Growing Missile Competition in South Asia and Role of Foreign Powers: Ramifications for Deterrence Stability

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Abstract

India is seeking the status of a global power. Any step taken by India to strengthen its defence poses a security dilemma for its neighbours. Pakistan, being a security conscious state, has had to restore the balance of power, whenever India off-set the equation. Indian quest to develop BMDs alongside its ambitious nuclear and missile program has triggered a missile race in South Asia which risks destabilizing the regional equilibrium. The US decision to make India a net security provider in the region and Indian acquisition of high-tech military hardware has become the driving force promoting Indian domination in the region. These developments warrant an objective analysis of the situation to evaluate the growing risks to regional security particularly the accelerating missile race in South Asia. If the strategic partnership between India and the US continues to grow at the expense of other states' security, Pakistan shall have to look at the option of formalizing defence ties with China besides regional integration with other states.

Keyword

South Asia, Deterrence Stability, Regional Hegemon, Military Capabilities, Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD), Nuclear, Missile Program, Regional Equilibrium, Missile Race, Regional Security

Introduction

South Asia has remained an unstable region due to lingering disputes and ideological schisms since 1947. These factors further accentuate

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intra-state and inter-state rivalries prevalent here due to ethnic, linguistic, and racial diversities.[1]

The ideological split, which played a primary role in the partition of the sub-continent, served as a catalyst in perpetuating deep-rooted hostilities between India and Pakistan. However, for the last few decades, the Indian urge to dominate the region became the principal reason for retarding the progress towards regional integration besides risking the initiation of an arms race in South Asia. India's desire to act as a policeman in the Southern Asian region was first promulgated through the Indira doctrine in the early 1980s and recently has been demonstrated through unilateral annexation of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).[2] Besides regional hegemony, India also seeks to acquire global recognition which had been the driving force behind its nuclear and missile programs. Pakistan and India have repeatedly fought with each other over unresolved territorial disputes but Pakistan only realized the magnitude of the existential threat posed by India, after losing its eastern half in the 1971 war. Indian nuclear explosion in May 1974, misleadingly termed as 'peaceful nuclear explosion', had more to do with prestige rather than security.

The 'prestige' postulation, contested by several Indian scholars,[3] ultimately became a reality after the nuclearization of South Asia in 1998, when India detonated nuclear devices to project its military muscle. Nuclear weapons, nevertheless, stabilized the deterrence equation between India and Pakistan, but the inadequacy of delivery means also set-off anxieties within both states, leading to a competition for developing nuclear capable ballistic missiles. Indian quest to secure decisive ascendency in South Asia, bringing major powers into its strike range in the Asia-Pacific, seeking highly destabilizing technologies from the US/west and becoming part of military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region has created a formidable security dilemma for Pakistan thus obligating the latter to enhance its

nascent missile capabilities.[4] The recent missile testing spree by India, has gone unnoticed in the west, and risks triggering a new arms race in the region.[5] If these trends continue, both India and Pakistan would be following the trajectories of the superpowers, witnessed during the Cold War, by engaging in a perilous arms race. Indian regional and global ambitions coupled with the acquisition of state of the art military hardware and technologies are disturbing the regional balance and stability.

Development of newer kinds of missiles and plans to deploy Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) shield in the future, by India, is compounding the security dilemma for Pakistan. Due to its smaller economy and international compulsions, Pakistan is compensating for its conventional inadequacies through the nuclear deterrent shield. Redefining nuclear thresholds against the threat of conventional war and enhancing cooperation with China in the defence and economic fields have become the prominent contours of Pakistan's national policy. Development of nuclear-capable naval platforms, Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs) capable long-range missiles, and BMD systems by India, has compelled Pakistan to seek matching capabilities for neutralizing and countering threats posed by India. Consequently, Pakistan has also qualitatively improved its deterrence posture of 'credible minimum deterrence' (CMD) by plugging the gap at the lower end of the threat spectrum through 'full spectrum deterrence', (FSD) which innately remains part of the CMD.[6] This entails developing Low Yield Short Range (LYSR) nuclear-capable missiles, Submarine Launched Cruise Missiles (SLCM), and MIRVs capable medium-range ballistic missiles, to foreclose the option of a limited war under a nuclear overhang.

