

REVISITING THE NUCLEAR DEBATE IN SOUTH ASIAN SECURITY

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Abstract

Grand strategy and nuclear deterrence have been the most distinct strategies of the last century. The principal objective of a grand strategy for a major state is to achieve some grand strategic objectives, and for other states, it is to preserve their security in an anarchic world. However, contrary to the central assumption of the nuclear deterrence theory, evidence shows that in certain situations, mere possession of nuclear weapons does not automatically translate into deterrence. The central argument of this article is based on the idea that deterrence strategy is neither a static concept nor should be taken as such. Nuclear deterrence. It is a dynamic concept in nature and its utilization depends on the ingenuity of the Nuclear Weapon State (NWS). While citing a history of incidents, especially the Pulwama crisis in 2019 between India and Pakistan, this article explores how nuclear deterrence worked when the fear of a nuclear war was hanging in the region and how these states were able to use the nuclear deterrence strategy to their benefit. It also discusses whether there was a need for either side to operationalize nuclear deterrence through some physical and tangible steps.

Keywords: Nuclear Deterrence, Nuclear Weapons (NWs), Nuclear Weapon States (NWS), Grand Strategy, Kashmir

In explanation of the concept of 'Grand Strategy,' Liddle Hart, in his famous work '*Strategy: Indirect Approach*' propounded that all the resources of a nation, or a band of nations, must be coordinated and directed towards the attainment of the political objectives of war.¹ Howard opined that this notion of Grand Strategy would ultimately aid not in war

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¹ Basil H. Liddle Hart, *Strategy: Indirect Approach* (London: 1967), 187-188.

fighting only but also in war avoidance.”² This idea on ‘war avoidance’ later became the bedrock of the notion of ‘deterrence’³ and in turn the ‘nuclear deterrence theory.’

Initially conceptualized in the Cold War era, ‘nuclear deterrence’ was supposed to dissuade the opponent from attacking one’s state by using retaliatory threats of the use of nuclear weapons (NWs). The classical nuclear deterrence reasoning made an offensive strategy towards a nuclear rival nearly impossible because of the sheer destructive power of the nukes. Hence, the utility and capability of NWs was considered more to avert the war than fighting the war.⁴ Theoretically, the presence of nuclear deterrence was generally considered as an end of warfare between Nuclear Weapon States (NWS).

Over the years, within this paradigm, the nuclear deterrence theory came to be seen through two discrete angles: (the defensive) nuclear deterrence strategy and the (offensive) nuclear ‘compellence’ strategy as introduced by Schelling in his famous work *Arms and Influence*,⁵ although in real, both are two sides of the same coin. Schaub’s explanation is helpful in this regard where he categorised ‘compellence’ as an offensive strategy, where the compeller, in order to change the status quo, uses the persuasive value of threat to compel the adversary into taking action as desired by the compeller. On the other hand, to him, ‘deterrence’ is a defensive strategy, where the persuasive value of threat is used to keep the status quo unchanged⁶ by dissuading the adversary from taking any action or initiating any offensive.⁷ Building upon Schelling’s ideas, Sperandi talks of blurred boundaries between both the strategies, especially in crisis⁸ even to the extent of a continuous interplay between both strategies of coercion.⁹ However, the operability, and in turn success, of these strategies is predicated upon ‘credibility of intentions’, revealed by ‘the threat of use of NWs’ and ‘the will to use it’ though in case of ‘deterrence’ the threat of use of NWs is ‘latent’ and in case of ‘compellence’,

² Michael Howard, “Grand Strategy in the Twentieth Century,” *Defence Studies* 1, no.1 (Spring 2001), 1-10.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bernard Brodie, “The Development of Nuclear Strategy,” *International Security* 4, no 2 (Spring, 1978): 65-83.

⁵ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

⁶ Gary Schaub, “Compellence: Resuscitating the Concept,” *In Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 37-60.

⁷ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.

⁸ Maria Sperandei, “Bridging Deterrence and Compellence: An Alternative Approach to the Study of Coercive Diplomacy,” *International Studies Review*, no. 8(2006): 253-280.

⁹ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.

the threat of use of NWs is overt. According to Powell, in an environment where there is an overt threat, there is a possibility that that situation may go out of control and result in a nuclear exchange.¹⁰ Powell's idea of *brinkmanship* is noteworthy here where he is of the view that while states involved will make an effort to exert coercive pressure to extract maximum out of the situation from an adversary,¹¹ at the same time, there exists a space for possible political gains for a state, where a *threat* to impose a cost of destruction would force an adversary to de-escalate the conflict.¹² On the other hand, Krepon and others talk of a possibility for a low intensity conflict below the conventional threshold owing to the presence of NWs within the framework of 'stability/instability paradox.'¹³ In short, these ideas hint at the fact that nuclear deterrence is not a war aversion strategy exclusively but may be used in many other ways to reap maximum benefits depending on the ingenuity of the states utilizing it.

