

ESCALATING CRISES BETWEEN INDIA-PAKISTAN AND DETERRENCE STABILITY: A PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The paper argues that India's crafting of escalatory strategies is dangerously destabilizing the strategic stability and deterrence matrix of South Asia. The geostrategic transformation has accorded India a critical role under the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy to contain the rise of China. Most significantly, India's conventional and nuclear strategy appears to be aggressive and, on the other hand, Pakistan has too crafted a reactive full spectrum strategy to inflict severe punishment upon the rival with aim to deter it from either coercing or imposing a limited war particularly in the wake of restructuring of India's nuclear NFU policy. Pakistan's volatility coupled with India's restructuring of nuclear policy is a sure recipe for catastrophic disaster either by doing 'crazy things,' 'firing nuclear shots,' or by displaying 'will' to strike first?

Keywords: Pakistan, India, Nuclear, NFU, Stability, Deterrence, Crisis, War.

Introduction

This paper aims to critically analyze the Pulwama crisis of February 2019, and its impact on the viability of deterrence. Prima facie, a series of crises is pushing India and Pakistan on a perilous escalatory trajectory. This study will employ various theoretical lenses with a view to objectively assess India-Pakistan's conflicting strategies against each other, and implications for the strategic stability of South Asia.

Commenting on various dimensions of strategy, Colin S. Gray writes that: "Poor strategy is expensive, bad strategy can be lethal," and "when the stakes

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including, very bad strategy is almost always fatal.” He further observes that, “*Modern Strategy* is about the theory and practice of the use, and threat of use, of organized force for political purposes.”¹ However, strategy can become a redundant affair if it is not pragmatic,² which would exert adverse implications upon the behavior of the rivals, as it is the case between India and Pakistan. Since the overt nuclearization of India and Pakistan in 1998, the frequency of crises between the rivals has escalated: Kargil in 1999; Twin Peaks 2001 and 2002; Mumbai 2008; and Pulwama 2019. Apparently, India seems to be endeavoring to establish escalation dominance over Pakistan, which is quite dangerous development that is likely to exert destabilizing effect upon the volatile security environment of South Asia. Frequent outbreaks of crises in spite of both countries demonstrated nuclear weapons capability would lead them to the brink of a nuclear conflict either through miscalculations, accidentally or inadvertently. India clearly seems to be under illusion that it can employ its conventional forces edge to compel or to institute coercive diplomacy³ against Pakistan without crossing latter’s redlines; and assumes that the latter would not retaliate, either with conventional or nuclear forces. In fact, in case the deterrence structure is either threatened or eroded due to India’s aggressive conventional military plan/posturing - than stability fabric too would wear away. “For instance, if New Delhi was wrong and Islamabad did attempt to stop an invasion with battlefield nuclear weapons, it would shatter the taboo against nuclear use,” write Evan Braden Montgomery and Eric S. Edelman. On the other hand, “if Islamabad was wrong and New Delhi did respond with nuclear weapons, the result could be an economic, environmental, and humanitarian catastrophe.”⁴ Such an unpredictable security environment could become a catalyst for eruption of more crises. India supposed to be pursuing a coercive strategy against Pakistan with looming threat of “application of force to influence” its action.⁵ However, Pakistan seems to have embraced a restraining strategy or a “strategic deterrence” coated with “restraint and punishment” policy to deal with India’s posturing.⁶

Rationality & Deterrence

Having said this, it is significant to note that deterrence is liable to fail as states do not necessarily always behave in a rational way.⁷ The rival’s mutual mistrust, rivalry, and strategic cultural biases are deep rooted, and are premised on divergent poles. In such a security situation, the element of rationality and “the construction of threat” needs to be rationalized by understanding “the core of the theory of deterrence” otherwise sustainability of deterrence would become more challenging and complex security dilemma.⁸ Obviously, in such a flux security setting, any strategy to sustain a stable deterrence would be hard.⁹ Furthermore,

strategy and deterrence would remain ambiguous, therefore, the outcome would be hard to *predict*. In such a situation where the balance of power is asymmetrical, therefore, the prospects of escalation of more crises would tend to intensify, as we have witnessed during the past and Pulwama crises. In such a security matrix, threat has to be credible and backed-up with robust capabilities along with political leaderships' firm resolve to dissuade adversary from venturing on a military misadventure.¹⁰