However, this action-reaction syndrome is gradually transforming into an escalating missile competition which not only undermines Pakistan's security calculus but could also threaten the country's economic growth and prospects. Hence, in case India becomes a lynchpin in US Asia Pivot policy and continues to develop and acquire

missile technologies to alter the strategic equilibrium besides supporting regional proxies and militant groups to threaten China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan may look for stronger partnerships with regional states.

Indian Regional and Global Ambitions

India aspires to become a global power and a regional hegemon which makes its neighbours uncomfortable. To project itself as a global power, India is also aspiring to become the permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) alongside other P-5 states.[7] These Indian hegemonic ambitions risk marginalizing regional states merely to a status of Indian stooges. Pakistan never accepted the Indian role of a policeman in the region as this defied the principle of regional equality and national sovereignty.[8] India's forcible annexation of Junagadh and Manavdar (former princely states) and occupation of Kashmir,[9] sowed the seeds of perpetual conflict in the region and stirred hostilities with Pakistan. The regional situation became even more precarious after the Indian revocation of Articles 35A and 370 of the Indian constitution in August 2019 by the government.

These unresolved disputes remain the primary cause in preventing both states from having friendly relations since 1947. Consequently, the regional cooperation remains stalled due to India-Pakistan tensions. Indian attempt to gradually alter the strategic equilibrium and conventional balance in South Asia, through military modernization and acquisition of high-tech military hardware, is pushing the region towards an arms race which may lead to lowering of nuclear thresholds.[10] Indian defence spending has doubled since 1997 which has made India the second highest importer of military hardware and conventional arms in the world.[11] India has also signed nuclear deals with several advanced nations including the US, Japan, Russia, South Korea, France, Canada, Kazakhstan, Argentina, and

Australia, etc.[12] These deals provide a massive boost to the Indian nuclear weapons program by enabling it to import nuclear fuel for energy generation while diverting the domestic uranium reserves for the production of fissile material. The nuclear trade is also helping India in nuclearization of the Indian Ocean region.

In August 2016, India also unveiled its first nuclear-capable naval submarine to acquire an assured 2nd strike capability. The acquisition of 2nd Strike Capability by India has accentuated the security dilemmas for Pakistan as India is inclining towards adopting a pre-emptive strike posture.[13] This security dilemma has further been compounded due to the development of new kinds of dangerous and destabilizing medium and long-range nuclear-capable ballistic missiles along with the plans to deploy BMD shield. Due to Indian hostile and hegemonic aspirations, the unresolved disputes, especially in Kashmir, there is a heightened risk of an armed conflict between the nuclear rivals in South Asia.

India's Missile Program – Intentions and Purpose

Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru was considered amongst the pioneers to initiate the Indian missile program in 1958. A Special Weapon Development Team (SWDT) was formed under the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) which was later renamed as Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) in 1961 but DRDL is still responsible for the designing and development of the Indian missile program.[14] A Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) was established in 1947 for conducting research on space and rocket systems with explicit help from the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and France.[15] The Indian government created the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), with help from Germany, in August 1969, which enabled India to indigenously manufacture Geo-Stationary Space Launched Vehicles (GSLVs). The GSLV project subsequently laid the foundations of Indian medium and long-range missile development.[16]

