

NUCLEAR WEAPONS EFFICACY FOR DETERRENCE & COMPELLENCE: POST PULWAMA APPRAISAL

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Abstract

The scholars of strategic studies have devoted significant attention to nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan. However, they overlooked India's compellence strategy in a nuclearized strategic environment. This study argues that, despite India's extraordinary military power, it failed to compel Pakistan during the post-Pulwama military standoff. The Modi government's nuclear compellence strategy is equally an imperfect instrument of compellence because Pakistan is confident with its nuclear deterrent. Nuclear weapons are effective instruments of deterrence, and therefore they cannot be used for compellence. Moreover, PAF retaliation on February 27 and Pakistan's refrain from the tit-for-tat deployment of nuclear weapons to balance India's nuclear assets deployment at sea reveals Islamabad's confidence in its conventional war fighting capability and Full Spectrum Deterrence. Indeed, post-Pulwama military standoff and continuity of nuclear deterrence stability between India and Pakistan necessitates the scholarly revisit of nuclear weapons efficacy for deterrence and compellence discourse in South Asia.

Keywords: Nuclear, Deterrence, Compellence, India, Pakistan, Pulwama, Military Standoff.

Introduction

India has been struggling to shift the balance of power in its favor for establishing its hegemony in South Asia. Pakistan's conventional and nuclear capability spoils India's regional hegemonic pursuits and also refrained belligerent neighbors from the catastrophic total war in the region. The confidence-building measures and many Track-II diplomacy ventures did not culminate in the constitution of arms control agreement between India and Pakistan. New Delhi's military modernization, including hefty investment in Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems and apathetic approach towards Islamabad's nuclear restraint regime

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proposal, propelled the modernization of Pakistan's war fighting capability that was deemed imperative for sustaining nuclear deterrence stability in the region. However, the conventional and nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, former's nuclear signaling and latter's preparedness to retaliate, Modi government's unconstitutional annexation of the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), alarmed about the probability of nuclear deterrence instability in South Asia.¹

India and Pakistan have been unable to adjust their foreign policies and make concessions to prevent crises from erupting since the overt nuclearization. Nevertheless, nuclear weapons prevented the escalation of five crises between them during the last two decades.² Pakistan's conflict restraint policy in a nuclearized strategic environment has been misinterpreted by the Indian strategic pundits as a policy of appeasement and also the realization of India's 'Compellence Strategy.' The compellence strategy is defined as: "If a state possesses the capability to compel a target, the target may choose to make concessions to avoid a crisis and dampen the risk of conflict."³ India's compellence strategy was the use of military threats and maneuvers to persuade Pakistan to carry out a favorable action. India misjudged Pakistan's deterrence capability and intent.⁴ This error of strategic judgment—the chalking out a compellence strategy against a nuclear-armed adversary—laid the basis of India's 'surgical strike' stratagem against a nuclear-armed Pakistan. According to the Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces-2017 (JDIAF-2017), "India has moved to a pro-active and pragmatic philosophy to counter various conflict situations. The response to terror provocations could be in the form of a surgical strike, and these subsumed in the sub-conventional portion of the spectrum of armed conflict."⁵ The Indian national security officials considered that "preemptive counterforce options against Pakistan are permissible doctrinally and advantageous strategically."⁶ The preemptive counterforce gives "the choice of time, targets, and scale to the initiator and will pay the best dividends to safeguard the nation."⁷ But the preemptive counterforce doctrine creates a risky strategic environment in which military planners feel compelled to use nuclear weapons before the adversary's use.

India's surgical strike at Balakot beyond Azad Kashmir on February 26, 2019, and Pakistan's befitting-cum-restrained response on the following day were escalatory and signaled both sides' willingness to cross-new frontiers in a nuclearized strategic environment.⁸ Pakistan Air Force struck across the Line of Control in response to Indian surgical strike, and by accepting a higher risk of escalation, Pakistan prevented India from dominating the escalation ladder. The aerial clash between the nuclear-armed rivals on February 27, 2019, was an

unprecedented incident in nearly 74 years of nuclear deterrence history,⁹ which left nuclear pundits a bit dumbfounded. South Asian strategic environment would be further aggravated with India's nuclear compellence strategy. "Nuclear compellence is the use of nuclear threats to persuade an adversary to carry out a favorable action."¹⁰ Modi government had used the threat of nuclear force to elicit desirable behavior from Pakistan since the disclosure of its conventional forces limitation in a post-Pulwama military standoff. On March 3, 2019, *The New York Times* reported:

The aerial clash, the first by the South Asian rivals in nearly five decades, was a rare test for the Indian military — and it left observers a bit dumbfounded. While the challenges faced by India's armed forces are no secret, its loss of a plane last week to a country whose military is about half the size and receives a quarter of the funding was still telling."

