

THE PROBABILITIES OF NUCLEAR WAR IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

Both India and Pakistan are traditional rivals since their inception and both are nuclear powers, and this thing has made the South Asian region a nuclear danger. After becoming nuclear states, nuclear weapons have occupied center stage in the India Pakistan security debates. The centrality of nuclear weapons has entirely changed the strategic approach in the South Asian region. The probabilities of nuclear war are obvious due to the poor culture of conflict management and elite mind sets of both the countries in the region. Any miscalculation or misinformation can drift towards nuclear war. After comparing US-Soviet and Indo-Pak situations, it can be observed that both the countries are at the brink of nuclear war. However, both the countries proved to be the responsible states during Kargil and in 2001-2002 military standoffs, but it is not assumed that Kargil would be the last crisis in between them. The Kashmir dispute could be the tinderbox and a flash point for a nuclear conflagration. After analyzing the different probabilities of nuclear war in the South Asian region, the present study has suggested recommendations for avoiding the nuclear risks. Nuclear deterrence by itself does not ensure peace between two hostile neighbors unless the root cause of possible conflict is removed.

Introduction

The chances of nuclear war in the world are unlikely to happen in future because it is assumed that the nuclear arsenals are simply for the deterrence only. The fear of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) would prevent it as it did in the past. It is assumed that humans seek individual and collective survival rationally and would not attempt to destroy their adversaries if they are sure that they will be destroyed in the process. From these premises, some of them conclude that the presence of nuclear weapons can assure global peace rather than threatening it.

The fear of MAD, in which the untested deterrence theory is based, provides weak grounds for preventing a nuclear war indefinitely. In certain situations, some humans such as suicide bombers willingly choose to destroy themselves in order to destroy their enemy. In some other situations, a group and nation can adopt this self-destructive behavior for reasons similar to the individuals.

Indeed, the capacity of nuclear weapons to cause destruction at much larger scale and in a very short time makes them different in their consequence. But seen from the perspective of a suicide bomber, or a country having the mentality of a suicide bomber, it is inconsequential if the weapon used for self destruction is a cyanide pill or nuclear weapon, as their only concern is to cause the greatest possible damage to the enemy. Nuclear weapons are more suited to achieve such a goal than conventional weapons.

In the South Asian region, India and Pakistan have extraordinary status because India has more than 70 percent area and population and Pakistan has more than 18 percent area and population. Due to its hegemonic size, Indian political elite especially Hindu nationalist parties conceive the South Asian region as a single political entity. “George K. Tanham, of Rand Corporation, having visited India several times came back with impression that Indians consider the whole of the South Asian region as one political and strategic entity and that they intend to deny Pakistan the potential to challenge this claim. Most Indians strategists assume that Pakistan is a main hurdle in the Indian way for becoming the regional power in South Asia”.¹

There are number of people, groups of people and political parties in Pakistan seeking the conquest of India or its disintegration. Some of them are not adequately aware of the consequences of such an act to their own country or, may be they are willing to pay the necessary price.

Peace and security of South Asia is now an international concern and it can be achieved by adopting the effective ways of conflict management. The track record of conflict management in the presence of nuclear weapons is very poor in the region. Conflicts

can be resolved through innovative ideas that will offer tangible and effective substitutes to violence and hostility.

No doubt, both India and Pakistan are nuclear states and it is the need of time to analyze the mindset of the political elite of both the countries and to motivate them to resolve their disputes peacefully because nuclear war may be happened due to aggression of any one country.

Differences between US-Soviet and Indo-Pakistan Situations

Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) assured “no war peace” between USA, former Soviet Union and Europe during the Cold War, the geo-strategic and socio cultural environment in South Asia differs considerably from the region of the globe.

- The Communist and the Western world differed in their ideologies. They were involved in containing each other in various parts of the globe. They were known to be rational in their behavior. So when ever crisis of major proportions occurred, they were averted. Any flare-up during the Berlin Blockade in 1948-49, the Taiwan Straits crisis in 1954, and the China-Soviet conflict in 1969 was averted because the adversaries behaved in a rational manner and pulled back from the brink of war in the nick of time. Neither of them was prepared to see the destruction of their societies for the sake of temporary gains”.²
- It is not assumed that leaders in Eastern world show a greater sense of responsibility than those in the West. There are political leaders in both India and Pakistan whose behavior is based on emotions rather than on rationality. “One can not deny that the leaders of the two nuclear giants took strategic decisions in a deliberate and calculated manner. Both had stable governments though their ideologies differed. During the Cold War, four out of five Kremlin chiefs are reported to have died in office,

of old age. Nikita Khrushchev, who failed to act in a sensible manner, was removed”³.