This article aims to discuss how far nuclear deterrence can play a role in achieving grand strategic objectives of a state-right from deterring an enemy to attaining other political objectives of that state, keeping in view the case of Indo-Pak escalations. The argument dwells on the idea that sometimes the mere presence of NWs does not necessarily deter a rival and there may be a need to take some active steps to deter an enemy and force him into 'inaction.'

Role of Nuclear Deterrence during Indo-Pak Escalations

For the purpose, a study of history of escalations between the two South Asian nuclear arch rivals—India and Pakistan would be interesting to see the efficacy of nuclear deterrence beyond its conventional application. The article investigates the idea through case studies of Brassatacks Exercise (1986-87), the Kargil Conflict, Indo-Pak Military Standoff (2001-02), Mumbai Attacks – 2008, Pathankot incident (2016) and the Pulwama incident (2019)

Brasstacks Exercise

In 1986-87, the Brasstacks exercise was organised by the Indian Army to test military readiness at a larger scale. As per Weisman, it involved approximately 150,000 troops with more than 10,000

¹⁰ Robert Powell, "Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation, and National Missile Defense," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 86–118, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137605>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 86-118.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Michael Krepon, "The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation Control in South Asia," in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia*, ed. Rodney W. Jones, and Ziad Haider (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1-24.

mechanised troops in the Rajasthan desert.¹⁴ However, Bajpai, Cheema and others of the view, that during the Brasstacks exercise, Operation Trident was mounted to see the possibility of war between India and Pakistan.¹⁵ Badhwar argues that such a large-scale mobilisation and movement of Indian Army just 100 miles away from Indo-Pak border created alarms in Pakistan.¹⁶ Resultantly, Pakistan also mobilised its forces along the border.¹⁷ The crisis diffused suddenly and Bajpai, Cheema and others of the view that, "Indian and Pakistani journalists and scholars wondered how a crisis between the two countries could develop so quickly, could reach such an intense level, and then could vanish virtually overnight."¹⁸ At this stage, both states had allegedly carried out some testing of NWs or cold tests.¹⁹ However, apparently nuclear dimension did not directly affect the outcome of crisis.²⁰

Soon after nuclear tests in 1998 by India and Pakistan, both NWS passed through a set of crises such as the Kargil conflict in 1999,²¹ the attack on Indian Parliament in 2001,²² the Bombay Hotel Attack in 2008²³ and then the Pulwama incident in 2019 and crisis in its aftermath over Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). It appears that the presence of NWs has effectively deterred India and Pakistan from initiating aggression against each other during the period of these escalations.

¹⁴ Steven R. Weisman, "On India's Border, A Huge Mock War," *The New York Times*, March 6, 1987, accessed December 29, 2019.

¹⁵ Kanti P. Bajpai, P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Stephen P. Cohen and Sumit Ganguly, *Brasstacks and Beyond: Perception and Management of Crisis in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995):2-3.

¹⁶ Inderjit Badhwar, "General Sundarji Leaves behind a Legacy most Fiercely Disputed in the History of the Army," *India Today*, May 15, 1988, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bajpai and others, *Brasstacks and Beyond*, 2-3.

¹⁹ Ansar Abbasi, "Pakistan Secretly Carried Out Cold Test of Nuclear Device on Oct 6, 1984," *The News*, January 27 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/>

²⁰ Bajpai, *Brasstacks and Beyond*: 2-3.

²¹ In 1998-99, Pakistan Army personnel and mujahideen crossed line of control in the areas of Dras and Kargil and held unoccupied mountains to engage Indian supply lines to Siachin. Pakistan withdrew from these positions in July 1999.

²² In December 2001, terrorists attacked Indian Parliament resulted into death of 14 people. India claimed that the attack was carried-out by Pakistan-based terrorist organization, which resulted in military stand-off between India and Pakistan.

²³ In Mumbai attacks 164 people were killed by 10 terrorists.

Kargil Conflict

The Kargil Conflict (1999) happened immediately after nuclear tests by both states.²⁴ During the crisis, Pakistan claimed, Kashmiri Mujahideen²⁵ occupied key heights across LOC²⁶ in Dras/Kargil.²⁷ The response by Indian military forces to remove Mujahideen from these posts resulted into fierce fighting between both.²⁸ India used regular forces during the conflict, including Air Force and Artillery to support their troops. According to one estimate there were about 300 hundred artillery guns, multi-barrel rocket launchers, and mortars daily fired at an approximate rate of 5000 rounds per day.²⁹ The artillery regiments were even brought into conflict from very far-off locations like Indian Punjab.³⁰ However, the magnitude of the conflict remained limited for which a number of reasons could be attributed, including for example; that the military objectives set for Kargil operations by Pakistan were limited to interdiction of the Dras/Kargil supply line towards Indian side of Siachin and to portray Kashmir as a nuclear flash point.³¹ Secondly, Pakistan and India had recently conducted NWs tests and though by then their nuclear doctrines and concepts had not matured, yet they realized the consequence of escalation between the NWSs. Moreover, India only escalated the conflict to a level, where its objective of dislodging the Mujahideen from the heights of Kargil could be met, therefore, according to Joeck, Indian forces had strict orders not to cross LOC to avoid escalation with Pakistan.³² Thirdly, Pakistan agreed to assist in vacation of occupied position at Kargil heights. Fourthly, Pakistan was also alleged to

²⁴ Federation of American Scientist, "Pakistan Nuclear Weapons: Nuclear Tests," *FAS 2002*, accessed August 21, 2020, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/pakistan/nuke/>

²⁵ Mujahid is an Arabic word for warrior; in this case freedom fighter is the best alternative nomenclature.

