



FIRST-STRIKE STABILITY AND CREDIBILITY OF PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

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Abstract

Nuclear South Asia continues to draw the attention of strategic studies scholars across the globe. With three nuclear-armed states rivalling each other in the region, the study of coercion, deterrence and compellence, escalation and crises has been given a fillip. The Indo-Pakistan dyadic relation is often compared and contrasted with the Cold War nuclear dyad, however, the strategic stability in the Cold War dyad only emerged when the U.S. and the Soviet Union achieved strategic parity by matching the number of their nuclear weapons, targeting options and the delivery means. In the South Asian case, the dilemma is that while strategic parity exists, there is asymmetry between Indian and Pakistani nuclear forces, numbers of nuclear weapons, targeting options, delivery vehicles and nuclear use doctrines. This asymmetry is a factor of crisis instability and deterrence instability which are essential components of the overall strategic stability. There is a need for Pakistan (and India) to strengthen the credibility of their nuclear deterrence by achieving first-strike stability to plug the vulnerabilities of crisis and deterrence instability. This requires a rethink of their nuclear use doctrines and for Pakistan, that incentive comes from India's flirtation with its current 'No First Use Doctrine'. This will enhance strategic stability in South Asia.

Keywords: First-strike, Strategic Stability, Escalation, Nuclear Deterrence, Crisis, No First Use, Nuclear Use Doctrines, First Use.

Introduction

The South Asian region has merited a lot of scholarship across the globe. It would not be wrong to say that nuclear South Asia has been and continues to be an academics' delight. With three nuclear-armed states rivalling each other in the region, the study of coercion, deterrence and compellence, escalation and crises has been given a fillip. The focus of attention within this region is, however, on the nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan. This dyadic relation is often compared and contrasted with the Cold War nuclear dyad. Nuclear weapons, the plenitude of crisis propellants and the proclivities to use force are points of concern for watchers of the region who fear that threats to



deterrence stability in the Subcontinent are increasing. What are the sources of strategic stability in South Asia? What are the sources of strategic instability in South Asia? What will ensure peace in our region?

Today, the sources of strategic instability primarily emanate from India, a country led by the RSS-BJP government, fueled by militarized Hindutva nationalism. The myth of India's strategic restraint is finally busted: "the phantom surgical strikes post Uri, the Balakot strikes (2019) and provocations about gaining jurisdiction over AJK as per the recent statements by the Indian Defence Minister and later by the Indian Minister of External Affairs, are all indicators of India finally shedding its strategic pacifism. It is also increasingly becoming a 'revisionist' state, shedding the impressions of a status quo power." Pakistan needs a playbook to deal with this "assertive India bordering on arrogance which the militant Hindutva ideology affords its current ruling political elite. The perception of militant Hinduism and militarized nationalism reinforced through false media projections about the kind of power India is or has the potential to become, portends dangerous times ahead in South Asia." (Akhtar, 2019)

The India of today is a threat to regional peace and stability in South Asia and beyond. Indian counterforce and countervalue doctrine is influenced by a leadership imbued with an exclusionary and hateful Hindutva ideology. The corollary is that, with rationality fast-becoming a thing of the past in India's strategic calculus, efforts to evade deterrence are increasing. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand how India looks at its nuclear doctrine.

Sources of Instability in South Asia: A Survey of the Indian NFU

The first point of inquiry is to analyse India's highly-touted 'No First Use' (NFU) nuclear policy. Over a period of years, the Indian leadership has expressed its discomfiture with the NFU. It is instructive to note how India has gradually, deliberately, created space for discussion on the changing contours of its NFU and the future direction it might take, with leaving just enough ambiguity to backtrack to the status quo on NFU should the need arise.

The Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) (armscontrol.org, 1999) (mea.gov.in, 1999) was officially declared in 1999 by the Indian Nuclear Security Advisory Board. In 2003, a review of the DND was undertaken by the Cabinet Committee on Security and the DND became India's official nuclear doctrine without any further reviews to be instituted. The first statement that hinted at India's flirtation with any revision of its NFU doctrine, was made by the Indian Defense Minister, Rajnath Singh, at the height of tensions with Pakistan on August 16, 2019. Addressing the media at Pokhran, Singh stated that future circumstances will determine whether India's NFU will undergo a change, but for now it remains the same. (Chakraborty, 2019)

Months before that, former commander of the Indian Strategic Forces Command, Balraj S. Nagal, argued that India's "strategic deterrence can follow a policy of first use when there is an



unstable and unpredictable adversary, thereby eliminating the dilemma of responding to battlefield weapons.” (Nagal, 2014) He also added that no first use policy is flawed. Two high-ranking Indian officials, Shivshankar Menon, former National Security Advisor and former Defense Minister, Manohar Parrikar, came to the fore with their writings and statements. Menon wrote in his book, *Choices* (Menon, 2016):

“There is a potential gray area as to when India would use nuclear weapons first against another NWS [nuclear weapons state]. Circumstances are conceivable in which India might find it useful to strike first, for instance, against an NWS that had declared it would certainly use its weapons, and if India were certain that adversary's launch was imminent. But India's present public nuclear doctrine is silent on this scenario.”

This was followed by B.S.Nagal's outright renunciation of the NFU questioning the very morality of the NFU calling for its abandonment. Parrikar's statement during the same time was more meaningful given that he was the sitting Defense Minister back then. While calling a written strategy as a mere 'guideline' he said: “A lot of people say India has a no-first-use nuclear policy, but why should I bind myself? I should say I'm a responsible nuclear power, and I will not use it irresponsibly.” (India should not bind itself to a 'no-first-use nuclear policy', says Manohar Parrikar, 2016)

There are two reasons as to why surveying these statements is important. One, the sacrosanctity of India's NFU is being diluted by the Indian leadership. Two, the principal issue with NFU, amply highlighted by India's political, military and strategic elite, is Pakistan-specific. They argue that the NFU does not deter Pakistan from whipping up its sub-conventional war against India. These two factors, taken together, are instrumental to any discussion of the Indian NFU. Pakistan's disbelief in India's NFU, coupled with the virtual denunciation of the NFU in the official doctrine of 2003 represented by the announcement that India will reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to a biological or chemical weapons attack, was an irritant already. Now, the constant eviscerations of the NFU in order to deal with the so-called Pakistan's terrorism conundrum is but a step towards bringing about a shift in how India perceives nuclear weapons. Is India bringing its nuclear threshold down by trying to deter subconventional war through nuclear weapons? It seems so. Whether India formally renounces NFU or not, becomes immaterial for Pakistan. At a time when India is openly stating its intent of capturing territory from Pakistan by the use of force, Pakistan cannot help but take this constant dilution seriously. Will Pakistan review its readiness levels and even thresholds? It has to.

A purported shift from NFU to FU on part of India has to be put into perspective. That India wants to shift its policy to overcome a strategic paralysis at the tactical level is instructive, to say the least. This is primarily because India is avowedly signalling this: to shape outcomes on the battlefield in its favor, it must retain the option of using nuclear weapons first. This brings to the fore two concomitant problems. One, if the logic of nuclear strategy is anything to go by, India can ill-afford to carry out countervalue strikes while leaving Pakistan with all its retaliatory capacity to strike back.



Thus, India's FU could only be effective if that country launches counterforce strikes. Two, the nuclear threshold could come down precipitously. Taken together, both these effects will engender pressure on Pakistan to draw first blood, and, in the process, dilute crisis and deterrence stability. In their 2019 article, Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang cogently argued that, based on the official criticism of the NFU, coupled with its inability to punish Pakistan, India is gearing its nuclear developments towards adding counterforce options in its capability-spectrum so as to effectively deal with its perennial Pakistan conundrum. However, both rightly outline that India's drive to obliterate Pakistan's strategic forces is rife with great risks, due to a variety of reasons. They rightly contend that India's counterforce doctrine could bring in first-strike instability, since Pakistan would not wait for India to go first and disarm it. Indeed, as the authors say, a belief that one side could strike first could incentivize the other side to use it rather than lose it. They write: "as soon as one side believed there was even the possibility of nuclear use, it would have an incentive to go first and go massively." (Narang, 2018/19)

