

## PAKISTAN'S AMBIGUOUS NUCLEAR DOCTRINE PRIMA FACIE DETERRENCE AIMED AT WAR AVOIDANCE AND INDIA'S QUEST FOR COMPELLENCE

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### **Abstract**

*Nuclear weapons are not war-fighting arsenals but weapons of deterrence, which is articulated through nuclear doctrine. Nuclear doctrine provides a framework that determines development, deployment, and conditions in which states may consider its use. All nuclear states, except Pakistan, have declared the First Use and No First Use policy. Pakistan has adopted a different approach and has not publicly declared its nuclear doctrine, leaving it vague and ambiguous. However, statements of significant officials denote scattered strands of Pakistani nuclear doctrine, which led to the policy of Full Spectrum Deterrence. Full Spectrum Deterrence is neither a first-use nor no-first-use policy; instead, it is a military capability to avoid wars that deter India across the entire threat spectrum and prevent India from attempting any aggression in all continuums of warfare. This has limited Indian aggressive capabilities and forced a rethinking of its NFU, including its conventional doctrine for achieving compellence benefits against Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Deterrence, India, Pakistan, Compellence, No First Use, Full Spectrum Deterrence, Credible Minimum Deterrence.

### **Introduction**

**A**fter the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through the use of nuclear weapons, the international community has unanimously agreed that nukes are not weapons of war but are maintained for deterrence only. The

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factors of deterrence, like capability, credibility, communication, rationality, resolve, consistency, strategic environment and assessment of cost benefits analysis, primarily emanate from nuclear doctrine. Nuclear doctrine denotes the vital principles and guidelines governing a nation's use and control of nuclear weapons. Nuclear doctrines address queries regarding deterrence, compellence, escalation control, non-proliferation, arms control, and disarmament.<sup>1</sup>

Nuclear doctrines may adopt different postures, including "first use"<sup>2</sup> (the willingness to initiate nuclear strikes), "no first use"<sup>3</sup> (assurance to use nuclear weapons only in response to a nuclear attack), or "assured retaliation"<sup>4</sup> (building a secure second-strike capability as a deterrent against potential aggression). These doctrines can also involve different readiness levels and launch authority pre-delegation. Overall, nuclear doctrines play a crucial role in shaping a nation's approach to nuclear weapons, ensuring strategic stability, and managing the risks associated with the possession of nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup>

Russia, the U.S., the U.K., and France maintain the first-use policy.<sup>6</sup> China has maintained a policy of no first use since its first nuclear test in 1964.<sup>7</sup> India adopted a no-first-use policy in 1998 after re-conducting its nuclear tests.<sup>8</sup> However, specific reports and interviews by key stakeholders indicate that Indians are revising this policy based on changes in their security environments.<sup>9</sup> These Security environments and evolving changes are primarily the results of Indian Hindutva aspirations and quest for attaining the regional and global power status. Consequently, a gradual shift from massive retaliation to a flexible response and revisiting no-first-use policy have been witnessed over the years.<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan conducted its successful nuclear tests in 1998 and has not declared any nuclear doctrine regarding first use or no first use and kept it ambiguous, cogitating the conventional asymmetry with its arch-rival India.<sup>11</sup> Pakistan's nuclear deterrence remains under discussion because it is perceived that the non-declaration of nuclear doctrine affects the deterrence regime. However, Pakistan has discovered a unique path to maintain deterrence against India by not officially declaring its nuclear doctrine and radiating deterrence signals through the statements of critical officials that suit their security environment, thus keeping it ambiguous and non-declaratory. The comprehensive analysis of the statements of critical officials led to the conclusion that Pakistan has adopted the policy of full-spectrum nuclear deterrence under the auspices of credible minimum deterrence<sup>12</sup>. Few authors have argued that full-spectrum

deterrence is Pakistan's actual nuclear doctrine. Still, conversely, Pakistan has not officially called it a nuclear doctrine, nor does this full spectrum deterrence meet the criteria and contain essential ingredients of nuclear doctrine. This further increases Pakistan's ambiguity regarding its nuclear policy.