²⁶ Line of Control (LOC) is an armistice boundary between IOK and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. It is not a border but a de-facto boundary.

²⁷ Tehmina Mahmood, "Kargil Crisis and Deteriorating Security Situation in South Asia," *Pakistan Horizon* 52, no. 4 (October 1999): 31-47.

²⁸ Nasim Zehra, *From Kargil to the Coup: Events that Shook Pakistan*, (Lahore/Karachi: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2018).

²⁹ Ashwini Kumar, "Artillery: The Battle Winning Factor in Kargil," *India Today*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story>.

³⁰ Lieutenant General Khalid Maqbool, Commander 4 Corps, during an interaction with Asim Ahmed immediately after Kargil Operation on July 22, 1999.

³¹ Neil Joeck, "The Indo-Pakistan Nuclear Confrontation: Lessons from the Past Contingencies for the Future," Nonproliferation Policy Education Center (NPEC), accessed August 21, 2020, <http://npolicy.org/>.

³² Ibid.

have shown intentions to use NWs in case of escalation.³³ Overall, it could be assumed that the nuclear deterrence worked in the Kargil conflict as both states avoided escalation and wanted to keep the conflict limited to the heights of Dras/Kargil.

India-Pak Military Standoff 2001-02

The next test of nuclear deterrence was a ten-month military stand-off between India and Pakistan in 2001-02. This was consequent to a militant attack on the Indian Parliament, which India blamed to be an act of a Pakistan-based militant organisation.³⁴ In retaliation, India mobilised its military forces all along border. During the escalation, another terrorist incident occurred on May 14, 2002, in which militants killed 21 Indian soldiers in a bus, near Indian Army garrison in OIOK.³⁵ Once again, the risk of a war between both states reached its peak during these ten months escalation, however, India held back due to the fear of NWs exchange and finally started to withdraw troops in October 2002. Kapur quoted the reasons of withdrawal of Indian troops in following words:³⁶

Despite this noncompliance? India eventually demobilised its forces without attacking Pakistan. Having lost the element of surprise, anxious to avoid angering the United States by attacking its key ally in the Afghan war, and concerned with conventional costs and nuclear risks of a large-scale Indo-Pakistan conflict, the Indians began withdrawing from the international border and the LoC in October 2002.

Rahman quoted, President General Pervez Musharraf saying that “the Indian government had starting pulling back its troops due to his various covert messages to the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, that if a war was imposed on Pakistan, it would not remain a

³³ Emma Henderson, “Kargil war: Pakistan Planned to Drop Nuclear Bomb on India During Conflict, Former CIA Officer Claims,” *The Independent*, December 3, 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia>.

³⁴ Steve Coll, “The Stand-Off,” *The New Yorker*, February 6, 2006, accessed February 9, 2021 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/02/13/the-stand-off>.

³⁵ Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, “US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis,” *Stimson Center*, Report 57 (2014), https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Twin_Peaks_Crisis.pdf.

³⁶ S. Paul Kapur, “India and Pakistan’s Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not like Cold War Europe,” *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall, 2005): 127-152, quoting Sood and Sawhney, Operation Parakram, 80, 82, 87; Sudarshan and Pillai, “Game of Patience,”; Shishir Gupta, “When India came close to War,” *India Today*, December 19, 2002; and interviews of retired Indian Generals, New Delhi.

conventional one.”³⁷ Once again, in this case, the chances of a nuclear exchange were high, but they never materialized into an actual one. However, two other political outcomes were achieved due to the crisis. First, world attention was drawn towards the region. The fact that the threat of nuclear exchange was real, helped highlight the need for world intervention towards this region which might have been the aim of Pakistan as it has always called for world/UN intervention over the Kashmir issue. Second was the political gain for India, as it brought a lot of pressure on Pakistan to internationally denounce any extremist agenda and Pakistan even assured to the US officials that all terrorist training camps would be permanently shut down and no cross-border infiltration would take place.³⁸ The escalation, nonetheless, proved that nuclear deterrence will remain a permanent feature between both the states during any future escalation and secondly that threat of NWs could be used to achieve political aims.

Mumbai Attacks – 2008

On 26 November 2008, ten terrorists launched attacks in different parts of Mumbai, India. They reached Mumbai through sea routes and after reaching coastline they avoided usual check posts to reach the city.³⁹ They operationalized terrorist activity by targeting a number of locations at Mumbai like railway station, community residential area and prominent hotels of the town etcetera.⁴⁰ During the attacks, 174 people lost their lives and approximately 300 were wounded; among the dead there were 26 foreigners.⁴¹ The incidents drew worldwide condemnation. India blamed Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba for the incidents and claimed that this terrorist incident was directed from Pakistan.⁴² The lone alive terrorist involved in the incident was later hanged by India in 2012.⁴³ Despite the fact that India blamed Pakistan-based militant organisation for this incident, but avoided escalation with Pakistan to portray itself as a victim of cross-border terrorism and to pressurise Pakistan internationally. Riaz

³⁷ Shamim-ur-Rahman, “Warning Forced India to Pull Back Troops, Says President,” *Dawn*, December, 31 2002.