India initiated its missile program in the early 1970s in an endeavour to develop a 1500 km ballistic missile by reverse-engineering the Soviet SA-2 SAM.[17] Although this project couldn't succeed in developing the missiles, it did help India in laying the foundations of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP).[18] The IGMDP, launched in 1983, was an ambitious program aimed at developing several kinds of missile systems including anti-tank Nag, SAM Trishul and Akash, SRBM Prithvi, and IRMB Agni.[19] Having successfully developed these missiles, India subsequently initiated work on developing SLBMs and ICBMs including Sagarika, Surya, and K-4 missiles. Initially, the stated goal of IGMDP was to develop these missiles for research and peaceful purposes. The Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said on the eve of the Agni missile test, on May 22, 1989, *"Agni is not a nuclear weapons system. What Agni does is to afford us the option of developing the ability to deliver non-nuclear weapons with high precision at long ranges."*[20] A careful analysis of the Indian missile program discloses that the security factor has only been used as a pretext to justify its missile development whereas the prestige remained the most compelling cause for Indian missile pursuit.

Due to its size and geography, India faces no existential threat either from Pakistan or China, which may justify possession of such formidable nuclear and missile capabilities. China has neither threatened nor ever hinted towards either invading or attacking India and has no expansionist agenda. No state outside Asia has shown any hostile intentions towards India which could justify India's Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) program.

Indian nuclear and missile program is the consequence of an urge to seek equal status to P-5 states in the UNSC besides serving as a regional hegemon in Asia.[21] Indian regional and global ambitions can ideally be understood through the proposition of offensive realism which was best explained by John J. Mearsheimer. The offensive

realist theory informs us that due to the absence of a central authority in global politics the international order exists in a state of anarchy. Consequently bigger states endeavor to consolidate power in an urge to establish their dominance and hegemony which may undermine the security of other states.[22] Indian desire to dominate South Asia is no secret and almost every state in South Asia has shown its dissatisfaction over Indian behaviour on one occassion or another.[23] This urge was unambiguously witnessed during the late 1970s and early 1980s once Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, promulgated Indira Doctrine.[24] Thus Indian quest to acquire modern weaponry, high-tech equipment, radars, and missiles serves as a catalyst in projecting India's image as a big military power. This image boosts Indian desire to further develop and enhance newer kinds of long-range missiles including Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), cruise missiles, and hypersonic-glide vehicles. Developing missiles beyond the ranges of its potential adversaries illustrate that hegemonic designs remain the guiding principle behind Indian foreign and defense policies. The more India becomes a technologically advanced nation, with western help, the more aggressive behaviour it will demonstrate in the region and beyond.

Role of External Powers in Missile Development in South Asia

The dynamics of international politics in South Asia are significantly influenced and shaped by the interests and involvement of major powers in the region. Competing interests of these global powers in South Asia paved the way for instability by creating security dilemmas for the smaller states. By becoming its new Indian defence partner, Israel has become the destabilizing factor in the region. With Israeli help, India is rapidly enhancing its missile systems, BMD system, fighter aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The role of foreign powers in fuelling the missile competition is summarized below:

- **The US Role in South Asian Missile Race**. The US got involved in South Asia after the end of World War II once the British had left the region providing the US with an opportunity to fill the void. With the onset of the Cold War India joined the Soviet camp, despite associating itself with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), while Pakistan became the frontline ally of the US in containing the spread of communism. However, the US never completely remained disassociated from India and came for its help at the critical junctures in Indian history. The US overt support to India, in the Indo-China conflict of 1962, and imposing sanction against Pakistan during the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistan wars are illustrative of this reality.[25] Furthermore, despite Pakistan then being an ally of the US, this alliance did not help in preventing the US from proliferating critical technologies to India which greatly boosted the Indian missile program. The US was the first country to assist India in developing the technology for sounding rockets for conducting research in space and upper atmosphere. In early 1960's several Indian scientists, including the father of the Indian missile program Dr A.P. J. Abdul Kalam, were invited by NASA for training in rocket science.[26] This Indo-US collaboration became the key element in successful development of Space Launch Vehicles (SLVs) by India. The German and French assistance to India remained fundamental in the development of its Polar Space Launched Vehicle (PSLV) and GSLV. Therefore, the first Indian space vehicle named SLV-3 was successfully launched in July 1980.[27] The SLVs, PSLVs, and GSLVs projects subsequently laid the foundation for Indian medium and long-range missiles especially IRBM Agni III and ICBM Surya.[28]

