

Impact of Global Arms Control Crisis on Arms Restraint in South Asia

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Abstract

The global arms control framework has eroded significantly, as landmark treaties have collapsed under intensifying great-power competition. This erosion has directly impacted South Asia, where the normative standards that once encouraged strategic restraint have considerably weakened. While India and Pakistan have never concluded formal bilateral arms control agreements, global arms control initiatives have historically established norms that indirectly shaped regional strategic behavior. India's persistent reluctance to engage in regional arms control initiatives has been the principal driver of declining strategic stability in South Asia. New Delhi has consistently resisted bilateral confidence-building measures (CBMs) and nuclear risk-reduction arrangements, foreclosing the possibility of a negotiated regional security architecture. In contrast, Pakistan has demonstrated consistent restraint by maintaining a policy of credible minimum deterrence (CMD) without engaging in destabilizing arms racing behavior. Meanwhile, India has pursued rapid and accelerating military modernization across both nuclear and conventional domains, dramatically widening the asymmetry between the two states. The operationalization of sea-based deterrents, the development of advanced delivery systems, and the acquisition of precision conventional capabilities have compounded Pakistan's security challenges. The absence of any arms control framework to manage these developments poses a growing threat to

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strategic stability in South Asia, increasing risks of miscalculation and inadvertent escalation. Against this backdrop, the paper examines the impact of the global arms control crisis on arms restraint in South Asia and offers practical policy recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders that can be adopted by both states to establish restraint mechanisms, ultimately ensuring regional strategic stability.

Keywords: Global Arms Control Crisis, India, Pakistan, Arms Race, Strategic Stability.

Introduction

The decades-long international arms control architecture is facing its greatest crisis since the end of the Second World War.¹ The last remnants of the strategic arms control framework between the United States (US) and Russia have collapsed:² the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was terminated in 2019,³ while the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was effectively suspended by Russia in 2023, and expired on 5 February 2026 without any replacement in place.⁴ The global nuclear order is now in a state of extreme ambiguity, with no legally binding limits on nuclear stocks, a dramatic decline in strategic transparency and nuclear modernization programs all ramping up at an unprecedented pace among the nine nuclear-armed countries.⁵

¹ Vladimir Orlov and Leonid Tsukanov, eds., *Security Index Yearbook 2026–2027*, vol. 2, Global Edition, PIR Library Series no. 40 (Moscow: PIR Center and MGIMO University, 2026), <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Security-Index-Yearbook-2026-2027-by-PIRMGIMO-Vol.2-Global-Edition.pdf>

² Ibid

³ Michael R. Pompeo, “US Withdrawal from the INF Treaty on August 2, 2019,” US Department of State, August 2, 2019, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-withdrawal-from-the-inf-treaty-on-august-2-2019/>

⁴ Jyri Lavikainen, “Expiration of New START: The End of Post-Cold War Strategic Nuclear Arms Control,” FIIA Comment, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, February 5, 2026, <https://fiia.fi/en/publication/expiration-of-new-start>

⁵ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Increasing Focus on Nuclear Weapons amid Heightened Escalation Risks-New SIPRI Yearbook Out Now,” June 8, 2026, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2026/increasing-focus-nuclear-weapons-amid-heightened-escalation-risks-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>

All these changes take place in a geopolitical context. The breakdown of global arms control norms has reverberated in parts of the world that have long depended on the normative framework provided by arms control treaties to help them exercise strategic restraint.⁶ South Asia is no exception. The region is home to two nuclear armed countries, India and Pakistan, whose bilateral relations are one of the most volatile and consequential relationships in the world.⁷ South Asia has never had a formal bilateral arms control pact between Islamabad and New Delhi, but the global arms control framework in the past created normative expectations and diplomatic pressures that influenced the strategic actions of South Asian states, albeit to some extent.⁸

Over the years, the strategic landscape in South Asia has deteriorated because of this erosion of the framework. Continuous military modernization of India, whether nuclear or conventional, and the lack of willingness to take any steps towards bilateral arms control talks and CBMs with Pakistan has created an asymmetric situation which threatens the stability of regional deterrence.⁹ This paper examines the linkage between the international arms control dilemma and its implications for strategic stability of South Asian region in the context of rising security threats for Pakistan and its principled position on strategic restraint.

The Erosion of the Global Arms Control Framework

The global arms control system developed over the second half of the twentieth century assuming that uncontrolled nuclear rivalry among great powers poses a threat to the survival of humankind.¹⁰ The treaties, verification and diplomatic norms gradually developed, beginning with the

⁶ Orlov and Tsukanov, *Security Index Yearbook 2026–2027*, vol. 2

⁷ Muhammad Salman, “The Erosion of Global Arms Control and the Rising Nuclear Stakes in South Asia,” *Strafasia*, April 10, 2026, <https://strafasia.com/the-erosion-of-global-arms-control-and-the-rising-nuclear-stakes-in-south-asia/>

⁸ Eric Arnett, ed., *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in South Asia after the Test Ban*, SIPRI Research Report No. 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/RR/SIPRIRR14.pdf>

⁹ Zafar Khan, “Growing Conventional Asymmetry between India and Pakistan,” *Pakistan Horizon* 73, no. 3–4 (2020): 92, <https://pakistan-horizon.piia.org.pk/index.php/pakistan-horizon/article/view/140>

¹⁰ Mistry, Dinshaw. “Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.” In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict*, 2nd ed. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780123739858000106>

Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) of 1963¹¹ and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968.¹² The three treaties of the 1970s (SALT I and II)¹³ and the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty¹⁴ and the 1987 INF Treaty¹⁵ established a model for negotiated restraint between the nuclear superpowers. The INF Treaty was significant, since it was the first to prohibit a class of nuclear weapons: ground launched missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. It also bounded the two parties to conduct on-site inspections as a means of verification.¹⁶

