

Deterrence in Indo-Pak Context

Majid Mahmood

Introduction

The deterrence debate cannot be separated from the theoretical framework of interstate relations that govern states actions. The deterrence in the India – Pakistan context is not an exception to this discussion. This paper attempts to reassess the existing contours of nuclear deterrence debate within the context of larger theoretical framework and how after nearly two decades of nuclearization the assumptions underpinning these contours are valid and relevant to the changed geopolitical landscape.

States can strive to ensure their preservation either through internal balancing (increasing economic and military strength) or external balancing (creating alliances) in relation to other states. Kenneth Waltz introduced the distinction between bandwagoning and balancing, where the former refers to a state joining a stronger state, while the latter refers to a state joining few other states to balance against a more powerful state¹. Changes in the international system therefore depend upon the structure and composition of the powerful states, and more precisely upon the relative capacity of the state concerned.

Karl von Clausewitz famously defined war as the continuation of policy by other means. This is now a universally recognized concept and more or less basic to all military operations. Theorists and scholars in the beginning of the nuclear age contended that the traditional utilitarian relationship between military force and political behavior by states was turned fundamentally on its head by the development of nuclear weapons. According to Gaullist's perception of deterrence strategy and in current deterrence thinking, proliferation optimism is based on the premise that states behave with robust circumspection when confronted with even a modicum of nuclear risk².

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In this regard, Kenneth Waltz argues, “the measured spread of nuclear weapons is more to be welcomed than feared”. Waltz believes that “the gradual spread of nuclear weapons will promote peace and reinforce international stability because nuclear weapons induce caution between adversaries who possess them or more may be better³”.

Why Pakistan Needs Nuclear Weaponisation

Pakistan’s nuclear program and doctrine have been based on fairly clear and straightforward objectives to forge a credible deterrent to counter threat from India. In pursuit of this aim, Pakistan has been forced to shift from a policy of external balancing to one of internal balancing⁴. Throughout its history, Pakistan’s foreign policy has been dominated by the determination to find an honorable solution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute with India. Its security policy, in turn, has been formed by the perceived threat from India, defined in terms of Kashmir being a major factor in the country’s security policy. Since 1970s Pakistan has been engaged in a major nuclear program to enhance its nuclear weapons capability as a deterrent against India’s conventional and nuclear superiority.

Thus, Pakistan’s nuclear program has essentially been ‘dedicated’, much more ‘reactive’ and state security remains its principal *raison d’être*. Military doctrine in Pakistan is almost wholly directed to achieve some kind of potential parity with India. Pakistan has therefore sought nuclear weapons principally to meet the threat from India’s conventional military superiority and substantial nuclear potential, as well as to counter more subtle and indirect forms of Indian dominance in regional affairs⁵.

In addition, Pakistani leadership undoubtedly perceived that nuclear arming would enhance Pakistan’s image as the most technically advanced state in the Muslim world. Nuclear arms are also valuable for reasons of domestic politics.

Strategically, Pakistan’s nuclear program is driven mainly by its perception of threat and security concerns about India, which it claims

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has not fully accepted the existence of Pakistan as an independent country. Pakistan has always been less powerful in comparison to its adversary and it would face difficulty in prevailing in a war against India as its resources, both military and civilian, are limited. Pakistan cannot be expected to match India tank for tank or gun for gun because the numbers are large but effective optimization of current resources and conventional modernization of the armed forces does give Pakistan some quantitative advantage.

According to William Pfaff, India's intransigence on bilateral disputes and her nuclear superiority have made Pakistani leaders feel compelled to see nuclear weapons as a hedge, in order to stay in the game. Pakistanis know that Indian nuclear weapons are directed against Pakistan and China. Thus, if Pakistan is a potential target, a modest Pakistani nuclear program is another deterrence strategy. From the Pakistani perspective, conventional deterrence tends to become unstable and nuclear weapons are the only possible central basis for strategic deterrence against India.

Strategic dynamics of India – Pakistan Relations

The overt development of nuclear weapons, means of delivery and discourses on nuclear doctrines was a turning point in Indo-Pak strategic dynamics. Interestingly, both India and Pakistan would argue differently vis-à-vis the perceived impact of introduction of nuclear weapons in their strategic calculus. Pakistan would be content with elimination of any prospects of war between the nuclear-armed rivals while India would disagree and benefit from existence of space for conventional war of limited aims under nuclear overhang⁶.

Indian political and military leaders and strategic analysts believe that there is a clear strategic space for a conventional conflict below the nuclear threshold because nuclear weapons are not weapons of war-fighting. They are convinced that for Pakistan it would be suicidal to launch a nuclear strike against India or Indian forces, as it would invite massive retaliation.

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In the past decade or so, Indian strategic thinking has covered much ground in evolving a spring-loaded, offensive-defensive strategy, meaning to be strategically poised, at a very short notice, for the offensives to achieve maximum destruction of enemy forces and occupying territory as well, while remaining tactically on the defensive to deny the same to Pakistani forces. The concept was to address their sub-conventional vulnerability by employment of conventional forces under the Cold Start Doctrine' (CSD) for effecting punitive deterrence in retaliation to any abetment of insurgency or terrorism by non-state militants against India who may be of Pakistani origin. It is supposedly a very well-articulated Proactive Strategy' (PAS) calibrated to factor in Pakistan's nuclear capabilities⁷.