The conflict ridden South Asian security caveat further complicates the viability of strategy, deterrence, and consequently would blur the concept of rationality. Therefore, it is significant to critically and objectively assess the evolving situation dispassionately in view of both countries huge cultural, religious, and historical baggage that to this date is influencing their adversarial behavior/relations. In the whole saga, strategic cultural factor is also of paramount significance that continues to negatively impact the "ideational milieu which limits behavioral choices" due to multiple factors, including rival states' shared historical sources that influence their national moorings.¹¹ Another scholar describes strategic culture as a "system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."¹² In the case of India and Pakistan, they see each other as "threat."¹³ Particularly in the case of Pakistan's nuclear behavior, it was primarily deeply influenced by 1971 war; and since then it aimed to "avoid another... conventional defeat at the hands of the Indians."¹⁴ Lowell Dittmer writes that "Pakistan's motive for the acquisition of nuclear weapons is...far less complex and more conventional: national security oriented".¹⁵ Other scholars also observe that the "core aim of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program is to prevent a repetition of 1971," and "to deter an Indian attack that might reduce Pakistan's size even further, or perhaps even put the country out of existence entirely."¹⁶ Therefore, the "fear" prominently factor in Pakistan's strategic culture, which may make "war inevitable." As fear has been the major cause of past wars including Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens.¹⁷

Dimensions of Escalation

Herman Kahn states that to some people "escalation connotes an automatic rise in the scale of warfare from the level of an incident to the level of catastrophic nuclear exchange." He observes that it could lead to "calculated risk taking that is an established factor of limited conflict in the nuclear age," as we have witnessed during the Pulwama crisis of 2019. Kahn further elaborates that: "Strategies that emphasize the possibility of escalation are associated with the term

‘brinkmanship’.”¹⁸ In fact, the tension ridden security milieu of South Asia is too witnessing a reckless level of brinkmanship. The Pulwama crisis signifies that both countries seem to be dangerously pursuing *reckless* brinkmanship policies that possess seeds to spiral out of control, which at some juncture could even make it harder for the third-party to timely defuse it, or even to mediate. Their neurological mutual animosity would make it harder, if not impossible altogether, to control the chain-reaction emanating from their aggressive brinkmanship. India apparently aims to establish its hegemony over Pakistan and, on the other hand, the latter seems to be pursuing a well-calibrated proportionate strategy to protect itself from ostensible existential threat originating from former’s alleged dominating and aggressive posturing. According to Pakistani perspective, the structure of India-Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence is lopsided both in military and strategic connotations. “India plans to deliberately escalate a limited war against Pakistan. Pakistan is determined to neutralize India’s schema on different planes, a limited conventional, limited nuclear to strategic nuclear wars. It is destabilizing and complicating South Asia’s nuclear deterrence matrix.”¹⁹

Since the overt nuclearization of South Asia, Islamabad in reaction to New Delhi’s apparent doctrinal restructuring has crafted a calibrated strategy to maintain a stable strategic equation vis-à-vis India. In fact, nuclear weapons have qualitatively changed the “Indian conventional superiority into strategic impasse. However, the induction of nuclear weapons into the strategic doctrines of both India and Pakistan has induced caution in both countries posturing.”²⁰ Despite possession of nuclear weapons, both countries have failed to restrain themselves from frequent spate of clashes and crises originating from different unresolved disputes, including the core issue of Kashmir. Pakistan “several times less advantageous in relative economic and military power terms vis-à-vis India, has managed to craft an assertive nuclear policy.”²¹ India’s asymmetrical economic, military, and diplomatic rise against Pakistan has compelled the latter to robustly restructure and recalibrate its conventional military, strategic, and command and control organs to effectively demonstrate at an appropriate time its nuclear posturing so as to prevent India from initiating aggressive moves.²² Enforcement of effective nuclear deterrence requires some stringent measures as it is “not automatic” affairs per se. Albert Wohlstetter explains that “deterrence is a matter of comparative risks.” In his perspective, sometime it warrants “great ingenuity and realism at any given level of nuclear technology to devise a stable equilibrium” against the rival nuclear weapon state.²³ In the case of Pakistan, it is presently confronting two-frontal security dilemma emanating from North West Asia – Afghanistan, and from its erstwhile rival – India from the East. It seems to be