³⁸ Kapur, “India and Pakistan’s Unstable Peace,” 127-152.

³⁹ Angel Rabasa, Robert D. Blackwill, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, C. Christine Fair, Brian A. Jackson, Brian Michael Jenkins, Seth G. Jones, Nathaniel Shestak, Ashley J. Tellis, “The Lessons of Mumbai,” *RAND* (Santa Monica, Arlington, Pittsburgh: RAND Corporation, 2009).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Ian Black, “Attacks Draw Worldwide Condemnation,” *The Guardian*, November 28, 2008.

⁴² Zahid Hussain, “Islamabad Tells of Plot by Lashkar,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2009, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/>

⁴³ “Indian Supreme Court upholds Death Penalty for Kasab,” *Dawn*, August 29, 2012.

considered that this decision was largely responsible for restraining the crisis.⁴⁴

Pathankot & Pulwama Incidents

The year 2013 was the beginning of fresh wave of violence in IOK where Kashmiris started to agitate against the government of India. These protests were met with some severest kind of coercion by India.⁴⁵ After 2013, two major incidents held in IOK; first was Pathankot Air Base attack⁴⁶ in January 2016 and second was the Pulwama Attack in February 2019.⁴⁷ In reaction, Indian claimed that it had conducted surgical strikes inside Pakistan in September 2016, though these surgical strikes could not be verified by any independent source.⁴⁸ the IAF air strikes in alleged The complexities involved in Pulwama incident were more serious as it was not mere escalation but once again test of existing nuclear deterrence between the two NWS.

On February 26, 2019 India claimed a surgical strike inside Pakistan in the Balakot area⁴⁹ and in the following day in a tit for tat operation Pakistan Air Force (PAF) shot down two Indian military jets.⁵⁰ military India during this period of heightened tensions, continued to

⁴⁴ Riaz Mohammad Khan, "Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management: Challenges in Pakistan-India Relations," in *investigating Crises: South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics, and Trajectories*, eds. Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland, 75-95 (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, 2018).

⁴⁵ Kashmir Profile – Timeline, last updated August 6, 2019.

⁴⁶ Militants attacked Indian Air Force base at Pathankot from 2-5 January 2016, in which 2-3 Indian Security Forces personnel were killed. India blamed Pakistan-based group Jaish-e-Muhammad. Though, United Jihad Council of Kashmir-based militant group claimed the responsibility.

⁴⁷ On February 2019, a suicide bomber attacked convoy of Central Reserve Police Force of India at Pulwama and killed 40 personnel. India blamed Pakistan based Jaish-e-Muhammad for the incident.

⁴⁸ M Ilyas Khan in his article, "India's 'Surgical Strikes' in Kashmir: Truth or Illusion?" *The BBC News*, Pakistani-administered Kashmir, 23 October 2016, questioned the assertion of India's claims of surgical strike inside Pakistan, <https://www.bbc.com/news>. Similarly, Michael Sheldon, claimed that after studying satellite imagery of the area in Pakistan that India had bombed, he could see "no evidence any buildings were hit." He added, "It appears to me they didn't hit their targets," referred in Jeffrey Gettleman, Hari Kumar and Sameer Yasir, "Deadly Shelling Erupts in Kashmir Between India and Pakistan After Pilot Is Freed," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02>.

⁴⁹ "Balakot Air Strike: Pakistan Shows off Disputed Site on Eve of India Election," *BBC News*, April 10, 2019, accessed November 3, 2019.

⁵⁰ Hashim, "Pakistan Shoots Down Two Indian Fighter Jets: Military," *The Al-Jazeera News*.

up the ante on the escalation by arresting Hurriyat leaders in IOK,⁵¹ clamped strictest of curfews and took few measures in the valley, which in the presence of nuclear deterrence amounts to crossing the nuclear threshold?

While attempting to explain Pakistan's actions from the lens of nuclear deterrence theory, one would observe that its actions in the post-Pulwama situation have not conformed to the deterrence theory in general. In other words, Pakistan was unable to utilise nuclear deterrence to its advantage in the post-Pulwama situation. Despite the presence of nuclear deterrence, India scrapped Articles 370⁵² and 35A⁵³ of its constitution and claimed to have conducted surgical strike inside Pakistan at Balakot area. On the other hand, Pakistan was not able to stop India from scrapping Article 370 and 35A, which changed the special status of IOK and declared it integral part of India.⁵⁴ These articles provided special status to IOK in the Indian constitution where it cannot be treated like other states of India.⁵⁵ Scrapping of articles by India at the time when the population of IOK was agitating against the Indian state and a highly tense situation existed between India and Pakistan, provides an evidence that because of the presence of nuclear deterrence did not work. This happened due to the absence of any physical steps by Pakistan, which might have shown intentions of escalation, or an overt threat of use of NWs. , On the contrary, India used the Pulwama incident for obtaining political advantage at domestic front. Farooq Abdullah, the Chief of National Congress, indicting Modi, Prime Minister of India, points out that Pulwama incident and claims of surgical strike inside Pakistan were used by Modi to win elections in India.⁵⁶ From Pakistan's perspective, the basic tenet of deterrence i.e. 'dissuasion' did not work so as to coerce India from taking any action. Same idea has been debated by Schelling to use "threat" with the intention to keep an adversary from "starting something"

