity between India and Pakistan, and Pakistan keeps this potential option intact in order to offset India's growing conventional force advantage.²⁴

24 Mahmud Ali Durrani, (Washington, D.C.: Cooperative Monitoring Center, 2004), 1-54. Feroz Hassan Khan, *Easting? Grass: the Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (California: Stanford University Press, 2012); Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010); Naeem Salik, *Learning to Live with the Bomb: 1998-2016* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017); Zulfqar Khan (ed.), *Nuclear Pakistan: Strategic Dimensions* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012); Zafar Khan, *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015); Mansoor Ahmed, "Why Pakistan Needs Tactical Nuclear Weapons," (Islamabad), May 6, 2011; RabiaAkhtar, "NASR and Pakistan's Nuclear Deterrence," May 2, 2011; ScottD. Sagan (ed.), *Inside Nuclear South Asia* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009); Bhumitra Chakma, *Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge, 2009); Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy*

Therefore, the principal rationale of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent forces is to deter India from suffering a disastrous defeat, and Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons would primarily aim at not only deterring India's large scale conventional aggression, but also nuclear strikes. More conceptually, as India learnt a lesson from the previous South Asian crises such as the Kargil episode and the Twin-Peaks incident by means of developing a military strategy for successfully carrying out offensive strikes against parts of Pakistan without inciting Pakistan to use its nuclear forces, Pakistan at the same juncture also learnt a key lesson from Indian military CSD by relying primarily on its nuclear deterrent forces to offset India's growing conventional force modernization. In this context, Montgomery and Edelman argue that, "In theory, more capable and credible nuclear forces would enable Islamabad to continue engaging in low-level aggression by deterring India from conducting conventional military operations in response."²⁵ That being noted, Pakistan's credible nuclear forces, both in terms of number and the ability to deliver these deterrent forces to the assigned targets when absolutely needed, could at best be a deterrence signaling to deter India from waging both limited and large scale aggression against Pakistan.

Since Pakistani security leadership considered carefully that the rationale of its strategic deterrent forces are only for preventing bigger conventional and nuclear warfare, it would need to develop low yield deterrent forces that in turn could deter India at the low/tactical level.²⁶ That is, it will be a flawed and directionless strategy if Pakistan uses its strategic nuclear weapons to deter Indian low scale surgical strikes and/or conventional offensive strikes against parts of Pakistan. Therefore,

in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), see Chapter on "Pakistan," 55 and 93. Andrew Bast, "Pakistan's Nuclear Calculus," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (September 2011): 73-86. Lavoy, "Islamabad Nuclear Posture," 158-159.

25 Montgomery and Edelman, "Rethinking Stability in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and the Competition for Escalation Dominance," 168-169.

26 Adil Sultan, "Pakistan's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Impact of Drivers and Technology on Nuclear Doctrine," *Strategic Studies XXXI*, no. 4 (2012): 147-167.

Pakistan developed the short range of low-yield deterrent force, Nasr. Many in Pakistan agree that Pakistan eventually developed a low-yield battlefield nuclear weapon to deter Indian military CSD. For example, Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) official press release on its successful test of Nasr in April 19, 2011 stated that it is "to add deterrence value to Pakistan's Strategic Weapons Development Program at shorter ranges." It would carry "nuclear warheads of appropriate yield with high accuracy," and it has "shoot-and-scoot attributes—essentially a quick response system to deter evolving threats."²⁷ Lt. General Khalid Kidwai, who has been the Director General of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division (SPD) for many years, is reported to have said that Nasr development for Pakistan was to fill the perceived deterrence gaps and deter the adversary at all levels of spectrum (i.e. strategic, operational, and tactical levels).²⁸ Also, General Kidwai is quoted to have remarked that Nasr development is "to pour the cold water on Cold Start."²⁹ Adil Sultan, Director Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs (ACDA), argued that, "the development of Nasr ... could fall under the category of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) possibly designed to counter India's evolving war fighting concepts of Cold Start and Pro-Active operations, which are apparently aimed at exploring space for a limited objectives war."³⁰ Zahir Kazmi at the senior position of ACDA at SPD also argued that, "Indian strategies of Cold Start—fighting under Pakistani nuclear threshold—and massive retaliation strain deterrence stability ... Islamabad has developed short-range missiles like

27 Inter Services Public Relations, Press Release No. PR 94/2011-ISPR, April 19, 2011, http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=1721.