India and Pakistan fought conventional wars in 1948, 1965, and 1971, and a minor volatile border conflict limited to the Kargil sector in 1999. However, the results of 1948, 1965, and 1971 were nearly conclusive.<sup>13</sup> After attaining nuclear capability by Pakistan, the results of all the border standoffs, inadvertent escalations, and even the Kargil conflict in 1999 were not conclusive because of nuclear deterrence. Few authors argue that Kargil was an entire-scale war under the nuclear overhang. But if we analyse it thoroughly, it becomes clear that Pakistan neither used its air force nor officially accepted the involvement of the army in this conflict. Moreover, the conflict remained localised in the Kargil sector and didn't spiral out in other sectors, especially at declared international borders, because of nuclear deterrence. Therefore, it is evident that Pakistan's nuclear deterrence was never breached<sup>14</sup>. After Kargil, there were escalations, including the Pulwama fiasco, but both countries remained at bay and did not escalate the situation into war. Therefore, in the backdrop of the above-discussed historical perspective, it may be concluded that Pakistan's officially undeclared and ambiguous nuclear doctrine has worked very well and avoided wars with India.

Conversely, India maintains its stance as a major player in the Indian Ocean region and claims to maintain a robust military capability to discourage adversaries from taking unfavourable action. However, one can argue that this Indian military capability supported by resources of 5th and 6th generation warfare capabilities does radiate deterrence but not absolute deterrence<sup>15</sup>. Any state which possesses absolute deterrence, it may transit into the compellence domain, and India remains short of it in South Asia<sup>16</sup>. In India-Pakistan context, absolute deterrence leading to compellence is absent between two belligerents<sup>17</sup>. However, India may achieve compellence benefits with smaller South Asian nations like Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Bangladesh but not Pakistan<sup>18</sup>.

### **Credible Minimum Deterrence and Escalation Ladder**

Pakistan maintains the posture of credible minimum deterrence. However, it was widely discussed and argued that India tried to fight a limited war under the overhang of the nuclear umbrella during the Kargil conflict.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in the Kargil conflict, Pakistan's war avoidance deterrence worked,

which forced India to restrict the conflict to a limited area of operation in disputed territory on the line of actual control. From the perspective of deterrence optimists, "the Kargil War is a clear-cut case of nuclear-armed countries at war intentionally limiting their military operations to avoid escalation."<sup>20</sup> Nuclear "deterrence almost self-evidently worked"<sup>21</sup> in the Kargil crisis. The Kargil conflict was triggered in an area where limited skirmishes between two countries are prevalent features. Both countries kept on capturing each other's small tactical positions to convince the international community that the border was not internationally recognised, and it remains a ceasefire line between the two countries after the unjust partition by the British in 1947 through Redcliff demarcation. In the Kargil conflict, the countries did not use naval or air forces by crossing either international borders or line of control or even the line of actual control where both troops were engaged in battle duels.<sup>22</sup> India did use air force, but it remained restricted to the Indian side of the line of actual control, and Indian Airforce was deterred to cross it.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the Kargil conflict was not a war in the classical approach, and it did not affect Pakistan's state of deterrence.<sup>24</sup>

