



NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND CRISIS STABILITY: ASSESSING ITS ROLE IN AVERTING CONVENTIONAL WAR BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN POST-PULWAMA

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the Pulwama incident, several questions arise; to what extent did nuclear deterrence serve in preventing a full-scale conventional war between the two nations? The study aims to evaluate the role of nuclear deterrence in preventing a large-scale conventional war between India and Pakistan post-Pulwama crisis. The study finds that post-Pulwama crisis marked a major period in the relationship between Pakistan and India when both nations reached on the verge of conventional war, but despite the tense situation, the risks of nuclear war were minimum because of the role of nuclear deterrence in de-escalating the tense situation between Pakistan and India. Key restraining factors in the de-escalation of the post-Pulwama crisis were as Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) which applies to the fact that both the attacker and the attacked would be fully destroyed if a nuclear war takes place between them, the nuclear postures and doctrines of India and Pakistan played a key role in deterring both nations from attacking each other with nuclear weapons and Lastly, international pressures and mediation efforts cannot be sidelined when it comes to de-escalating the tense situation between Pakistan and India after Pulwama attack. The study provides a conceptual framework understating role of nuclear deterrence in deterring a conventional war between Pakistan.

Keywords: 'Nuclear deterrence', 'nuclear stability', 'nuclear deterrence and regional stability', 'nuclear deterrence in South Asia', and 'nuclear deterrence in the light of Pulwama Attack'.



1. INTRODUCTION

The two nuclear powers of South Asia, Pakistan and India, with a bitter historical and violent relationship, have thrown the security situation of South Asia into chaos. The security environment of South Asia is in a state of flux due to the tense relations between of India and Pakistan. The dust had hardly settled from the nuclear tests by both the rivals in May 1999. The security competition among them has been characterized by an action-reaction spiral. Debates erupted over nuclear proliferation of both rivals and its security impacts, the development and acquisition of nuclear weapons has been a significant topic of concern worldwide. Whereas some scholars believe that nuclear proliferation would stabilize the relations between Pakistan and India, arguing that conflict between both maybe prohibitively risky and they won't opt for warfare, while few scholars argue that the nuclear proliferation would make the region more dangerous and war prone by increasing the possibility of accident and miscalculations.

On February 14, 2019, The Pulwama attack which was watershed moment in the history of South Asia, not only reverberated through the socio-political landscape but also cast a profound shadow on the delicate balance of nuclear deterrence in the region when a suicide bombing took place in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir, India. A convoy of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel was targeted by a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) which resulted into tragic loss of 40 CRPF personnel and making it one of the deadliest terrorist incidents in the region. Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), a Pakistan based militant group claimed the responsibility of the attack. The Pulwama attack fueled escalation in the already tensed relations between Pakistan and India. It triggered national and international condemnation and led to a series of retaliatory measures taken by the Indian government. The incident not only had immediate security implications but also brought to the forefront the intricate dynamics of nuclear deterrence in the South Asian context. This study aims to have a comprehensive exploration of the complicated dynamics surrounding nuclear deterrence within the South Asian context with primary focus on the role of nuclear deterrence in averting a conventional war between India and Pakistan.

Bernard Brodie's (1910-1978) in his book 'The Absolute Weapon'. states the strategy of warfare has been changes after nuclear weapons, as he believed that the technological change can bring shift in the strategies. Brodie's book explores the concept of deterrence and its application in preventing large-scale conflicts by establishing a state of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). He discusses in his work that the survival of retaliatory nuclear forces is of importance for deterrence stability between states having nuclear weapons, until each side in a nuclear rivalry is afraid of destruction of its population and properties.

Kenneth Waltz (2003) in his book, 'The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed', offers valuable insight into the ongoing discourse of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The author had a point-counter-point discussion. He argues that the spread of nuclear weapons can contribute to stability among states. Quoting 'more may be better'. Waltz believes that the Cold War was a success due to nuclear deterrence. On the other hand, Sagan (2003) presents a counterargument; he draws attention to the harmful effect of nuclear on peacetime, highlighting



the risks and challenges associated with nuclear proliferation. Quoting 'more will be worse'. Sagan believes that the proxy war between the US and the USSR was as risky as, walking on thin ice and that it might not work again.