28 "Pakistan Needs Short Range 'Tactical' Nuclear Weapons to Deter India," *Tribune*, March 24, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/858106/pakistan-needs-short-range-tactical-nuclear-weapons-to-deter-india/>; "A Conversation with Gen. Khalid Kidwai" (transcript from the Carnegie Nuclear Policy Conference, March 23, 2015), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/03-230315carnegieKIDWAI.pdf>, 9.

29 David O. Smith, *The US Experience with Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Lessons for South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, March 2013), 32.

30 Sultan, "Pakistan's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Impact of Drivers and Technology on Nuclear Doctrine," 147.

Hatf-IX (Nasr) for delivering low-yield warheads against advancing forces seeking limited war."³¹ Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's former ambassador to the US and now Pakistan's Representative to the United Nations, also argued that "the aim of this was not to induct weapons of use, but weapons of deterrence to counterbalance India's move to bring conventional military offensives to a tactical level. Its purpose is to plug the gaps evident to Indian planners and achieve full spectrum deterrence."³²

In just after a year of Pakistani battlefield nuclear tests, a credible 39 page, yet not fully referenced report on a conference conducted at the US Naval Academy discussing the development of military and nuclear policy options in South Asia highlights the thoughts of leading Pakistani and US security analysts on the arrival of and reliance on TNWs in South Asia. The report stated: "These . . . conventional strategies (CSD) have pushed Pakistan to revise its war-fighting concept by both structuring and repositioning its conventional forces. By introducing TNWs into the mix, Pakistan's response is to "maintain a credible linkage between conventional war and nuclear escalation." Pakistan's strategy is designed to make an Indian decision to initiate conventional operations—even on a limited scale—difficult, complicated, and dangerous."³³ Given the uncertainty and risk in relation to employment of TNWs, one of the Pakistani presenters stated the advantages of the development of TNWs "is precisely this danger and uncertainty that will ensure stability of deterrence in the conventional domain."³⁴

That being noted, a majority of the key readings including that of policy statements by the Pakistani security leadership reflect the common

31 Zahir Kazmi, "Nothing Tactical About Nuclear Weapons," *Express Tribune* (Islamabad), May 17, 2014.

32 Maleeha Lodhi, "Pakistan's Nuclear Compulsions," *News* (Islamabad), November 22, 2012.

33 Feroz Hassan Khan and Nick M. Masellis, "US-Pakistan Strategic Partnership: A Track II Dialogue," 2012, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA555421>, 1-39 (see p. 26).

34 *Ibid.*, 26.

understanding on the induction of Nasr that battlefield nuclear forces 1) are significant to deter India's military CSD, 2) plug the deterrence gaps at all possible levels, 3) address the issue of growing conventional asymmetry, and 4) restore deterrence stability in South Asia.

7. Unpacking the Strategic Competition between India and Pakistan: Possibility of Conflict in South Asia

In addition to the CSD for limited wars and Pakistan's development of battlefield nuclear weapons in response, many new deterrent force developments are being broadly undertaken. These deterrent forces include India's BMD system, MIRVing of both land and sea based deterrent forces, nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, SLBMs, and SLCMs. Each of these deterrent forces become a broader part of South Asian arms competition. Therefore, the potential for strategic competition between India and Pakistan embarks on further endangering the risk of serious conflicts with a potential escalation to the nuclear level. Presumably, on the one hand, India tries to increase its deterrent forces by striving hard to complete its triad forces. This appears to be India's escalation dominance strategy as conceived here in the broader Southern Asian region which in turn prepares India to be an aspirant-regional power especially when the US desires to retain its predominance in the Asia-Pacific region.