⁵¹ Hurriyat is an Arabic word with meanings like freedom, liberty and independence. The consortium of freedom parties leaders in IOK are known as Hurriyat leaders.

⁵² Article 370 of the Indian Constitution gave special status of self-rule and autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir.

⁵³ Article 35A define permanent residents of the region in Indian Occupied Kashmir. It denies outsiders from permanently settling, buying land, holding local government jobs or winning education scholarships.

⁵⁴ Article 370 of the Constitution of India, [https://www.constitution.org/ cons/](https://www.constitution.org/cons/) and "Kashmir Special Status Explained: What are Articles 370 and 35A?" *Al-Jazeera*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/>.

⁵⁵ Article 370 of the Constitution of India, "Kashmir Special Status Explained: What are Articles 370 and 35A?" *Al-Jazeera*, August 5, 2019.

⁵⁶ Kamaljit Kaur Sandhu, "Modi behind Pulwama Attack as he Wanted to Win Elections: Farooq Abdullah," *The India Today*, April 7, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/>

(inaction).⁵⁷ In the same backdrop, Pakistan was unable to effectively internationalize the Kashmir conflict as a nuclear flash point between India and Pakistan. It continued to view nuclear deterrence from the narrow perspective of dissuading India from a war. Pakistan’s reticent behaviour after the Pulwama incident was negation of basic tenet of nuclear deterrence, where deterrer needs to communicate to rival of his intention to use NWs in order to dissuade him.

The regression in the prevailing nuclear deterrence was particularly observed from the Indian side. It tried to escalate the situation by violating the airspace and claimed to target areas inside Pakistan. It also took political advantage of presence of nuclear deterrence and scrapped Articles 35A and 370. Response from Pakistan on the other hand was imprudent as it did not try to show seriousness of its intentions by taking some physical steps like movement of troops or NWs etcetera, which permitted India to move ahead in scrapping Articles without any fear.

The data below shows six major incidents of crisis between India and Pakistan in order to understand how both the states reacted during these situations in terms of nuclear deterrence, mobilisation of forces and threat of use of NWs. This will help in figuring out, how these states perceived the purpose of NWs and its deterrent capability in managing the crisis.

Table 1: Six Major Incidents between India and Pakistan

Incidents	Blamed for the Incident		Mobilisation of Forces		Threat to Use NWs	
	India	Pak	India	Pak	India	Pak
Brasstacks 1986-87	1 ⁵⁸	0	1 ⁵⁹	1	0	0
Kargil War	0	1 ⁶⁰	1 ⁶¹	1 ⁶²	0	1 ⁶³ (though Pakistan denied the allegation of threat to use NWs)

⁵⁷ Sperandei, “Bridging Deterrence and Compellence.”

⁵⁸ Aziz, “A Leaf from History.”

⁵⁹ Weisman, “On India’s Border.”

⁶⁰ Zehra, *From Kargil to the Coup: Events that Shook Pakistan*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Alan Sipress and Thomas E. Ricks, “Report: India, Pakistan Were Near Nuclear War in 99,” *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2002, <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

Stand-off 2001-02	0	¹⁶⁴	¹⁶⁵	¹⁶⁶	0	¹⁶⁷
Mumbai Attacks (26-29 November 2008)	0	¹⁶⁸	0	0	0	0
Pathankot (2 January 2016)	0	¹⁶⁹	0	0	0	0
Pulwama (14 February 2019)	0	¹⁷⁰	¹⁷¹	0	¹⁷²	¹⁷³
Total	1	5	4	3	1	4

Source: Prepared by authors.

Results of the data presented in Table 1 above are as under: -

- Out of the above six incidents, India was blamed for initiating one incident and Pakistan for five.
- India carried out mobilisation of forces four times and Pakistan thrice.
- India once posed threat to use NWs during the crises, while Pakistan three times.

⁶⁴ Celia W. Dugger, "Group in Pakistan is Blamed by India for Suicide Raid," *The New York Times*, December 15, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com>.

⁶⁵ John F. Burns and Celia W. Dugger, "India Builds Up Forces as Bush Urges Calm," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

⁶⁶ Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, "US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis," *Stimson Center*, Report 57 (2014), <https://www.stimson.org/>.

⁶⁷ Rahman, "Warning Forced India to Pull Back Troops, says President."

⁶⁸ Hussain, "Islamabad Tells of Plot by Lashkar."

