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***Nuclear Stability in Asia
Strengthening Order in Times of Crises***

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***Session II:
Stability in South Asia***

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Nuclear Stability in South Asia: Pakistan-India-China

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After situating Pakistan in the context of current geopolitics (June, 2016), I consider here three nuclear issues that jointly involve Pakistan, India, and China. These are presently the key determinants of nuclear stability in South Asia.

But before embarking upon the nuclear aspect, it is important to understand that the world view of Pakistan's strategists and foreign policy planners – which really means that of its powerful military – remains firmly centered on India and its actions. Nuclear issues are, of course, evaluated almost exclusively in the context of India but Pakistan also sees its relations with all its other neighbors and the US through this prism.

With Afghanistan, a Muslim country, Pakistan's relations have recently nose-dived in spite of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's repeated overtures and visits to Islamabad. Ghani wants an end to Pakistani support for the Taliban. But the killing in May 2016 of Taliban chief Mullah Mansour in an American drone strike inside Pakistani territory – and the subsequent angry reaction from the Pakistani side – indicates that Pakistani support for the Taliban is far from over. The Pakistan army has long believed that Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan will be better served by a Taliban government rather than one which enjoys US or Indian support. The inauguration earlier this month (June, 2016) of an Indian built dam at Chist-e-Sharif in Afghanistan adds to Pakistan's worry that India is bent upon encircling Pakistan.

With Iran, a Shia Muslim country, Pakistan once had a very close relationship. The Shah of Iran was a national hero in Pakistan and, during his coronation in 1967, some had even called for him to be declared the emperor of Pakistan! After 1996, which is when the newly installed anti-Shia Taliban government took over, Iran-Pakistan relations have deteriorated significantly. Currently India's help in constructing the port of Chahbahar is considered by Pakistan as part of its wider strategy to ring Pakistan with states beholden to India and hence unfriendly to Pakistan. It is commonly believed that India is fomenting separatism in Balochistan, a view that received significant reinforcement after the hugely publicized capture of an Indian spy, [Kulbhushan Yadav](#) who had crossed over from Iran into Pakistan¹.

With China, it's a different story. Things have never been so good and Pakistan's establishment is extremely enthusiastic about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This scheme partly aims at development and is partly a strategic gambit that reflects China's rising geopolitical ambition. The CPEC is expected to lead to a

¹ <http://arynews.tv/en/indian-paper-explains-how-kulbhushan-yadav-blew-his-cover-in-pakistan/>

network of highways, railways, and pipelines accompanied by energy, industrial, and other infrastructure development projects to address critical energy shortages needed to boost Pakistan's economic growth. Eventually, the CPEC will also facilitate trade along an overland route that connects China to the Indian Ocean, linking the Chinese city of Kashgar to the Pakistani port of Gwadar. In the 1980's China provided critical help to Pakistan in its development of nuclear weapons, and is Pakistan's only acknowledged supplier of nuclear power plants and technology. Naturally, Pakistan sees China as its major strategic ally and partner, the supplier of weaponry, and a source of economic strength.

Finally, although it is not a neighbor, the United States has loomed large over Pakistan's foreign policy. Since the 911 attacks, Pakistan has fluctuated between being a loyal ally of the US and a secret accomplice of those who seek to inflict harm on the US. The upshot of this, and the rising economic military and economic might of India, has led to the U.S. policy of [dehyphenation](#). This policy puts Pakistan in a different category from India and destroyed a once symmetrical relationship. The US now envisions India as a strategic partner that would limit Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Let us now turn to those issues determining nuclear stability or, equally, those which may be the cause of instability and rapid racing on the subcontinent.

I. The question of India and Pakistan's entrance into the Nuclear Suppliers Group

The United States is enthusiastic about India's membership. During his visit to India in 2010, President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued a [joint statement](#).²

The United States intends to support India's full membership in the four multilateral export control regimes – the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Australia Group (for chemical and biological controls), and the Wassenaar Arrangement (for dual-use and conventional arms controls) – in a phased manner, and to consult with regime members to encourage the evolution of regime membership criteria, consistent with maintaining the core principles of these regimes.