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I, II and New START) reinforced a significant reduction in deployed strategic warheads and delivery systems.¹⁷ The 2010 agreement, called New START, signed by Presidents Obama and Medvedev, limited deployed strategic warheads to 1,550 and deployed delivery platforms to 700, and robust transparency and verification provisions.¹⁸ While they were far from a solution to nuclear threats, these pacts did provide a certain level of predictability, transparency and confidence in the strategic balance between the world's two major nuclear powers.¹⁹

¹¹ Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Treaty Banning Nuclear Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water (Partial Test Ban Treaty) (PTBT)," <https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/treaty-banning-nuclear-test-atmosphere-outer-space-and-under-water-partial-test-ban-treaty-ptbt/>

¹² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," <https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/weapons-mass-destruction/nuclear-weapons/treaty-non-proliferation-nuclear-weapons>

¹³ Office of the Historian, "Strategic Arms Limitations Talks/Treaty (SALT) I and II," Milestones in the History of US Foreign Relations, US Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/salt>

¹⁴ Arms Control Association, "The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty at a Glance," last reviewed December 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/anti-ballistic-missile-abm-treaty-glance>

¹⁵ Arms Control Association, "The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at a Glance," last reviewed August 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-inf-treaty-glance>

¹⁶ Arms Control Association, "INF Treaty at a Glance."

¹⁷ Office of the Historian, "Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties, 1991 and 1993," Milestones in the History of US Foreign Relations, US Department of State, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/104210.htm>

¹⁸ Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, "The New START Agreement," fact sheet, last edited February 2024, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/New-START-Fact-Sheet-Feb-2024-Edit.pdf>

¹⁹ Orlov and Tsukanov, Security Index Yearbook 2026–2027, vol. 2

In 2002, the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty, which signaled the beginning of the collapse of this framework, and it has accelerated in the past two decades.²⁰ The INF Treaty, known as a cornerstone of strategic stability in Europe, came to an end in 2019 when the US formally withdrew, accusing Russia of breaching its INF obligations with deployment of ground-launched cruise missile system 9M729. In response, Russia threatened to pull out as well, eliminating one of the most notable arms control achievements of the Cold War.²¹

New START experienced a similar fate. In February 2023, Russia declared that it would not attend the verification and inspection processes of the treaty anymore, a statement that was technically not legally binding but nonetheless had significant effects, removing the transparency measures which had made the treaty credible. The bilateral sharing of data and on-site inspections were stopped, which meant both sides were left without tools to build strategic confidence. While both sides formally observed the main features of the treaty - the restrictions on the number of warheads, and the delivery systems - there were no working verification mechanisms, making the commitments increasingly hollow.²² Without a successor agreement, New START has come to an end on 5 February 2026, ending a half-century-long era of nuclear restraint between Washington and Moscow.²³

According to SIPRI's Yearbook 2026, programs to modernize and improve nuclear arms were ongoing in all nine nuclear-armed states in 2025, with most implementing new nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable weapon systems during the year. The total global stockpile of estimated 12,187 warheads consisted of about 9,745 warheads in military stockpiles and about 4,012 warheads deployed with missiles and aircraft. More critically, the gradual reduction of retired warheads by Russia and the US, which has led to a year-

²⁰ Lynn F. Rusten, *US Withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty, Case Study 2*, Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction Case Study Series (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2010), https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/casestudies/CSWMD_CaseStudy-2.pdf

²¹ Pompeo, "US Withdrawal from the INF Treaty."

²² Williams, Heather. "Russia Suspends New START and Increases Nuclear Risks." *Critical Questions*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 23, 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-suspends-new-start-and-increases-nuclear-risks>

²³ Karim Haggag, "After New START Expires, Europe Needs to Step Up on Arms Control," SIPRI Essays, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, February 4, 2026, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2026/after-new-start-expires-europe-needs-step-arms-control>

on-year decline in the world's nuclear stockpile, is likely to be reversed as the rate of dismantlement slows while the deployment of new nuclear weapons increases.²⁴

As risks of miscalculation and escalation increase, states are turning to nuclear arms as tools of national power, reversing a decades-long trend in decreasing the number and role of nuclear weapons, warned SIPRI Director Karim Haggag. The transition to nuclear reliance has also been accompanied by a growing problem of transparency: the level of strategic ambiguity and opacity among nuclear-armed states has increased, despite the countries' attempts to modernize and increase their own nuclear arsenal, and there is still no strategic dialogue or direct communication between some nuclear-armed states. States are 'reaching for nuclear solutions,' and thus 'creating new risks and fueling arms-race dynamics,' warned Hans M. Kristensen of SIPRI and the Federation of American Scientists.²⁵ The third consecutive NPT RevCon without an outcome document was a further setback for the grand bargain at the heart of the treaty, further denting the treaty's legitimacy at a time when collective action is needed on nuclear challenges.²⁶ The end of New START in February 2026 without any replacement agreement has lifted the final legally binding limit on deployed nuclear warheads, leaving the world with no institutionalized method to hold the stocks of the two countries containing some 83 per cent of the world's total nuclear warheads accountable. This thorough disintegration of arms control has weakened the moral imperative for all countries, even regional nuclear powers, to act with restraint, with worrisome implications for strategic stability in South Asia.²⁷

Beyond the treaty mechanisms, the end of the arms control agreement between the US and Russia has far-reaching consequences for the global nuclear order. The credibility of the NPT depends on the underlying premise that the nuclear-weapon states will work towards disarmament in return for

²⁴ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Increasing Focus on Nuclear Weapons amid Heightened Escalation Risks," June 8, 2026, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2026/increasing-focus-nuclear-weapons-amid-heightened-escalation-risks-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>"

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Daniel Salisbury, "A Nuclear Order under Strain?," IISS Online Analysis, International Institute for Strategic Studies, June 16, 2026, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2026/06/a-nuclear-order-under-strain/>

²⁷ Ibid

the non-nuclear-weapon states not acquiring the bomb. This bargain has been deeply compromised by the lack of a New START successor, and by the general course of nuclear modernization by all nuclear-armed nations, which has undermined the NPT and the broader non-proliferation architecture.²⁸ The end of New START will further undermine the NPT's effectiveness, and is likely to worsen the global challenge of proliferation, also sparking discussions in several countries regarding the strategic benefit of standalone nuclear deterrents.²⁹ Furthermore, the lack of arms control agreements between the two countries has left other nuclear-armed countries with less normative pressure to limit their own programs. The course of this has fundamentally complicated the global arms control landscape and paved the way for greater regional military competition.