China asserts to be a regional power while India sets the stage to become a rising regional power. On the other hand, Pakistan attempts to produce effective countermeasure in what appears to be a strategy for plugging deterrence gaps and retaining balance in South Asia. The strategy Pakistani security planners adopt vis-à-vis its adversary could presume to be an act of balancing the escalation dominance. For many in Pakistan, this strategy could be to prevent Pakistan from weapon-to-weapon development strategy while retaining the balance and preserving deterrence stability in South Asia. In doing so, the Indian military aspiration for demonstrating its potential for successfully carrying out limited war against parts of

Pakistan with the confidence not to provoke Pakistan appears to be heavily ambitious and in turn could provide India an incentive to undertake limited offensive strikes. Pakistan could perceive Indian military force aggression as a threat to a sovereignty and territorial integrity that Pakistan jealously guards.

That being noted, this could quickly produce miscalculation for serious conflicts between the two South Asian arch nuclear rivals. India would have a couple of plausible options: one, if Indian civilian leadership – the top security echelon – seriously considers that the cost of Indian military CSD is too risky and great, and that it could eventually undermine the credibility of its deterrent forces, Indian civilian leadership may not operationalize the so-called CSD against Pakistan. This in turn may provide a potential signal to Pakistan not to deploy its battlefield nuclear forces for that matter. Two, since India would comprehend that the cost of its CSD deployment could be great, Indian security planners would not instantly waste the benefits of the CSD-non-deployment. However, it could explore other measures for inflicting high costs on Pakistan – that is, India could generate proxy forces inside Pakistan to generate instability, fear, and confusion.³⁵ However, proxy forces on both sides could also generate further mistrust and instability between India and Pakistan while Pakistan could declare this potential threat as part of its redlines, eventually putting pressure on India, including the international community, to consider the high risk and cost of proxy forces deployment in South Asia. Therefore, proxy forces deployment in South Asia could become prone to serious crises between India and Pakistan, engendering the risk of escalation. Third, Indian security planners could embark on offensive limited strikes against Pakistan for limited gains because of its tremendous public pressure. India could push the Indian military forces as part of the CSD to cross the international border, occupy significant parts of Pakistan, and use these unknown locations for bargaining purposes while provoking

35 See Aamir Ilyas Rana, "Afghanistan being used for proxy war against Pakistan: PM," *The Express Tribune*, February 24, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1337284/afghanistan-used-proxy-war-pakistan-pm/>.

Pakistan to deploy and use its battlefield nuclear forces. It could be India's trap strategy while provoking Pakistan to use its battlefield forces against Indian forces so that the Indian civilian government reaches out to the international community to shift the burden of responsibility on Pakistan and to eventually convince the international community to declare Pakistan as a pariah and irresponsible nuclear state or India would retaliate as part of its massive retaliation strategy. India would attempt to raise the cost for Pakistan's use of battlefield nuclear forces to a potentially higher threshold.

Striving for punitive conventional offensive strikes while deploying its own battlefield nuclear forces, India would appear to be more assertive and its nuclear policy might not remain consistent with what Indian security leadership earlier conceptualized for several reasons: 1) India would not be the first to use nuclear forces by principally following the NFU nuclear option; 2) India would not engage in bigger arms race with Pakistan in general and China in particular; 3) it would follow the recessed/non-weaponized deterrence; and 4) India would only use its nuclear forces as part of its retaliatory nuclear strategy.³⁶ Nevertheless, while observing India's contemporary nuclear strategy in the changed strategic environment, Narang is not too optimistic about these essentials with regard to India's nuclear policy. He believes that India's DRDO is trying to make the most, if not all, of its nuclear capable deterrence forces ready to be deployed against its potential adversaries.³⁷

36 For readings on Indian nuclear policy and its essentials, see Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, "India's Nuclear Use Doctrine," in *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons*, eds. Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Ashley J. Tellis, "India's Emerging Nuclear Doctrine: Exemplifying the Lessons of the Nuclear Revolution," *NBR Analysis* 12/2 (May 2001); Stephen Philip Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2001), Chapter no. 6; Stephen Philip Cohen, "Is India Ending its Strategic Restraint Doctrine?," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (spring 2011): 163-177; Harsh V. Pant, "India's Nuclear Doctrine and Command Structure: Implications for India and the World," *Comparative Strategy* 24, no.3 (July 2005): 277-293.

