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Strengthening Order in Times of Crises***

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

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Stability in South Asia: An Indian Perspective

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1. Ever since India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in 1998, stability in South Asia has been a much debated theme. Geographical proximity, political instability in Pakistan and unresolved border and territorial issues add to the concerns about South Asian stability. Several international independent assessments have come out in the recent years suggesting a growth in Pakistani nuclear arsenal and if the trend continues, it could very well become the world's fifth largest nuclear weapon state. Pakistan has presumably based its decision to grow the nuclear arsenal based on its own calculations about India's nuclear arsenal. There are those who have raised concerns that India could possibly respond to Pakistan's expansion and thus it could give way to a nuclear arms race in Asia. However, there is a somewhat calming phenomena because India has not shown much reaction or concern to Pakistan's growing nuclear arsenal. Nevertheless, there is a slow and steady development of India's nuclear capabilities but this is not directly linked to the developments in Pakistan or even that of China. But since India does not yet have adequate deterrent capability against China, there will be gradual enhancement of India's capabilities which will continue in the coming years.
2. Having said that, there are two broad issues that need to be examined: technology & doctrine; external partnerships and influence. With regard to technology and doctrine, there are some dangers, but there are some exaggerations too. India has outlined a nuclear doctrine including a clearly spelt out No First Use (NFU) policy. But even so, there are some problems with the doctrine, especially as it relates to massive retaliation or using nuclear weapons against any WMD attack including chemical and biological weapons. There have been some in India who demand that India change this policy. There have been some who have demanded to give up also NFU policy. But it seems unlikely that anything will happen. India seems quite happy with the current doctrine by and large. However, if there is movement and if the government were to actually review and make changes, it will only be in more moderate direction – certainly there will be no dropping of NFU.
3. The question of review/ change in India's nuclear doctrine came up recently in April 2014 when the BJP highlighted in its election manifesto. However, the idea

of engaging in such an exercise has been shelved and has been stated by none other Prime Minister Modi himself on repeated occasions.¹ I would here also argue that a periodic review is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, a periodic review that takes into account various regional and global developments could be more credible and reassuring. While the broad tenets will likely remain the same, periodic reviews could add rigour and clarity to the doctrine.

4. On the other hand, Pakistan has no stated nuclear doctrine but insists on first use policy. It appears that the loud rhetoric is to essentially deter India and it is unlikely that Pakistan will risk everything and actually use its nuclear weapons first. So it is more bluster but it works. Indian government has been scared by Pakistan's loud rhetoric and so Pakistan has already achieved its objective of deterring India. Thus, today, India's concerns are not so much that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is growing but the fact that New Delhi does not have an effective option of dealing with sub-conventional conflicts arising out of/ sponsored by Pakistan. Nevertheless, there are dangers - danger arising out of Pakistan's introduction of actual tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs). Because if they do it (they claim but not clear if they are forward deployed yet), it could be dangerous for a couple of different reasons. It is not clear if Pakistan has resolved command and control issues around TNWs - whether the command / order has been passed on to battlefield commanders to use TNWs in case of a perceived attack is not certain. There is also the possibility that terrorists could steal and gain access to TNWs and lastly concerns of potential accidents or inadvertent use of TNWs, all of which pose as dangerous scenarios.
5. Biggest dangers, at least on Indian side, is government's absent-minded approach and so arsenal might keep growing. But if one were to examine the numbers in the last one decade, that is not really the case and it should not pose itself as a big concern. In the beginning of the decade around 2000, India is believed to have 30-50 nuclear warheads and it has grown to around 110-120 today,² which works out to an increase of roughly 70 warheads in 16 years or an annual average increase of slightly more than four warheads per year. This should not raise alarm

¹ Prime Minister Modi, since coming to office, has stated that India has no plans to move away from its stated NFU policy. In an interview in August 2014, Modi was categorical in saying that "No first use was a great initiative of Atal Bihari Vajpayee - there is no compromise on that. We are very clear. No first use is a reflection of our cultural inheritance." See Douglas Busvine, "India's Modi says committed to no first use of nuclear weapons," Reuters, April 16, 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-india-election-nuclear-idUKBREA3F11B20140416>

² Hand M Kristensen and Robert S Norris, "Indian Nuclear Forces," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/71/5/77.full.pdf>

bells. This also fits with what India has been reiterating for more than a decade that India is not aiming at a massive build-up of its nuclear arsenals – a point categorically stated in India’s [draft nuclear doctrine](#) released in 1999. The doctrine said, “India shall pursue a doctrine of credible minimum nuclear deterrence” and this was further reinstated when elements of India’s official nuclear doctrine were released in January 2003.

6. There is an overall increase in the number of nuclear warheads in South Asia but not direct cause of each other and therefore it is not the typical arms race as was seen during the Cold War. Development of India’s deterrent capability is not focused on Pakistan but China.³ Again, with China too, India is not in a competition to develop capability one for one, but the effort is to develop long-range weapons and strengthen its delivery capabilities, and not match it in numbers.
7. Two, on external relationships, India is both opportunistic and a reliable partner, but these two are not mutually exclusive. Seen in the nuclear realm, despite not being a signatory to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), India never violated NPT norms (despite the opportunity to proliferate), in fact abided by all the principles that enshrine the treaty. It has a clean record that even some of the signatories cannot claim.
8. India’s decision-makers are extremely risk-averse; unlike China or Pakistan. So, India is generally considered reliable but New Delhi, as seen in recent years, is seen using opportunities offered by its greater importance, better image among other things. For instance, the 2008 NSG waiver, 2005 India-US civil nuclear agreement, and now NSG membership – all are examples of how India uses opportune moments to scurry benefits. However, India’s entry into the four export control regimes including NSG and its efforts to be part of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture will only enhance the nuclear regime.
9. China has already destabilized by giving Pakistan nuclear technology, delivery mechanisms like missiles, now power plants, thus protecting/ shielding Pakistan, as part of its containment of India strategy. Despite being an NSG member, China’s engagement in proliferation of these technologies has undermined the efficacy of these global institutions.

³ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, “Delhi’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *The World Today*, June & July 2016, pp. 30-31.

10. In terms of implications of and impact on regional stability of Chinese actions, damage is already done. The military balance in South Asian has been altered because of Chinese actions – not clear if it can do more. And now within multilateral platforms like Conference on Disarmament (CD), Pakistan is shielding China. Pakistan has prevented negotiations on FMCT to the point of even revising the Shannon Mandate.
11. So this is a bad “axis” for international security stability – should not be seen from a narrow regional perspective alone.