Arms Control in South Asia: The Absence of a Formal Framework

The case of South Asia is unique and, in many ways, also distinct in the study of regional arms control. South Asia has never had a formal bilateral arms control regime between India and Pakistan like the Cold War era.³⁰ The two countries have witnessed three major wars (1947, 1965, and 1971) and several crises including Kargil (1999), Operation Parakram (2001-02), Balakot crisis (2019) and military conflict in May 2025.³¹ Both countries have carried out nuclear tests in May 1998, declaring themselves as nuclear states, but there is no formal treaty framework to regulate their nuclear relationship.³²

This lack of formal arms control is not the result of a lack of effort on Pakistan's part. After the 1998 nuclear tests, Pakistan actively put forth the idea of a Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR) that comprised three interlinked aspects of nuclear and missile restraint, conventional balance, and mutually

²⁸ Haggag, "After New START Expires."

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Syed Ali Zia Jaffery, "Mapping the Prospect of Arms Control in South Asia," Stimson Center, September 6, 2024, <https://www.stimson.org/2024/mapping-the-prospect-of-arms-control-in-south-asia/>

³¹ Rahul Puri, "Pakistan India War: Complete List of Indo-Pak Wars and Conflicts," Anantam IAS, last modified May 18, 2026, <https://anantamias.com/pakistan-india-war/>

³² Muhammad Ans Ijaz, "Challenges to Nuclear Non-Proliferation in South Asia since 1998: A Case Study of India and Pakistan," Focus, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad, November 2024, <https://irs.org.pk/Focus/FNov24.pdf>

reinforcing elements of conflict resolution.³³ The SRR proposal, tabled at the foreign minister level in October 1998, was a comprehensive Pakistani idea for a negotiated regional security architecture. India consistently refused to accept the framework.³⁴ The Lahore Declaration of February 1999, which had led to some bilateral CBMs, was effectively buried by the Kargil conflict that broke out a few months later.³⁵

Although, there were no formal bilateral arms control arrangements in South Asia, but the arms control treaties between the US and Russia had an indirect yet significant normative impact on regional states' behavior. While India and Pakistan are not signatories to the NPT, it yet sets global standards to prohibit nuclear testing, production of fissile material without safeguards and deployment of destabilizing weapon systems. Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which is not in force yet, had introduced a unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing which both India and Pakistan have largely observed since 1998.³⁶ The review process of the NPT and related disarmament discussions raised diplomatic expectations and international pressure on all nuclear-armed states, including the countries that are not members to the NPT.³⁷

Multilateral forums like the Conference on Disarmament (CD), as well as arms control advocacy by the major powers, also helped create a wider normative setting that limited nuclear competition in South Asia in the first two decades following the 1998 tests.³⁸ In Kargil, Operation Parakram and other crises, international pressure, especially from the US, influenced the

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Arms Control and Disarmament," <https://mofa.gov.pk/arms-control-and-disarmament>

³⁴ Naeem Salik, ed., *Nuclear Pakistan: Seeking Security & Stability* (Islamabad: Center for International Strategic Studies, 2018), <https://ciiss.org.pk/PDFs/Nuclear-Pakistan.pdf>

³⁵ Amjad Abbas Maggsi, "Lahore Declaration February, 1999: A Major Initiative for Peace in South Asia," *Pakistan Vision* 14, no. 1 (2013): 187, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/studies/PDF-FILES/Artical-9_Vol_14_No1.pdf

³⁶ CTBTO Preparatory Commission, "Ten Years since India and Pakistan Conducted Nuclear Tests," May 29, 2008, <https://www.ctbto.org/news-and-events/news/ten-years-india-and-pakistan-conducted-nuclear-tests>

³⁷ Adam M. Scheinman, "Review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: A Practitioner's Perspective," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 9, no. sup1 (2026): 20–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2026.2660915>

³⁸ Eric Arnett, ed., *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in South Asia after the Test Ban*, SIPRI Research Report No. 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1998), 5, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/RR/SIPRIIR14.pdf>

crisis management. This pressure was tied to the overall arms control agenda adopted by the US and its desire to avoid nuclear escalation.³⁹ This normative pressure, along with its level of intensity and credibility, has been reduced as that agenda has been weakened.

Structural Drivers of India's Refusal to Engage in Regional Arms Control

The failure of India to hold bilateral arms control or confidence building talks with Pakistan is not incidental but embedded in the country's strategic imperatives, all of which are interrelated. First, India views its strategic position not in regional but in global terms, and states that its nuclear deterrent is not targeted at Pakistan but China, therefore any arms control agreement should be trilateral or multilateral, rather than bilateral.⁴⁰ The framing - which essentially blends Pakistan's legitimate bilateral security concerns with India's great power ambitions - is meant to deflect calls for restraint, while giving the impression of a responsible global actor.