⁶⁹ Sumit Ganguly, "The Next Pathankot: India's New Terrorism Battleground," *Foreign Affairs*, January 6, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india>.

⁷⁰ Maria Abi-Habib, Sameer Yasir and Hari Kumar, "India Blames Pakistan for Attack in Kashmir, Promising a Response," *The New York Times*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/15/>.

⁷¹ Jeffrey Gettleman, "Troops on the Move as India and Pakistan Face Off Over Kashmir," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

⁷² India Today, "Our Nuclear Weapons are not for Diwali: PM Modi on Pak's Nuclear Button Threat," *The India Today*, April 21, 2019, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/>.

⁷³ India Today, "Imran Khan Addresses Pakistan on Kashmir, Threatens Nuclear War Once Again," *The India Today*, August 26, 2019, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/>.

- Nuclear deterrence was primarily experienced in the framework of stability/instability paradox (militant & terrorist attacks/limited war) etcetera.

Politics of Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia

Krepon, while discussing the stability/instability paradox and nuclear brinkmanship considers that the presence of nuclear deterrence permits India and Pakistan to initiate conflict below the conventional level,⁷⁴ however, he is of the opinion that brinkmanship under the nuclear umbrella may prove potentially dangerous. In the case of South-Asian regional rivals, escalation between them occurred six times and the results presented in the data set in Table 1 reflect that Pakistan has been the main beneficiary of the presence of nuclear deterrence in South Asia. The purpose of escalations from Pakistan's perspective could be to hurt India and internationalise the issue of IOK. Apparently, in the five incidents referred in Table 1 above, Pakistan has allegedly used nuclear deterrence in the framework of stability/instability paradox and thereafter on at least three occasions, threatened to use NWs in case of any conflagration in order to deter India. In the post-Pulwama situation, Pakistan's behaviour conflicted with its early behaviour and vehemently cast-off threat of NWs as obvious in statements issued by different personalities holding important portfolios in Pakistan at that time.⁷⁵

In the post-Pulwama 2019 incident, a number of incidents took place, where India was observed disregarding presence of nuclear weapons with Pakistan. It claimed to conduct surgical strike on 26 February 2019 in the wooded area of Balakot, Pakistan,⁷⁶ and in follow-up operation Pakistan shot down 2 Indian Jet Aircrafts,⁷⁷ though, Pakistan later returned the Indian pilot possibly to diffuse the situation.⁷⁸ During the period, the major political step India took was scrapping of Articles 370 and 35A on 5 August 2019.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Krepon, "The Stability-Instability Paradox."

⁷⁵ Asif Shahzad, "PM Khan: Pakistan would Not Use Nuclear Weapons First, Amid Tensions with India," *Reuters*, September 2, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/>.

⁷⁶ BBC, "Balakot Air Strike."

⁷⁷ Joanna Slater and Pamela Constable, "Pakistan Captures Indian Pilot Aftershooting Down Aircraft, Escalating Hostilities," *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2019.

⁷⁸ Jeffrey Gettleman, Hari Kumar and Sameer Yasir, "Deadly Shelling Erupts in Kashmir Between India and Pakistan After Pilot Is Freed," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02/world>.

⁷⁹ Aljazeera, "India Revokes Disputed Kashmir's Special Status with Rush Decree," *The Aljazeera News*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/>.

Changing the autonomous status of IOJK to a territory controlled by the Indian Union was a significant decision by the Indian government. The decision has repercussions for Kashmiris living on both sides of LOC and it has also hurt the claims of Pakistan on IOK as Pakistan considers Kashmir as a disputed territory whose fate has to be decided on the basis of UN resolution through a plebiscite. India, on the contrary, considered Jammu and Kashmir to be her integral part, and any decision on the status of the disputed territory should be taken mutually by India and Pakistan. Both states have fought three wars (1948, 1965 and Kargil) over IOK, and the exchange of fire/skirmishes is a routine matter along the LOC, causing loss of civilian lives towards Pakistan side and military personnel on both sides.⁸⁰ Though in the past Pakistan has been able to use nuclear deterrence to its advantage but at this critical juncture once India took decision to change the status of IOK, Pakistan could not dissuade India from taking this step nor effectively portray the gravity of the situation between the nuclear rivals. The statements given by Pakistan leadership were mainly rhetoric on the volatility of the situation in IOK, the threat of the use of NWs and a demand for world powers to intervene. However, Pakistan did not take any physical steps which could reflect that there was a serious chance of a nuclear war between both the states. Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, during his annual address at UNGA highlighted the worsening of situation in IOK and also used other diplomatic forums for doing the same. Despite all these efforts, no seriousness was shown by US nor was the world community in general sufficiently alarmed that any delay in diffusing the tensions between both states may result in NWs exchange. Contrary to the expectation, only verbal offers from President Trump for mediation and some statements appeared from China, Malaysia, Turkey and Iran for exercising restraints by both the states.

