

Nuclear Balance of Power in South Asia

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ABSTRACT

The South Asian security environment is defined by India-Pakistan relations. The history of two state's relations has been embroiled with skirmishes, conflict and wars. The asymmetry in size, economy, and conventional military capabilities of both states have resulted in their threat perception and security dilemma. However, the introduction of nuclear weapons into the South Asian strategic environment has brought an element of stability in the region owing to the nuclear deterrence. Nuclear deterrence has created a balance in overall power structure of the region. Therefore, if any aggressive development by one state disturbs the power balance, then rebalancing act has to be done by the other. Indian worldview is based on the regional hegemony through economic, military and industrial development. Although, nuclearization has brought an element of stability in terms of conflict escalation, yet the historical protracted conflicts have further complicated the security dimensions of the region. The nuclearization of South Asia presents a unique and dynamic equation of balance of power which is different from the Cold War definitions of it. Pakistan tries to balance Indian power while India is trying to balance China. However, balance of power is concentrated in the nuclear developments. So, South Asian nuclear balance of power merits the consideration of significance of nuclear weapons and their role in the strategic stability in the region. The external powers have played an important role to balance India-Pakistan power relationship. However, their role has been partial in resolving concerned issues between India and Pakistan. They have managed to serve their own interests. In the meanwhile, both India and Pakistan have benefitted from the role of external powers and the strategic environment has remained stable.

Key Words: **Realism, Nuclear, Balance of Power, Nuclear Deterrence, Strategic Stability, India-Pakistan, South Asia.**

Introduction

India and Pakistan are the major players in South Asia and they define the regional security environment. Traditionally, this region is known as a region of mistrust and conflict (Chakma, 2012) that has unresolved traditional and non-traditional security challenges. These numerous security challenges and inter and intra state level conflicts pose serious threat to the regional strategic stability. Both the states share a bloody history of antagonism; ups and downs in their relations further complicate the regional security environment. Their relative security challenges range from traditional to non-traditional; conventional to sub-conventional; and

limited war options that add to the threat perception. Nuclear deterrence aptly covers these challenges and helps to maintain strategic stability in the region.

Due to the unjust division of sub-continent in 1947, Pakistan lacks superiority in terms of division of assets and size, land, population, economy, industry, and military resources (Suto, 2004). Kashmir is the main source of conflict between two states and three wars 1948, 1965, 1971 and the Kargil crisis 1999 took place between them. The crisis at the Line of Control (LoC) is long standing with continual skirmishes and exchange of fire by forces of two countries. In the conventional balance of power, India has been in advantageous position right from the beginning. Coupled with this power asymmetry, the policies of India toward Pakistan have been non-accommodating which dominate the threat perception of Pakistan centred upon India. The continued hostilities and history of wars have deep rooted the security dilemma in Pakistan's policies regarding India. This security dilemma of Pakistan makes every development by India as a direct security threat to Pakistan. So, Pakistan's policies have been security oriented vis-à-vis India.

The introduction of nuclear weapons stabilized deterrence created a relative balance of power between two states. The nuclearization of South Asia, when India conducted its nuclear tests and Pakistan pursued, has helped to maintain the regional balance of power (Hussain, 2007), and nuclear deterrence is established in the region which has led to strategic stability in the region. However, the nuclearization carried with it the 'stability-instability paradox' which refers to two consequences attached to nuclearization. First, the nuclear weapons bring stability because the states are deterred from attacking the adversaries having the nuclear weapons. Second, the nuclear weapons bring instability because the states having nuclear weapons may indulge in conventional low intensity war considering that the adversary would not respond owing to the fact that the Aggressor State has nuclear weapons up its sleeves.

In case of India-Pakistan, according to Panday (2011), "nuclear weapons simultaneously induce stability at level of nuclear war and instability at lower intensity levels of violence" (p. 7). Incidentally, the deterrence optimists' view is that nuclear weapons maintained stability in the region. During the Kargil crisis of 1999 and 2001-02 border confrontation, deterrence capability prevented the conflict to escalation of full scale war (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010). On the other hand, the deterrence pessimists believe that nuclear weapons played no role in the Indo-Pakistan crises. V. P. Malik, Indian Chief of Army Staff during the Kargil crisis, explicates that "Indians avoided crossing the LoC mainly out of concern for world opinion; the political leaders felt that India needed to make its case and get international support for its position in the conflict" (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010). They also maintain that India wanted to gain the support of international community that was the limiting factor, not the fear of Pakistan's nuclear weapons during the crisis.

India intends to exercise regional dominance on the basis of its industrial production, military modernization and development of nuclear triad and anti-

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ballistic missile defence systems. On the other hand, Pakistan is not ready to be a subordinate to India. Hilali (2003) has found that “Pakistan has sought nuclear weapons principally to meet the threat from India’s conventional military superiority and substantial nuclear potential, as well as to balance power with India” (p. 4). Therefore, whenever and wherever India alters the strategic balance, Pakistan makes every possible effort to restore it.

The external powers played a vital role in South Asian security environment. The case of China and the United States (U.S.) is discussed for purpose of this study. The U.S. has emerged as a natural ally of India over the past two decades and this friendship has formed the shape of a strategic partnership over the time where the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal and the subsequent waiver from the provisions of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) have served as a linchpin for the partnership. At the same time, this strategic partnership is viewed as contrary to the Pakistan’s interests owing to the fact that it disturbs the strategic balance in the region because Pakistan believes that India is going to achieve huge gains in nuclear technology as well as on diplomatic and economic fronts. Pakistan terms the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal and NSG waiver as discriminatory and dangerous for regional stability and nuclear non-proliferation. Despite all this, China has supported Pakistan at every sphere like economy, military, or international politics. China has also favoured Pakistan’s position in NSG and other international forums.