Second, India continues to ignore the essential parity of the India-Pakistan nuclear dynamics, maintaining a hierarchy where India's nuclear posture is seen as fundamentally different from Pakistan's. Such an asymmetry has enabled India to continue with significant nuclear modernization while criticizing Pakistan's rational move as 'destabilizing' or 'irresponsible'.⁴¹ Third, India uses the counter-terrorism angle to justify the suspension of dialogue and the development of punitive military doctrines against Pakistan.⁴²

India's No First Use Policy: Eroding Credibility

Another aspect of India's arms control policy is its declared policy of No First Use (NFU) of nuclear weapons. This is India's declaration, but the NFU policy has been increasingly discredited by official Indian

³⁹ Syed Ali Zia Jaffery, "Understanding Kargil's Nuclear Factor: Lessons for Future Crises," *South Asian Voices*, May 27, 2019, <https://southasianvoices.org/understanding-kargil-nuclear-factor-lessons-for-future-crises/>

⁴⁰ Salman Bashir, "The China-India-Pakistan Nuclear Triangle: Consequential Choices for Asian Security," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no. 2 (2022): 336–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2141053>

⁴¹ Khan, "Growing Conventional Asymmetry," 95

⁴² International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'India's Hardening Policies towards Terrorism and Pakistan,' *Strategic Comments* 31, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2025.2520717>

pronouncements. In 2019, former Defense Minister Rajnath Singh had indicated that the NFU commitment depended upon the circumstances and Indian strategic thinkers have been more forthright in expressing the conditions for India to consider first use.⁴³ The development of canisterized missiles that can be transported with mated warheads ready for immediate launch and India's sea-based deterrent program through its ballistic missile submarines make the credibility of NFU even more complicated.⁴⁴

India's NFU policy had never been a guarantee, as declarations are subject to change and capabilities speak louder than doctrine. The policy of full spectrum deterrence (FSD) adopted by Pakistan deliberately leaves ambiguity about the nuclear threshold, which is a sensible reaction to this doctrinal uncertainty. The strategic logic of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence posture has become even more compelling than ever as India has made its nuclear policies more sophisticated and flexible.

On the nuclear front, India has also consistently refused to engage in bilateral CBMs. Previously negotiated CBMs, including the 1991 Agreement on Prevention of Air Space Violations⁴⁵ and the 1988 Agreement on Non-Attack on Nuclear Installations,⁴⁶ have not been followed by more substantive risk-reduction agreements. There are no formal agreements in place for the establishment of 'hotlines' with the National Command Authorities, joint early-warning systems or mutual notification of missile tests. A promising start was made in 1999 with the Lahore Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties to give advance warning of missile tests, but this was never pursued.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ullah, Sufian. "Conceptual Assessment of NFU – Case Study of India." *Journal of Security and Strategic Analyses* 7, no. 2: 65–90. <https://thesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/sufian-ullah.pdf>

⁴⁴ Komal Khan, "Warheads on Standby: India's Technological Leap and Doctrinal Drift," Strategic Vision Institute, October 9, 2025, <https://thesvi.org/warheads-on-standby-indias-technological-leap-and-doctrinal-drift/>

⁴⁵ Agreement between India and Pakistan on Prevention of Air Space Violations and for Permitting Over Flights and Landings by Military Aircraft, India-Pakistan, April 6, 1991, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 1843, no. I-31419, 59, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%201843/volume-1843-i-31419-english.pdf>

⁴⁶ Agreement between India and Pakistan on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities (India-Pakistan Non-Attack Agreement), India-Pakistan, December 31, 1988, Nuclear Threat Initiative, https://media.nti.org/documents/india_pakistan_non_attack_agreement.pdf

⁴⁷ "Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of India and Pakistan," India–Pakistan, February 21, 1999, *United Nations Peacemaker*, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/9228>

India suspended the Composite Dialogue Process and kept its near-total diplomatic freeze with Pakistan (only lifted during periods of severe crisis under international pressure), thereby blocking any systematic engagement on nuclear risk reduction.⁴⁸ It is not a principled adherence to arms control principles, but an intentional move to take advantage of conventional and nuclear superiority without the limitations of formal arms control discussion.

Pakistan's Advocacy for Arms Control and Strategic Restraint

Pakistan's nuclear policy since 1998 has been based on the concept of CMD, later expanded to FSD within the same rubric of CMD. The doctrine, which has been put forward in several official statements and policy pronouncements, is a strongly India-centric and defensive nuclear posture.⁴⁹ In May 1999, during his speech at the National Defence University, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had said explicitly that the fundamental pillars of Pakistan's nuclear policy are 'nuclear restraint, stabilization and minimum credible deterrence'. It has been the cornerstone of Pakistan's strategic policy ever since.⁵⁰

The doctrine of Pakistan is based on four pillars: deterrence, not war-fighting; being defensive and India-specific; maintaining strategic stability, not superiority; and being responsive to India's strategic and conventional shifts in a calibrated way.⁵¹ Pakistan does not seek to annihilate the enemy in the first strike, nor does it want to increase its arsenal. Instead, it aims to retain enough capacity to inflict unacceptable costs on a potential aggressor,

⁴⁸ Jawed Naqvi, "India Rejects Resumption of Composite Dialogue," *Dawn*, February 27, 2009, <https://www.dawn.com/news/447005/india-rejects-resumption-of-composite-dialogue>

⁴⁹ Asia Karim, Amna Mahmood, Muhammad Wajeeh Shahruxh, and Abdul Jabbar, "Transformation of Pakistan's Nuclear Posture from Minimum Credible to Full Spectrum Deterrence," *Liberal Arts & Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)* 6, no. 1 (2022): 92, <https://doi.org/10.47264/idea.lassij/6.1.7>

⁵⁰ Sitara Noor, "Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine," *Arms Control Today* 53, no. 8 (October 2023): 12–17, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/pakistans-evolving-nuclear-doctrine>