  Immediately after the partition, the US became the principal supplier of arms to Pakistan. However, this cooperation was limited to conventional weapons including small arms, tanks, artillery guns, and aircraft. Pakistan-US cooperation suffered greatly after the wars of 1965 and 1971 when Pakistan's

expectations of help against India were dampened by the US imposing an arms embargo. As a consequence, Pakistan lost its eastern half. Later, after the Indian nuclear explosions of 1974, the US again imposed sanctions against Pakistan due to apprehensions that it may also develop nuclear weapons.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Indo-US partnership further strengthened and the US started viewing India as its strategic ally whose regional stature needed further elevation to serve as a counterweight to China. The Indo-US nuclear deal finalized during the Bush era, cited by several scholars as a violation of Article I of NPT by the US, greatly enhanced Indian nuclear weapons capabilities and stockpiles.[29] Obama administration also viewed India as a valuable partner in the containment of China policy which resulted in a closer and growing relationship between India and the US. Furthermore, big Indian consumer market and enormous defence spending offered lucrative economic opportunities for the US commercial and defence industries. Thus the Indo-US cooperation further improved during the Presidency of Barak Obama, who went out of the way to support India's admission in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Failing due to the Chinese principled stance on NSG membership, the US admitted India in other export control regimes including Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Australia Group (AG), and Wassenaar Arrangement (WA). Since India became a member of MTCR, it embarked on enhancing the ranges of its missiles besides developing new types. New Indian role in the region in US containment of China policy, led to the signing of strategically important defence agreements with the US including Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). The US also encouraged India to become part of regional arrangement of QUAD, which is gradually transforming into a military alliance.[30] These agreements and alliances are seen with

concern by Pakistan as such agreements risk affecting the regional stability in South Asia.[31]

- **The Russian Assistance to India**. Russia had always been a trusted partner of India during the Cold War era. Although this relationship is gradually coming under stress due to growing ties between the US and India, Russia nevertheless still remains the largest supplier of military hardware to India.[32] Bulk of the Indian Air Force and army aviation comprises the aircraft and helicopters of Russian origin. Indian navy fleet also includes a large number of Russian vessels and most significantly the first Indian nuclear-powered submarine, INS Arihant, was developed with Russian assistance. Russia and India have jointly developed a supersonic 290 km range cruise missile BrahMos. After India became a member of MTCR, it has announced to increase the range of BrahMos to 800 km with Russian assistance, which has already been tested at a range of 450 km, in violation to the MTCR.[33] Russia also provided India with several Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs) and Anti-Air Defence systems. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the Russian presence in the region has remained modest. However, the incumbent Russian President Putin is focused on reviving the Russian global stature which is evident from the Russian sale of S-400 to India.
- **Indo-Israeli Collaboration in Missile Development**. Collaboration between India and Israel is growing rapidly. Israel has emerged as the new defence partner, assisting India in the development of Indian missile technology, ABM/BMD shield, space and ground surveillance radars, hi-tech EMP (Electro-magnetic Pulse) emitter platforms, and Directed Energy Weapons (DAWs) for Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD).[34] Both these states have agreed to jointly collaborate for the development of anti-ship missile Barak-8 and ABM systems. This cooperation can put India at an advantageous position against its neighbours thus disturbing the delicate stability in South Asia.