For Pakistan, a rethink is a must. Both deterrence stability and crisis stability will come under severe stress whether India formally declares a FU policy or chooses to consistently discredit its contestable NFU. In Rajnath's statement, the operative word is 'future'. This future could, for all intents and purposes, mean today. With regard to crisis stability, Pakistan must look at India as now being in the 'future' scenario. It continues to press ahead with its Cold Start Doctrine (III, 2007/08), teasing out the challenges of early mobilization. It believes that its adversary (Pakistan) is capricious enough to draw first blood against it. Therefore, the Indian leadership decides to pre-empt and mull over launching weapons first: the Indian logic of preemption. Conversely, fearing a pre-emptive first-strike, Pakistan might entertain ideas of using them rather than losing them. Either way, it would be curtains with first-strike instability becoming all the more apparent. In such a scenario, chances of a countervalue strike go up precipitously.

Incentive to go first, regardless of whether it is through a counterforce or countervalue strike, is inherently an anathema to deterrence and crisis stability. Pakistan, due to its size and lack of depth, can ill-afford to absorb a nuclear strike from India. Even India or any state for that matter cannot let another state cause obliteration to the homelands. India, therefore, in its thinking towards developing a preemption doctrine, is not prepared to absorb a first-strike from Pakistan at any cost.

As far as general deterrence and deterrence stability are concerned, the changing role of nuclear weapons, as represented by India's flirtations with NFU and strides towards counterforce options, will be termed as an attempt to escape from the hallmarks of the Nuclear Revolution Theory (Jervis, 1989). Deterrence stability will then be challenged by efforts to deride mutual vulnerabilities, changed patterns of deployments and a farewell to recessed deterrence. An India laced with counterforce options and free from the constrictions of NFU will indeed be a bane for deterrence stability. That said, the ambiguity surrounding India's current doctrinal thoughts are enough to put exceeding pressures on deterrence stability, especially for Pakistan.



Transforming First-Strike Instability into Stability

The first and foremost objective of Pakistan's nuclear forces should be to eliminate any Indian temptations to launch a preemptive nuclear first-strike against Pakistan. The idea is for general deterrence to hold. But if India possesses first-strike capability against Pakistan without a counterbalance from Pakistan, first-strike instability will ensue. However, if Pakistan matched the first-strike capability then by both states possessing first-strike capabilities against each other, first-strike instability will transform into first-strike stability, whereby, neither will have the temptation of conducting preemptive strikes. Pakistan's nuclear forces, therefore, need to take the incentive away from India that it can conduct a nuclear first-strike against Pakistan during a crisis in order to avoid waiting and then absorbing Pakistan's first-strike. And the only way it can neutralize any Indian advantage of striking Pakistan first in a preemptive nuclear first-strike, is by Pakistan balancing it with its own preemptive first-strike options, both counterforce and countervalue. These costs in the shape of countervalue and counterforce strikes on enemy assets and forces must be communicated to India explicitly. Pakistan must not think that India is contemplating changing NFU to FU. It must strategize based on the knowledge that India has already done so irrespective of whether official announcements are made or not. In order to have first-strike stability, Pakistan must have survivable nuclear forces and that should be the single-most critical strategic aim to be met to ensure the credibility of its deterrence.

Deterrence and First Strike Stability

In order to ensure the credibility of its deterrence towards India, Pakistan must ensure that India understands this: no-nuclear exchange is better than a nuclear exchange. By this measure, India must conclude that the cost of striking first, including damage to both its valued assets and strategic forces, would far exceed the cost of status quo. At some point, Pakistan needs to prioritize its national security objectives and priorities. What does it value most? Maintaining deterrence or establishing first-strike stability? Maintaining deterrence is not sufficient in itself since it does not neutralize the Indian temptations of preemptive first-strike against Pakistan. Thus, the entire debate of whether India wants to move from NFU to FU is bothersome, whereby the virtue of this upgrade, India retains the advantage of striking Pakistan first instead of absorbing Pakistan's first-strike during a crisis and then retaliating. (Akhtar, 2006) And that is where Pakistan's own No No First Use (NNFU) doctrine is problematic due to the ambiguity it enshrines.