⁵¹ Amber Afreen Abid, "Pakistan's Responsible Nuclear Posture in an Unequal Global Order," *Strategic Vision Institute*, May 4, 2026, <https://thesvi.org/pakistans-responsible-nuclear-posture-in-an-unequal-global-order/>

thereby dissuading both conventional and nuclear aggression at every level of the escalation ladder.⁵²

Pakistan's policy of CMD/FSD despite the continuous and increasing advantage of the Indian army is an exceptional instance of strategic restraint. In fiscal year 2024-25, India's military spending totaled USD 75 billion, of which USD 20.6 billion was dedicated to arms procurement.⁵³ Pakistan's defence spending, on the other hand, is much less than India's in absolute terms.⁵⁴

The military standoff between Pakistan and India in May 2025, as a result of India's Operation Sindoor, was a testament to Pakistan's restraint.⁵⁵ Despite India's unprecedented use of conventional force, including an attack on Pakistani military infrastructure, Pakistan did not resort to clear nuclear threats or nuclear signaling but responded with calibrated conventional force to restore deterrence. This is a sign of Pakistan's sincere efforts to maintain nuclear deterrence stability and its willingness to avoid nuclear brinksmanship even in the face of conventional challenges.⁵⁶

The size of Pakistan's nuclear stockpile is around 170 warheads, which is not driven by expansionist ambitions, but instead, is maintained at the level required for credible deterrence.⁵⁷ In its Yearbook 2026, SIPRI has also reported that Pakistan is working on new delivery systems and is building up fissile material, indicating a possible modest increase in its nuclear

⁵² Ghulam Shabeer Narejo, Zulfiqar Khan, and Ahmad Khan, "Pakistan's Ambiguous Nuclear Doctrine: *Prima Facie* Deterrence Aimed at War Avoidance and India's Quest for Compellence," *Strategic Thought* 6, no. 1 (2024): 45, <https://strategithought.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/107>

⁵³ A. K. Chawla, "Defence Budget 2024-25—An Analysis," *SP's Naval Forces*, no. 4 (2024), <https://www.spsnavalforces.com/story/?id=874&h=Defence-Budget-2024-25-andmdash;-An-Analysis>

⁵⁴ Statista, "India's Defense Budget Outgrows Pakistan's," May 6, 2025, <https://www.statista.com/chart/17197/india-and-pakistan-defense-budget/>

⁵⁵ Zahir Kazmi, "No Space for War: Marka-e-Haq and the Logic of Deterrence in South Asia," *British American Security Information Council (BASIC)*, May 20, 2025, <https://basicint.org/no-space-for-conventional-war-between-india-and-pakistan/>

⁵⁶ Shemin Joy, "There Was No Nuclear Signalling by Pakistan, US 'Neither Involved nor Informed' about Ceasefire: Foreign Secy Misri to Parliamentary Panel," *Deccan Herald*, May 19, 2025, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/there-was-no-nuclear-signalling-by-pakistan-ceasefire-bilateral-foreign-secy-misri-to-parliamentary-panel-3547513>

⁵⁷ *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), SIPRI Yearbook 2026: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2026), 45

stockpile over the next decade,⁵⁸ but that such actions should be interpreted as a responsible and measured response to India's continued nuclear expansion rather than an impulse toward an independent arms race.

Pakistan has always been a principled and consistent advocate for bilateral arms control in South Asia.⁵⁹ In addition to the proposal of Strategic Restraint Regime in 1998, Pakistan has made a number of calls for negotiations of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT)⁶⁰ on a non-discriminatory basis, and has also participated actively in the Conference on Disarmament deliberations in a constructive manner,⁶¹ and proposed mutual restraint agreements on delivery system development.⁶² In addition, Pakistan has also observed the moratorium on nuclear testing since 1998 and has urged India to reaffirm and intensify its own commitments.⁶³

At the multilateral level, Pakistan has been raising South Asian strategic stability issues in various international forums, highlighting the critical implications of the dangerous trajectory of India's military modernization and lack of risk reduction mechanisms. Pakistan's emphasis on the need for conventional and nuclear asymmetry to be tackled simultaneously and not separately, clearly demonstrates a degree of sophistication in understanding the escalation dynamics of South Asian security. Pakistan has also been actively engaged in the Track 1 and Track 1.5 discussions on CBMs, and is genuinely committed to negotiated management of stability.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Imran Hassan, "South Asian Arms Control and Pakistan's Nuclear Diplomacy" (transcript of remarks, *International Institute for Strategic Studies* webinar, June 23, 2020), <https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/events/2020/transcript-of-colonel-imran-hassan-public-webinar--23-jun-2020--south-asian-arms-control-and-pakista.pdf>

⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Arms Control and Disarmament," accessed June 26, 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/arms-control-and-disarmament>

⁶¹ Saif ul Haq, "Pakistan's Position on Nuclear Disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament," *Strategic Vision Institute*, June 18, 2026, <https://thesvi.org/pakistans-position-on-nuclear-disarmament-in-the-conference-on-disarmament/>

⁶² "Pakistan Proposes 20 CBMs: Secretary-Level Talks Begin," *Dawn*, December 28, 2004, <https://www.dawn.com/news/378281/pakistan-proposes-20-cbms-secretary-level-talks-begin>

⁶³ "Pakistan Reaffirms Commitment to N-Test Moratorium," *Dawn*, June 15, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1264952>

⁶⁴ Zachary S. Davis, ed., *A Different Approach: Assessing the Legacy of Track 1.5 and Track 2 Engagements with India and Pakistan* (Livermore, CA: Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, 2025), <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/sites/cgsr/files/2025-05/042925-cgsr-occasional-paper-cgsr-south-asia-occasional-paper-a-different-approach.pdf>