pushing the Pakistani policymakers to “institutionalize a comprehensive strategy based on all elements of the national power, including integration of its tactical-strategic-conventional military, to prevent the adversary from utilizing its cavalier strategy to coerce Pakistan.”²⁴ Actually, the “national security dilemmas are the product of existential challenges and opportunities as well as errors in policy and strategy.”²⁵ In this backdrop, Pakistan seems to be pursuing a determined and comprehensive national security strategy to hold India’s relative geo-economic, diplomatic, and military advantage in check. For Pakistan, it is imperative to overcome its “national security dilemmas,” which in fact is “the product of existential challenges and opportunities as well as errors in policy and strategy.”²⁶ Realistically speaking, the existential challenges to country’s security would naturally mandate a determined and comprehensive national security plan so as to overcome the challenges. Therefore, Pakistan’s efforts to protect its critical national security interests ought not to be misconstrued as “reactive.” On the other hand, it clearly explains Pakistan’s rationale to craft a proactive full-spectrum strategy²⁷ vis-à-vis India’s massive offensive conventional, and at occasions, nuclear posturing. In this regard, Pakistan’s highest nuclear decision making institution - the National Command Authority (NCA) in a meeting on September 9, 2015, expressed deep concern about India’s growing conventional military edge over Pakistan. The NCA also reiterated its determination to maintain “full-spectrum deterrence capability” in consonance with its “credible minimum deterrence” policy to prevent all prospects of “aggression.”²⁸ This explicitly indicates Pakistan’s firm determination to integrate all types of weapon systems, including the battlefield and strategic nuclear weapons into its strategy with a view to ensure its security that is perceived to be threatened by India’s Pakistan-centric offensive operational plan enshrined in its “Cold Start Doctrine” (CSD) policy.²⁹ Therefore, Pakistan’s deterrence would depend on the “effectiveness of a threat,” and on the severity of the punishment threatened along with its capability and credibility.³⁰ In fact, during the Pulwama crisis, Pakistan had effectively and determinedly sustained nuclear deterrence in spite of India’s limited aggressive air intrusion into Pakistani territory. The next section will critically analyze the crisis, and its impact on the future strategic stability of nuclear armed rivals in the wake of India’s increasing inclination to deliberately escalate tension to impose its dominance over Pakistan and, and latter’s calibrated response strategy of full-spectrum to counter it.

Pulwama Crisis

The Pulwama crisis of February 2019, after the Kargil war, was the most escalatory and dangerous. Both countries in a limited time and space had employed their air powers against each other in parallel with massive deployment of troops

along the border/Line of Control (LoC), and frequent clashes - that had all the ingredients to spiral the situation out of control. The escalatory, offensive and defensive moves of India and Pakistan respectively raise some serious and pertinent questions regarding the future strategic stability of region in view of both countries dangerous tit-for-tat policies. This ostensibly was a dangerous strategic gamble - as both countries' estimates depended on their "strategic choices," which again hinged on "estimates about risks and subjective judgments about the value of the stakes,"³¹ which has strong probability to go astray. Richard Betts observes that "without strategy, there is no rationale for how force will achieve purposes worth the price in blood and treasure. Without strategy, power is a loose cannon and war is mindless."³² The Question is that frequent eruption of crises can nullify the rationale of their strategies and undermine deterrence, as it has strong prospects of going amiss. Betts outlines that "strategies cannot be evaluated because there are no agreed criteria for which are good or bad; there is little demonstrable relationship between strategies and outcomes in war; good strategies can seldom be formulated because of policymakers' biases; if good strategies are formulated, they cannot be executed because of organizations' limitations;"³³ and due to other variable factors. Therefore, India and Pakistan need to dispassionately, objectively, and realistically assess the quantum of threat, which includes both nuclear and conventional, and to truthfully rationalize the safe degree of hostility against each other - otherwise the prospect of miscalculations probably would bring them to the edge of a nuclear catastrophe. Rationalizing both states strategic rationales for a particular act or pretext would always entail consequences as their conflicting strategies could actually become a "loose cannon."