This support has been repeatedly reaffirmed and, as a follow up, [Westinghouse](#) has recently inked a deal to sell six AP-1000 reactors to India³. But, as India's strategic

² https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/india-factsheets/India-US_Agreement_on_Export_Controls.pdf

³ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-and-india-agree-u-s-company-to-build-six-nuclear-reactors-1465317345>

rival and Pakistan's strategic partner, China is expected to oppose India's membership unless Pakistan is admitted as well. Pakistan has already formally applied for membership, and China says that its aspirations are legitimate. China [stated](#) in 2015 that⁴,

We support Pakistan's engagement with the NSG, and hope such efforts could be conducive to the authority and effectiveness of the international non-proliferation regime... Pakistan has taken steps towards its mainstreaming into the global non-proliferation regime.

Although China did not block the lifting of NSG sanctions on India in 2008, it is expected to push hard for Pakistan's membership. This would make easier the export of Chinese nuclear reactors to Pakistan. Presently China takes the position that those exported in recent years have been "grandfathered". But this can go only so far. Thus China is likely to take the position that either both countries are awarded NSG membership or else neither is. Citing the A.Q. Khan affair, the US, UK, and France are expected to oppose Pakistan's membership.

Opinion: both countries should be awarded NSG membership provided that they abide by [UNSCR 1172](#) which calls for a cessation of nuclear testing, fissile material production, and development of ballistic missiles.⁵ To deny Pakistan membership while granting it to India will lay open the NSG to charges of partiality and disregard of basic principles of fairness.

II. The development of tactical nuclear weapons by Pakistan

Pakistan is explicit about its plans to use short-range nuclear weapons to counter Indian conventional forces. Pakistan's planners intend this as a shot across the bows: the armoured invasion could stop and the Indians withdraw in the face of such resoluteness. Pakistan has "blocked the avenues for serious military operations by the other side", declared retired General Khalid Kidwai in March 2015. He dismissed fears that the command and control of truck launched missiles would introduce command and control instability. Echoing this message, in October 2015, Pakistan's foreign secretary, Aizaz Choudhury, [declared](#)⁶ that Pakistan might use tactical nuclear weapons in a conflict with India.

India is making its own preparations. In a massive military exercise in April 2016 involving tanks, artillery, armored personnel carriers and 30,000 soldiers in the Rajasthan desert bordering Pakistan, the Indian Army practiced what it would do if

⁴ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1269971.shtml

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1172

⁶ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1214157>

attacked with nuclear weapons on the battlefield. Driving the current set of Indian strategies and capabilities is the army's search for a way to use military force to retaliate against Pakistan for harboring terrorists who, from time to time, have launched devastating attacks inside India.

Driving the current set of Indian strategies and capabilities is the army's search for a way to use military force to retaliate against Pakistan for harboring terrorists who, from time to time, have launched devastating attacks inside India. In 2001, the Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammad claimed credit for an attack on India's parliament. India massed troops on the border but had to withdraw them after several months. Pakistan's threat to use nuclear weapons if attacked, a public commitment by then President Pervez Musharraf to restrain militants from future attacks, and international pressure ultimately caused the crisis to wind down. Following the 2008 attack on Mumbai by Pakistan based militants, General Deepak Kapoor, then army chief, declared that India must find a way to wage "limited war under a nuclear overhang."

India's doctrine is worth considering here as well. In 2003, India's cabinet [declared](#) nuclear weapons "will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere ... nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage." According to Admiral Vijay Shankar, a former head of Indian strategic nuclear forces, such [retaliation](#) would involve Indian nuclear attacks on Pakistan's cities. General Kidwai [describes](#) such Indian threats as "bluster and blunder." Risking the slaughter of millions and mutual destruction seems to be the order of the day.

There are risks short of war, of course. Nuclear weapon units integrated with conventional forces and ready to be dispersed on a battlefield pose critical command and control issues. General Kidwai [believes](#) such a focus on "lesser issues of command and control, and the possibility of their falling into wrong hands is unfortunate."⁷ He claims "Our nuclear weapons are safe, secure and under complete institutional and professional control." The implication is that communications between the nuclear headquarters and deployed units in the field will be perfectly reliable and secure even in wartime. Also, that commanders of individual units will not seek or have the capability to launch a nuclear strike unless authorized.

