

**Christopher Bluth and Uzma Mumtaz, *India-Pakistan Strategic Relations: The Nuclear Dilemma*, (ibidem-Press, 2020), 350.**

Ever since the advent of nuclear weapons, the role of coercion in international politics has been a subject that has attracted attention of many a scholar. There are two sides in the coercion spectrum: deterrence and compellence. Due to their sheer capacity to wreak havoc, nuclear weapons are said to be great instruments of deterrence. That said, states possessing nuclear weapons also look to create spaces to extract compellence. Strategic relations between nuclear dyads are marred when at least one state in the equation feels that mutual deterrence can be circumvented. Today, rationality and mutual vulnerabilities are being deemed of as hindrances by states that want to attain strategic ends through the use of force. The resultant risks are not adding value to deterrence, but are rather contributing towards making it less stable. In such an environment, it is imperative to enrich the discourse on the impact of nuclear weapons on coercion. In this regard, how states interact, under a bilateral deterrence framework, is an important area of study. The Indo-Pak nuclear dyad has enthralled scholars in more ways than one. One of the reasons for academic interest in nuclear South Asia is its similarity and dissimilarity to the dyadic relationship between the US and the erstwhile USSR during the Cold War.

Academicians and practitioners have tried analyzing the prospects of strategic stability in the subcontinent, by dissecting the behaviors of India and Pakistan during peacetimes and crises. The primary concern for those that study nuclear South Asia, is the occurrence of what Barry Posen called inadvertent escalation. In their new book “India-Pakistan Strategic Relations: The Nuclear Dilemma”, Christopher Bluth and Uzma Mumtaz, have investigated the nuclear dilemma that typifies

Islamabad-New Delhi strategic relations. The book has taken up an important area to study and reexamine. The study propounds that the protracted conflict and the concomitant risks of crises and instability in South Asia, should be analyzed through the framework of the conflict transformation theory. While acknowledging and appreciating the authors for identifying inadequacies in the literature on Indo-Pak strategic relations, it is necessary to set the record straight on some of the glaring anomalies in the book. This is important because without analysing assumptions laid out in the book, substantive engagements with the basic argument of the authors, is difficult.

First and foremost, it is a poorly-edited book. The revised edition could do with thorough copy-editing so as to bring in much-needed clarity, which is missing in the present edition. In its current shape, the book fares badly in terms of grammar, syntax, and diction, something that is extremely off-putting for readers. For example, the authors write:

The Indian government responded with air strikes against what they claimed was a terrorist training camp inside Pakistan two weeks later Pakistan responded with air strikes on targets in Indian-administered Kashmir that was followed by direct engagements between the Indian and Pakistani air forces in which two Indian aircraft were downed and one Indian pilot was captured.

This portion is structured incorrectly and is without proper punctuations, changing the sequence of events in question.

Also, given the subject this book deals with, words do matter. Surprisingly, the authors have shown an inaccurate judgment in choosing terms. For instance, the authors have ascribed a threat of “first-strike” to Pakistan’s tactical nuclear weapons. Any rudimentary student of nuclear strategy would look askance to this choice of word, or claim, for that matter. Related to this is the fact that the book is rife with factual errors. One of the most conspicuous mistakes was to write that Pakistan lost its eastern half in 1973 instead of 1971. If the book is

to gain traction, the authors and the publisher must engage a group of professional, competent editors and reviewers.

Second, the authors enunciate that Pakistan's national security narrative rests on the following four myths:

1. The myth of the Indian threat and the myth that India is the source of instability in the relationship
2. Pakistani nuclear weapons can deter Indian conventional threats as well as nuclear capabilities and therefore there is a strategic space for conventional military operations without having to fear Indian responses
3. Pakistan has created a strategic space for the first use of tactical nuclear weapons
4. Afghanistan provides strategic depth for Pakistani military operations and Pakistan can achieve local military superiority in conventional conflicts with India.

Let's deconstruct these myths, sequentially. In 2019, the Indian leadership, assuming that Pakistan would take an attack on its mainland as a *fait accompli*, launched airstrikes inside the Pakistani town of Balakot. When Pakistan levelled the scores, with a calibrated air attack across the Line of Control (LoC), India showed its discomfiture with a deterrence-inducing response. Feeling that it could get away with launching missile strikes inside Pakistan, India upped the ante by threatening horizontal escalation. If not for Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan's deft handling of the crisis, the world could have witnessed two nuclear-armed states hurling missiles at each other.