Pakistan's NNFU makes its retaliatory options ambiguous. On the one hand, it tells India that its nuclear weapons are for defensive purposes only, while on the other hand, in the absence of a universally understood NFU, it sends signals to India that it might not 'wait out' the period during a crisis and use nuclear weapons first. But nowhere in the literature that analyses Pakistan's NNFU does Pakistan clearly signal that it wants to retain the advantage of preemptive first-strike since it does not believe in India's FU. This ambiguity dilutes the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence



and is not taken seriously by India since you cannot have it both ways. Pakistan needs to do away with this ambiguity without even changing its doctrine from NNFU to FU by developing a first-strike stability strategy whereby it clearly signals to India that it understands the consequence of waiting during a crisis could mean India's first-strike and therefore, it is prepared to deny India that advantage.

First-strike stability therefore would include a twin calculus, whereby both Pakistan and India understand that the costs of waiting and incurring first-strike from the enemy will be much higher than the cost of striking first. When both sides have an equal incentive to strike first and their strategic forces will posture this resolve and capability, first-strike stability will lead to strengthening their mutual deterrence.

First Strike Stability and Crisis Instability between India and Pakistan

Let us examine, hypothetically, the Indian assumptions about Pakistan's leadership during a future crisis when Pakistan's NNFU is operational with all its ambiguities as understood by the Indian leadership. During a future crisis, after reaching third round of escalation (if Balakot 2019 crisis was to serve as any indicator for a Balakot 2.0), India would base its calculations on two factors:

- It would think that Pakistan would launch a first-strike on India if India waits and
- It would weigh its costs of incurring Pakistan's first-strike in comparison to the cost of initiating its own first-strike to preempt Pakistan's first-strike.

Based on these calculations, Indian leadership will be contemplating the following:

- Given that Pakistan's NNFU allows Pakistan to launch a first-strike, yet, its operationalization is problematic, since it also says its nuclear weapons are weapons of last resort. So has the last resort arrived? Is it a use it or lose it dilemma for Pakistan? If India waits, what is the likelihood that Pakistan will launch a first-strike?
- What is Pakistan's strategic force structure and posturing during the crisis? What does Pakistan have in its inventory that will be used to strike first and at what Indian targets? Will it be countervalue or counterforce? How much of Pakistan's nuclear forces destroy Indian countervalue targets and how much can take out counterforce targets if Pakistan initiated first-strike?
- What will India gain to save if instead of waiting to absorb Pakistan's first-strike, it preempted Pakistan's first-strike?

Crisis instability between India and Pakistan will thus be operational at two levels:



- That the space for crisis exists and then embroils the two nuclear armed countries to explore each other's thresholds by engaging in rounds of escalation, each thinking it can dominate the other.
- Incorrect assumptions about all the factors mentioned above on which India will be basing its calculations to launch a preemptive strike against Pakistan.

In addition to these two factors, some other critical variables like each leader's ideological predisposition (especially an Indian motivated by militarised Hindutva nationalism), civilian and military assessments of the situation on both sides, psychological stress during the crisis, international community's pressures, third party mediation attempts to achieve crisis termination, misperception about the other side's intent, and miscalculation about the other side's capability and resolve, will enhance crisis instability between India and Pakistan.

Based on all the factors analysed above, crisis instability between India and Pakistan is itself perhaps the most dangerous catalyst which can catapult either side into launching a preemptive first-strike against the other since neither would want to go second. This begs the question: why should any nuclear weapons state, absorb first-strike, put its valued strategic assets and forces at risk, and then strike second? Can the costs of initiating a disarming first-strike ever be greater than the costs of absorbing a first-strike? Consider this: if India is worried about losing a significant portion of its cities and population in Pakistan's countervalue first-strike or worried about losing a significant portion of its strategic nuclear forces, its command and control or its military infrastructure in Pakistan's counterforce first-strike, shouldn't Pakistan be worried about the same? The answer is yes. What then is the prescription?