The comparative study of the Indian and Pakistani armed forces revealed that the conventional forces balance was in favor of the former during the post Pulwama military standoff in spring 2019. However, the Modi government's nuclear rhetoric after losing two fighter jets and failure of submarine's ingress in Pakistani water on March 4, 2019, reveals its lessening of confidence in the conventional forces advantage. It is because "a state that is conventionally stronger than its adversaries will be better able to deter threats and inflict costs without the aid of nuclear weapons. On the one hand, a relatively strong state will be less likely to find itself in situations in which it needs to escalate to the nuclear level to achieve its security goals."¹² India, despite being conventionally stronger than Pakistan, has been relying more on nuclear weapons that tell it is using nuclear capability not only for deterrence but for compellence as well. The deployment of nuclear assets and swapping of its No-First-Use (NFU) with First-Use (FU) nuclear policy testified the change in India's nuclear doctrine and posture to operationalize its nuclear compellence strategy against Pakistan.¹³ On August 16, 2019, the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh reconfirmed the swapping of NFU with FU policy. He said, "Till today, our nuclear policy is 'no first use.'" He added: "What happens in future depends on the circumstances."¹⁴ Pakistan continued its nuclear restraint policy and refrained from reciprocating to India's shift in NFU and nuclear assets deployment. On August 30, 2019, Prime Minister Khan wrote *New York Times* op-ed, "Our Air Force brought down an Indian plane and captured the pilot. We struck back to signal we could defend ourselves but chose not to strike a target that would cause loss of life. I made a conscious decision to show that Pakistan had no intention of aggravating the conflict between two nuclear-armed states."¹⁵ Islamabad categorically ruled out the possibility of using nuclear weapons in a

post-Pulwama crisis and also reiterated its stance that nuclear weapons were a deterrence tool to prevent actual wars.

The authors of India's nuclear compellence strategy and preemptive war doctrine either belittle Pakistan's response or were confident that with 'surgical strikes,' the entire striking capability of Pakistan decapitated. Indeed, such strategic thinking was severely risky and unprecedented in nuclear deterrence history. Besides, the change in India's nuclear use policy confirmed that India would preemptively strike at Pakistani nuclear installations during a crisis. In such a strategic environment, Pakistan must be prepared to rapidly mate the nuclear warheads with the delivery vehicles and used them first. Hypothetically speaking, the action-reaction syndrome compels both India and Pakistan to place their "nuclear weapons on a hair-trigger alert – a so-called launch-on-warning posture – to avoid losing their nuclear arsenals in a first strike. Fears of pre-emption also placed enormous time pressure on decision making during a crisis."¹⁶ The hair-trigger alert necessitated the delegation of nuclear weapons use a code system to the local commanders, especially in case of the nuclear submarines deployments, such as Arihant.

The escalation of the nuclear arms race in South Asia and its likely transformation in nuclear doctrines and postures have attracted the attention of security analysts towards the efficacy of the nuclear weapons for coercive strategies such as deterrence and compellence. Michael Krepon pointed out "the nuclear competition between India and Pakistan is accelerating with the introduction of new ballistic and cruise missiles, along with missiles carrying multiple warheads. India is implementing plans to deploy missile defenses, even though Pakistan has already taken steps to defeat them."¹⁷ The military competition is a double-edged sword for strategic stability; it maintains a balance of power between the competitors that guarantee strategic stability; it also causes an imbalance of power that encourages the advantageous state to do coercive diplomacy to persecute the strategic competitor. The open-ended nuclear competition between India and Pakistan posed a severe challenge to the sustainability of strategic stability between them. The nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan and their nuclear postures raised three interlinked questions: Are nuclear weapons useful tools for compellence strategy? What is the impact of India's nuclear compellence strategy on Pakistan's nuclear deterrent posture? How the deterrence dented and rectified during the Pulwama crisis? This article pursues its argument in seven sections. It begins by defining and spelling out differences between nuclear deterrence and compellence. The second section contained a discussion on the aberration in

Indian politics and its impact on India's nuclear decision making. The third section deliberated on India's compellence strategy. The fourth section highlighted India's nuclear assets deployment and endeavors for nuclear dominance capability against Pakistan. The fifth section discussed India's policy of compellence by punishment. The sixth section highlights Pakistan's determination to use nuclear weapons for deterrence. The final part analyzed the current nuclear deterrence relationship between India and Pakistan and reasons for a rethinking of strategic stability-instability paradox in South Asia.

Recapitulation of Nuclear Deterrence & Compellence

The conflict between nuclear-armed states contains the intrinsic potential for a battle to escalate to a higher level of destruction—nuclear Armageddon. The primary source of both 'Deterrent' and 'Compellent' effects of the nuclear strategy lies in this potential for escalation to a higher level of destruction. "Nuclear deterrence refers to the use of nuclear threats to discourage an adversary from carrying out an unfavorable action,"¹⁸ or to prevent a change in the status quo of the strategic environment. According to John Mearsheimer "Nuclear weapons are considered the ultimate deterrent for a good reason: Adversaries are unlikely to threaten the existence of a nuclear-armed state, especially one with a deterrent that can survive a first-strike attack because that is the one circumstance in which a state is likely to use its nuclear weapons."¹⁹ The nuclear deterrence conceptualization had immensely influenced the making of a strategy since the nuclear strikes against Japan in August 1945. The complete destruction of Hiroshima on August 6, and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, and subsequent debate about the repercussions of the use of nuclear weapons in a conflict had not only shunned war as a rational mean to settle a dispute between/among the nuclear-armed states, but also laid basis for a prolonged strategic stability in an anarchical global politics.