The fundamental principle of a sound strategy is pragmatism. The post-Pulwama escalation, unfortunately demonstrates that the risk taking and brinkmanship were the paramount factors behind the escalation of crisis. Whereas the pragmatism only came into play when the US apparently dissuaded India from further escalation. Betts explaining various dimensions of strategy writes that:

Among practitioners, politicians often conflate strategy with policy objectives (focusing on what the desired outcome should be, simply assuming that force will move the adversary toward it), while soldiers often conflate strategy with operations (focusing on how to destroy targets or defeat enemies tactically, assuming that positive military effects mean positive policy effects). Both policymakers and soldiers have more than they can handle, working around the clock, to deal with the demanding problems in their respective realms, with neither focusing intently on the linkage—the bridge between objectives and operations, the mechanism by which combat will achieve objectives.³⁴

Therefore, fusion of conflating strategy with policy and, on the other hand, fusing of strategy with military operations – both can prove counter-productive in some circumstances, if not disastrous, particularly in case the rivals are NWS. This does not per se mean that there should not be any fusion between them. Actually, the issue is of rationality and pragmatism – cost and benefit analysis, which is the cardinal principle of theory of deterrence. Obviously, in the absence of a rational and realist approach, pragmatism, and without taking into account the cost associated with escalation, the situation would only churn out a deadly strategy from which both countries are obviously not expected to gain anything except chaos and destruction. In Pulwama, for instance, India was rationalizing its offensive strategy as a part of its right to self-defense and, similarly, Pakistan too justified its retaliatory strikes on the rationale of self-defense and expressed resolve to retaliate against aggression. This clearly indicates that states in crisis situation are likely to make divergent interpretations, which can lead to miscalculations and misperceptions with tendency to justify their acts. This propensity is a perilous omen especially for the viability of strategic stability and nuclear deterrence particularly in presence of both countries deep-rooted and neurological mutual mistrust. Logically speaking, both countries need to evolve a mechanism or code of conduct to prevent future occurrence of similar incidents, and to defuse crisis in case code of conduct or a bilateral mechanism of maintaining peace is violated by a state. For such type of security dilemma, it has been nicely summed up by Betts – that: “Strategies can be judged looking backward, but they must be chosen looking forward.” He conjectures that “any choice of action can be deemed strategically reasonable beforehand, or none can be afterward, strategy cannot be meaningful.”³⁵ Hence, it can be deduced that both countries’ strategies are destabilizing and pose serious threat to peace and security and workable deterrence.

The Pulwama crisis raises some relevant questions concerning the endurance of nuclear deterrence in such a charged security environment. In essence, deterrence revolves around the nuclear weapons power to dissuade the rivals to initiate a military aggression either to coerce or to compel the opponent to comply with aggressor’s dictates.³⁶ Therefore, any deliberate act of escalation is expected to exert negative political and diplomatic implications on the strategic stability of South Asia. It is imperative to analyze the series of events that had triggered dangerous skirmishes between the two. During the skirmishes, both countries came very close to eruption of a full blown war. The succeeding paragraphs will briefly describe few incidents leading up to the crisis.