First Strike Stability and its Impact on Crisis and Deterrence Stability (Krepon, 2012)

As part of methodological evaluation of U.S. strategic forces, a 1990 RAND study on 'First-Strike Stability and Strategic Defenses' explains first-strike stability as follows (Glenn A. Kent, 1990):

"First-strike stability between two adversaries is robust when both leaders perceive no great difference between the expected "cost" to each side of striking first and the expected "cost" of incurring a first-strike if one withholds his attack. In such circumstances, neither superpower leader perceives himself (or his adversary) as pressured by the posture of forces to strike first in a deepening crisis. First-strike stability could become an important factor toward escalation if either leader (or both leaders) believed that the other perceived an advantage in going first."

Applied to the Indo-Pak context, both countries will need to have an incentive to initiate a preemptive strike against the other during the crisis in order for first-strike stability to be operational between the two. However, herein lies a paradox: in order for nuclear deterrence to hold and thrive



between India and Pakistan during a crisis, each side must eliminate the temptations of the other side to launch a preemptive first-strike. But the only sustainable way of ensuring that deterrence holds during a crisis, first-strike stability has to be a prerequisite, a precondition. Strength of Pakistan's strategy will be to make the Indian leadership believe it is not in the best interest of either state to engage in a crisis in the first place and that aggressive strikes, be it surgical or like Balakot 2019 (Tufail, 2019), are not only dangerous, but counterproductive to achieving whatever Indian war aims might be. During a crisis, neither India nor Pakistan have the absolute comfort that they are in total control of the trajectory of the crisis and that the crisis will not spiral out of control.

Therefore, it is extremely important for both countries to understand the paradox of first-strike stability and deterrence as explained above. Such an understanding will push both countries to address their vulnerabilities to the factors that induce crisis instability and challenge the stability of their established nuclear deterrence.

In order for the overall strategic stability to prevail in South Asia, both India and Pakistan must ensure that the two essential components of strategic stability, crisis stability and deterrence stability (Akhtar, 2020), remain robust for all times to come. This in turn will not happen until and unless both India and Pakistan maintain a mix of offensive and defensive strategic systems. And for that to happen, their nuclear doctrines would need to be First Use, with absolutely zero ambiguities embedded in their communication to each other of what it entails. It does not matter whether their official doctrines are changed to reflect this shift. India can continue to hedge behind NFU (Vernie Liebl, 2009) and Pakistan behind NNFU, but as long as both adversaries know that first-strike stability exists and is operational, space for crisis instability and deterrence instability to ensue will be minimal. Both countries would also need to drop the word 'minimum' from their credible deterrence doctrines to strengthen the credibility of their deterrence vis-a-vis each other. Their deterrence cannot be cost-effective and stable with minimum numbers of nuclear weapons and smaller numbers of offensive and defensive strategic systems.

If the overall objective of both countries is to avoid strategic nuclear war, then FU and Credible Deterrence will help achieve that aim by addressing the existing crisis instability vulnerabilities and misperceptions about each other's credibility and resolve which pushes them to challenge mutual nuclear deterrence. First-strike stability will be achieved by India and Pakistan when both countries will be indifferent to the costs of a) initiating a first-strike and b) waiting and giving peace a chance. If one cost will outweigh the other, first-strike instability will be in play. If India believes that the benefits of launching a preemptive strike against Pakistan outweigh the benefits of it waiting and hoping the crisis will not graduate to war, deterrence has every chance of breaking down. This will hold true until both India and Pakistan develop substantial second-strike capabilities.

In the next Indo-Pak crisis, what will be the calculus of first-strike stability? India will strike Pakistan first if it believes striking second has the worst consequences. Similarly, for Pakistan too, a first strike against India will be launched if Pakistan believes that the cost of launching a first-strike



is much lesser than the cost of waiting and then facing a potential first-strike from India while it is waiting. Once India and Pakistan have achieved this first-strike stability, whereby both countries believe they will be worse-off if they wait and incur a first-strike from the other side and thus should strike first, their crisis stability and deterrence stability will strengthen.