India's Military Modernization and the Widening Asymmetry

Nuclear Arsenal Expansion and Delivery System Development: The efforts towards nuclear modernization in India have gained tremendous momentum over the last decade. India is steadily building up its nuclear arsenal, with the country's estimated warhead count rising from an estimated 172 in 2024 to around 190 warheads in 2026, according to SIPRI's Yearbook 2026, which projects continued progress in the country's nuclear arsenal.⁶⁵ The Federation of American Scientists' Nuclear Notebook indicates that India is developing at least four new weapon systems and numerous new delivery platforms in all three domains - land, sea, and air.⁶⁶

On land, India operates five types of mobile nuclear-capable ballistic missiles that are considered operational: the short-range Prithvi-II and Agni-I, the medium-range Agni-II, and the intermediate-range Agni-III and Agni-IV.⁶⁷ The Agni-Prime (Agni-P) is fully operational and undergoing structured operational testing,⁶⁸ while the Agni-V with a range of 5,000 to 8,000 kilometres, placing it firmly in the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) category, significantly extends India's strategic reach well beyond South Asia.⁶⁹ The Agni-V has already been equipped with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology, successfully flight-tested for the second time in 2026⁷⁰ following its first MIRV test, Mission Divyastra, in March 2024,⁷¹ placing India among a

⁶⁵ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Yearbook 2026: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2026), 45

⁶⁶ Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, and Mackenzie Knight, "Indian Nuclear Weapons, 2024," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 80, no. 5 (2024): 326–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2024.2388470>

⁶⁷ Kristensen et al., "Indian Nuclear Weapons, 2024," 331

⁶⁸ Karl Dewey, Chelsey Wiley, and Joseph Dempsey, "On Track: India's Rail-Based Agni-Prime," *Missile Dialogue Initiative, International Institute for Strategic Studies*, February 4, 2026, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/missile-dialogue-initiative/2026/02/on-track-indias-rail-based-agni-prime/>

⁶⁹ Monitoring Desk, "India's Agni MIRV Test Poses Threat to Global Stability, Analysts Warn," *Kashmir Media Service*, June 3, 2026, <https://kmsnews.org/kms/2026/06/03/indias-agni-mirv-test-poses-threat-to-global-stability-analysts-warn.html>

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ministry of Defence, Government of India, "DRDO Successfully Conducts Mission Divyastra: Indigenously Developed Agni-5 Missile Makes Maiden Flight with MIRV," *Press Information Bureau*, March 11, 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2013549>

small group of states with an operational MIRV-capable ICBM. An even longer-range Agni-VI, reportedly capable of exceeding 12,000 kilometres, remains in the design and development stage.⁷² The development of canisterized versions of these missiles, which can be transported with mated warheads, is particularly significant: SIPRI's Yearbook 2026 confirmed that India has, for the first time, moved a portion of its arsenal into a deployed operational status, with 12 of its estimated 190 nuclear warheads now classified as deployed, either mounted on missiles or positioned with operational forces, marking a fundamental departure from India's long-standing practice of maintaining complete separation between warheads and delivery systems during peacetime.⁷³

Sea-based deterrence has also advanced a great deal since the commissioning of three SSBNs: INS Arihant,⁷⁴ INS Arighaat⁷⁵ and INS Aridhaman (S4).⁷⁶ The SSBN program gives India a survivable second strike capability, thereby completing the nuclear triad. Concurrently, India is also investing in 26 Rafale Marine fighter jets to be deployed on its aircraft carriers, INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya, augmenting India's already formidable nuclear capable naval force.⁷⁷ These are qualitative improvement in Indian nuclear capability.

Conventional Military Modernization and the Cold Start Doctrine: The conventional military modernization of India is also of importance, given its implications for the strategic stability in South Asia. Over the past few years, India's defense procurement has seen a mix of advanced combat

⁷² Newsd Staff, "India's Agni-VI ICBM Design Completed, DRDO Waiting for Government Approval," *Newsd Defence*, May 22, 2026, <https://defence.newsd.in/india/indias-agni-vi-icbm-design-completed-drdo-waiting-for-government-approval>

⁷³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Yearbook 2026: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2026), 45

⁷⁴ Sushil Ramsay, "INS Arihant Fully Operational and Raring to Go," *SP's Naval Forces*, no. 5 (2018), <https://www.spsnavalforces.com/story/?id=582>

⁷⁵ Drishti IAS, "INS Arighat," August 31, 2024, <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/ins-arighat>

⁷⁶ Siddharth Singh, "INS Aridhaman: India's Sea-Based Nuclear Deterrent Just Got Real," *Asia Times*, April 20, 2026, <https://asiatimes.com/2026/04/ins-aridhaman-indias-sea-based-nuclear-deterrent-just-got-real/>

⁷⁷ Adithya Krishna Menon, "India Orders 26 Rafale Marine Carrier-Based Aircraft for \$7.5 Billion," *Naval News*, April 28, 2025, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2025/04/india-orders-26-rafale-marine-carrier-based-aircraft-for-7-5-billion/>

aircraft (including the Rafale),⁷⁸ long-range precision strike systems,⁷⁹ ballistic missile defense systems acquired from Russia (S-400) and from internal programs,⁸⁰ and advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) systems.⁸¹ The Global Firepower Ranking 2026 reveals that India has the fourth strongest military in the world,⁸² highlighting a tremendous conventional imbalance between India and Pakistan.

This modernization has doctrinal implications that are encapsulated in India's Cold Start Doctrine, also known as the 'Proactive Strategy' in Indian military planning. CSD envisions the rapid mobilization of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs), small combined arms units that could launch offensive operations within 48–72 hours of the political order, and pursue limited territorial objectives within the Pakistani territory before Pakistan can mobilize nuclear forces or before international intervention can take place. The doctrine is clearly intended to be used in an environment below Pakistan's nuclear threshold and to capitalize on conventional advantage for compellence without nuclear escalation. In October 2025, India also held a set of exercises related to drones and counter-drones that were explicitly based on the Cold Start doctrine, showing that it remains relevant in operations.

