

Nuclear Weapons in Southern Asia

The Dynamics, Challenges & Possibilities



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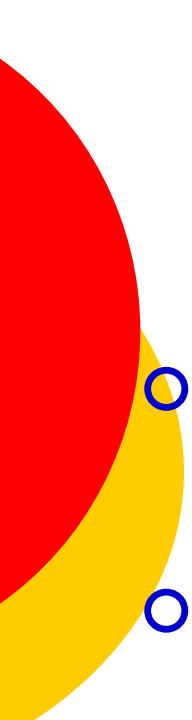
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Getting Terminology & History Right

- **South Asia – geographical region**
- **Southern Asia – geopolitical construct reflecting the region's nuc reality**
- **China's nuc shadow on region since 1964**
- **Pak decision to go nuclear 1972**
- **India's PNE 1974**
- **Pak announces nuc capability 1987 – China's immense help**
- **India waits till 1998 to conduct nuc tests... Pak follows**



Complex Nuclear Environment

- Three geographically contiguous nuclear powers with territorial disputes & history of wars**
- Growing nuclear arsenals & capabilities based on different nuclear doctrines**
- Pakistan use of terrorism as state instrument**
- Risk of Non-State Actors causing crises or escalation during crises**
- Robust China – Pakistan relations vs adversarial China – India relations**

Challenges – Nuclear Doctrines

- **Disparate role of NWs**
 - **Pak's conv det; India's nuc det; China's nuc det & parity**
- **Varied ideas of practicing nuc det**
 - **China – Looking for a version of MAD with US**
 - **India - Credible min det despite 2 front threat**
 - **Pakistan - Full spectrum det – all yields & ranges (0-2750km) to dominate all levels of conflict**
 - **FU Vs NFU**



Challenges - Technological

- **Dual use delivery platforms with entanglement risks**
- **Pursuit of missile defences**
- **Testing and Induction of MIRVs**
- **Growing accuracy of ballistic & cruise missiles**
- **Hypersonics**
- **Growing space-based cap – better ISR, targeting**
- **Cyber challenges to C2**
- **Disinformation with AI enabled capabilities**

Challenges -- Political

- **Pak continued/emboldened use of terrorism**
 - **Lahore MoU, Kargil (99), Parliament(2001), Mumbai ('08), Pathankot ('16), Pulwama('19), Pahalgam ('25)**
- **India's loss of tolerance & growth of mil cap**
 - **Operation Sindoor May 2025 – ex of conv war in nuc shadow**
- **China-Pak collusion – Op help in 2025**
- **Shadow of China's growing mil/nuc cap & assertive beh on India – chain conundrum**



Challenges – Strategic Stability

- **No shared interest in reducing nuc risks**
- **No mutual desire for strategic stability**
 - **India-Pak trust prob; India-China att prob**
- **No acceptance of SS as a worthwhile objective by national leaderships**
- **No readiness to invest in negotiations**
 - **Talks considered a sign of weakness**
 - **Hard power is the name of the game**

Issues of concern for India

- **Normalisation of nuc brinkmanship**
 - **Emboldened Pak behaviour**
 - **Statements ‘dumper truck’, ‘half the world’**
- **Popularity of idea of ltd nuc war with TNWs**
 - **Escalation control over neat rungs of ladder?**
 - **Will be a messy, dangerous affair**
- **China – US nuc competition generating arms race pressures on India**



India's Nuc Strategy

- Based on understanding *basic nature* of NWs & nuc deterrence
 - NWs distinct from conv weapons
 - Numerical parity not necessary - **CMD**
 - Suitable for deterrence by punishment not war-fighting -- **NFU**
 - First strike can still not 'win' nuc war
 - Damage limitation at what cost? Nuc Winter?
 - NFU relieves use or lose pressures – raises no use chances
 - Provides arms race stability



Risk Reduction Possibilities

- Strat dialogues to understand each other's threat perceptions, doctrines & force postures**
- Crisis communication channels - hotlines**
- Joint studies/movies on effects of nuclear deterrence breakdown**
- Look for areas of cooperation such as nuc safety/security**



Global Nuc Dynamics Matters

- **Regions do not exist in vacuum**
- **Breakdown of US-Russia NAC architecture; pessimism over US-China dampens urgency in Southern Asia**
- **Nuc doctrines/postures of US/Russia matter**
- **Language and behaviour of leaders matter**
- **Strength of norms of non-use or non-proliferation matter**
- **Present nuc cacophony matters.... Will shape nuc future**