The nuclear weapons led to nuclear deterrence, a system-wide condition that does constitute a particular kind of structural change. They bolster the concept of deterrence to reduce all-out war obsolete—"that all parties might calculate negative cost-benefit to the use of military force."²⁰ The nuclear deterrence strategy has served to prevent the outbreak of large-scale conflict between/among nuclear-armed states since the dawn of the nuclear era. Notably, the nuclear deterrence had visible and traceable consequences for the behavior of nuclear-armed states. During the cold war nuclear weapons influenced the making of super powers military doctrines and also moderated their bilateral relations. It had altered the very purpose of military establishment of nuclear-armed states. In the words of

Bernard Brodi: "Thus far, the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on, its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose."²¹ The threat of a nuclear Armageddon created powerful shared incentives for both Soviets and Americans to cooperate in preventing nuclear war and chalking out arms control agreements.²²

Nuclear compellence refers to the use of nuclear threats to coerce an adversary to carry out a favorable action.²³ According to Tristan A. Volpe, "Compellence refers to a situation in which one state (the challenger) inflicts, or threatens to inflict, some form of pain against another country (the target) until it complies with an explicit set of demands."²⁴ The effectiveness of nuclear compellence strategy depends on whether the challenger's threats are credible enough to pressurize the target to comply. Practically, the "nuclear weapons are uniquely poor instruments of compellence. Compellent threats are more likely to be effective under two conditions: first, if a challenger can credibly threaten to seize the item in dispute; and second, if enacting the threat would entail few costs to the challenger. Nuclear weapons, however, meet neither of these conditions. They are neither useful tools of conquest nor low-cost tools of punishment."²⁵ As instruments of compellence, nuclear weapons cannot be used for taking and holding territory. "They therefore do not enhance a state's ability to simply seize possessions that a target refuses to relinquish."²⁶ Besides, the use of nuclear weapons has severe military and economic repercussions, and therefore it does not create optimism about a positive war outcome. Hence, "nuclear weapons offer an ideal deterrent capability because they tend to eliminate optimism about a positive war outcome."²⁷

Deterrence is different from compellence and therefore its outcomes/ effects are always dissimilar from the latter. Though, "deterrence and compellence rely on threats to motivate the adversary to comply with a coercer's demands, but they differ with regard to the nature of these demands. Deterrence demands that the adversary refrain from acting, whereas compellence demands that the adversary undertake action."²⁸ Robert Art opined that difference between compellence and deterrence "is one between the active and passive use of force. The success of a deterrent threat is measured by its not having been used. The success of a compellent action is measured by how closely and quickly the adversary conforms to one's stipulated wishes."²⁹ Indeed, the "deterrence fails when the adversary crosses redline(s), initiates hostilities, creates a *fait accompli*, or undertakes some sort of unwanted activity."³⁰

Aberration in Indian Politics: Altering Nuclear Doctrine

Narendra Modi led BJP's racist, bigoted, communal, and warmongering statements throughout the 2019 general election were surprising. The BJP campaign, labeled as an aberration in Indian politics, acted as a catalyst in changing India's nuclear doctrine from non-deployable status to deployed nuclear assets, swapping NFU with FU nuclear policy and above all replacing nuclear deterrence with nuclear compellence strategy against Pakistan. According to Indian scholar Rajesh Rajagopalan, "that such proposals are ideologically-driven short-cuts to demonstrate 'resolve' rather than a careful response to India's strategic problems."³¹ The rise of Hindutva populism and the values that underpin the BJP campaign viewed and equated by some to amount to the 'end of Indian secularism' and beginning of Hindu Rashtra. Besides, Modi's reelection for the second term exposed India's reputation as a responsible nuclear weapon state, which would act with restraint and prudence in handling nuclear weapons. Toby Dalton opined: "Yet, with a broad election mandate, demonstrated the power of persuasion, and legions of supporters ready to defend any move he makes, Modi could just as easily choose to secure India through both strength and accommodation."³² The Indians elected government stridently questions two fundamental pillars of the Indian constitution, i.e., secularism and minorities equal existence in India. Prime Minister Modi's strategy of pursuing India's Great Power status in South Asia did not match to the gap between Indian hegemonic interests and capabilities. It drew attention to the risky choices of the Indian right-wing extremist ruling elite that ultimately played into regional strategic instability. Importantly, India had not only deployed nuclear submarine Arihant at the Arabian Sea but also threatened a nuclear war during the February 2019 crisis in Kashmir.³³ Moreover, it was an open secret that India adopted an NFU policy because it did not want to be seen as morally inferior to China. In reality, India was not committed to NFU from the beginning. According to Bruno Tertrais, "New Delhi abandoned its NFU declaratory policy in 2003 for fear that Pakistan or China could use chemical or biological weapons in the course of a conflict against India despite their ratification of the relevant conventions."³⁴ The aberration in Indian politics and change in posture caused the safety and security problem of the Indian nukes. The nukes deployment and the aggressive mindset of India's NCA chairman and members were alarming. On August 18, 2019, Prime Minister Khan tweeted: "The world must also seriously consider the safety & security of India's nuclear arsenal in the control of the fascist, racist Hindu Supremacist Modi govt. This is an issue that impacts not just the region but the world."³⁵ Khan's concerns had logic because religious fanatics controlled India's nuclear weapons.