On February 14, 2019, a Kashmiri youth of the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IoK) in a suicide attack killed 40 personnel of India's Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Immediately after the attack, Indian policymakers accused Jaish-e-Muhammad, a militant outfit banned in Pakistan, of allegedly sponsoring this terrorist act. Moreover, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked that he has given a "free hand" to the armed forces to strike against Pakistan at an appropriate time and place, and reiterated that India was not "scared of Pakistan's threats" and that its nuclear weapons are not meant for Diwali (Hindu religious festival) either.³⁷ Such escalatory statement coming from the head of government indicates that India was presumably not critically "looking backwards" for learning from the previous crises, and neither it was "looking forward" with a view to avoid repetition of crisis.³⁸ It is important to note that threat to a declared nuclear state is likely to have serious military repercussions. Hence, it was obviously difficult for the Pakistani leadership - either to consider Modi's statement as a mere political rhetoric or a serious threat of punishment. Or was it admission that deterrence was wobbly, if not insignificant, in Indian perception or that war was about to start - or it indicated that presumably the aggressor was not deterred - rather it was defending and defying? Perceptibly, statement was expected to evoke a calibrated response from Pakistan as well, which ostensibly undertook proportionate military measures to deal with the looming threat. Ostensibly, both countries' leaders were not taking into account the risk calculus, which logically from deterrence perspective, should have locked them up in a self-deterring dilemma? "If the deterrer is rational, his response to aggression will be determined," writes Glenn H. Snyder, revolving around four imperatives:

- Territorial objectives to be gained.
- Cost and benefit analysis.
- The territorial gains and its actual worth.
- The change in the probability of future enemy attacks on other objectives which would follow from various responses.

Further, Snyder is of the view, "the deterrer will select the response which minimizes his expectation of cost or maximizes his expectation of gain." Interestingly, he further explains that the "credibility of various possible responses by the deterrer depends on the aggressor's image of the deterrer's risk calculus - i.e. of the latter's net costs and gains from each response - as well as on the aggressor's assessment of the deterrer's capacity to act rationally."³⁹

The Pulwama episode suggests that Pakistan's response was proportionate, and it did not overestimate the prospective gains - rather it was restricted to a limited military and air manoeuvring in which two intruding Indian fighter aircrafts were shot down. Pakistan's apparent military preparedness did manage to deter India from further escalating the crisis. It is important to take into account the fact that "threat of denial action is likely to be appraised by the aggressor in terms of the deterrer's *capabilities*; threats of nuclear punishment require primarily a judgement of *intent*."⁴⁰ Pakistan's assertive reprisal strategy and "exploitation of potential force" dissuaded India from initiating more military actions,⁴¹ and moreover it also amply demonstrated its forces, preparedness and policymakers' *intent* to defend the critical national security interests, including territorial integrity in accord with its proportionate strategy, which is supposedly embedded in its full spectrum nuclear deterrence strategy. In Pakistani perspective, its response strategy was rational, and took into account the cost and benefit analysis by denying aggressor a space to further escalate crisis in the backdrop of its *capabilities* to punish the aggressor. In essence, the acme of deterrence is the "skillful *non-use* of military forces" in league with "something broader than military skills."⁴² Whereas the 'Game Theory' focusses on the game of strategy in which "the best course of action for each participant depends," writes Thomas Schelling "on what he expects the other participants to do."⁴³ In Pulwama crisis, Pakistan's political resolve, acumen, skillful employment of force too had a restraining effect upon India. Hence, deterrence remained enforced in spite of serious military and air clashes. At the height of crisis, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in a speech to the nation reiterated that, Pakistan has no interest or intent in engaging in a military conflict, but if India escalated tension, than it will *certainly* retaliate. He advised India to take into account the cost and benefit analysis before embarking on any military operation, which would have perilous consequences for the entire region. He observed that it is easy to start a conflict but it will be difficult to control it,⁴⁴ as war has its own dynamics.

The cardinal principle of deterrence theory rests on state's demonstrated capability along with delivery systems to carry the strategic weapons, and communication of political leadership's resolve to make "effective *use* of military force."⁴⁵ Pakistan's effective strategizing actually influenced Indian leadership's next choices and decisions.⁴⁶ One can assume that thaw between the rivals was realized as a result of "explicit bargaining" to maintain the status quo instead of opting to initiate a limited aggression or war, which in Schelling's perspective too "requires limits," in order to stabilize the situation "short of war."⁴⁷