In 'Paradox of Deterrence: India-Pakistan Relations', the author of the article Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (2009) argues that the deterrence is a leading concept of nuclear strategy from the start of the nuclear age. He states that South Asian nuclear deterrence may be anxious about arms race between India and Pakistan. The author concludes by discussing that nuclear weapons maintain the status quo and prevent war between India and Pakistan.

In 'India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Nuclear Deterrence', Christoph Bluth (2010) an expert in international relations and security studies, argues that in term of nuclear asymmetry, India enjoys a superior over Pakistan with a larger and more advanced nuclear weapons stock while Pakistan has developed a range of tactical and short-range missiles to offset India's nuclear capabilities. He adds that both India's larger nuclear arsenal and Pakistan's tactical weapons to use against each other has created a complex deterrence environment as both fear each other when it comes to full-scale nuclear escalation.

Arvind Kumar's (2020) work 'Theories of Deterrence and Nuclear Deterrence in the Subcontinent' explores the terms such as Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and Deterrence and argues that both countries keep the damage in mind caused by nuclear escalation, which prevents them from initiating full-scale nuclear war.

In 'Conceptualizing Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Posture', Rasul Bakhsh Rais (2020) explores the strategic posture and policies of Pakistan concerning its nuclear deterrence capabilities. He argues that Pakistan's nuclear strategy involves maintaining a credible second-strike capability to ensure that any nuclear aggression from India would result in unacceptable retaliation. He explains that Pakistan's posture of nuclear weapons reflects Pakistan's perceived threats from India and thus the country maintains its nuclear readiness to offset India's nuclear superiority.

In 'Deterrence (In)stability Between India and Pakistan', S.R. Aarten (2021) examines the dynamics of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan, focusing on how their nuclear strategies impact regional stability. He argues that since the inception of Pakistan and India, both nations have been at odds over various issues such Kashmir Issue and water distribution. In their 75-year history, both nations have fought at least four face-to-face wars and still skirmishes happen at Line of Control (LoC). He argues that the events demonstrate that both states are reluctant to use nuclear weapons to retaliate against each other. He adds that efforts to concentrate and offset each other are more minimal and unconventional thus preventing any threat of nuclear war between; however, persistent confrontations between cannot guarantee no use of nuclear weapons in future.

In 'Deterrence Stability, Security Doctrines, and Escalation Control in South Asia', K. Khan (2013) provides a thorough analysis of the nuclear deterrence dynamics in South Asia, focusing on the security doctrines of India and Pakistan and the mechanisms for managing escalation risks. He argues that nuclear weapons cannot maintain deterrence when there is persist conflict and increasing hostilities between Pakistan and India. However, he adds that despite US



and former Soviet Union being arch rivals, nuclear weapons of each other deterred each other from direct nuclear war. But, he maintains, the Cold War scenario cannot be applied to South Asian context because of the complex political and security scenarios between Pakistan and India thus nuclear deterrence may not remain effective for long run. He argues that India's massive investment in its defense sector and nuclear weapons development cannot be matched by Pakistan which is economically weaker than India. India's continuous use of economic, psychological, diplomatic, political, intelligence and military tools to offset Pakistan will add more to Pakistan's frustration which may lead to brinkmanship and never-ending enmity between the two nations.

This Study was qualitative in nature allowing an in-depth exploration of the research topic and providing comprehensive understanding of the topic. Using qualitative approach, endeavor to comprehend, describe, interpret, and develop innovative ideas about a context (Creswell J.W, 2009). The choice for qualitative research design was essentially guided by the nature of the study. The study was explanatory in nature to investigate the impacts of nuclear deterrence on the South Asian regional stability in the aftermath of the Pulwama Attack. Qualitative research relies on analyzing and interpreting social experiences and concepts in their own context (Glesne, 2016). The study aimed to answer the role of nuclear deterrence in preventing a conventional war between India and Pakistan after the Pulwama attack. The data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis of publicly accessible scholarly works in shape of research articles, books, news reports and other sources. The Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

This study acknowledges certain limitations, the study on nuclear deterrence and regional stability and its various dimensions cannot be completed in one study as the area of the research is too vast. The current study only focuses on Pulwama attack and its aftermath. The study focuses only on nuclear weapons as deterrence thus overlooking other broader regional power dynamics such as economic ties, international diplomacy and other factors which may impact as deterrence. Besides this, future studies on nuclear deterrence can focus on other broader dynamics and dimensions. For instance, future research studies can carry out research on new developments and advancements in nuclear and military technology and changes in warfare such as cyber warfare, drone warfare which can impact nuclear deterrence and regional stability.