Prime Minister Modi's Kashmir policy further alienated Kashmiris and increased tension with Pakistan. His Pakistani counterpart wrote, "Evidently Mr. Modi had mistaken our desire for peace in a nuclear neighborhood as appeasement. We were not simply up against a hostile government. According to M.K. Bhadrakumar, "The government succeeded momentarily to shove under the carpet its appalling incompetence in handling the situation in Jammu and Kashmir through the past five-year period and the massive intelligence failure that caused the Pulwama tragedy."³⁶ While analyzing the post-Pulwama military standoff between India and Pakistan, Srinath Raghavan pointed out: "BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi is determined to use the current crisis and India's military response to his party's electoral advantage. He has positioned himself as a muscular nationalist who is unafraid of hitting India's adversaries militarily."³⁷ Prime Minister Modi had misconstrued as well as miscalculated the situation, which drew both the countries at the brink of war because he was expecting a considerable uncertainty about the outcome in the parliamentary election. He anticipated a heated contest in the election due to regional political parties and disappointing economic performance of his government. Ashley J. Tellis opined that the "economic record—the plank on which Modi secured his decisive majority in the 2014 election—was under attack in domestic politics."³⁸ He struggled to muster the support of voters by propagating against Pakistan. On February 19, 2019, India's Ministry of External Affairs, instead of welcoming the investigation offer of Mr. Khan, stated: "The Prime Minister of Pakistan has offered to investigate the matter if India provides proof. This is a lame excuse."³⁹ While commenting on Pulwama, chief spokesperson of India's Congress party, Randeep Surjewala said: "But we have a government today which only wants to take political advantage from a crisis."⁴⁰ Hence, Prime Minister Modi and BJP were interested in sustaining a tension with Pakistan for domestic political objectives, i.e. winning the general election 2019. The aberration in Indian polity altered India's strategic thinking cultivated over the years. Consequently, it "stood considerably confused in a moment of crisis at the altar and primacy of a political party's electoral strategy; it conceded professional space to the whims of a heavyweight Prime Minister."⁴¹ India's "strategic thinking and actions get muddled up even before the first shot has been fired. This was not only irresponsible conduct but also an institutional failure in India."⁴²

India's Nuclear Compellence Strategy

Since the loss of its two aircraft and arrest of a pilot in air combat on February 27, 2019, India's nuclear posture has been changing from deterrence to compellence. India was using its conventional military advantage for compelling its smaller South Asian neighbors, including Pakistan. But after February 27, 2019, it

lost its confidence in its conventional compellence capability against Pakistan. Therefore, it shunned 'no-first-use' nuclear policy and 'massive retaliation' nuclear doctrine. B.S. Nagal pointed out: "There is a school of thought in India that the country should adopt a strategy of nuclear war-fighting, based on our neighbors' developing Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW) and adopt a quid pro quo option instead of massive retaliation."⁴³ He added, "the use of TNW will be limited to army field formations and logistics echelons or bases in support of offensive formations in the battle zone, forward aviation assets, forward air bases, critical command and control centers."⁴⁴ Despite Pakistan's reiteration that nuclear war was catastrophic and nuclear weapons were the weapon of deterrence and a political choice for ensuring deterrence stability,⁴⁵ India's ruling elite used nuclear threats to compel Pakistan to change its Kashmir policy. It was compelling Pakistan to forget IoK and discuss the status of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan for the settlement of long-standing Kashmir dispute. India formulated a demand and planned to take punitive action if Pakistan refused to yield. It was not issuing a mere threat, which was sufficient for deterrence; it was pronouncing both the danger and exemplary use of force that required for compellence.

India constituted and operationalized 'surgical strike strategy' to punish and compel Pakistan through military offense. This new dimension in India's military doctrine was/is incompatible or mismatched with India's nuclear doctrine and posture that was suitable for nuclear deterrence. In 2016, while analyzing India's nuclear deterrence capability against Pakistan Toby Dalton and George Perkovich opined, "India's current nuclear doctrine and posture are fundamentally sufficient as long as Indian leaders do not authorize the Indian Army to make major thrusts into Pakistani territory or the air force to conduct major missile or bombing missions against the Pakistani heartland in response to a terrorist attack."⁴⁶ Nuclear deterrence doctrine was inappropriate for the Modi government, which wants to promote policies and capabilities to conduct military operations—surgical strikes—on Pakistani territory. Therefore, it formulated a nuclear compellence strategy. The following discussion discloses the tactics of India's nuclear compellence strategy.

India's Escalation Dominance & Nukes Deployment

Many international nuclear experts ignored the irresponsible nuclear-related statements of Prime Minister Modi due to the election campaign fervor during the post Pulwama military standoff. They thought it was a mere election-winning tactic. They were convinced that after the elections, rationality would prevail. However, after sworn in the second time as the country's Prime Minister,