- The USA and former Soviet Union have no common border. Mighty oceans separate them from one another. Their forces have not come face to face in any part of the globe throughout their 50 years of bitterness. The chances of direct conflict between them were remote and nuclear deterrence held. There was no history of direct clashes between the American and the Russians. They have remained at a distance from each other and preferred proxy wars to achieve their political goals. Direct conflicts were avoided at all costs.
- India and Pakistan have a long common frontier which is occasionally violated. No natural feature of any significance separates them. Indian and Pakistani troops sit eyeball to eyeball along the entire length of the line of control in Kashmir and frequently get involved in an exchange of fire. They have fought wars for resolving their disputes. “An undemarcated border in an insignificant piece of territory in the Rann of Kutch led to a conflict in 1965. An internal political issue encouraged Mrs. Indra Gandhi to send her troops marching into East Pakistan and make full use of the opportunity provided to her by an inept political and military leadership in Pakistan in 1971. The temptation to go for war between India and Pakistan like the two superpowers during the Cold War.”⁴
- The political instability is observed in India and Pakistan. There is no chance of overnight change of the Governments in USA and in former Soviet Union. Street power did not topple their regimes. No military coups took place. State structures remained stable and government policies did not revert with the change of the governments.
- “Pakistan has faced three military coups. Governments have been dismissed and constitutions abrogated several

times. Policies have shifted from joining US sponsored military pacts to condemning Washington's interference in our internal affairs. The world's largest democracy has not stable regime after the assassination of Mrs. Indra Gandhi in 1984. The BJP government reversed the policy of secularism and has adopted a very aggressive posture towards China and Pakistan. Political instability in India and Pakistan can breakdown nuclear deterrence."⁵

- Both USA and former Soviet Union did not enter an all out war due to both having the MAD capability. They have developed latest anti ballistic missile systems. Will India and Pakistan not fall into a similar spiraling arms race? Security does not come through weapons alone. It comes through solving disputes and removing tension through peaceful negotiations.

Nuclear Doctrine of India and Pakistan and Drift towards an International War

Even it is assumed that such people will not come to power during the period, the two countries possess nuclear weapons. A very precarious assumption indeed, the two countries can drift into an international war due to the thrust of their nuclear doctrines. "India is expanding its nuclear program continuously and has attained second strike capability. On the other side, India proclaimed that it has no intentions to use nuclear arsenals against Pakistan. However, Pakistan declared that it can utilize nuclear arsenals for the sake of its survival and integrity."⁶

Many Pakistani and Indian strategists know that due to having smaller conventional forces, Pakistan can initiate a nuclear strike. For avoiding such strike, India may initiate pre-emptive strike. Pakistan will not hesitate to use nuclear bomb to counter such pre-emptive strike. All these possibilities create a highly unstable situation in which nuclear war can erupt."⁷

Both the countries have made a number of threats of using nuclear weapons against each other after the nuclear tests. If the security environment between the two countries was free from

jingoism and brinkmanship, such threats could be treated as empty and rhetorical and attempt to please their local hawkish constituencies. However, in the situation as it is between the two countries, such threats can only heighten the war hysteria pushing them towards a nuclear exchange.

The Kargil Episode and the Crisis of 2002

During the Kargil episode, the two countries were heading towards such an exchange. According to the assessment of a British Foreign Minister Peter Hain, “the two countries were very close to a nuclear exchange during these crisis”⁸. The Kargil conflict took place just one year after the nuclear tests in Pokhran and Chagai in summer 1999, and a few months after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajapayee’s visit to Pakistan in February 1999. Kargil was history’s most powerful negation, and such negation was ever needed, of the irrationality of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which proclaims that leave alone a nuclear confrontation, even conventional conflict between nuclear weapons-states, is impossible.

The Kargil conflict was a serious mid-sized military engagement and a shooting war. “It involved at least 40,000 troops from India and thousands of soldiers disguised as *mujahidin* from Pakistan. Both militaries used top of the weaponry. India used a great deal of air power during the two months-long conflict.”⁹.