Furthermore, limitations of the study also include, while conducting the study interviews were not conducted for data collection, since there is extensive existing literature on nuclear deterrence in South Asia, this study primarily relies on secondary sources. The extensive body of work provided a strong foundation for analyzing the impact of nuclear deterrence and regional stability. It is more resourceful to synthesize and connect these insights with the specific context of the post-Pulwama crisis. The decision made to utilize existing literatures and documents was also made to ensure the timely completion of this study. The reliance on secondary data and well documented sources enables for a broader perspective and the synthesis of diverse viewpoints and providing an analysis of the subject matter. While these limitations are acknowledged, they do not undermine the validity of the research findings.



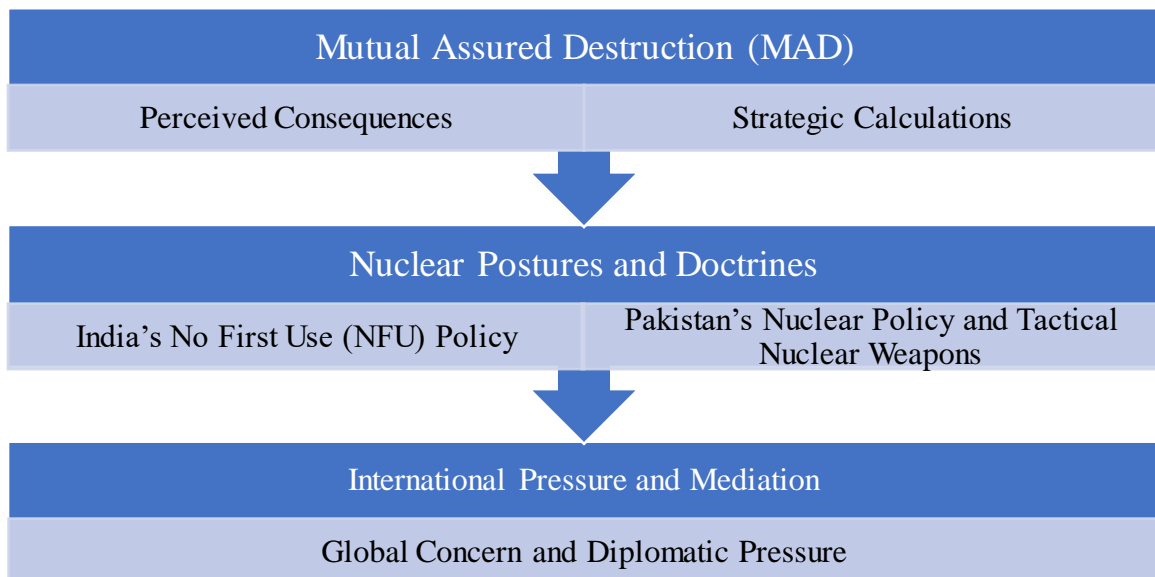
2. ROLE OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

The nuclear arsenal contains huge deterrence value in preventing a conventional war and this was observed during the post-Pulwama situation between India and Pakistan that how both countries would restrain from attacking each other keeping in mind that a nuclear war would cause complete destruction for both nations. The principles of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), the specific nuclear doctrines of both countries and international diplomatic pressure were key factors in managing the crisis. However, the post-Pulwama crisis also highlighted the need for confidence-building measures and arms control initiatives between both nations to maintain peace and balance of power in the region and prevent future escalations.

2.1. The Role of Nuclear Deterrence in Preventing a Conventional War between India and Pakistan after the Pulwama Attack.