Modi increased tension in the region by revoking the special status of IoK and issuing a veiled threat to nuclear-armed Pakistan. India deployed its nuclear assets, and its defense minister signaled about the shift in its NFU. He said the country's continued nuclear commitment to "no first use" would "depend on the circumstances."⁴⁷ Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang pointed out, "India's adoption of potentially preemptive counterforce options—even as a choice on a menu that otherwise consists of counter value retaliation options— would mark a seismic shift in Indian nuclear strategy and the death knell of so-called credible minimum deterrence."⁴⁸ It revealed the frustration of Indian nuclear strategists with "massive retaliation" nuclear doctrine. They advocated for the swapping of NFU with a doctrine of flexible response to acquire multiple offensive nuclear options. They argued that flexible response posture would provide India many options to respond to the range of contingencies that might arise, and enable it for escalation dominance.⁴⁹ Toby Dalton and George Perkovich opined, "Some U.S. scholars advocate that India adopt the logic of limited nuclear options to change the deterrence equation with Pakistan and assert escalation dominance."⁵⁰ The limited nuclear options enabled India to conduct selected nuclear operations in concert with conventional forces, which protect vital India interests and limit Pakistan's capabilities to continue aggression.⁵¹ They suggest that:

*"doing so could potentially deter nuclear use in the event of limited conventional conflict. That is, by holding out the threat of a symmetrical and proportional response, [India] would avoid the 'all or nothing' nuclear retaliation dilemma it now seems to face... Confronting an opponent with its own battlefield nuclear weapons, Islamabad could not reasonably conclude that limited nuclear strikes against invading ground forces would stop an invasion without triggering a nuclear reprisal."*⁵²

The Indian military planners contemplated fighting a war against Pakistan under conditions of relative nuclear parity by acquiring 'escalation dominance' capability since the disappointment of Operation Parakram—military standoff of 2001–2002. Escalation dominance is "a condition in which a combatant has the ability to escalate a conflict in ways that will be disadvantageous or costly to the adversary while the adversary cannot do the same in return, either because it has no escalation option or because the available options would not improve the adversary's situation."⁵³ The Indians chalked out a nuclear strategy to acquire "credible ability to disarm Pakistan of its long-range nuclear systems to implement a strategy of escalation dominance, where India can threaten credibly to escalate and defeat Pakistan at every potential level of violence."⁵⁴

India's Quest: Compellence by Punishment

Since the Pulwama incident on February 14, the Indian ruling elite, military establishment, media, and entertainment industry have been accusing and threatening Pakistan. They emphasized on one point to “teach Pakistan a lesson.”⁵⁵ Modi led BJP has been articulating threatening mantra since the 2014 general elections. Pakistan's nonresponse to India's phantom surgical strikes in September 2016 enhanced Indians' arrogance and adventurous military thinking, which was a departure from rational thinking in the nuclearized strategic environment. The belligerent behavior of the Modi government intensified the tension between nuclear-armed neighbors. Islamabad claimed that New Delhi contemplated launching a military attack on the latter to divert the attention of international community and Indians masses from its unconstitutional abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A and illegal annexation of Jammu and Kashmir including Ladakh division. In response to India's bellicosity, Pakistan announced its preparedness to respond to the adversary's military misadventure. The irresponsible behavior of Modi and his RSS cohorts threatens the lives of two billion people residing in the region. Michael Krepon pointed out, “Because anyone in his or her right mind can see that nuclear dangers are growing while the dynamics of violence on the subcontinent are becoming more adventurous.”⁵⁶

In reality, India could not teach a lesson to Pakistan because of the strategic equilibrium between them. The post-Pulwama military standoff underscored that India did not have decisive advantage even in the conventional weaponry.⁵⁷ According to *SIPRI Yearbook 2019* estimates, India possessed 130-140, and Pakistan owned 150-160 nuclear warheads.⁵⁸ It revealed nuclear capability balance is in favor of Pakistan. Besides, teaching a lesson to the nuclear-armed neighbor is an unthinkable for the rational decision-makers due to the likelihood of the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). According to Gurmeet Kanwal, “On average, a retaliatory strike capability to destroy eight to ten major population and industrial centers would be adequate to meet the requirements of deterrence.”⁵⁹ Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press pointed out that “When nuclear-armed states face overwhelming conventional threats—or worry about the possibility of catastrophic conventional defeat—they often adopt coercive escalatory doctrines to deter war or stalemate a conflict that erupts. Pakistan openly intends to use nuclear weapons to counter an overwhelming conventional Indian invasion.”⁶⁰ After realizing the dangerous repercussions of the Modi government's nuclear posture, former Indian Admiral L. Ramdas (Retired) wrote to the President of India to address the dreadful situation. He wrote: “As the Supreme Commander, you must caution our leaders about the genuine dangers of the present standoff escalating into a war situation –

and quickly going beyond a conventional engagement – given that both India and Pakistan are two nuclear-armed countries.”⁶¹ Former Indian spy chief A.S. Dulat also concurred Ramdas concerns that war was not a picnic between the nuclear-armed states.⁶²

The Indian ruling elite and media’s warmongering increased after the revoking of the special status of IoK on August 5, 2019, to divert the attention of both Indians as well as the international community from the deplorable situation in IoK. The Modi government underestimated the risky dynamics of a military conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. However, Prime Minister Khan was conscious of the repercussions of war between India and Pakistan. He said, “When two nuclear-armed countries fight, if they fight a conventional war, there is every possibility that it is going to end up into nuclear war.”⁶³ The growing prominence of nuclear weapons in India’s national security strategy casts a shadow of nuclear use over any military conflict between the belligerent neighbors. Hence, the clouds of devastating nuclear war are hovering over the region due to India’s planning to teach a lesson to a nuclear-armed neighbor with its military might. Indeed, it is a risky deviation from nuclear deterrence to nuclear compellence.