37 Vipin Narang, "Five Myths about India's Nuclear Posture," *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 143-157.

Considering this, Indian security leadership might plan the combination of both counterforce and counter-value targeting options.³⁸ Its short range missiles such as Prahaar, Brahmos, and Nirbhay could ideally be used for counterforce targeting while its intermediate and long-range missiles are specially designed for counter-value targeting options when it comes to the Indian nuclear strategy of massive retaliation. However, India could utilize its long-range missiles up to the ICBM level for a mass destruction and power projection strategy while considering itself to be amongst the established nuclear states who have already acquired their ICBMs. Conceptually, if the Indian forces advancing inside Pakistani territory are hit by the Pakistani battlefield nuclear forces, then India may consider the nuclear option. For example, the Indian Cabinet Committee has stated in 2003 that a "nuclear weapon will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or Indian forces anywhere."³⁹ The former Indian Chief of the Army Staff General V.K. Singh reaffirmed India's nuclear option in retaliation. Singh stated bluntly, "Let us be quite clear that nuclear weapons are not for war fighting...they have got a strategic capability and that is where it should end."⁴⁰ Also, a non-governmental, but significantly influential Indian National Security Advisory Board presented their justification for India's nuclear responses in the wake of Pakistan's use of battlefield nuclear forces against Indian forces. The board argued, "India will not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but if it is attacked with such weapons, it would engage in nuclear retaliation which will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage on its adversary... the label on a nuclear weapon used for attacking India, strategic or tactical, is irrelevant from the Indian perspective."⁴¹

38 For discussion see, Clary and Narang, "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities," 16-25.

39 Prime Minister's Office, "Cabinet Committee on Security Reviews Progress in Operationalizing India's Nuclear Doctrine," January 4, 2003, <<http://pib.nic.in/archive/lreleng/lyr2003/rjan2003/04012003/r040120033.html>>.

40 General V.K. Singh, quoted in "Nukes Only for Strategic Purposes: Army Chief," *The Indian Express*, January 16, 2012.

41 Quoted in Indrani Bagchi, "Strike by Even a Midget Nuke Will Invite Massive

Although the Indian top leadership has not officially declared that it would rescind its doctrinal posture of the NFU option, these credible statements reflect India's departure from its NFU option as it could seriously consider the use of nuclear forces as part of its evolving nuclear strategy. Though it could not be a rational approach, India could use its nuclear strategy of massive retaliation as a "shield behind which Indian conventional forces could be engaged in an offensive conventional attack inside Pakistan."⁴² The strategy behind India's offensive strikes against different parts of Pakistan as part of Indian military CSD is to "...counter the Pakistani threat of using nuclear weapons first inside Pakistan against Indian armored divisions threatening to defeat the Pakistan Army."⁴³ Nevertheless, India might consider using the short range nuclear capable missiles as part of an Indian limited war fighting strategy in response to Pakistan's possible deployment of its battlefield nuclear forces against the advancing Indian military forces inside Pakistani territory.⁴⁴

Although many in India perceive that the development of CSD is to prevent so-called terrorism across the border, Indian military CSD supported by India's punitive strike strategy could have broader implications for the strategic stability of South Asia. One, it provides an incentive to Indian security planners both at the strategic and tactical levels to revamp India's nuclear policy from NFU to FU nuclear option. To conceptualize this further: since the Indian military CSD may not offset Pakistan's asymmetric strategy of using its nuclear forces first as a last resort in the event of serious crises, Indian security planners may consider that the proposed FU nuclear option could be viable in order to prevent Pakistan from using its deterrent forces first. This is recently discussed in India at a quasi-official level, though the Indian government has not yet declared the proposed shift officially with regard to its FU nuclear

Response, India Warns Pak," *Times of India*, April 30, 2013.

42 Scott D. Sagan (ed.), "The Evolution of Indian and Pakistani Nuclear Doctrine," in *Inside Nuclear South Asia* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 250 and 252.