- **The Chinese Factor**. Pakistan and China share a long history of mutual cooperation and friendship. This relationship was further consolidated after the 1962 Indo-China war over the border dispute in Aksai Chin region. Recent Indo-Chinese tensions over the Line of Actual Control (LAC) have only vindicated the Pakistani stance of Indian hegemonic regional ambitions. The US sanctions on Pakistan during the 1965 and 1971 wars soured bilateral relations and encouraged Pakistan to search for a trusted partner against a powerful adversary which had hegemonic ambitions. Pakistan-China friendship flourished with the passage of time and China became instrumental in strengthening Pakistan's defence against external threats. China helped Pakistan in strengthening its conventional defence against the Indian threat which included the provision of artillery guns, rockets, tanks, and aircrafts, etc. Some of the projects were jointly developed by Pakistan and China, like for example JF-17 multi-role fighter aircraft. Although Pakistan maintains that its missile program is indigenous, the western analysts have pointed fingers towards Chinese help which enabled Pakistan to mature its missile technology in a short span of time.[35] However, several of its missiles, especially the cruise missiles, don't match with the Chinese versions of cruise missiles. It is also surprising that while western analysts have been accusing China of providing help to Pakistan, their reaction towards proliferation of missile technology to India and anxiety towards missile testing remains muted. China is also undertaking several economic initiatives inside Pakistan notably China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The Chinese reported plan to establish a naval base in Gwadar appears to be in reaction to the US Asia pivot policy.[36]

Missiles Inventory of India and Pakistan

India possesses multiple types of nuclear capable ballistic and cruise missiles on its inventory both indigenously developed and bought from other states which include:[37]

Indian Missiles

Type	Range	Payload	Version	Remarks
Prithvi Series	**SRBM**			
Prithvi I	150 km	1000 kg	Army	To be refurbished with increased range
Prithvi II	250 km	500 kg	Air Force	To be refurbished with increased range
Prithvi III/ (Dhunsh)	350 km	500 kg	Naval	Dhunush being developed: 350 km with 1000 kg warhead 600 km with 500 kg warhead 750 km with 250 kg warhead
Agni Series	**MRBM/IRBM/ICBM**			
Agni I	700-1000 km	1000-1500 kg	Army SFC	SRBM
Agni II	2000-2500 km	500-1000 kg	Army SFC	MRBM
Agni III	3500 km	1500 kg	Army SFC	Also known as Agni II Prime IRBM
Agni IV	2500-3500 km	800-1000 kg	Tested, under developed	IRBM
Agni V	5000-6000 km	1500 kg	Tested, under development	ICBM
Agni VI	6000-10000 km	3000 kg	In planned/ developmental phase	ICBM Capable of carrying MIRVs

Indian Missiles

Others	CRUISE/SLBM/SLCM/ANTI-SHIP			
Sagarika (K-15)	700 km	500-800 kg	Deployed	SLBM
K-4	3500 km	2000 kg	Tested, under development	SLBM
K-5 / K-6[38]	5000-6000 km	?	In planned/ developmental phase	SLBM
Shaurya	700 km (planned 3500 km)	500-800 kg	Under development	Silo based land version of Sagarika K-15. Range being extended to 3500 km.[39]
Nirbhay	800-1000 km	?	Under development, several tests failed	Subsonic cruise missile for Army, Navy &Air Force
Surya	8000-20000 km	2500 kg	Planned for future	ICBM (three variants of 5000, 12000 and 20000 km range) [40]
Prahaar	150 km	200 kg	Under development	Improved version of Prithvi to carry TNWs
Brahmos	400 km	200-300 kg	Army, Navy & IAF	Supersonic cruise missile, tested up to 400 km and planned for 1500 km[41]
Akash	25 km	55 kg	-	Medium range SAM associated with Rajendra radar

Indian Missiles

Barak	10 km	-	Procured from Israel	Surface to Air ship-borne interceptor missile
3M-54 Klub	250-300 km	--	Acquired from Russia	Frigate launched multi-role cruise missile
Pragati	50-170 km	200 kg	Tactical SSM	Also available for export
Popeye/Crystal Maze	100 km	--	ASM	Procured from Israel
Barak-8 MRSAM	70 km	60 kg	Under development for Navy	Being jointly developed by Israel & India
S-DEW[42]	120 km	?	Joint Indo-Israeli project	Stand-off (EMP emitting) Directed Energy Weapon
Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle	?	?	Under development with Israeli help	Likely to be used with multiple types of missiles including Agni series. Tested up to an altitude of 32 km.[43]