This brings one to a critical understanding that in certain situations, the mere presence of NWs is not sufficient to dissuade an adversary from action and in order to achieve some particular objectives, the intentions to use NWs must appear in a certain concrete form, with some sort of overt physical steps. After the Pulwama incident, once India scrapped the Articles on IOK, had Pakistan been serious about deterring India from doing so, it would have at least taken some apparent concrete steps to show the seriousness of efforts like in the form of forward movement of troops to LOC, heavy exchange of fire/skirmishes with Indian troops on LOC or deployment of NWs/missile. After strategic signalling to India, Pakistan's will to use NWs might have appeared through public and media interviews of Government functionaries and other important personalities from the politico – military sphere, duly followed thereafter by intense diplomatic efforts to underscore the

⁸⁰ OHCHR, Kashmir: UN Reports Serious Abuses (New York: OHCHR, 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/10>.

precariousness of the situation. This was not evident in this case, as Pakistan highlighted the gravity of the deteriorating situation between the two rival nuclear powers in front of the international community but in words without showing any substantial or concrete evidence of its intentions on the ground or in practical terms. For example, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, said that there exists a possibility of use of NWs in an Indo-Pak conflict over Kashmir.⁸¹ Such hollowed efforts only attracted US President Donald Trump's interest in mediating on the issue of Kashmir with India and Pakistan.⁸² The offer, no matter how genuine it may have been, practically had no bearing on reversing the loss caused to Pakistan's and especially Kashmiris' interests, primarily for two reasons. India turned down the offer by saying that all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan will be resolved bilaterally.⁸³ Pakistan's stance looked to be more of a verbal threat or empty rhetoric and failed to present the situation as grave to invite tangible intervention from the international community, specially the US, beyond issuing statements showing concern over atrocities in IOK.⁸⁴

Pakistan's stance, in fact, looked more like a pacifist stance showing no practical desire to do something to 'compel' India to revert its decision to annex the IOK other than issuing public statements. In that sense, it is understandable why the international community gave a lacklustre response and did not put much pressure on India to change its decision. To date, the international community has not put enough pressure on India despite recognizing the humanitarian crises in the IOK and the brutalities of Indian forces in Kashmir.⁸⁵

This was primarily the factor due to which any reason for NWs exchange was never present in real terms in the first place and the world was not alarmed enough to intervene either. Table 3 below presents a suggested web, which shows *how and why should the world be alarmed of NWs exchange*.

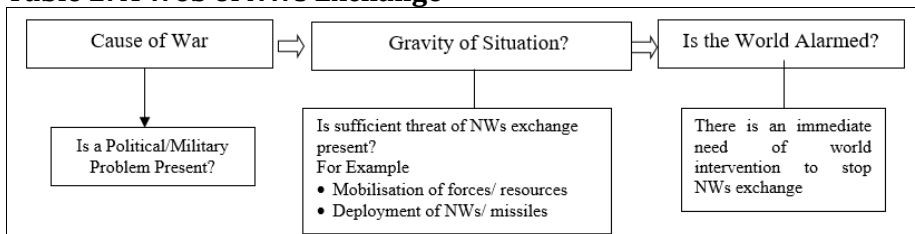
⁸¹ Imran Khan, "Full Transcript of Prime Minister Imran Khan's Speech," Business Recorder, September 27, 2019.

⁸² Dev Goswami, "Why Donald Trump's Kashmir Mediation Comments are not a Setback for India," *The India Today*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story>.

⁸³ "Fury in India over Donald Trump's Kashmir Claims," *The Guardian*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/23/>.

⁸⁴ OHCHR, Kashmir: UN Reports Serious Abuses.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Table 2: A Web of NWs Exchange

Source: Prepared by authors.

The web in Table 2 suggests that world will only be alarmed about gravity of situation between NWS, if there is a 'cause of war,' which emanates from existence of actual problems between NWS. Secondly; gravity of situation between them is reflected in shape of some physical steps and escalation. Therefore, there is a sufficient reason for the world to believe about seriousness of the situation between NWS and their non-intervention may lead to war and exchange of NWs. In the post-Pulwama situation, absence of seriousness of situation could not alarm the world for intervention to diffuse the situation between India and Pakistan.

Taking the example from past, Horlick in his report considers placing of Soviet intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962 as one of the important incidents during the Cold War era between USA and the erstwhile USSR, where USSR considered reaping some political and military advantages by placing nuclear capable missiles at Cuba.⁸⁶ The political advantages included erstwhile USSR's interests in West Germany and to deter any possibility of a foreign invasion in Cuba directly or sponsored by USA. The military advantages for erstwhile USSR included increase in nuclear strike capabilities, improved preemptive capability of USSR that would offset American capabilities and purported USA's first strike capabilities in Europe.