Pakistan maintained credible minimum deterrence by forcing India not to take unfavourable action of crossing international borders. Furthermore, neither country was embedded on the 'rungs of the escalation ladder' path in the Kargil conflict. In the context of nuclear war, the "rungs of the escalation ladder"<sup>25</sup> refer to the various levels or stages of increased military action and intensity that can potentially occur during an escalating conflict between nuclear-armed nations. Each rung signifies a higher level of aggression or escalation, typically associated with using more destructive and lethal military capabilities.<sup>26</sup> The ladder highlights the progression of increasing severity and impact of attacks, starting from conventional warfare and potentially advancing to the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>27</sup> The "rungs" on this ladder might include Ladder-1, Conventional Forces: Initial engagements through regular military forces, such as ground troops, naval vessels, and aircraft.<sup>28</sup> Ladder-2, Limited Force: Escalation to limited military force could involve strikes against military installations or infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> Ladder-3, Strategic Force: deployment or threat of strategic weapons, such as long-range missiles or bombers, substantially threatening an adversary's national security.<sup>30</sup> Ladder-4, Tactical Nuclear Weapon: Using low-yield or battlefield nuclear weapons to gain a military advantage.<sup>31</sup> Ladder-5, Regional or Limited Nuclear Exchange: Engaging in a limited nuclear conflict, encompassing a few targets or limited geographical areas, without aiming for full-scale destruction.<sup>32</sup> Ladder 6, Full-Scale Nuclear Exchange: The deployment and

utilisation of a significant number of nuclear weapons, impacting multiple targets and potentially resulting in widespread destruction and loss of life.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of the escalation ladder serves as a guideline to understand the potential development of a conflict and the ever-increasing risks associated with a nuclear war. However, belligerents do not need to adopt a typical pattern of escalation ladder in case of war.<sup>34</sup> However, in the Pakistani context of the Kargil war, no paths leading to full-scale war were slewed. Though both countries deployed their conventional forces on international borders, skirmishes and troops' engagement in battles were also limited to the Kargil sector, which was on the line of actual control.<sup>35</sup> Pakistan exercised strategic restraint and prudence, and its naval and air forces did not engage any target across the spectrum of Indo-Pak borders.<sup>36</sup> The nuclear deterrence of Pakistan played a pivotal role in war avoidance due to inherent ambiguity in its nuclear doctrine, which kept Indians at bay who did not dare to cross the international borders to wage full-scale war.<sup>37</sup>

### **Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence to Avoid War**

The nuclearisation of South Asia has created a state of balance between India and Pakistan, whereas simultaneously twisted the situation into an arms race between two nuclear states. The Observation, Orientation, Decision, and Action (OODA) loop for leadership has become far more complicated, and policymakers face complete decision paralysis while deciding on the prosecution of the war. Owing to India's conventional superiority over Pakistan, India has declared a nuclear no-first-use policy (NFU).<sup>38</sup> Indian NFU entails that India will not be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict, which makes India vulnerable to Pakistan's nuclear strikes in self-defence at a critical stage of conflict, dreading conventional defeat, endangering national security, or existential threat.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons has made India reluctant to escalate disputes with Pakistan, fearing nuclear retaliation.<sup>40</sup> India faces limitations in obtaining limited victory in conventional war against Pakistan due to geography, geopolitical environment, domestic/international pressures, fear of nuclear war, and the existence of Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, Pakistan has also completed the nuclear triad and attained sea, air, and land-based nuclear launching capability.<sup>42</sup> Pakistan possesses all the means of full-spectrum nuclear deterrence.<sup>43</sup> The most documented evidence regarding Pakistan's nuclear capability is a conversation by Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai (retired) during the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy

Conference in 2015 and his latest statement on May 26, 2023, at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) just before the anniversary of Pakistan nuclear detonation in May.<sup>44</sup> He highlighted the unpredictable regional environment within South Asia, where nuclear powers attempt to convey lessons to each other amid the volatile situation along the Line of Control (LoC) and in the disputed territory of Kashmir. Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai (retired) stressed that the primary factor defining the current South Asian strategic environment is the potential use of nuclear weapons in any conflict. The critical points of Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai's (retired) address at ISSI in 2023 should be emphasised here again. He said that Pakistan's current nuclear deterrent abilities are built around an adequate triad of strategic assets with capabilities based on land, air, and sea that can completely deter incursion.<sup>45</sup> These are outlined in the Full Spectrum Doctrine policy and function under the National Command Authority and Strategic Plans Division's robust command and control framework.<sup>46</sup> He went on to say that Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence capacity is made up horizontally of a substantial tri-services stockpile of multiple kinds of nuclear weapons, or a trio if you will, while still adhering to the broader concept of Credible Minimum Deterrence. "It is held on land with the Army Strategic Force Command (ASFC), at sea with the Naval Strategic Force Command (NSFC), and in the air with the Air Force Strategic Command (AFSC)."<sup>47</sup> The spectrum vertically encompasses nuclear weapons' lethal capacities at three levels: "strategic, operational, and tactical," and sufficient range coverage "from 0 meters to 2750 kilometres."