Pakistan has been accused of getting missile technology from other states especially China and North Korea.[44] Pakistani officials however, never accepted these allegations, saying that their missile technology is indigenous. The current missile inventory of Pakistan includes:[45]

Pakistani Missiles

Type	Range	Payload	Version	Remarks
SRBM				
Nasr	60 km	400 kg	Army/ASFC	In service (Solid fuel)
Hatf-1/1A[46]	70-100 km	500 kg	Army/ASFC	In service (Solid fuel)
Abdali (Hatf-2)[47]	180-200 km	500 kg	Army/ASFC	In service (Solid fuel)
Ghaznavi	290 km	700-800 kg	Army/ASFC	In service (Solid fuel)
Shaheen I/1A	750-900 km	700-1000 kg	Army/ASFC	In service (Solid fuel)
MRBM				
Ghauri	1300 km	700 kg	Army/ASFC	Liquid fuel
Shaheen II	1500-2500 km	1000-1100 kg	Army/ASFC	Solid fuel
Shaheen III	2750 km	1000 kg	Tested, under development	Solid fuel/ Under development
Ababeel	2200 km	?	Tested, under development	Solid fuel MIRVs capable/ Under development
CRUISE				
Babur I	500-700 km	300 kg	Army/ASFC	SLCM
Babur II	750 km	300 kg	Army/ASFC	SLCM
Babur III	450 km	450-500 kg	SLCM/NSFC	Under development
Raad	350 km	450 kg	AFSC	Air Launched Cruise Missile
Raad II	600 km	?	AFSC	Air Launched Cruise Missile

Indian Future Development Plans

India has become the world's largest importer of arms and military hardware in recent years.[48] These imports threaten the security of India's neighbours especially Pakistan. The Indo-US nuclear deal has enabled India to grow its nuclear weapons stockpiles and encouraged it to build a nuclear city near Karnataka for developing thermonuclear weapons.[49] India has already purchased five regiments of the S-400 Triumf Air Defence System from Russia at a cost of $4.5 billion, and the first regiment is expected to be delivered by 2021.

These hi-tech weapon systems could give India an edge over Pakistan and other neighbouring countries, ensuing aggressive Indian behaviour and perpetuating regional instability. India is enhancing its military and space capabilities besides, pursuing the development of long-range missiles including Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). Agni V, Agni VI, K-5, and Surya, some of which are MIRV capable, can hit targets in other continents, even beyond those states perceived as hostile or enemies by India. This clearly demonstrates that India aspires to become a global power and its ICBMs and space program would be posing risks to the security of states situated in other regions. Besides civil applications, the Indian space program has military dimensions. India took a giant leap towards militarization of space after conducting an anti-satellite test in March 2019, in violation to the Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) and Hague Code of Conduct.

In September 2020, DRDO claimed testing of its indigenous Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle, which can be armed with nuclear warheads,[50] and being developed with Israeli assistance. In response to Indian developments in missile and space technology, which are likely to increase nuclear and missile competition in the region, Pakistan would have to take appropriate remedial measures. These developments thus not only are becoming destabilizing for the entire South Asian region but also risk setting the stage for the

regional space and missile race which will have global repercussions on the pattern, witnessed during the Cold War.

Deterrence Stability and Strategic Equilibrium in South Asia

Strategic and deterrence stability are usually used as synonymous terms despite having some degree of variation.[51] Stability rests on the principle of mutual vulnerability of states and an environment in which no one sees an advantage to initiate war or strike first. The deterrence equation between India and Pakistan appears stable at a first glance, due to possession of nuclear weapons and mutual vulnerability from a nuclear strike. However, the existing disputes over the restive Kashmir region alongside issues of Siachin, water accord and terrorism etc., render the stability factor extremely fragile and unpredictable. The situation has become more volatile due to the lack of a conflict resolution mechanism and absence of confidence-building measures (CBM). This was demonstrated by the reckless Indian strike at Balakot, in February 2019, which brought both the nuclear capable states at the verge of war. Furthermore, Indian doctrine of limited war under nuclear overhang, termed as Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), development of BMD system and deployment of nuclear capable submarines further dilutes the deterrence equation and strategic equilibrium.