Pakistan considered Indian aerial violation of its territory as a grave threat to its sovereignty and national security. In the aftermath of Indian air violation, the latter took necessary measures and kept Pakistan Air Force (PAF) on alert, and reportedly it was “ordered to retaliate with a ‘tit-for-tat’ response on Feb 27, 2019.”⁴⁸ In addition, PAF also targeted various military installations in the Indian occupied Kashmir. Reportedly by design PAF did not hit or destroy Indian military installations, in fact, it was a potent signal to India that Pakistan has resolve and capability to defend itself, however, by design it had refrained from hitting the Indian military targets with a view to avoid further escalation that “the eventual outcome of even the smallest border skirmish *might* be utter devastation” hence “the aggressor’s uncertainty is an important deterring factor.”⁴⁹ Stephen Van Evera draws three deductions from the concept of offense and defense, which includes: 1) if conquest is easy then war will be common; 2) more offensive capabilities to “initiate wars than other states;” and 3) more offensive and defensive capabilities of state will encourage it to initiate a conflict.⁵⁰ Similarly, in South Asia, India seems to harbour illusion that it possess both relative (not absolute) military advantage over Pakistan, therefore, it deliberately initiated aggressive military posturing, which was quite forcefully countered by Pakistan. Prima facie India’s over reliance on its offensive and defensive capabilities seemingly made it to assume, if not to overlook completely, Pakistan’s sufficient conventional military capability in parallel with nuclear, to effectively counter such types of actions. Evera observes that “offense-defense balance is affected by national foreign and military policy,” which largely depends upon the political will of the policymakers.⁵¹ Essentially, the powerful states, in this case India, tend “to exaggerate the dangers they face, and respond with counterproductive belligerence”⁵² and, on the other hand, Pakistan was under constraint to demonstrate its will to counter the aggression through institution of proportionate strategy. In fact, even a limited conflict is open for wrong interpretations or miscalculations by the rival, which can increase the probability of war. Thomas Schelling observes that the prospects of all-out war is enhanced in the event of a limited war. Therefore, to threaten a limited war against a NWS means a high risk of a general war.⁵³ Therefore, India’s effort to intimidate Pakistan for limited tactical objectives proved to be extremely risky venture.

After Pulwama, Indian Prime Minister during electioneering campaign in February 2019 rhetorically claimed of neutralizing Pakistan’s supposed nuclear threat, although during the entire crisis, no Pakistani leader had directly or even indirectly, signaled any intent of deployment of its strategic forces in spite of India’s deployment of nuclear powered ballistic missiles submarine INS Arihant in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁴ Indian announcement of deployment of Arihant and nuclear

capable BrahMos cruise missiles during the Pulwama crisis clearly negated India's claimed policy of no-first use (NFU). Incidentally, INS Arihant is capable of carrying 12 theatre ballistic missiles with ranges of 700 to 1,000 kilometers.⁵⁵ In reaction, Pakistan maintained complete nuclear restraint. Moreover, Pakistani armed forces spokesman Major General Asif Ghafoor reacting to Indian nuclear deployment stated that, "Since we have gone overtly nuclear, as India also, in 1998, our stance is that this capability eliminates the possibility of conventional war between the two states. So that is to say, this is a weapon of deterrence and a political choice. No sane country having this capability would talk about using it."⁵⁶ The "deployment of the nuclear-armed submarine and signaling of using nuclear capable BrahMos, short-range cruise missile questioned the critical tenet of India's nuclear doctrine, i.e., the commitment not to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict. In reality, today, India's nuclear doctrine premised on 'launch-on-warning' or preemptive nuclear strike capability."⁵⁷ Actually, Pakistan's non-deployment of its strategic assets signaled its confidence in its conventional forces capability to meet conventional attack threat accordingly, and at the same, to sustain a robust nuclear deterrent posture in spite of India's aggressive air intrusion into Pakistan and frequent border clashes. The Pulwama crisis underlines the continuing "prevalence of nuclear deterrence and vindicate Pakistan's strategy of 'Full Spectrum Deterrence'."⁵⁸ Former Pakistani ambassador observes that "India had crossed a red line," to which Pakistan was bound to retaliate.⁵⁹ However, Pakistan maintained restraint with aim to prevent security environment going down the cliff. Escalation would have further exacerbated the prospects of conflict, which consequently would have fuelled miscalculations thereby triggering chain reaction of events that obviously would have undermined the viability of nuclear deterrence. In this episode, the international community had also played a positive role in defusing the crisis.