Pakistan: Nukes for Deterrence

The Pakistani strategic analysts have penned the deviation in India’s nuclear policy and its likely impact on the deterrence stability in the region. Ironically, they were failed to sensitize the foreign experts or draw the attention of the international community towards the risky deviation in India’s nuclear policy and nuclear signaling since February 27, 2019. Being a strategic rival, Pakistan could not ignore the alteration in India’s nuclear doctrine and posture and therefore it was compelled to adopt countermeasures to deter the Modi government’s nuclear compellence strategy. India’s nuclear compellence strategy suggested that the threat of mutually assured destruction would not work between India and Pakistan in the way that it used to ensure nuclear deterrence stability in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.⁶⁴ Realizing India’s compellence strategy and the probability of the Modi government’s military misadventure for winning the general election in 2019, Islamabad chalked out the “policy of ‘Quid pro-Quo Plus’ in case of a limited Indian attack,”⁶⁵ and ‘Full Spectrum Deterrence’ (FSD) nuclear posture to deter all forms of aggression. According to Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai (Retired), Advisor Pakistan National Command Authority, the ‘Quid pro Quo Plus’ strategy testified that “in an active military conflict situation, especially a limited one with nuclear-armed Pakistan, while it may be relatively easy to climb the first rung on an escalation

ladder, the second rung would always belong to Pakistan, and that India's choice to further up the ante by moving to the third rung would invariably be dangerously problematic in anticipation of the fourth rung response by Pakistan."⁶⁶ □ Pakistan's restraint-cum-befitting response to India's Balakot surgical strike revealed its willingness and capability to escalate up the ladder. Pakistan's preparedness to escalate up the ladder questioned the reliability of India's escalation dominance strategy through the surgical strike stratagem. Prime Minister Modi declared Pakistan's retaliatory airstrikes on February 27 as an act of war, but the possibility of an adversary's escalation strategy drove him to desist from counterattack airstrikes.⁶⁷

Deterrence Remodeling in Post Pulwama: An Appraisal

India and Pakistan established command and control structures, constituted robust nuclear weapon security architectures, and developed nuclear triads. They expanded their military fissile material production capabilities, modernized weapon designs, and developed a wide array of nuclear delivery vehicles, including battlefield nuclear weapons or counterforce capabilities, in addition to their strategic nuclear weapons or counter value capabilities. The open-ended nuclear competition resulted in "expanding India and Pakistan military fissile material production capabilities on a scale that may lead to significant increases in the size of their nuclear weapon inventories over the next decade."⁶⁸ Both could hardly fail to grasp the repercussions of a war between them. Carl von Clausewitz observed, "that when the potential exists for extreme violence, states should not take the first step toward war without carefully considering the last step."⁶⁹ Indeed, nuclear weapons clarified and sharpened the Indian and Pakistani leaderships' thinking about war in ways other weapons could not, therefore, during the Pulwama crisis they were cautious of escalation of crisis because they readily 'grasped the image of the last step.' In the words of Kenneth Waltz, "Nuclear weapons make the cost of war seem frighteningly high and thus discourage states from starting any wars that might lead to the use of such weapons. Nuclear weapons have helped maintain peace between the great powers and have not led their few other possessors to military adventures."⁷⁰ Thus, nuclear deterrence moderated belligerent neighbors' behavior in South Asia. Once leaders in New Delhi and Islamabad recognized and acknowledged to the other that a nuclear war between them would almost certainly lead to their mutual destruction, it made them extremely reluctant to take any action that they considered would escalate the crisis into an all-out war. Accordingly, nuclear deterrence prevented the escalation of crises—1999 Kargil, 2001-2002 military deployments, 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, 2016 India's Phantom 'Surgical Strikes', and 2019 air combat—

between India and Pakistan. The significant contribution of nuclear deterrence to peace and stability in the region is that even if a few conflicts occurred during the last two decades, the presence of nuclear weapons had limited their escalation. This illustrated the continuing value of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan.

The review of India and Pakistan strategic competition in the post-nuclear weapons testing in May 1998 revealed that the third party, the United States, played a decisive role in sustaining nuclear deterrence stability in three crises—1999 Kargil, 2001-2002 military standoff on the international border and 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack—between the belligerent neighbors. Each time, both welcomed Americans mediation, “seeing it as an insurance policy against all-out escalation.”⁷¹ After the militants attacked an army base in Uri in IoK in 2016, the Modi government claimed about conducting ‘surgical strikes’ against Pakistan on September 29, 2016. The US silence over the phantom ‘surgical strike’ mantra of India undermined its mediatory role between India and Pakistan. Michael Krepon opined:

“In New Delhi’s calculus, “surgical strikes” by commandoes across the Line of Control dividing Kashmir now seem insufficient, as does striking back within Azad Kashmir. Combat aircraft are now part of the equation for retaliation and response. More meaningful targets are likely in store. National leaders now find themselves amidst new escalation dynamics, and the usual expectations of third-party crisis management no longer apply.”⁷²

The nonappearance of a third party commitment in crisis management to continue nuclear deterrence stability between India and Pakistan could result in the spiraling of crisis in the future. In such a situation, the Pakistani defense policymakers’ responsibility was to establish that New Delhi, from whatever quarter, understand plainly that the capacity and resolve of Pakistan should deny India victory and that the price the latter pay due to its military adventure should be intolerable. Deterrence theory is simply the persuasion of one’s opponent that the costs and risks of a given course of action outweigh its benefits. The classic focus of deterrence theory has been on creating a military capability to prevent taking aggressive military action.⁷³ Thus, struggling for deterrence stability is not for waging or fighting a war, but for preparing for a war.