These capabilities could instil a false sense of superiority amongst hardliner Indian leadership which may be willing to undertake a pre-emptive strike against Pakistan, considering it to be immune from Pakistani retaliation. Pakistan was thus obliged to develop capabilities to foreclose the Indian option of limited war and countering Indian 2nd strike capability. These Pakistani capabilities included Low-yield short-range (LYSR) nuclear-capable missiles, MIRV capable Ababeel ballistic missile, and Sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) Babur III. Pakistani capabilities are aimed at off-setting Indian false sense of military superiority and immunity through the BMD system.[52] In response to Indian plans of deploying newer kinds of missiles and the

BMD shield, Pakistan is also seeking a credible 2nd strike capability through SLCM and MIRV capable ballistic missiles. Looking at South Asia it becomes evident that the learning curve of India and Pakistan follows a pattern of the Cold War rivals and both states have not learnt the right lessons from the futile arms race of superpowers.

Mitigating the Dangers

The developments of newer kinds of missiles and deployment of BMD shield by India pose a serious threat to Pakistan and the inter-state rivalry looks to be setting a stage for a new nuclear and missile race in South Asia. This race could have serious repercussions for the entire region where no viable mechanism exists to normalize the situation. Some of the immediate steps which need to be taken to minimize the threat include:

Pakistan-China Strategic Partnership. China remains apprehensive of the US 'containment of China' policy. In this policy, India has become an active regional player alongside the US. As a result of this policy, the US has increased its presence around the South China Sea and ASEAN region.[53] China has taken several steps to counter this US policy including showing interest to share the naval base at Gwadar Port along with Pakistan.[54] China has also shown concern on the Indian tests of long-range ballistic missiles, including Agni IV and Agni V, besides cautioning that if India continues to threaten the regional stability and strategic equilibrium in Asia by enhancing the range of its missiles, China may assist Pakistan in dealing with the potential threat.[55] China sees the deployment of the Theatre High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea by the US as destabilizing, which may also incorporate India as a partner in the future.[56] These developments could pose formidable security challenges for all regional states including Pakistan, China, and Russia. Consequently, the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan will have to grow to stabilize the region. This partnership may include joint projects to develop military hardware and technology, sharing of

naval bases and facilities for logistic and operational purposes, and joint defence against common threats from within and outside the region. Joining of Russia in such a defensive arrangement also remains a possibility which although at the moment doesn't appear plausible due to the strong Indo-Russian partnership.

South Asian Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The US and Russia successfully concluded an ABM treaty in 1972 which was aimed at limiting the BMD systems. Although the US unilaterally withdrew from the treaty in 2002, the treaty nevertheless played an important role in mitigating threat perceptions between Russia and the US. The regional stability in South Asia is also being threatened due to Indian plans to deploy the BMD shield. Pakistan in response may have to advance its missile program to counter the threat posed by Indian BMD system. This action-reaction syndrome risks transforming into a missile race. To minimise this risk, both India and Pakistan need to negotiate an ABM treaty which should mandate both states to refrain from developing the BMD systems besides inhibiting either state to become part of another BMD system developed by some other state.