CSD and Deterrence

The scale of Pulwama crisis indicated that India apparently had plan to operationalize its CSD, which since 2004 has been fine-tuned and extensively war gamed to launch a limited conventional strikes against Pakistan. However, during the crisis, India demonstrated restraint and did not activate CSD, which probably would have been a major climb over the escalation ladder consequently undermining, if not irreparably endangering, the entire concept of deterrence and the credibility of nuclear weapons deterrent value. In reaction it could also have prompted Pakistan to operationalize its full spectrum deterrence strategy. Incidentally, Pakistan's National Command Authority in September 2013 outlining the objectives of full-spectrum deterrence strategy outlined that it

“would not remain oblivious to the evolving security dynamics in South Asia and would maintain a full-spectrum deterrence capability to deter all forms of aggression.”⁶⁰ Incidentally, in December 2017, the former director general of the Strategic Plans Division of Pakistan, Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai, revealed that “Pakistan possesses the full spectrum of nuclear weapons in all the three categories: strategic, operational and tactical, with full range coverage of the large Indian land mass and its outlying territories.”⁶¹ As argued in the preceding paragraphs, Pakistan’s red lines for operationalization or use of nuclear weapons is by design shrouded in ambiguity to enable it to craft a response strategy in proportion to the degree of Indian aggression.

Indian policymaker seems to be desperate to operationalize its CSD under the nuclear overhang, which raises serious questions concerning the rationality and viability of Indian military strategy under its flagship strategic plan. In essence, nuclear weapons are supposed to prevent wars, but not to deliberately escalate them. One Pakistani writer opines that Indian CSD plan “has been encouraged and enabled by... powers,” particularly the US with “aim of containing China, the US has pandered to Indian ambitions for regional hegemony so as to use India as a counter-weight to China.”⁶² This policy seemingly undermined Pakistan’s security and the strategic stability of South Asia.

Conclusion

Can South Asian nuclear deterrence matrix remain stable in view of both countries’ highly conflicting strategies that since 1998 has led to a series of crises? Pulwama after Kargil was the most perilous and destabilizing crisis. Albeit, both countries are continuously evolving and further fine-tuning their divergent strategies; however, ostensibly they are not realizing that bad strategy would be costly, lethal, and destabilize nuclear deterrence. They also have proclivity to frequently emit threats of use of force in order to achieve their political objectives. This has adversely impacted their behaviour pattern, and it seems their policymakers are not prepared to realistically climb down from their historical, religious, ethno-centric, and cultural biases against each other, which is further widening the wedge of misperceptions.

It was argued that New Delhi has fine-tuned its flagship CSD plan to establish its escalation dominance over Pakistan, which is likely to destabilize the volatile security environment of South Asia. In fact, frequent eruptions of crises

particularly after India-Pakistan's nuclear tests could not prevent them from deliberately escalating crises that possess all the ingredients to lead them to brink of a full-blown war. India clearly seems to be under illusion that it can achieve an escalation dominance over Pakistan by employing its conventional forces edge ostensibly to coerce Pakistan. The tension-ridden security environment of South Asia is presently facing a dangerous cycle of brinkmanship. Hence, both countries' policymakers need to objectively and rationally assess the impact of their conflicting strategies on the peace and security, of not only India and Pakistan, but also of the entire region. The study underscores the significance to desist from frequent emission of barrage of threat of use of force particularly nuclear threat to achieve their political objectives. In essence, strategy without rationality would always remain a double edged weapon or a "loose cannon" and then war will become a "mindless"⁶³ venture for them. Therefore, it is imperative to refrain from resorting to coercive military posturing and to focus on realist strategies to sustain strategic stability. It is necessary to foster mutually beneficial diplomatic and security relations to eliminate the prospects of nuclear catastrophe.

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