Many analysts, including Pakistani authors, widely discussed the above statement of zero range. Dr Adil Sultan stated, "The newer explanation of Full Spectrum Deterrence includes developing a zero-meter range of weapons capability."<sup>48</sup> He believes that Pakistan's nuclear policy generally maintains ambiguity on its nuclear use policy, where this particular explanation reflects official thinking in Pakistan. He further stated that this new explanation may create misrepresentations that "Pakistan now possesses nuclear RPGs and artillery shells."<sup>49</sup> Another author, Sitara Noor, also shares that "there is a possibility that this assertion is a reflection of his personal opinion and not a statement of an official position."<sup>50</sup> Ejaz Haider, a prominent journalist in Pakistan, wrote that:

*The spectrum [FSD] encapsulates adequate range coverage from zero metres to 2,750 km and destructive yields at strategic, operational and tactical tiers. This is graduated war-fighting by any definition! Certainly not Credible Minimum Deterrence. What is "zero" metres? nuclear Demolition Munitions or Mines? The concept the U.S. used for years before*

*it realised how infeasible it was? And what's with the absolutely "precise" 2750 km range? The ranges were kept secret or ambiguous. Why such precision now? If the idea is to signal that Andaman and Nicobar naval stations can be targeted, that can be managed without giving the precise range. Or is the accurate range to assuage the U.S., whose talking points with Pakistan include Intercontinental Ballistic Missile ranges? We are unclear, and Lt-Gen Kidwai has not clarified these points. Deliberate ambiguity?<sup>51</sup>*

During an academic interaction at the Center for International Strategic Studies Sindh, Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai (retired) was asked about his statement. Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai (retired) clarifies that:

*I wonder if Pakistan is considering making Zero-range weapons. It is interesting to note that this particular portion of my statement has drawn the attention of some analysts. Unfortunately, to the exclusion of much else, I said in the message. I had mentioned the Zero-meter range metaphorically. Ranges of our [Pakistan] missiles are well known. Any other interpretation of what I said is entirely speculative.<sup>52</sup>*

After thoroughly analysing Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai's (retired) statement, one can conclude that this may limit India's ability to act unilaterally and contribute to uncertainties about India's deterrence capabilities against Pakistan. Continuous unresolved border disputes and frequent border skirmishes on line of control and line of actual control between India and Pakistan indicate that even Indian deterrence has not been entirely effective in the Pakistani context, instead claiming phony aspirations of compellence benefits. However, the unresolved Kashmir issue and deep-rooted animosity between the two nations have generated a constant threat of nuclear warfighting in South Asia. The nuclear war is only being averted due to the existence of credible deterrence. Pakistan has deliberately not announced (publicly available document) its nuclear doctrine<sup>53</sup> and kept it secret to maintain the state of deterrence and ambiguity that suits Pakistan.<sup>54</sup> Whenever India lopsided the equation through aggressive posture or manifestation of conventional capability, Pakistan rapidly regained the balance, not letting India dominate escalation<sup>55</sup>, resulting in a state of deterrence.