Kargil was the first military conflict in nearly 30 years between any two nuclearised rivals in the world and the largest-scale conventional military engagement ever between any two nuclear states. “The Usuri River conflict of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s between China and USSR never involved air strikes nor had the same escalation potential. Kargil took a (combined) toll of nearly 1,300 lives (according to Indian government) and over 1,750 (according to Pakistan).”¹⁰

The Kargil war held a serious potential for escalation of the nuclear level. “Both the countries exchanged nuclear threats 13 times within 35 days during Kargil war. This is an indication that both the countries would not hesitate to threaten each other with

nuclear arsenals in future. The Kargil conflict was rooted in the hubris generated by South Asia's recent nuclearization. This created a false sense of complacency in India, coupled with greater willingness in Pakistan to embark on a military misadventure.¹¹

Many political and military leaders and strategic experts in the two countries permitted themselves the dangerous image of invulnerability on account of their nuclear bombs. Their disreputably arrogant claims of superior military-nuclear power are part of a mind set which drives the temptation to raise the conventional danger threshold, to see how far each can irritate and harass the adversary at the sub-war level.

Specifically, nuclear lessons of Kargil are also clear that in future, the South Asian region would be the most dangerous place where nuclear war can be happened. It is when war-time or near war-time conditions prevail, that a nuclear outbreak becomes most likely whether because brinkmanship is practiced, and hostile emotions and suspicions get out of hand, or because the dynamic of military escalation careens out of control.

Soon after the Kargil incidence, "an equally strong refutation happened after the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in 2001; India planned for pre-emptive military action against Pakistan and rose to extraordinary levels through most of 2002. India banned the communication channels of Pakistan and the bilateral relations of both the countries reached at the lowest level after the Kargil incidence. Both the countries mobilized their forces on their borders, and became red alert for war for ten months. It was extremely dangerous situation. It was the second time that South Asian region again came close to a nuclear war. Involving a million troops, this was said to be one of the world's greatest military mobilization since World War II."¹²

During the hair-raising stand-off, India and Pakistan came close to the brink an actual armed conflict at least twice in January, and than again in May-June 2002. India threatened a "limited" conventional strike at alleged terrorist training camps across the LOC. Pakistan openly warned India that any conventional attack by

India, however limited, would precipitate an all-out confrontation, with a nuclear escalation potential. The stand-off was eventually defused through Western intervention, including visits by high US officials.¹³

Nuclear War Due to Kashmir Issue

The drift prone mindsets of the elite in the two countries, the festering dispute over Kashmir can suck them into an un-intended nuclear war. In past, neither of them wanted war particularly in 1965. Pakistan believed that “India would not cross the international borders, but it did and the two countries involved in to a three week war.”¹⁴

Kashmir issue has become a nuclear flash point between the two countries. Both the countries have nuclear capabilities, and the violence intensity over the Kashmir issue may reinforce the two countries to trigger a nuclear war. According to Richard Nixon, “there is no possibility of war in between the nuclear states but in the context of South Asian region, where India and Pakistan can experience the nuclear war”.¹⁵

According to Robert M. Gates, after analyzing the Pak-India relations, “I am afraid that if both the countries come to a war, it will be a nuclear war.”¹⁶ According to Bruce Riedel “Pakistan army mobilized its nuclear arsenals against India in July 1999.”¹⁷ Many of the Pakistan army officials have categorically denied Riedel’s assertion.¹⁸

It can not be assumed that both the countries would not fight in future. According to Lt. General (retired) Kamal Matinuddin, “nuclear arsenals could not assure peace between hostile neighbors unless the root cause of possible conflicts is removed.”¹⁹

Political Culture and Elite Mindsets in India and Pakistan

The way their culture has evolved and is presently structured, humans invariably respond to any threat of their perceived personal and collective survival with violence. However,

the intensity of such violent response is not universally constant. In such a situation, the elite and non elite are in its grip equally. The present history of Hindu and Muslim communities and the post partition developments particularly three wars, the Kashmir issue and other smaller conflicts between the two countries have sustained and stimulated such response continuously. Victories over the enemy and martyrdom for achieving it have become two important values.

The martial qualities such as bravery in causing the greatest damage to the enemy and martyrdom are glorified. The nuclear tests of May 1998 have further strengthened this culture. The elite in both the countries hold highly negative images of each other. They rationalize their policies and actions with reference to the past behavior and fault of each other and often blame each other for the partition of India. The consequences that flowed from it the Pakistani elite repeatedly assert that the Indian leaders continue to be un-reconciled to the existence of Pakistan wanting it collapse.