Future of Shelling-esque Strategic Stability in South Asia

A discussion on the technical requirements for Indian and Pakistani strategic nuclear forces (Status of World Nuclear Forces, 2021) to establish first-strike capability is beyond the scope of this paper and thus the analysis has been limited to the conceptual contours of first-strike stability. In the India-Pakistan dyad, the drivers of instability to the overall strategic peace are numerous. First and foremost amongst them is each country's perception about what strategic stability entails and the credibility of their deterrence. India's flirtations with NFU to test reactions of the international community and its regional nuclear rivals, is a dangerous flirtation. Pakistan's lack of faith in India's current NFU doctrine will only be strengthened in resolve if India was to drop the facade and actually adopt FU. In Rajesh Rajagopalan's survey of India's NFU conundrum, it is evident that the moderates and the expansionists in the Indian strategic scholarly community are divided on the dividends of Indian NFU. (Rajagopalan, 2016) India's coming out of the closet on FU in itself, therefore, will be a factor of strategic stability in South Asia for it will allow Pakistan to work towards establishing first-strike stability.

Strategic planners in India and Pakistan perhaps need to re-read Thomas Schelling's masterpiece, *Strategy of Conflict* (Schelling., 1990) to understand how critical it is to establish the first-strike equilibrium for crisis and deterrence stability in South Asia, as two rational actors who understand each other's predicament of "he thinks we think he thinks we think...he thinks we think he'll attack; so he thinks we shall; so he will; so we must." (Schelling, 1958)

According to Schelling, the reciprocal fear of surprise attack is a process involving interactive expectations and successive cycles. To Schelling, even a slight first-strike advantage was a factor of instability. Thus, first-strike stability was critical to maintaining crisis stability. Bringing Schelling to the South Asian theatre, one could figure out the deleterious effects of first-strike instability. For instance, if either of the two countries, India and Pakistan, feels that the costs of going first are lesser than the costs of going second, fears and nervousness will exacerbate, much to the detriment of deterrence and crisis stability. As Schelling said, the fear of pre-emption could compel a state to pre-empt by itself. If Pakistan, faced with an enemy with a diluted NFU doctrine, a hawkish leadership, and a compendium of counterforce capabilities, feels that India will launch decapitation strikes on its strategic assets, it will most likely be incentivized to cross the line. If the cost-benefit analysis is different for both countries, even the little window of opportunity for one country could be all but disastrous for the ever so fragile state of strategic stability in South Asia.

As opposed to all this, many have suggested a commitment to arms control critical to



stabilizing deterrence in South Asia. Here, it is important to note that overtures for a strategic restraint regime and meaningful Nuclear Risk-Reduction Measures (NRRM) (Jaspal, 2004) have been turned down by India's intransigence since 1998. Arms control, on the other hand, is but a tall order between the two South Asian nuclear rivals.

Those who quote the Cold War arms control framework and models to the two South Asian rivals and want them to emulate the Cold War rivals, often forget what drove the U.S. and the Soviet Union towards considering arms control in the first place. It was not until they had achieved strategic parity in terms of the numbers of their nuclear weapons and the numbers and types of their delivery vehicles that there was this need to control the numbers and manage the qualitative arms race. It was the competition which drove both the U.S. and the Soviet Union towards the golden period of arms control which is exemplified for the South Asian duo. In addition, the Cold War rivals had huge amounts of stockpiles, something that gave them ample room to cap and later reduce their stockpiles without attenuating their deterrents. Mutually Assured Destruction (Richard Ned Lebow, 1995) and first strike stability remained firmly intact even during the heydays of arms control. It is also important to understand that, during the Cold War, nuclear nonproliferation and arms control were boosted partly because both the US and the USSR were fearful about the domino effects of proliferation. (James M. Smith, 2002) Stopping China and West Germany from going nuclear, for instance, was a shared goal. Also, what facilitated arms control was the comfort that the countries got from the then evolving nature of the nonproliferation framework which was inherently lopsided in favor of the nuclear haves. South Asia's strategic landscape is very different. (Arnett, 1998) The South Asian nuclear dyad does not have the numbers that would generate the environment for arms control. Roughly, both India and Pakistan are in possession of 350 warheads altogether. With trust-deficits, mutual-hostilities, and their mutual security dilemmas increasing by the day, it is very difficult to bring both countries on the table to explore the prospects of arms control. Unfortunately, neither the duo's credible 'minimum' deterrence doctrines, nor their asymmetric strategic nuclear forces typified by NFU and NNFU are geared towards addressing the drivers of strategic instability, and its inherent components of crisis and deterrence instability.