After the Pulwama attack, the situation turned very tense with the culmination of India's attack on Balakot in Pakistan and subsequent aerial attacks on each other's soil. Despite these actions, the tense situation was de-escalated and a full-scale war was prevented between the two nations. The following section discusses various studies that how nuclear deterrence played a role in de-escalating the tense situation between Pakistan and India during crisis which after Pulwama incident.

Table 1. Role of Nuclear Deterrence in Preventing a Conventional War between India and Pakistan after the Pulwama Attack





2.1.1. Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) as a Restraining Factor

Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) is a key term in international relations during war which is a principle of deterrence meaning that a nuclear power attacker would be met with a nuclear counterattack from the defender or the country being attacked thus leaving both countries that a nuclear war is a full destruction for both (Sokolski, 2004).

(a) Perceived Consequences

After the crisis of the Pulwama attack, it was observed by many analysts and experts that Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) was a key factor that restrained India and Pakistan from attacking each other with nuclear weapons. Dawn (2020) reported that India and Pakistan were aware of the dangers of a nuclear war therefore they restrained from a full-scale nuclear war. Salik (2022) researched how the perceived consequences of a nuclear war prevented a full-scale nuclear escalation between the two nations. The leaders of both countries seemed aware and were careful not to go towards a full-scale nuclear war.

(b) Strategic Calculations

The debates (Khan, 2020; Jaspal, 2020) on strategic calculations understood that there was no potential strategic gain from a conventional nuclear war. Therefore, it was observed during the crisis that leaders from both countries calculated that there would more destructions and harms for both countries that any potential strategic gain from a nuclear war and it would be an lose-lose situation for both the countries. The then foreign minister of Pakistan Shah Mehmood Qureshi requested United Nations (UN) Chief to play a role in de-escalating the situation as Indian side was planning to attack Pakistan (AFP/Dawn, 2019). After ten days of Pakistan's foreign minister's request to UN chief for de-escalation of the tension, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced release of arrested Indian pilot Abhinandan as a gesture of peace toward India (Raza, 2019). A report by Reuters (2019) published in Dawn reported that despite many peace gestures from Pakistan, Indian side was adamant to attack on Pakistan with nuclear missiles. India threatened that it would fire at least six missiles on terrorist hideouts into Pakistan and Pakistan responded that it would fire three times more missiles into India if Pakistani territory attacked. However, the leaders from both countries were aware that there would be no strategic gain from a nuclear war between Pakistan and India.

2.1.2. Nuclear Postures and Doctrines

Nuclear posture or doctrine refers to how a nuclear country would use its nuclear weapons in the time of war or peace with each country having a different doctrine (Hagerty, 2020). Such as, India and Pakistan have the doctrine that they would use their nuclear arsenal only in retaliation to a nuclear attack. The US has doctrine that it would use its nuclear weapon when the country is under the danger of foreign attack (Smetana, 2018).



Both Pakistan and India have nuclear doctrines. India's No First Use (NFU) policy states that it would not use nuclear weapons first until attacked. Although Pakistan's have no official documented nuclear doctrine but still its policy differs from India's doctrine stating that it does not accept India's NFU policy; however, it states that it would retaliate to any Indian or foreign aggression with full force and if necessary, with nuclear weapons. Pakistan's undeclared nuclear policy states that it would use nuclear warheads if its existence as a state is in danger. India's nuclear system and its operationalization is under the control of civilian department or India's Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) which is headed by Prime Minister including foreign minister and intelligence chiefs. While Pakistan's nuclear weapons system and operationalization is totally under the control of its military. Though officially and constitutionally the authority to decide to use nuclear weapons is totally vested in Pakistan Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) which is headed by Prime Minister; however, in practice the decisions regarding use of nuclear warheads are made by the military (Latif, 2014; Hussain & Ahmad, 2019; Khalid, 2020). It was observed after the Pulwama incident that nuclear postures and doctrines of both India and Pakistan played a significant role in de-escalating the tense situation.

(a) India's No First Use (NFU) Policy

India's NFU policy refers to India's restraint from attacking or starting a nuclear war. The policy which was first drafted in 1999 and made official in 2003 states that India would not use nuclear weapon until it is attacked by another country with nuclear weapons which means that India would use its nuclear weapons to retaliate against any nuclear attack (Sundaram & Ramana, 2018). While Pakistan have not declared any such policy which means FU of nuclear weapons by Pakistan cannot be ruled out in a conflictual situation.