Cold Start represents a fundamental challenge to strategic stability for two interrelated reasons. First, it decreases the warning time and decision margin of the Pakistani leadership in crises, which increases the likelihood of unintended escalation and miscalculation. Second, it is designed to exploit the space between Pakistan's conventional and nuclear thresholds - a space that, in Pakistan's strategic calculus, should not exist, since any large-scale conventional aggression against Pakistan's territory constitutes

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ "India Tests 1,000km Long-Range Cruise Missile, DRDO's LRLACM Alters Indo-Pacific Strike Balance," *Defence Security Asia*, June 16, 2026, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/india-lrlacm-cruise-missile-test-drdo-1000km-long-range-strike-indo-pacific/>

⁸⁰ "India's Massive S-400 Missile Shield Expansion Signals New Indo-Pacific Airpower Balance against China and Pakistan," *Defence Security Asia*, June 19, 2026, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/india-s400-missile-defence-expansion-russia-airpower-deterrence-china-pakistan/>

⁸¹ Amjad Mahmood and Adil Sultan, "Impact of India's ISR Capabilities on South Asian Security Dynamics," *Strategic Studies* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 20, <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.041.04.0040>

⁸² GlobalFirepower.com, "2026 World Military Strength Rankings," <https://www.globalfirepower.com/>

an existential threat that must be deterred. India's Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, after Operation Sindoor in May 2025, made an unequivocal statement that the operation created 'space' for conventional war under nuclear threshold, which Pakistan sees as highly destabilizing and as proof of India's intent to undermine the deterrence stability in the region.

Ballistic Missile Defense System: Another layer of strategic imbalance is added with India's purchase of the Russian S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile system and its own efforts to build the country's indigenous ballistic missile defense (BMD) capabilities. Ballistic missile defense systems are purportedly defensive but can erode the opponent's confidence in the second-strike capability, resulting in an increase in the number of missiles in the opponent's arsenal.

India's military modernization, its nuclearization, its procurement of BMDs, and its Cold Start doctrines are specifically designed to give India the room to resort to limited war without crossing the nuclear threshold and to enhance India's coercive options against Pakistan. These developments systematically affect the security perceptions of Pakistan and compel Pakistan to act accordingly and take measures such as the development of short-range systems, sea-based deterrents, etc. to retain the credibility of its deterrent and restore strategic balance. Hence, the responses of Pakistan are not competitive but restorative and reactive. Without an arms control framework to manage this Indian-driven spiral, the risk of miscalculation and escalation is likely to deepen as India continues to develop more sophisticated and capable offensive military forces explicitly oriented towards Pakistan.

Implications for Strategic Stability in South Asia

India's nuclear and conventional modernization, its adoption of the offensive doctrine of the 'Cold Start',⁸³ and a lack of bilateral arms control or CBMs, along with the failure of the global arms control framework that was once exerting normative pressure for restraint, have created conditions conducive to the erosion of deterrence stability in South Asia. Deterrence

⁸³ Jaganath Sankaran, "The Enduring Power of Bad Ideas: 'Cold Start' and Battlefield Nuclear Weapons in South Asia," *Arms Control Today* 44, no. 9 (November 2014), <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014-11/features/enduring-power-bad-ideas-cold-start-and-battlefield-nuclear-weapons-south-asia>

stability depends on mutual confidence in the survivability of their second strike forces, the availability of communication lines and de-escalation processes in the event of a crisis, and neither side believing that it has an obvious first-strike advantage. All of these conditions are simultaneously being eroded.⁸⁴

Though nominally committed to NFU, fears are being raised about India's development of canisterized, road-mobile missiles and its acquisition of MIRV capability, which could indicate a transition toward a more ready, first-use-capable posture. The strategic landscape in South Asia would be transformed if India could launch missiles in launch-ready configurations, armed with mated warheads (which canisterized systems can carry), then timescales of decision-making would shorten, and space for crisis management would diminish. In this regard, Pakistan has strategically designed its own deterrence, such as the Nasr short-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile for tactical deterrence and the Babur-3 cruise missile for sea-based deterrence. These are not aggressive acts but prudent responses to a real and growing threat.

The India-Pakistan conflict of May 2025 was a reminder of how this situation can escalate. India used the false flag terrorist attack in Pahalgam in April 2025 as an excuse and escalated the situation, culminating in direct military exchanges such as Indian airstrikes on Pakistani territory, drone attacks, and retaliatory conventional military operations by Pakistan. During the confrontation, strikes on key military facilities could have escalated into a nuclear crisis.⁸⁵ The crisis proved that in an era of new technologies, misinformation, and quick decision-making cycles, risks can escalate quickly in nuclear-armed competitions. Overall, the role of the international community, in particular the United States,⁸⁶ was crucial in preventing further escalation, but ad hoc third-party crisis management is not a substitute for institutional risk-reduction mechanisms.

⁸⁴ Antoine Levesques, Desmond Bowen, and John H. Gill, *Nuclear Deterrence and Stability in South Asia: Perceptions and Realities* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021), <https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/research-papers/nuclear-deterrence-and-stability-in-south-asia---perceptions-and-realities.pdf>

⁸⁵ Christopher Clary, "Four Days in May: The India-Pakistan Crisis of 2025," *Stimson Center*, May 28, 2025, <https://www.stimson.org/2025/four-days-in-may-the-india-pakistan-crisis-of-2025/>

⁸⁶ Muskaan Mujahid, "The 2025 Pakistan-India Conflict—as It Happened," *Dawn*, May 6, 2026, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1996978>

There were no direct hotlines between the National Command Authorities, no agreed protocols for communicating in crisis, and no joint early-warning mechanisms in place, increasing the chances of miscalculation during this confrontation in 2025. These are exactly the sort of loopholes an effective bilateral arms control and CBM regime might cover. The fact that South Asia came as close as it did to a nuclear crisis in May 2025, in the absence of any such framework, is a testament to the urgency of establishing one.