In addition to these factors of instability, Pakistan's tactical ballistic missile NASR's counterforce component, without its countervalue component is also destabilizing, and adds little to deterrence. (Haider, 2011) This is primarily because India may perceive the costs of obliteration of its armor columns lesser than the costs of Pakistan destroying Indian cities. NASR's counterforce component has nonetheless an important role to play as a gap-filler at the theatre level. For the critics of Pakistan's NASR (Joshi, 2013), the logic of the U.S. expanding its low-yield nuclear arsenal as enshrined in the 2018 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, 2018) should suffice. Pakistan's NASR is a counterforce weapon designed to thwart attempts by India's advancing IBGs as per India's Cold Start Doctrine. (Ahmed, 2016) Any use of NASR against advancing Indian conventional forces, will be the onset of nuclear escalation since India vows to respond with 'massive' retaliation against nuclear use (irrespective of the yield). Even though India's use of the word 'massive' in terms of its retaliation to Pakistan's nuclear strike by NASR, is problematic, as has been



examined by Indian scholars, the problem remains.

For now, India believes that NASR is a counterforce weapon and it will have counterforce responses to neutralize it. In order to buttress and amplify the deterrent effect of NASR, Pakistan should expand its range to increase countervalue targeting options. This is all the more important because of one major reason: a countervalue leg to NASR will, in essence, complete Pakistan's response to the Indian Cold Start. It must be stressed that Cold Start puts at risk Pakistan's strategic nerve centers in Lahore and Sialkot. Thus, a countervalue side of NASR must be explored in earnest. However, Pakistan has to be careful in selecting targets and ranges of NASR's variants so as to avoid targeting cities that are home to the Sikh community, which is already fast-becoming a victim of India's drift into religious fanaticism driven by Hindutva ideology. Also, Pakistan, by opening the Kartarpur Corridor (Kermani, 2018), has won over the hearts of Sikhs across the globe. Any use of NASR inside Indian Punjab would, thus, suit India. It would likely use that Sikh population as its first line of defense, putting it at greater risk to Pakistan's counterforce NASR strike. If Pakistan develops a NASR countervalue low-yield variant with an approximate range of 500 kilometers, New Delhi would be well within striking distance. Once deployed during a crisis, it will enhance the credibility of its deterrence and India will stop calling Pakistan's NASR bluff. If deployment of low-yield weapons is to take place then it must not be differentiated as counterforce or countervalue.

Pakistan must have both strategies available to it via NASR during crisis times. Even-otherwise it is noteworthy that deterrence is greatly strengthened when a state holds adversaries' cities hostage. (Feiveson, 1999). In other words, the larger chunk of deterrence is derived by credibly threatening a prospective aggressor with reprisals in the form of countervalue strikes. In the Cold Start-NASR showdown, India's forays in Lahore will be best deterred if, along with NASR's capacity to destroy IBGs, it is able to target India's capital, New Delhi. The escalate-to-deescalate strategy with low-yield nuclear weapons like NASR, having both countervalue and counterforce targeting options available, may aggravate Indian insecurities and will lead to first-strike stability at lower levels.

First-strike stability is a strategy which is rationally motivated and driven by both countries' self-interest. In Pakistan's case, that self-interest is to limit the damage to itself. In India's case, it is the same: not being willing to incur first-strike while waiting. By establishing first-strike stability, India and Pakistan thus will have their own version of *Nash equilibria* operative in South Asia.



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