The Indian leadership tried to sidestep deterrence on not only that occasion. It must be stressed that India's military and political leaders have vowed to 'snatch' territories from Pakistan, through the use of force. All this, coupled with the evisceration of its No-First-Use policy, and its rapid progress towards attaining counterforce capabilities, is

emblematic of New Delhi's unease with the state of deterrence equilibrium in the region.

As for the authors' second point, it is worth recalling what Bernard Brodie said in his book "Escalation and the Nuclear Option." Regarded as the American Clausewitz, Brodie cautioned analysts from conflating occasional outbreak of violence with deterrence failure. Indeed, Pakistan rightly believes that its nuclear weapons will deter India from launching large-scale conventional attacks. In the previous sentence, the operative clause is 'large-scale'. Even a cursory look at pre and post-nuclearization wars and crises would help us understand how nuclear weapons have curtailed the magnitude of India's first acts of aggression against Pakistan. That India's response to Pakistan's deep incursions in Kargil was limited as compared that to Operations Gibraltar and Grand Slam is the clearest manifestation of how existential deterrence did and does the talking in South Asia.

Looking back at the Pulwama-Balakot crisis, one observes how, instead of testing its Cold Start Doctrine in response to an alleged terror attack, India had to settle for a token airstrike. Given that it is easier to claim deterrence, Pakistan could rightfully credit its full-spectrum deterrence for deterring India from 'biting and holding' territory, as envisaged by the brains behind the Cold Start Doctrine.

The authors also wrongly attribute to Pakistan the proclivity to create space for kinetic operations under a nuclear umbrella. It is India that has been talking about breaking the shackles imposed by Pakistan's nuclear weapons. It is worth mentioning that when India talks about its strategic paralysis it gives credence to Pakistan's nuclear deterrent. India has repeatedly expressed its intent to call Pakistan's nuclear bluff. It is in this context that Pakistan developed tactical nuclear weapons. The authors contend that Pakistan has created strategic space for using tactical nuclear weapons. The assertion is problematic, for Pakistan's induction of tactical nuclear weapons is meant to close the band that India may find attractive to launch strategic operations aimed at exacting compellence. Here, it is pertinent to mention that two of the

operational objectives of India's Cold Start Doctrine are to capture Pakistani territory and attenuate the war-fighting ability of the Pakistani military. Carrying-out Cold Start successfully, thus, runs the risk of breaching Pakistan's nuclear-use thresholds. In this backdrop, it is quite clear that India's limited war stratagem has strategic connotations, necessitating Pakistan to take adequate countermeasures. The authors' analysis of the Cold Start Doctrine does not take into account Pakistan's geography and centers of gravity that lie at the heart of this doctrine.

The authors wrongly ensconce Pakistan's veritable security concerns emanating from its western neighbor, Afghanistan and rely on the age-old, unsubstantiated strategic depth argument. There are a number of issues with retaining this line of thinking and dovetailing it with Pakistan's nuclear policy. One, the idea of gaining strategic depth was just a thought that did not translate into official policy. A desire to have a stable, friendly country in the neighborhood, does not and cannot provide Pakistan what the authors call "local military superiority" vis-à-vis India. Deconstructing the term local military superiority, it is hard to fathom where, when, and how can the highly-touted depth in Afghanistan favor Pakistan's military position against India on the LoC, International Border, or the Working Boundary, for that matter.

The book portrays Pakistan as a revanchist nuclear-state. The lens used by the authors produces an appraisal that is both incomplete and incoherent. For starters, the authors have not delinked Pakistan's nuclear weapons from its grand strategy. Islamabad's nuclear excursion has been all about achieving and maintaining a robust deterrent. Neither it has relied on its 'nuclear shield' to whip up subversive activities at the sub-conventional level, nor has it brandished nuclear weapons to browbeat neighbors (communicating one's capability to the adversary is a different ball game altogether) and make territorial readjustments in its favor. Absent rejigging and broadening the prism, analyses on regional nuclear dynamics will lack

much-needed nuance, that is critical to understanding some of the pressing challenges faced by the Indo-Pak nuclear dyad.

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