It's a complex politico-strategic undertaking that is predicated on the assumption that in case of any major case of terrorism in India, allegedly with Pakistan's support, Indian political leadership would be fully poised to immediately order war under proactive strategy; exploiting defensive unpreparedness of Pakistani forces, inducing dislocation by way of multipronged non-linear offensives, while defending own vulnerabilities and calling Pakistan's nuclear bluff in the process. Any delay therein would entail repeat of Operation Parakram 2001 or even post- Mumbai 2008. Sensing danger then, Pakistan had mobilized its forces, had reinforced defensive formations and was ready to exploit its offensive capabilities for trans-frontier options besides mounting international pressure. The concept of this short duration, intense war is coined by Indian Armed Forces as hit and mobilize', structured to be the converse of the previous notion, i.e. mobilize and hit'.

It offsets Indian mobilization differential vis-à-vis Pakistan by preplanned configuration of the offensive content of defensive/ pivot corps, termed Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) applied within 48-72 hours of the opening of hostilities. The offensive corps would simultaneously mobilize in three different Army command areas as Theatre Force Reserves (TFRs) to fuse with IBGS within 72-96 hours and carry on the offensive at opportune points, with limited objectives, in order to remain below Pakistan's perceived' uncertain nuclear threshold. Grappling with this dilemma of uncertainty, Indian planners say that

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—the crucial choice here requires a decision to move away from a paradigm focused on capture of territory to a paradigm based on destructive ability, with airpower, missiles and long range guns as the central vectors.

On watching closely the current unstable equilibrium in Pakistan, the report, *Nonalignment 2.0 — A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century*, opines,

“We should not assume that all forms of instability (in Pakistan) are bad from our perspective. In the backdrop of such provocative policy being propounded by Indian strategists, the sensitivity of disputes assumes even greater significance. —After over a decade of Pakistan’s proxy war and particularly after Kargil, the national mood is much different. Indian public opinion will accept nothing short of the final dismemberment of Pakistan in case that country chooses to cross the nuclear Rubicon and launch a nuclear strike, even if it is on Indian forces⁸”

It is often argued that protracted combat between Pakistani and Indian armed force in the wake of nuclear weapons heightens alarmingly the prospects of this regional conflict resulting into a nuclear conflagration. The long drawn and complex competition between India and Pakistan, is described by Stephen P. Cohen, after spending a lifetime studying Indo-Pak conflict ridden relationship, describes the eternal rivalry’ as genealogical, mutating and pervasive⁹. Kashmir, the root-cause’ of rivalry is itself becoming as much a symptom as a cause’. It was essentially an issue of injustice to people but has become more of an irredentist dispute. The adversarial relationship between these two countries is intractable, with the rivalry firmly wedged in the internal politics of both countries’.

The intractability is structurally complicated. In trying to find out its root-cause, Cohen explores whether it is driven by territory (for example Kashmir), authority over people (over Kashmiris, and also over Indian Muslims), ideology or a simple struggle for power between two powerful states?’ Quite pessimistically, he concludes that, some elements on both sides argue that they will never have a normal relationship’. It is going to be a latent and protracted civil war’, until either of the rivals gives in

completely — whether on the territorial issue, the people issue, or the ideological issue — or all three¹⁰.

Nuclear Weapons and Stability

Taking all the indicators of instability into account, one might ask: has nuclear deterrence really enhanced stability? The answer to this question is less straightforward than it might appear. Firstly, the efficacy of nuclear weapons to prevent an all-out war is difficult to assess. It is therefore impossible to properly evaluate the effects of nuclear deterrence on stability. Indeed, the influence of nuclear deterrence cannot be separated from other possible influences upon the conflict between India and Pakistan and can thus not be explored in isolation¹¹.

Secondly, it is impossible to evaluate how the conflict would have evolved, had India and Pakistan not acquired nuclear weapons. Finally, as mentioned earlier, it is not possible to say when nuclear deterrence works, and when it does not. Moreover, it has been interesting to assess relations between Pakistan and India since 1998, when both states tested their nuclear weapons. At the time of the acquisition of nuclear weapons there was a widespread positive (and somewhat romanticised) sentiment in regards to the ability of these weapons to settle the protracted dispute in Kashmir.

So far, the presence of nuclear weapons in the conflict has not had the expected effect. Quite on the contrary, the conflict, even in the nuclear-era, has been dominated by crises and cold air. Currently, all attempts to enhance stability and peace have been obstructed and the conflict remains highly unstable¹².

Conclusion

It is possible to take the reflections one step further. After having concluded that nuclear deterrence does not enhance stability on the lower levels, and knowing that this instability in turn could lead to instability at the higher levels, one might question the legitimacy of nuclear weapons as a mean of creating stability. In fact, with the

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introduction of nuclear weapons, the aim of wars should have changed from winning them to preventing them. At the time, the introduction of nuclear weapons was justified by realist assumptions; in a world determined by anarchy, the acquisition of nuclear weapons was perceived as a stabilizer as initiation of war could lead to a nuclear retaliation with disastrous consequences. This approach to rationality is deeply embedded in the question of nuclear deterrence. The question however remains to what extent this rationality can be relied upon.

Will the legal-rational Weberian state continue to have the monopoly on violence, and thus on nuclear weapons when power centres are increasingly dispersed? Can rationality be guaranteed? Various “What if” scenarios have been inherent to the question of nuclear weapons and have suffered from lack of verification. But, again, despite the fact that the argument have been endlessly repeated, the relation between India and Pakistan remind us that such considerations remain of eminent importance and deserves further focus.

*Majid Mehmood is an
Associate Research Officer at CISS*

End Notes

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