The Indian elite assume that Pakistani elite has the intentions for further fragmentation of India and reduce its international status. Both blame each other for starting the three wars fought between them. They also hold each other responsible for internal turbulence and terrorism in their countries.²⁰

Reinforcing each other, the dominant strains in this culture create a fertile ground for starting or drifting towards a nuclear war. In a conflict situation when intense emotional frenzy seizes, both the elite become ready to use nuclear weapons. They must be afraid of mutual destruction rationally and the desire to live. Some evidence detailed later suggests that such frenzy during the Kargil crises had brought the two countries near to the nuclear precipice.

Some political extremists in India and Pakistan are willing to be deterred with nuclear arsenals for the security of their ideological concepts. They would not hesitate to use force to achieve their objectives despite the knowledge that the opponent has nuclear weapons. "They carelessly talk of destroying Mumbai and New Delhi to the ground or talking the so called Pakistan-occupied

Kashmir by force of arms, unmindful of the devastating effects on their own population in the event of a nuclear exchange. They are ready to pay whatever price is needed to protect and promote their objectives. Religious animosity and the hysteria that can be built up around it have often resulted in irrational behavior by the extremists in both countries.”²¹

The Hindu-Muslim hatred, which was at its height at the time of independence, unfortunately continues unabated in the minds of the religious extremists on both sides of the border. The demolition of 16th century Babari Mosque in Ajodhya by the BJP in 1992 and the vengeance with which they went about their task was indicative of the latent hatred between the two communities which can be whipped up by leaders motivated by narrow self-interest. The religious parties in Pakistan can also work up similar destructive emotions against perceived enemies of Islam. The religious sectarian and ethnic violence which have plagued the country of late shows short tempers in South Asia.

The jingoistic political culture is fed, sustained and expresses itself in a more extreme form in the declared or undeclared political agenda of a number religious groups and political parties in both countries. According to Rashtriya Sevek Sangh (RSS), “the dropping of nuclear bombs over Pakistan is a solution to the longstanding Pakistani hostility and belligerence against India.”²²

Conflict Management in Nuclear Environment

Disputes between nations can be put into three categories, each requiring a different mode of solving.

- “A dispute can be in existence for a very long time but the issue is such that the parties concerned are willing to wait for it to be resolved while maintaining normal bilateral relations. The India-China dispute over territories in adverse occupation in the Himalayas falls in this category.

- A dispute can be so vital that the stronger party is willing to settle it by military means as soon as it occurs.
- When there is a core issue for both parties but they have not such military capability for resolving the issue by force. The longer such a dispute lasts without a settlement in sight the more chances, there are of nations using unconventional means to achieve their objectives.”²³

The dispute over the status of Jammu and Kashmir falls in the third category. If this issue remains unresolved mistrust and suspicion is likely to grow. Dislike turns to hatred and nuclear weapons are a dangerous mix.

Though “George Perkovich has disclosed that Indian policymakers had considered the option of attacking Pakistan’s nuclear installations in January 1987”,²⁴ the option of going to war to solve a conflict in a nuclear environment is unthinkable. There are military leaders in India who have been floating the idea of limited attack against Pakistan. “They cite Siachin and Kargil as examples where limited attacks have been carried out dispute the fact, both countries had nuclear weapons. Still, the objective of compelling the opponent to give up their policy on Kashmir was not achieved because both armies remained intact and the area occupied was not of that vital importance to force the opponent to submit to the aggressor’s demand.”²⁵

Many analysts in Pakistan believe that the option of a low intensity conflict can be exercised even in a nuclear environment. According to them, “without military pressure, India would not be willing to come to the negotiating table.”²⁶ They believe that a policy of low-intensity conflict, “if properly arranged, may one day tire out the Indians and compel them to come towards the political solution of Kashmir and to satisfy all the three parties’ concerned.”²⁷

However, in the changed international environment after 9/11, world capitals no longer differentiate between freedom movements and acts of terrorism. India has chosen a policy of brinkmanship against Pakistan. The motivation seems to be to

enhance the tension.²⁸ In a nuclear environment, this is a dangerous game to play as matters can get out of control.

Conflict resolution in a nuclear environment requires very careful handling. The steps to be taken by both parties to the conflict include reduction of tension, lessening the bitterness and rivalry, making expectations more realistic, being sensitive to others concerns, avoiding conflicts which might get out of hand and avoiding being isolated.

Nuclear War due to Miscalculations and Misinformation

The superpowers are living under a perpetual fear of nuclear weapons. This fear becomes double in the presence of ballistic missiles which minimize the reaction time against nuclear attack. During the Cold War, the nuclear weapons states set up early warning systems for their protection against the nuclear attack.