43 Ibid.

44 Narang, "Five Myths about India's Nuclear Posture," 145-146.

option.⁴⁵ Two, while considering using nuclear forces for limited warfare as part of its CSD, the Indian military strategy could rely on nuclear weapons more than it earlier conceptualized in its previous nuclear drafts policy. The reliance on nuclear forces would make India appear aggressive in its strategic approach, and the similar approach could further enable India to deploy most of its nuclear forces ready to be launched on the Indian leadership order. Three, this could make India's strategic rival China worry since this option could have security implications for the Chinese interest in the broader Indo-Pacific region, though Chinese nuclear deterrence is not primarily Indian-specific. Apparently, it is India that factors in China much more than China does to fundamentally bring India into its strategic calculus. However, the contemporary Indian conventional force modernization and acquisition of advanced nuclear force delivery systems with bigger ranges (especially bringing the US-India growing strategic partnership into consideration) make the regional rising power China worry. This could eventually threaten Chinese security interest in the Southern Asian region when it comes to contemporary competing strategies in Asia-Pacific region. Four, inducting nuclear forces as part of the Indian CSD increases the chances of Indian battlefield nuclear weapons deployment to the field commander, making the Indian military confront the issues associated with the TNWs (i.e. pre-delegation, command and control issues, use and lose security dilemma). This in turn increases the risk of miscalculation and inadvertence. Finally, if the Indian military relies on nuclear forces for waging a limited nuclear war while particularly associating its battlefield nuclear weapons with the CSD, it could provoke Pakistan to deploy its battlefield nuclear weapons and ultimately lower the nuclear threshold vis-à-vis the Indian bigger conventional force advances, including that of its nuclear forces.

45 Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2016).

8. Conclusion

The mutual vulnerabilities on both sides will make the South Asian security leadership think cautiously before they bring their military strategies into action in what appears to be war-fighting strategies between India and Pakistan that in turn could engender the risk of serious conflicts. The good news is that neither has India operationalized its CSD against Pakistan (although India has already undertaken a number of military exercises on the CSD development) nor has Pakistan considered the immediate deployment of its battlefield nuclear forces in response to Indian military CSD against Pakistan.

The bad news is that India and Pakistan have not yet resolved all the outstanding issues including the core and complex issue of Kashmir, and they continue to be prone to many serious crises emitting out of these issues including that of the emerging issue of terrorism. For example, terrorism remains the topmost agenda item for India while Pakistan considers Kashmir to be the topmost agenda while terrorism remains one of the agenda items in the proposed Composite Dialogue process between New Delhi and Islamabad. An even worse scenario could be if the dialogue process at the bigger level has ended between the two sides, and India and Pakistan are not formally and consistently talking to each other on these issues.

When it comes to the development of war-fighting strategies in South Asia, India desires to operationalize its CSD against Pakistan without provoking Pakistan to use its battlefield while Pakistan would like to use its battlefield nuclear forces to prevent the advances of Indian military offensive strike forces without letting Indian security leadership consider using its nuclear forces as part of India's nuclear strategy of massive retaliation. This becomes significant, but each side fails to consider what the other side frames the unfolding South Asian threat scenario. The South Asian security leadership will have to use their cognitive instincts in order not to be completely confident in their war-fighting strategies in that they have designed to prevent each other

from offensive strikes in the first place, but actually this over-reliance on these war-fighting strategies could trigger serious conflicts that could spiral out of control. The key readings in the existing literature draw our attention to the fact that South Asian war-fighting strategies are fraught with weakness and obstacles, thereby, unlikely to be deployed without expecting miscalculation and inadvertence. Therefore, more conceptually, if India and Pakistan tend to convert most of their nuclear capable deterrent forces while ready to be deployed for action, the prospects for miscalculation and inadvertence get higher. However, if the South Asian nuclear rivals are locked by mutual vulnerabilities and, thereby, largely practice nuclear restraint, nuclear moratorium, and non-weaponized nuclear deterrence, then the possibility of nuclear conflict decreases and serious conflicts in turn could likely be prevented in South Asia.

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