Many analysts argue in favor of India's NFU policy stating that it helps India stand as a responsible nuclear power on the world stage. They argue that nuclear weapons should be for only defense purposes therefore every nuclear-powered state should adopt this policy. Besides this, NFU policy has its own strategic viability because it prevents arms race and other miscalculations. While a First Use (FU) policy always calls readiness and alertness of forces thus leading to arms race which in turn leads to insecurity and instability causing crisis. While NFU calls for a relaxed nuclear posture preventing arms race and potential nuclear war. Therefore, analysts in favor of India's NFU policy argue that India should maintain its NFU policy to keep the regional peace intact while proving itself to be a responsible nuclear power. The Indian image has been solidified with being a responsible and credible nuclear power due to its NFU policy and doctrine of nuclear minimalism (Hitkari, 2023).

Analysts argue that during the crisis that emerged after the Pulwama attack in 2019 between India and Pakistan, India's NFU policy was one of the key factors in the de-escalation of the conflict or crisis. As the experts agreed that the Indian attack on Pakistan was limited and precise avoiding further attacks on Pakistan's military installations and government infrastructures which could trigger counter-nuclear attacks from Pakistan.



(b) Pakistan's Nuclear Posture and Tactical nuclear weapons.

Pakistan's nuclear posture states that it would use nuclear weapons only in retaliation to a nuclear attack from any foreign country or force (Khan, 2015; Noor, 2023). Pakistan sees its nuclear arsenal as a guarantor against any foreign nuclear threat especially from Indian side (Yamin, 2015). Before testing nuclear weapons in 1999, both Pakistan and India announced that they would abandon their policy of 'bomb in the basement' and officially be declared as nuclear-powered states. Experts of nuclear weapons and defense were of the view at that both nations would compete for more nuclear weapons and military strength leading to more insecurity and arms race in the region. It is now visible that they were right and their prediction was inevitable (Hussain, 2014). Pakistan's development of tactical nuclear weapons is seen differently by different analysts; however, within the perspective of Pakistan, its tactical nuclear weapons are a response to India's limited war strategy thus reinforcing deterrence and enhancing stability (Ahmad, 2020). Within Pakistan, the military strategists and decision-makers argue that tactical nuclear weapons such as Nasr, Ghori, Raad, Adali and other short-range cruise and ballistic missile systems are a major addition to full spectrum deterrence counter weighting India's so-called Cold Start, which calls for proactive military operations within Pakistani territory. Analysts argue that these weapons have created a credible counterforce posture against enemy troop and armored concentrations (Lodhi, 2012).

There is also opposition to Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons raising concerns that these weapons don't have any utility or strength to counterweight Indian's armored tanks and missile systems. Experts such as Pevez Hoodbhoy, A. H. Nayyar and Zia Mian have argued that the tactical nuclear weapons don't have effectiveness in deterring or defeating India's armored formations. They argue that these weapons cannot destroy a big number of tanks and armored vehicles despite their long reach (Nayyar & Mian, 2015; Hoodbhoy & Polyani, 2013). In order to make its missile system effective and workable, defense analysts and strategists argue that Pakistan needs to build a real-time intelligence and accurate target acquisition capability, such systems are available with China, USA and other European countries, if Pakistan can afford. Without a satellite navigation system, Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons are of no use (Ahmad, 2014).

India is modernizing its forces and other defense related machineries to preempt Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons. In term of space technology, India has established its own navigational satellite network (Cottom, 2022) while Pakistan is working to ramp up its Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) satellite navigation system under its 2040 space program. However, Pakistan lags far behind India in term of space technology. For use precise and effective use of tactical nuclear weapons, an advanced navigation satellite system is must (Singh, 2018). The development of tactical nuclear weapons by Pakistan is forcing India to modernize and develop its own tactical nuclear weapons to effectively respond to Pakistan (Akhtar, 2022). Pakistan's development of tactical nuclear weapons has filled the perceived deterrence gap in the region (Khan, 2019). Pakistan's development of a nuclear triad and second-strike capabilities has enhanced deterrence stability by ensuring that nuclear attacks from both countries would be immense thus causing MAD (Dalton, 2016). Maintaining adequate conventional forces as was



done during the Cold War era is relevant in South Asia seeing its prevailing nuclear dynamics (Acheson, 2012).