The USA and former Soviet Union relied upon sophisticated early warning systems. By this way, they were informed within two to three minutes of the possible launch of nuclear arsenals. They confirmed the information and decided to retaliate within six to seven minutes. The missile flight time in between USA and former Soviet Union is almost 25 minutes. By this way, they had enough time to prevent themselves from any accidental launch of missiles.²⁹

The USA spent a lot of financial resources to make the early warning systems fool proof but it can not be trusted because during the years of 1977 and 1984, the 20,000 factitious indications were received and 1000 indications showed serious threat.³⁰ In November 1979, the US warning system indicated a sudden attack and the concerned forces became alert, but it was wrong alarm because the computer was not switched off properly.³¹ There is an interesting example, in June 1980, the system warned US, about the launching of two missiles and some other missiles following the first two. The US administration was ready to retaliate. That was not true due to the fault in computer.³²

There is limited information about the early warning systems of former Soviet Union, but one thing is clear that its warning system does not compete the US system. In January 1995, the Norwegian government informed Russia about the launch of a rocket. The rocket was traced by the Russian radar. The Russian became red alert, but after the investigations, they were known that the signals were wrong.³³

The early warning systems in South Asian region can not be compared with the US-Soviet systems due to poor technology. For example, USA fired a cruise missile from Arabian Sea to Afghanistan; there was a long distance which missile flew over Pakistan. Before the launch of missile, an American General visited Pakistan for assuring the Pakistani authorities that the target is Afghanistan not Pakistan. But unfortunately that missile was not detected by the Pakistani authorities.³⁴

There are a lot of possibilities of miscalculations and unauthorized use of nuclear weapons due to the absence of sophisticated early warning systems in the South Asian region. Both India and Pakistan are neighboring countries and missile flight time in between their cities is very limited. For example, the ballistic missiles take only five minutes from New Delhi to Sargodha³⁵. By this way, both the countries have a very short reaction time against any attack³⁶. For overcoming minimum reaction time and faults of early warning system, both the countries must deploy Launch of Warning (LOW) system. The deployment of this system is not possible in the near future because of its high cost and technological complications.³⁷

Neither India nor Pakistan has the ability to watch over each other's activities in peacetime. The RAW and the ISI, their intelligence agencies, do intrude into each other's country and, besides other secret activities, keep themselves informed of their movement of troops and weapon systems towards the borders but there are a lot of gaps in the intelligence reports they send to their authorities. Correct and timely information is either not available to them or they fall a prey to faulty conclusions. Chances of decisions taken on false premises are more likely in the India-Pakistan context

than in the case of the better equipped nuclear opponents. Nuclear deterrence is more likely to fail in context of South Asia due to faulty intelligence of the intentions of the enemy.

Steps to Reduce Nuclear Danger

To keep the South Asian region away from nuclear war, certain measures are suggested below:-

- Continue the bilateral strategic dialogues that began with Strobe Talbott's discussion after the May 1998 nuclear tests and were resumed by the Bush administration. However such dialogues should not simply be seen as a forum for the US officials to preach nuclear and missile non-proliferation. Rather, the goal should be gained a greater mutual understanding of the perceived requirements of deterrence stability and strategic restraint, and to help India and Pakistan build greater stability and restraint into their strategic competition.
- Accept Indian and Pakistani compulsions for the development of a relatively small number of survivals, second strike nuclear forces-at least in private, if not formal policy pronouncements. There are two critical challenges here.
 - India and Pakistan might not be content with minimum deterrent capabilities. Many of same forces that drove the United States and the Soviet Union to stockpile numbers and kind of nuclear weapons well in excess of any plausible strategic need probably also will operate in South Asia.
 - India faces a strategic competition with China as well as Pakistan; thus New Delhi might, even though it could far exceed the requirements for deterring Pakistan.
 - Encourage India and Pakistan to see arms control as a vital element of national security, much as the US

and the Soviet Union did after the 1962 Cuban missile crises. Previous non-proliferation measures disguised as arms control such as the CTBT and FMCT might be useful starting points, but meaningful arms control in South Asia probably has to be initiated from inside the region, not imposed from the outside. That is why it makes sense for the US to discuss the process of arms control and linkage between arms control and national security, rather than proposing specific arms control initiatives for India and Pakistan³⁸.