In the long term, the future of strategic stability in the South Asian region is extremely worrisome. India's nuclear stockpile is likely to continue expanding with the Agni missile development program, the expansion of the SSBN fleet, and the possible deployment of MIRV-capable delivery systems. The conventional superiority of India is being strengthened over time by continuous high defense spending. Normative and diplomatic pressures promoting restraint have been reduced by the global arms control crisis.⁸⁷

It was one of the most precarious years in the history of the global arms control system since the end of the Cold War, when institutions were paralyzing, militarization was increasing, and trust in international arms control was vanishing. This international situation is not conducive to strategic stability in South Asia. It establishes an environment that allows India to avoid the international condemnation it would otherwise attract for its military actions and reduces the need for bilateral dialogue that is necessary for strategic stability.

Policy Recommendations

- i. **Renewing the Call for a Strategic Restraint Regime:*** The immediate need for South Asian strategic stability is to resume substantive dialogue between India and Pakistan on the building of a Strategic Restraint Regime. Pakistan's 1998 proposal⁸⁸ remains a viable and holistic option, calling for mutually connected steps in nuclear and missile restraint, conventional balance, and conflict resolution. The international community should actively urge India

⁸⁷ Muhammad Salman, "When Arms Control Erodes: South Asia's Rising Nuclear Stakes," *Modern Diplomacy*, April 11, 2026, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2026/04/11/when-arms-control-erodes-south-asias-rising-nuclear-stakes/>

⁸⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Arms Control and Disarmament," <https://mofa.gov.pk/arms-control-and-disarmament>

to participate in this framework, as bilateral arms control in the South Asia region is not only a regional issue, but a global nuclear security issue.

- ii. ***Confidence-Building Measures and Nuclear Risk Reduction:*** A package of bilateral CBMs and nuclear risk-reduction measures should be prioritized as an immediate step if comprehensive arms control is not realized. This package should include the establishment of a direct hotline between the military leaderships of both countries; the formalization and expansion of the Agreement on Pre-Notification of Missile Tests to cover all categories of nuclear-capable delivery system tests; agreement on mutual restraint in the deployment of ballistic missile defence systems; and the establishment of a joint nuclear risk-reduction centre modelled on Cold War US-Soviet precedents.⁸⁹ These actions do not need to be driven by a settlement of other political issues, and can be carried out alongside wider diplomatic efforts.
- iii. ***International Engagement and Multilateral Pressure:*** The international community has a considerable role to play in the current situation of strategic stability in South Asia. The US-India civil nuclear deal and the 2008 nuclear suppliers group (NSG) waiver⁹⁰ has effectively rewarded India's non-participation in the NPT and contributed to India's nuclear modernization. A more balanced approach to South Asia would also involve making international nuclear cooperation with India contingent on tangible efforts towards arms control with Pakistan and on transparency measures for India's nuclear program.
- iv. ***Revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament:*** The revitalization of the CD as a working negotiating forum is crucial at the multilateral level. The paralysis of the CD, primarily brought on by the disagreements about the scope and sequencing of the FMCT negotiations, has deprived the international community of its main multilateral arms control negotiating forum. The demand by Pakistan for a non-discriminatory FMCT to address existing

⁸⁹ US Department of State, "History of the National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Center," <https://2021-2025.state.gov/history-of-the-national-and-nuclear-risk-reduction-center/>

⁹⁰ Siddharth Ramana, *The Nuclear Suppliers Group Waiver* (London: British American Security Information Council (BASIC), 2008), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/92364/gtz08.pdf>

stockpiles and not just to end future production of fissile material⁹¹ is a principled and strategically sound stance which deserves to be supported by the international community more widely. The resumption of substantive talks in the CD would also give a multilateral dimension to the bilateral talks between India and Pakistan, which would offer more incentives to engage.

Conclusion

South Asia has lost the normative spirit for arms control that, at least partially, encouraged some degree of strategic restraint in the past. In this context, India has been following a rapid nuclear and conventional military modernization drive, which has substantially altered the regional strategic landscape and deepened the asymmetry with Pakistan, as well as added new doctrinal threats, namely the Cold Start Doctrine and its subsequent mutations that threaten the cornerstones of deterrence stability in South Asia. However, Pakistan has shown a principled and consistent approach towards CMD and FSD as measures of strategic stability without indulging in destabilizing arms race dynamics. This responsible stance, which has been maintained for over two decades and reaffirmed even in the face of great pressure during the May 2025 conflict, is an expression of Pakistan's genuine aspirations for peace in the region and its understanding that the region's strategic stability is in the interest of all regional states. But South Asian strategic stability can no longer rely on unilateral restraints by Pakistan, given the ongoing and unabated Indian military modernization. The lack of arms control mechanisms to oversee India's growing nuclear stockpile and conventional superiority means that there are conditions that can lead to miscalculation, inadvertent escalation and crisis instability. The dangers of the South Asian nuclear dyad could only increase if institutional processes of dialogue, transparency, and mutual restraint are not established. This is a matter of a great degree of urgency. South Asia is the world's most volatile nuclear flashpoint - a region where two nuclear-armed neighbors with unresolved territorial disputes and a history of armed conflict interact across a complex landscape of conventional and nuclear threats. In today's arms control situation, this is a more perilous scenario. The international community, and India, in particular, has a responsibility to change this course or else a miscalculation or an accident can have

⁹¹ US Department of State, "History of the National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Center," <https://2021-2025.state.gov/history-of-the-national-and-nuclear-risk-reduction-center/>

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consequences that are irreversible. Pakistan is prepared to have a serious, sustainable, and just dialogue with regard to regional arms control and strategic stability. The answer lies in whether India will respond.