## **India's Quest for Compellence**

On December 13, 2001, five armed men attacked the Indian Parliament building in New Delhi, killing nine people, including security officials. India blamed Pakistan for sponsoring the armed militants. In response, India launched Operation Parakram, a large-scale military mobilisation aimed at coercing Pakistan. Both countries' armed forces remained eyeball-to-eyeball for over a

year.<sup>56</sup> Any misunderstanding, miscalculation, or outbreak of conventional war might have resulted in a nuclear exchange between the two nuclear belligerents. In this military standoff, India could not maintain its compellence posture; however, Pakistan deterred conventional war.<sup>57</sup> India's efforts to gain international support to isolate Pakistan in the aftermath of the attack also failed, despite the Indian government's attempt to equate it with the 9/11 terrorist attacks<sup>58</sup> in the U.S. and the U.S.' initiation of the Global War on Terrorism.

On November 26, 2008, ten militants attacked prominent locations in Mumbai, including the famed Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. The Indian government blamed Pakistan-based militant groups for the attack and demanded action against them.<sup>59</sup> Following the attack, tensions between India and Pakistan escalated. Pakistan denied any involvement in the attack but agreed to cooperate with India in the investigation. In retaliation to the attack, India mobilised its military along its borders with Pakistan and threatened full-scale war for seeking compellence benefits. In response to the Indian aggressive posture, Pakistan mobilised its troops. Both countries conducted several military aggressive postures and test-fired nuclear-capable missiles. The situation remained tense for several months, including implementing a no-fly zone in the respective airspace. The situation was defused when both countries agreed to de-escalate their forces to peace locations. During the entire period of escalation, a state of deterrence prevailed, and compellence benefits, including space for conventional war, were denied to India by Pakistan.<sup>60</sup>

On February 14, 2019, a suicide bomber attacked a convoy of Indian security forces in Pulwama, killing 40 soldiers. The attack was not the deadliest in the region because Pakistan suffered civilian casualties of more than 150 students/teachers in APS Peshawar in 2014, despite clear proofs of Indian involvement in the incident,<sup>61</sup> Pakistan did not initiate war by exercising strategic restraint. However, in the case of Pulwama, India did not exercise restraint due to its conventional asymmetry and straight away blamed Pakistan for providing support to the terrorist group without conducting any investigation into the incident. In response to the Pulwama attack, India launched airstrikes in Pakistani territory near Balakot town on February 26, 2019. The Indian government claimed it was a successful surgical strike that killed a significant number of terrorists.

Nevertheless, in reality, Indian jets only caused minor damage to trees in the forest, and any independent sources reported no human loss.<sup>62</sup> This incident

further escalated tensions between the two countries. Pakistan retaliated for violation of its airspace and the release of payload by Indian jets on Pakistani soil.<sup>63</sup> In response to Indian aggression, the Pakistan Air Force released the payload of F-16 fighter jets near Indian military installations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir while remaining within the limits of Pakistani airspace.<sup>64</sup> In a hot pursuit and aerial combat between Indian and Pakistan air forces, Pakistan Air Force shot down two Indian fighter jets that attempted to violate Pakistan's airspace. Out of two aircrafts, one Indian fighter jet crashed into Pakistani soil, and its pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan, was captured alive.<sup>65</sup> Pakistan's military strength on the international stage reaffirmed deterrence, denied the space for conventional war, and refuted the notion of a new normal.

On August 5, 2019, the Indian government revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and split it into two Union Territories.<sup>66</sup> The Pakistani government strongly condemned the revocation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union territories by the Indian government as a violation of the U.N. resolutions and an attempt to change the demographic composition of the region.<sup>67</sup> Pakistan downgraded its diplomatic relations with India. India's stance on the issue was hegemonic and a step towards the manifestation of the more incredible India concept. The Indian Government argued that the revocation of Article 370 was to integrate Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir fully into India.