- Examine options for bringing India and Pakistan into the nuclear non-proliferation regime as nuclear-weapon states. Because the NPT does not permit the recognition of additional nuclear weapons states beyond the first five (the US, Russia, Britain, France and China), this will not be an easy process but the costs to the regime of continuing to ignore the reality of a nuclear South Asia are likely to climb in the future.
- Sharing information on “best practices” for ensuring the safety and security of nuclear weapons, but not only, during storage, transportation, and possibly deployment to operational positions. However, such information sharing should not take place by itself. It should be tied to meaningful bilateral dialogues about the requirements of effective nuclear deterrence, for best practices are “best” if they satisfy military as well as political needs.³⁹
- The role of mediator is obvious in the South Asian region. For example, Indo-Pak agreement at Sharm el Sheikh (Egypt) in July 2009 was happened due to a mediator that was USA. A more direct role for a mediator would perhaps be able to help in crisis prevention rather than escalation control. Washington should begin planning now for assertive diplomatic actions to discourage nuclear escalation of India and Pakistan to find themselves at war for the fourth time in their history.⁴⁰

- Discuss with Indian and Pakistani government officials, concrete steps that could be taken to work out solutions to their bilateral disputed, especially regarding the political status of Kashmir. Arguably, this is the most important task, but it also is the hardest. The point is that, while a meaningful peace process is long overdue, measures to improve strategic stability should not be held hostage to what would surely be a long and painful process. At the very least, these interactions would ensure that troop deployment plans are put on hold until all avenues for rapprochement are exhausted. For example, if India planned to mobilize in response to a terrorist attack on its territory; Pakistan could provide proof of its innocence or agree to specific measures to ratify the situation within a set time frame.
- A problem may happen due to nuclear signaling. It can be resolved with the help of communication links between the Director General Military Operations (DGMOs) and foreign secretaries of both the countries. A binding agreement stating that these channels would remain open during crisis. By the help of these channels, misperceptions could be sufficiently reduced.
- For avoiding any nuclear holocaust, there should be a binding agreement on non-deployment during times of crisis or conflict. Pakistan has previously offered to formalize an agreement guaranteeing “non-deployed deterrence” with India. However, the latter rejected it. Pakistan still maintains that it will not initiate deployment.⁴¹
- Both the countries should learn from the experiences of avoidance during the Cold War, and learn generic accident-avoidance techniques and reduction of technological errors, such as electromagnetic radiation, computer fallibility⁴².
- Another risk reduction measure in South Asia is “Cooperative Ariel Observation (CAO)”. It is essentially

a verification mechanism, which theoretically could help in crisis prevention as well as escalation control.⁴³

- Both countries need to ensure that a fail-safe command and control system is operational. A clear chain of command on paper does not necessarily mean that it will hold during conflicts. Safeguards must be built to ensure that the chain of command is fully respected under all conditions. Moreover, even when conflict necessitates dispersal, predeligation should be avoided.
- A composite dialogue on trade and economic issues must simultaneously commence and cover trade related issues such as most favored-nation status, formalizing informal trade, energy pipelines, cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts besides enhancing business by regular interaction of respective chambers of commerce. This will positively compliment and also bring incentives to secure peace.

Conclusion

South Asia demands an approach that leads for parallel processing of different issues, disputes and wrangles. There is no better way of stabilizing nuclear deterrence than opening up many channels of communication at different levels between the two traditional adversaries. It is the responsibility of the leaders of both the countries to respond to each other, not only in terms of warlike statements and scoring the points for political gains but responding to each other for normalization of relations in a true sense. There is a need of time for institutionalizing a nuclear dialogue between the two countries. There must be more transparency in the nuclear doctrines of both the countries for avoiding any accidental use of nuclear weapons and steps should be taken on nuclear risk reduction measures.

It is not possible in the South Asian region to become nuclear free as neither India nor Pakistan would be ready to roll back their nuclear weapons program. However, it can be made

nuclear safe by taking all possible steps to ensure that unintentional nuclear exchange does not take place.

India and Pakistan must change the nature of their relationship as nuclear neighbors. The international community must seek early resolution of their conflicts. Though conflict resolution and end of terrorism in the region are very complicated issues, there is an urgent need to prevent formal nuclear or increased conventional force deployments. Aggressive military policies and engagement in an unrestricted arms race with no communication and fewer safety measures are recipes for nuclear instability. Greater cooperation and construction of a mutually acceptable network for a stable nuclear regime will not happen without regional resolve and facilitation and constant encouragement from the international community. It will India and Pakistan that must decide the best course for stability in the region.

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Notes

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