If NWS intend to take political advantage of the presence of nuclear deterrence, it may create a credible crisis or create a situation that will present a risk that if the situation runs out of control, it will be potentially dangerous and may escalate to a level of catastrophic NWs exchange. Dissuasion may remain one of NWS' purposes. If nuclear deterrence is used to accrue political advantage of the situation or dissuade an adversary, there will always be a risk of escalation. In the post-Pulwama situation, nuclear deterrence did not dissuade India from revoking Articles 35A and 370. It meant that in certain situations, the mere existence of NWs does not deter an adversary from certain actions, and instead, an opponent needs to initiate certain actions. If Pakistan was sensing the

⁸⁶ Horlick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis."

revoking of these articles by India,⁸⁷ then it might have had to mobilise its forces, exchange skirmishes along LOC and atleast show some intentions for deployment of NWs; such strategic signalling would have presented a potent risk for exchange of NWs and prevented India from action. In addition, this would have invited an immediate response from the international community to intervene to avoid further escalation. Pakistan might have used the situation for political gains against India by highlighting the case of Indian atrocities in the IOK and pushing for a just solution in the IOK. However, the caveat in this brinkmanship is the possibility of any state making wrong calculations about the rival state, which may put humanity in peril. Table 3 reflects that once the threat of war increased, for example, by mobilisation of forces, the stronger was the intervention by the world as during the Kargil Conflict and Escalation 2001-2 between both states to dissuade both states from engaging in some conflict or war.

Table 3: Relationship between Mobilisation of Forces and Intervention

Incidents	Mobilisation of Forces	World Intervention		
		Strong	Partial	No
Brasstacks 1986-87	Yes	-	-	No evidence
Kargil War (1999)	Yes	Yes ⁸⁸	-	-
Indo-Pak Standoff after attack on Indian Parliament 2001/02	Yes	Yes ⁸⁹	-	-
Mumbai Attacks (2008)	No	-	Yes	-
Pathankot (2016)	No	-	Yes	-
Pulwama (2019)	No	-	Yes	-

⁸⁷ Pakistan Today, "Pakistan Condemns Indian Attempts to Bring Demographic Changes in IOK," *The Pakistan Today*, February 24, 2019, accessed December 29, 2020, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/02/24>.

⁸⁸ Joeck, "The Indo-Pakistan Nuclear Confrontation: Lessons from the Past Contingencies for the Future."

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Source: Prepared by authors.

India and Pakistan's military forces engaged in combat during the Kargil War in 1998, and during the Indo-Pak standoff in 2001–2002, both countries mobilised significant forces. At this point, the international community felt compelled to act quickly to prevent further escalation between India and Pakistan, which could result in the use of nuclear weapons. The presence of nuclear deterrence dissuaded both states from further escalating the situation, and meanwhile, potential conflict lines between both states, like Kashmir, were highlighted. In the Mumbai attacks and Pathankot incident, no mobilisation of forces or deployment of NWS was carried out by either of the states to present a veritable threat of an imminent nuclear catastrophe to the world community. However, barring limited gains on the diplomatic front, Pakistan was unable to extract substantial advantages out of the opportunity proffered by the brewing tense situation in its favour, which was only possible as suggested above like some physical steps like mobilisation of forces, cross-border skirmishes and even deployment of NWS. Intervention by the world powers at that opportune moment would have had a far more irrefutable impact on India to find some amicable solution to the IOK conflict. Same way, lacklustre response from Pakistan also permitted India to move ahead in abrogating Article 370 and 35A.

Conclusion

The basic purpose of Nuclear Deterrence is to dissuade an opponent from 'action.' The study examined these circumstances and came to the conclusion that, in some cases, nuclear deterrence won't be activated until a NWS takes specific physical actions and the other NWSs are compelled to "inaction." In the same way, the skilful use of nuclear deterrence permits political advantage over a rival. In order to understand these concepts, the history of nuclear deterrence between two arch-rival NWS of South Asia that is India and Pakistan, was brought to focus. It shows that nuclear deterrence remained effective between both these states during the period of escalation, and war was avoided as observed during the Kargil conflict, escalation of 2001-02 and the post-Pulwama situation. However, 'inaction,' one of the basic purposes of nuclear deterrence was violated in the post-Pulwama situation, where India changed the political status of the IOK without taking into account the presence of nuclear deterrence between both states. This was a special situation as India could not be deterred by the presence of NWS with Pakistan; therefore, the existing nuclear deterrence needed reinvigoration, which was possible through some physical steps. The absence of such steps has allowed India to advance and violate 'inaction' by changing the political status of the IOK.

Secondly, it was also observed that India adroitly used nuclear deterrence to gain political advantage. In the post-Pulwama incident, *prima facie*, it was understood that Pakistan was not showing any reaction to the Indian atrocities in IOK as no seriousness of efforts was observed in the shape of some physical steps. No escalation or movement on borders took place, and Pakistan primarily focused on diplomatic efforts to internationalise the issues faced by the IOK. In the absence of such physical action, India did not expect a military reaction and escalation from Pakistan; therefore, it changed the political status of the IOK. The political advantage gained by India from the situation was absent in the case of Pakistan. The failure of nuclear deterrence between South Asian rivals could have been the only compelling reason for the world to intervene between them, and this would have been possible, had Pakistan mobilised or at least partially mobilised its military forces and showed some intentions or deployed NWS.

Presence of NWS has changed politics among NWS, wherein their grand strategic objectives are pursued through skilful use of nuclear deterrence. A dynamic operational interpretation and use of the nuclear deterrence strategy during crisis is likely to accrue more benefits for a NWS rather through application of some fixed, static understanding of nuclear deterrence.