It is difficult to believe these claims. Peering through the fog of war, dizzied by the developments on a rapidly evolving battlefield, confronting possible defeat, and fuelled by generations of animosity towards India as well as a thirst for revenge from previous wars, it cannot be guaranteed that a nuclear commander will follow the rules.

Opinion: A first step to reducing all these nuclear dangers is to prevent an escalation of tensions. This must start with Pakistan tackling the threat of Islamist

⁷ <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/03-230315carnegieKIDWAI.pdf>

militancy at home and preventing militant attacks across the India-Pakistan border. The two countries also should prepare if things go wrong. One possibility is a direct line of communication – a hotline – from Pakistan’s SPD chief to the head of India’s Strategic Forces Command. There are other hotlines, and they are not always used or used wisely, but in a crisis this may be better than relying on the television news, Facebook or Twitter.

III. Development of SLBMs and ABMs by India

Expectedly Pakistan has reacted sharply to the reported successful testing of a nuclear-capable K-4 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBMs) by India last month from its nuclear-powered submarine, the INS Arihant. India envisages having a full fleet of large nuclear-powered submarines, of which the Arihant is the first.

A spokesman for the Strategic Plans Division [said](#) that the “up-gradation of military hardware by India for operationalizing Cold Start Doctrine; building a variety of nuclear capable missiles ranging from tactical weapons to inter-continental ballistic missiles, enabling of its nuclear triad; acquisition and up-gradation of aircraft carrier fleet and nuclear submarines were all worrisome developments that would destabilize the nuclear stability.”⁸

Pakistan has also said that it is "seriously concerned" by [India's test](#) of a locally developed anti-ballistic missile on 15 May.⁹ This could intercept missiles coming from the Pakistani side and thus blunt Pakistan’s offensive edge.

Opinion: Given India’s burgeoning economic power and competition with China, it is hard to see how it can be dissuaded from pushing the subcontinent’s arms race. For now one can only watch.

Prognosis

Pakistan and India are locked in a stalemate today and it is difficult to see what will break that. Pakistan insists on Kashmir being the core issue while India is adamant that Kashmir is non-negotiable. Instead it insists that Pakistan must prevent terrorist from using Pakistani soil to attack targets in India.

⁸ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1258420/indias-bid-for-second-strike-capability-to-put-pressure-on-pakistan-says-spd-official>

⁹ <http://in.reuters.com/article/pakistan-india-arms-idINKCN0YA2KL>

What can prevent an escalation of tensions? Obviously, the most potent action would be to somehow prevent more terrorist actors from crossing the India-Pakistan border. Some optimism is justified here. To its credit, Pakistan was relatively forthcoming this time around when attackers belonging to the Jaish-e-Mohammed, a militant jihadist group based in Pakistan, stormed the Pathankot airbase in India. Sartaj Aziz, the adviser on foreign affairs to prime-minister Nawaz Sharif, made the surprising revelation that one of the mobile phone numbers linked to those who attacked the Pathankot airbase had been traced to the militant Jaish-e-Mohammed group's headquarters in Bahawalpur. Subsequently a Pakistani fact-finding mission went to Pathankot to investigate Indian claims. Unfortunately the investigation has foundered, and diplomatic relations between the two countries are currently at a low point after the unearthing of an Indian spy chain in Pakistan's province, Baluchistan.

In these circumstances, it is difficult to imagine any kind of rapprochement. The only reasonable route to pursue is that of management of tensions and prevention of their escalation. Rather than limit cooperation to crisis management after an attack, Pakistan and India could agree a South Asian version of the Open Skies Treaty to provide each other limited access to their air space for surveillance purposes. India has an interest in monitoring possible militant camps within Pakistan and border areas where militants may cross. Pakistan seeks early warning in case India is preparing to mount a surprise attack. The 1992 Open Skies Treaty, covering the United States and its European North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies and Russia and its former Soviet and Eastern European partners, allows for controlled surveillance flights with agreed instruments such as photographic and video cameras, radar and infrared-red (heat) scanners. The goal is to [promote](#) "greater openness and transparency in their military activities" and "to facilitate the monitoring of compliance with existing or future arms control agreements and to strengthen the capacity for conflict prevention and crisis management."¹⁰ The United States and other parties to the Open Skies Treaty could share with Pakistan and India the technical and management issues involved and the value and experience of an agreement.

¹⁰ <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102337.htm#articleI>