Strategic Stability and Restraint Regime (SS&RR). Currently no apparatus exists in South Asia which could help in promoting stability and restraint between India and Pakistan. All past crisis were prevented from escalating into a full scale war primarily due to third party mediation and existence of nuclear weapons on both sides.[57] This was witnessed during the Brass Tacks crisis in 1986, uprising in Kashmir during 1990s, Kargil conflict in 1999, border escalation of 2001, after the Mumbai incident of 2008 and most recently after the Indian Balakot strike in February 2019. Despite the increased frequency of these incidents, Pakistan and India have not been able to formalize a mechanism to stabilize the region through mutual restraint. A formal proposal to establish a Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR) was repeatedly proposed by Pakistan to India but was always dismissed by the latter.[58] But without formalizing a SS&RR in South Asia the risk of nuclear conflagration cannot be diminished. The

composition of this regime may include the foreign ministers and foreign secretaries of both the states, in addition to representatives from the Ministry of Defence. The purpose of this regime should be to evaluate the trends, developments, and foreign procurements related to defence industry which could risk affecting the regional stability. The regime meetings could be agreed ideally on half-yearly basis to review the on-going developments and progress on the points and issues highlighted and discussed during the previous moots.

Conflict Resolution and Confidence Building Measures. The stability in South Asia remains hostage to the existing disputes, between the nuclear rivals, including Kashmir, Siachin, Indus water accord, terrorism, and Sir Creek, etc. No formal mechanism exists to resolve these festering disputes which have been the cause of wars and border skirmishes between India and Pakistan. The crisis after the Indian aerial strike on Balakot highlighted the risks which the unresolved Kashmir dispute poses to the region in particular and the world in general. With each passing year, the number of conflicts between India and Pakistan is growing. Pakistan despite being the victim of terrorism has been accused of using proxies to sponsor insurgencies and terrorist incidents inside India. On the other hand, Pakistan has accused India of sponsoring insurgency in its Balochistan province and militant groups inside the ex-FATA region. In this connection, several Indian agents, involved in actively supporting and funding the terrorists' activities inside Pakistan – including a high-profile Indian naval officer – were arrested from different parts of Pakistan.[59] Thus there is a dire need to establish a mechanism to create a working group on both sides of the border, which should draw a road map for implementing confidence-building measures and conflict resolution. Foreign offices of both India and Pakistan and special representatives nominated by the respective Prime Ministers of both countries and the National Security Advisors of Indian and Pakistan, need to be included in the working group. As a first step, only issues between India and Pakistan should be included in the

mandate and subsequently the issue of regional integration and cooperation should also be included. The working group should meet preferably on quarterly or at least half-yearly basis, to chalk out a road map for conflict resolution and implement measures for confidence building.

Regional Integration. The regional integration in South Asia remains a very sour point. SAARC has become redundant due to tense relations between India and Pakistan. There is a need to improve the regional integration which can only be possible if the lingering disputes between India and Pakistan are resolved. Till the time India and Pakistan remain hostile to each other, there is almost no hope for any improvement in the regional security situation and intra-regional trade. However, Pakistan may still continue to encourage other regional states, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Iran and Afghanistan to become part of the CPEC project. This may lessen the risks of confrontation due to economic interdependence and may subsequently force India to change its policy of becoming a hegemon in South Asia.

Conclusion

Both India and Pakistan share historical rivalry and have gone to war several times since 1947. However, since the nuclearization of South Asia there is no more room for a major conflict between the rivals. The escalating missile race and growing nuclear stockpiles in South Asia pose risks to deterrence stability and strategic equilibrium of the entire region. Indian pursuit of BMD shield and development of newer kinds of ballistic missiles and destabilizing technologies not only pose a threat to states in the region but even those situated beyond South Asia. If India continues to pursue its current course of disturbing regional stability, it would put pressure on Pakistan to take necessary steps for balancing the regional equation. This, however, could lead to a missile race in South Asia which could amplify the risks of a major confrontation in the region. Consequently, the risk of a nuclear

exchange would continue to haunt the region till the time existing disputes are resolved between India and Pakistan. China has also shown serious concerns about the growing range of Indian missiles and if India continues to play an important role in the US policy of containment of China, Pakistan and China would have to further strengthen the partnership besides taking other regional states into the equation. The only path for India and Pakistan to lessen the risk of confrontation in South Asia is to resolve existing disputes, curb the missile race and build trust through confidence-building measures as was done by the US and Soviet Union during the cold war.

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