The broad consensus among Pakistan's strategists is the belief that introduction of tactical nuclear weapons has succeeded in deterring India and complicating Indian plans for conventional conflict with Pakistan. Introduction of tactical nuclear weapons is cost-effective for Pakistan seeing its economic conditions; however, it is an effective solution for Pakistan's long-standing defense woes (Khan & Wueger, 2015).

Despite all the criticism and favors, the majority of the official and academic circles believe that tactical nuclear weapons contain huge deterrence value in the face of conventional war or conflict. The nuclear posture/doctrine and its development of tactical nuclear weapons were one of the key factors in the de-escalation of the crisis that emerged after the Pulwama attack. Such postures and tactics by Pakistan made India decide to limit its strikes and avoid a nuclear attack on Pakistan.

2.1.3. International Pressure and Mediation

The role of international actors especially that of the US and China was one of the key factors which resulted in the de-escalation of the crisis further into a full-scale war between the two nations. The international community played a vital role in pressurizing and mediating the tense situation that emerged post-Pulwama attack in South Asia between Pakistan and India.

The Global concern about a nuclear Confrontation reinforced deterrence between India and Pakistan. After the incident of Pulwama, the international community expressed alarm over the possibility of nuclear escalation between Pakistan and India, creating external pressure on both to keep away from undertaking any actions that may lead to a full-scale confrontation. So, this feared both nations of global fallout (including economic, diplomatic, and humanitarian consequences) which served as an additional layer of restraint. The global concern influenced decision-makers in both India and Pakistan, encouraging them to adhere to the principles of deterrence to avoid international condemnation and potential sanctions.

(a) Global Concern

After the Pulwama attack, the Indian side was in a hurry and adamant to attack Pakistan which claimed the Pakistani government and military were behind the attack. On the part of Pakistan, the government and military were ready to face and retaliate against any Indian aggression. Seeing the tense situation, the international community especially the US, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and other major powers expressed concern and expected both nations to maintain restraint. In order to resolve the tense situation, the UN, USA, China, and other major powers expressed their deep concern and used backdoor diplomacy to de-escalate the situation and stop a full-scale nuclear war between the rival states. Seeing the tense situation, the UN Chief asked both countries to resolve the situation through dialogue and asked for full assistance to both nations (Haider, 2019). The then US president Donald Trump voiced alarm over the dangerous



standoff between Pakistan and India and indicated that US along with other major powers would make efforts to resolve the situation (Iqbal, 2019). The diplomatic intervention from many international powers played a key role in mediating the tense situation between Pakistan and India encouraging them to step back from the brink of war and engage in constructive dialogue.

3. CONCLUSION

The post-Pulwama crisis which emerged after attack on Indian paramilitary forces in Pulwama region of Indian-held Kashmir on 14 February, 2019 was a reminder for both nations that what is at stake between them. The crisis was clouded by misperceptions and miscalculation from both sides which could lead to unintended escalation. Both countries were in hurry not thinking of their long-term national interest, but were intrigued by short term political expediency and showcase. The post-Pulwama crisis is a reminder for both nations to consider the ways in which nuclear weapons can both contribute to and undermine their national interest, including complete destruction and national extinction.