The Indian decision to revoke Article 370 was the demonstration of political might by the Indian government under Narendra Modi's leadership to actualise their dream of "Akhand Bharat" more excellent India.<sup>68</sup> The extremist mindset of Narendra Modi can be traced back to 2002 when Narendra Modi ordered the massacre of over 2,000 Muslims in Gujrat. In this tragic incident, Narendra Modi was the mastermind of the brutal killing of women and children in an attempt at genocide of Muslims in Gujrat. He was Chief Minister of Gujarat and simultaneously head of the Hindu extremist party. He used police and other govt paraphernalia as instruments to ransack and set ablaze the houses of Muslims and indiscriminate killing of innocent people.<sup>69</sup>

Narendra Modi has been accused of working rigorously on the agenda of "Akhand Bharat," the more excellent Indian concept where initially, the entire Asian subcontinent and subsequently the world will submit under Hindu rule.<sup>70</sup> This extremist mindset resembling the Nazi Germany concept has flattered alarms

of nuclear conflict in South Asia. Only full spectrum deterrence of Pakistan is operative as a buffer between extremist Narendra Modi and the rest of the world. Whenever deterrence is breached, the world will be once again at risk of Nazi Germany-type invasion by Indian extremists.

On March 9, 2022, an Indian Brahmos supersonic missile was launched from Suratgarh into Pakistani territory.<sup>71</sup> It substantially threatened human life, property, global and regional security, and stability. After the incident, the government of India ordered an internal inquiry into the incident and fired three air force officials for "accidentally firing a missile"<sup>72</sup> into Pakistan. The incident heightened tensions between the two nuclear weapons states. Delhi blamed the "deplorable" incident on a "technical malfunction" during routine maintenance.

Islamabad cautioned Delhi to "be mindful of the unpleasant consequences of such negligence"<sup>73</sup> and to avoid repeating the mistake. According to the reports, an inquiry determined that the officers' "deviation from Standard Operating Procedure" resulted in the accidental discharge of the Brahmos missile.<sup>74</sup> According to Pakistan's military, the missile "endangered many passenger and international flights in Indian and Pakistani airspace" as well as "human life and property on the ground."<sup>75</sup> After the event, India's defence minister, Rajnath Singh, stated that India valued its weapon system's "safety and security"<sup>76</sup> and that any flaws discovered would be addressed following an investigation. Pakistan called for a joint investigation into India's reckless actions, which violated international law, the United Nations Charter, and safety standards. India's strategic weapons management system has been identified with technological and operational issues. Pakistan also demands a clearer understanding of security protocols and technical safeguards against accidental or unauthorised missile launches in a nuclearised environment.<sup>77</sup> Pakistan rejects India's purported closure of the incident of the firing of a supersonic Missile into Pakistani territory and reiterates its demand for a joint probe.<sup>78</sup>

This incident may lead to two conclusions: first, there were India's efforts to undermine the state of deterrence between the two countries, and second, it was a tester for checking Pakistan's response in the event of an actual nuclear strike by India. In both assumptions, deterrence remained in place, and action brought a bad name to the Indian armed forces and raised questions about Indian security systems.

## **Conclusion**

Indian nuclear doctrine is based on a policy of deterrence for China and supports compellence for Pakistan. India views its nuclear weapons as a means to ensure its national security in the face of potential threats from other nuclear-armed countries, primarily China and Pakistan. India believes it can better safeguard its national interests by deterring a direct attack on its territory. India's possession of nuclear weapons is a way to gain hegemony in the South Asian region. The idea is to fight a limited conventional war with Pakistan under the overhang of the nuclear umbrella. If Pakistan retaliates, India will project its nuclear capability as an escalation dominance tool against Pakistan. However, the Indian quest to launch compellence for Pakistan may not be supportive of its nuclear doctrine as Pakistan's Full Spectrum Nuclear Deterrence remains a war avoidance mechanism to thwart Indian aggression in South Asia.

The chances of a nuclear conflict between P5 are rare, but in the case of the India-Pakistan scenario, the possibility of nuclear exchange becomes pronounced due to conventional asymmetry. The economies of India, Pakistan, and neighbouring countries would suffer significantly, as their economies already suffered due to past crises.

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