Pakistan’s force structure, proximity, and power-projection capability and above all announced ‘Quid pro-Quo Plus’ strategy did not desist India to take aggressive military action on February 26. It was a blatant challenge to Pakistan’s deterrent apparatus. Islamabad’s attempts for immediate deterrence (a potential

attacker is actively considering the use of force, and the deterrer, aware of that threat, issues a counter-threat to deter) also failed. For example, in response to Prime Minister Modi warmongering, his Pakistani counterpart promised for retaliation for the sake of deterrence stability.⁷⁴ On February 27, 2019, Pakistan's retaliation became obligatory because "deterrence comes in three varieties: retaliation, punishment, and denial. At the heart of all three types of deterrence lie capability and credibility."⁷⁵ Pakistan's retaliation validated its deterrent capability and credibility to carry out plausible military actions that were unaffordable for India.⁷⁶ It encouraged both sides to adopt a high state of alert to discourage adversarial pre-emption, thereby increased the risk of accidental war. The course of events, however, forced India to back down from an implausible threat.

The deterrence theorization in the South Asian strategic environment envisioned at strategic nuclear deterrence level before the Pulwama military standoff. The fundamental of deterrence stability theorization between India and Pakistan was the threat of the use of nuclear weapons as the instrument of punishment. Therefore, conventional deterrence level or retaliation with conventional armaments received less attention. The situation transformed due to PAF retaliation on February 27, 2019. It exposed the limits of India's apparent conventional advantage. "Pakistan's conventional strength is sufficient to eliminate India's ability to impose high costs with a low-intensity conventional response, and Pakistan has drawn its nuclear use red lines such that any high-intensity conventional response will lead to the risk of a nuclear war."⁷⁷ Accordingly, the use of conventional weapons by India against Pakistan destabilized nuclear deterrence stability between them. Theoretically, it was difficult to underestimate the negativity of the use of the conventional weapons in a nuclearized strategic environment due to the probability of unintentional escalation of the limited conventional war. Hence, nuclear deterrence stability needs to be grounded on conventional deterrence stability between nuclear-armed strategic competitors. Many security analysts considered India's surgical strike at Balakot on February 26, 2019, the breach of Pakistan's conventional deterrence. However, PAF retribution on the following day rejuvenated the credibility of Pakistan's conventional deterrence and revived a new period of stability. On February 27, 2019, the air combat between IAF and PAF was a peak of instability at the conventional level as well as in a nuclearized strategic environment. Still, both sides observed maximum restraint to avoid further escalation of the conflict. Simultaneously, the high alert of both India and Pakistan armed forces with maximum transparency continued. This added a factor of conventional deterrence stability in the strategic environment of India and Pakistan.

India had both urge and self-assurance about its military capability to launch with impunity conventional punitive offensive in Azad Kashmir before February 27, 2019. The Indian leadership frequently issued threats of 'punitive-action,' 'hot-pursuits,' and 'surgical strikes'. The Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces-2017 and Land-Warfare Doctrine-2018 were grounded on concepts to cater to India's conventional offensive pursuits. Hence, it was not deterred from a surgical strike at Balakot on February 26, 2019, by the prospect of Pakistan retaliation under the nuclear threshold. The termination of conflict after the air-combat between IAF and PAF signified the relevance of the current balance of power to lessen both sides' reliance on nuclear weapons to deter the escalation of a conflict. Both sides conventional forces shouldered the burden of sustaining conflict stability, ensuring the continuity of strategic balance in the region as the instrument of deterrence by denial in addition to nuclear weapons as the instrument of deterrence by punishment. The PAF befitting-cum-restrained response revealed that Pakistan was not relying solely on nuclear deterrence. That premise resulted in consideration of conventional force options to deter and, if necessary, defeat the invading land forces.

The surgical strike at Balakot's politico-military objective was an act of compellence, i.e., to change Pakistan's Kashmir policy and also demonstrate that Prime Minister Modi dared to strike nuclear-armed adversary for changing its foreign and strategic plan. Theoretically speaking, the IAF surgical strike 'dented' deterrence stability instead of 'quashing or ending' it at least for 30 hours between belligerent neighbors. Prime Minister Modi's speech and discussion in India's electronic and print media following the Balakot surgical strike generated the impression that Pakistan lacked deterrence capability. However, PAF retaliation in broad daylight evaporated the euphoria of India's military superiority and demonstrated Pakistan's deterrence creditability. India crossed the first-rung, and Pakistan crossed the second-rung on the escalatory ladder. Despite the loss of its two fighter jets and arrest of a pilot in combat, India chose not to proceed further to the third rung because of the fear of escalation. India's apprehension of crossing third-rung 'rectified' deterrence stability between the nuclear-armed belligerent neighbors. The following table sums-up the deterrent remodeling between India and Pakistan in post-Pulwama strategic environment:

Components of Deterrence	Pakistan	India	Appraisal
Capability	Pakistan acquired conventional and nuclear military capability and deployed conventional forces in a ready mode that can retaliate immediately in an unacceptable manner to deny India's objectives in an unaffordable way.	India acquired and deployed conventional and nuclear military forces that enable it to carry out plausible military actions with immunity—'surgical strike' to pursue objective(s) in an affordable way.	Comparative analysis of belligerent neighbors' force structure reveals that India's 'surgical strike' stratagem lacks a firm basis, i.e., conventional and nuclear military capability to overwhelm Pakistan militarily.
Credibility	Pakistan's a befitting-cum-restraint response exhibits its intent and resolves to protect a given interest. Pakistan's reputation for carrying out threats, as opposed to bluffing, was established. The credibility of the deterrent force reinforced.	Pakistan's de-escalating overtures validate/reinforce the credibility of India's force structure, proximity, and power-projection capability to discourage Pakistan from an escalation of a conflict.	India and Pakistan have intent and resolve to protect their respective given interests. They possessed credible conventional and nuclear force structures and deployments in proximity to retaliate unacceptably.
Communication	The capability and will to carry out the deterrent threat, but refraining from a deliberate conflict escalation.	Lacks capability and will to escalate the conflict into all-out war despite initiating a conflict.	India and Pakistan are rational nuclear-armed actors. They do calculate and conclude a negative cost-benefit to the escalation of a conflict. Hence no incentive to initiate or escalate the conflict soon.

The deterrence stability remodeling demands the revisit and revamping of stability/instability paradox hypothesis in the region. It was established that Pakistan would retaliate in kind and further escalate the pressure on India. Conversely, India has been struggling to develop disarming capabilities to neutralize Pakistan's nuclear capabilities in a future conflict. "The goal of such a shift would be to allow New Delhi to recapture the space it believed it had lost for conventional retaliation, without fear of nuclear use from Pakistan and without

having to engage in tit-for-tat nuclear war fighting.”⁷⁸ The danger in the action-reaction measures would be that India and Pakistan could be locked in a classic risky arms race escalation spiral.

Rationally, it was hard to imagine India attacking Pakistan even with conventional weapons after February 27, 2019, air combat, simply because there would be a chance of traditional action-reaction spiraling into nuclear use. The encouraging experience was that despite Pakistan's declaratory first-use nuclear policy, it seemed hard to imagine it would be using nuclear weapons first in a crisis because it considered nuclear weapons as a last-resort weapon and had confidence in its conventional defensive fence. However, the undeniable reality is that during the crisis, the escalatory spiral has its dynamics, which could compel it to pursue exceedingly risky strategies. Besides, post-Pulwama military standoff reveals that India is unable to achieve the ability to execute counterforce strikes against Pakistani nuclear targets. Nevertheless, its pursuit of counterforce strikes capability and nuclear compellence strategy intensifies an arms race on the Indian subcontinent and also compelled both sides to prepare for dangerous strike first option in a crisis.

Conclusion

India's 'surgical strike' stratagem revealed that its minimum nuclear deterrence evolved into a nuclear war-fighting posture to achieve escalation dominance for the sake of nuclear compellence strategy. Therefore, it deployed nuclear assets in the post-Pulwama military standoff to strike Pakistan's military, air and naval bases, missile storage areas, and other strategic facilities. Pakistan observed restraint and remained stuck to its un-deployed nuclear deterrent policy during the military standoff. However, it retaliated with conventional weapons after the compromise of its conventional deterrence on February 26, 2019. The subsequent transformation in India's nuclear posture necessitated that Pakistan's National Command Authority rethink its nuclear posture and further improve its conventional war fighting capability to deter India's surgical strike stratagem. "Conventional deterrence in crises less than national survival can be more effective than nuclear deterrence, as its capability enhanced by the certainty (therefore, credibility) of a response."⁷⁹ The state of Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability was well known to India, courtesy of its nuclear deterrence policy that necessitated the release of information on capability. Its Nuke policy prioritized the maintenance of a limited but survivable nuclear force having first use policy with ambiguity remained over the conditions under which it employed its nuclear weapons in a war. Currently, FSD is sound and served the objectives of deterrence stability in the

region. However, it needed to continue improving its ground, air, and submarine-based nuclear strike precision capability to maintain a viable nuclear triad for the sake of a credible nuclear deterrent and a befitting nuclear retaliation in the wake of India's nuclear compellence strategy or preemptive nuclear war thinking. Besides, Pakistan ought to enhance its conventional war-fighting capability to check India's extensive military mobilization and horizontal escalation below the nuclear-threshold. The gist of the study is that India's nuclear compellence strategy would not be workable against Pakistan because it lacked a nuclear advantage over the latter. Therefore it could not afford to escalate a crisis and run a higher risk of nuclear conflict. The nuclear compellence strategy is likely to succeed when compellent threats come from nuclear-armed states against a nonnuclear opponent because the latter cannot threaten atomic retaliation in response to the nuclear attack. Thus, in the context of India and Pakistan, nuclear weapons would remain useful or effective tools of nuclear deterrence rather than nuclear compellence.

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