As Lawrence Freedman provides one of the most famous analyses regarding nuclear deterrence in his famous argument that “I exist; therefore, I deter.” which reveal that nuclear arsenal contain huge deterrence value in preventing a conventional war. The nuclear weapons having deterrence was observed during the post-Pulwama situation between India and Pakistan. The nuclear deterrence restrained both nations from attacking each other validating Lawrence Freedman’s argument that nuclear weapons exist to deter. Nuclear weapons deter because of its power to destroy the attacked and the attacker therefore before attacking, the attacker always keeps in mind the MAD which means that an attacking nuclear-powered country would be met with a nuclear counterattack from the defender or the country being attacked thus leaving both destroyed. The study finds that post-Pulwama crisis marked a major period in the relationship between Pakistan and India when both nations reached on the verge of conventional war. But despite the tense situation, the risks of nuclear war were minimum because of the role of nuclear deterrence in de-escalating the tense situation between Pakistan and India. One of the key restraining factors in the de-escalation of the post-Pulwama crisis was MAD which applies to the fact that both the attacker and the attacked would be fully destroyed if a nuclear war takes place between them. As found from the studies, Pakistan and India restrained from a full-scale nuclear escalation keeping in mind that a nuclear war contains more dangers than any strategic gain for Pakistan and India therefore both nations avoided a full-scale war being aware of the perceived consequences of nuclear escalation. Besides the dangers and consequences of a nuclear escalation, both nations seemed aware that there was no potential strategic gain from a conventional nuclear war. Therefore, the leaders from both countries and global powers calculated that there would be more destructions and harms than any strategic gain for both nations from a nuclear war.

The study finds that nuclear postures and doctrines of India and Pakistan played a key role in deterring both nations from attacking each other with nuclear weapons. For instance, the nuclear doctrines and policies of both nations permit and declare the use of nuclear weapons only in retaliation to a nuclear attack from the opponent restraining both nations from attacking in the first instance. India’s NFU nuclear policy, it states that it would not use its nuclear weapons first against



any nation until attacked by another state. Though on the part of Pakistan, there is no officially declared nuclear doctrine; however, its nuclear policy can be understood in term of official statements stating that it would retaliate to any foreign nuclear attack or aggression with nuclear weapons, Pakistan sees its nuclear arsenal as a guarantor against any foreign nuclear threat especially from Indian side. Besides this, Pakistan has developed tactical nuclear weapons for its defense which played key role in restraining a full-scale war during the crisis which emerged after the Pulwama attack. The study argues that such a nuclear posture and tactic by Pakistan made India decide to limit its strikes and avoid nuclear attack on Pakistan.

Lastly, international pressures and mediation efforts cannot be sidelined when it comes to de-escalating the tense situation between Pakistan and India after Pulwama attack. The Global concern about a nuclear Confrontation reinforced deterrence between India and Pakistan, the international community expressed alarm over the possibility of nuclear escalation between Pakistan and India, creating external pressure on both states to keep away from undertaking any actions which may lead to a full-scale nuclear confrontation. So, this feared both nations of global fallout (including economic, diplomatic, and humanitarian consequences) which served as an additional layer of restraint. The global concern influenced decision makers in both India and Pakistan, encouraging them to adhere to the principles of deterrence to avoid international condemnation and potential sanctions. Within the international powers, the role of USA, China and other European countries especially France and Britain were commendable in de-escalating the situation. The global concern in shape of diplomatic intervention and backdoor diplomacy by global powers were key factors in de-escalating and mediating the tense situation between Pakistan and India while encouraging them to step back from the brink of nuclear war and engage in constructive dialogue.

Many scholars (Rais, 2020: Bluth, 2010: Kumar, 2020: Jaspal, 2020, Hagerty & Pusca, 2020) argue that nuclear deterrence has stabilized the region by preventing large-scale wars between India and Pakistan. The presence of nuclear weapons is seen as a deterrent to conventional conflicts escalating into full-scale wars. However, this study reveals that the Pulwama attack and subsequent Balakot airstrike reveal significant crisis instability indicating that nuclear deterrence has prevented conventional military responses.

The Findings of the study impact and relate to the current knowledge and literature of South Asian regional stability and nuclear deterrence. Exploring the Role of Nuclear deterrence in South Asian rivalry between India and Pakistan, with special focus on the incident of Pulwama incident, the finding of the study supports that the nuclear deterrence play a vital role in preventing large scale conventional war between the south Asian nuclear rivals. Furthermore, the study also focus on the specific dynamics of Pulwama crisis, offers a deeper insight into the role of nuclear deterrence role in south Asian context. Overall, the findings expand the theoretical understanding of deterrence in South Asia and provide practical implications for policymakers aiming to maintain strategic stability in the region.



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