This paper tries to contemplate upon (i) the concepts of balance of power; (ii) the role of nuclear weapons in this balance of power politics in South Asia; (iii) power dynamics of South Asia and strategic stability; (iv) nuclear deterrence as a power balancer in South Asia; and (iv) the role of external powers i.e. U.S. and China in contributing to this power balance and strategic stability of the region.

Conceptual Framework

To understand balance of power for this study, basic conceptions of realism are very helpful. The realist worldview has evolved from traditional conceptions of human nature being aggressive and interest oriented to an anarchic and power oriented international system controlling the state behaviour. Waltz’s structural realism and Mearshiemer’s power maximization notions are at the heart of explanation of international relations as Mearsheimer is of the view that, “the structure of the international system compels states to maximize their relative power position” (Cirincione, 2007). This aspect of international political structure persuades states to maximize its power because security and physical survival cannot be separated from power maximization. Resultantly, ¹ Pauletet al., (2004) has found that “the competition for power becomes a natural state of affair in international politics.”

Based on this power oriented paradigm of Realism, the theory of ‘Balance of Power’ was born which theorists proclaim to be the factor which prevents the war and maintains peace among the rival states. Balance of Power in International Relations exists when there is stability between two rival states. According to

Goldstein (2005), “the term balance of power refers to the general concept of one or more States’ power being used to balance that of another state or group of States” (p. 77). states adopt various policies and strategies to sustain balance of power as they adopt key techniques to preserve desired status as to build up arms race through internal as well as external sources.

The concept of balance of power explains Cold War relations where states balanced power with rivals through direct power maximization, through bandwagoning, and through alliances. At the system level, the world was divided into two poles where U.S. and Soviet Union provided security assurances to their allies while at the regional level, States preferred bandwagoning or alliances in order to attain a collective balance of power against adversaries.

However, in case of South Asia, the situation is quite different. India and Pakistan are two regional adversaries who have fought wars. They are neither the great powers nor the regional powers. Pakistan has the regional adversary in the shape of India while India has extra-regional adversary in the form of China. So, Pakistan needs to balance power with India while India has to balance power with Pakistan and China. Furthermore, adding to the complexity of balance of power equation, the external factors like U.S. and Russia are also involved along with China obviously. However, they are not involved directly into the power equation but their support to particular country affects the power balance in the region. So, despite asymmetry in economic, industrial, and military strengths, there is a balance of power existing between India-Pakistan owing to the deterrent value of nuclear weapons.

To see the role of nuclear weapons in South Asian balance of power politics, it is important to have a look at the drivers and policies of both India-Pakistan regarding nuclear weapons and their effect on the strategic stability of the region. South Asian security environment is defined by Indo-Pak relations. Both have their own compulsions and drivers for seeking and developing nuclear weapons. Pre-nuclear era manifestly exposed the Indian and Pakistani conventional differences. India’s superiority of conventional arms threatened Pakistani policy-makers as Pakistan’s integrity could be at stake at the emergence of any war with its neighbour. India wanted to acquire nuclear weapons capability so that it could achieve its objective of regional hegemony and to counter China.

But India’s position is otherwise, India’s insecurity stems from its inability to get accepted as the biggest power in South Asia and as a global actor. Goldstein (2005) found “the ability of Pakistan to challenge India’s military might become a major irritant and part of New Delhi’s insecurity syndrome” (p. 77). On the other hand, he stated, “Pakistan’s insecurity is often viewed in terms of a smaller state forever threatened by the presence of an ambitious and bigger adversary” (p. 77). The disturbances in balance of power compelled Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons technology to counter India’s superiority in conventional arms. Till Pakistan creates credible economic, political and military means for such competition, nuclear weapons are the only way to maintain balance with India. To

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cope with India's threats, nuclear weapons provide the guarantee to Pakistan. It is like a security shield which is essential to maintain balance with India.

Pakistan's nuclear tests following those of Indian tests restored, according to Bhushan & Katyal (2002) "a sense of a balance of power with India in the eyes of itself, India, and the world" (p. 202). Pakistan stated that India's tests had destabilized the security balance in South Asia, and that it was obliged to establish the balance of power by its own tests (Goldblat, 2002). Similarly, in post nuclear tests, the nuclear deterrence compelled both states, especially India, not to cross threshold in any conflict. However, Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear weapons technology was due to India. Therefore, Islamabad makes every effort to restore balance in the region.

Power Dynamics of South Asia

A long-standing mutual animosity exists between India and Pakistan (Donald, 2016) since their independence in 1947. The roots of this animosity stem from the sudden partition of the subcontinent which resulted in mass killings of the migrants. The pre-partition hostility between Muslim and Hindu community could not be resolved after partition despite India claiming itself to be secular state and world's largest democracy. In fact, this enmity was strengthened by the events of partition where greater chunk of military and industrial resources was given to India. This resulted in an asymmetry in the power potential and military strength of India and Pakistan. Understandably, India being larger country was not happy by the partition while Pakistan was caught into security dilemma from a country larger in size and power and which was not happy by the very existence of it. So, India always wanted to maximize its power to maintain hegemony while Pakistan always had a quest of maintaining a balance of power to maintain its security and sovereignty (Siddiqi, 2004).

Acquisition of military technology and weapons was essential for two states. They were engaged in enhancing their military power on the basis of internal as well as external resources. In this regard, external factors also contributed in South Asia by pursuing their own economic and strategic interests in the region. During the U.S.-Soviet Cold war rivalry, Pakistan joined the Western bloc. India maintained the non-alignment policy with superpowers. To counter Soviet expansion in South Asia and to contain communism, the U.S. had no choice other than to establish relations with Pakistan. In response, U.S. assisted Pakistan in economic and military sectors. According to Ahmad (2011), "By 1957, the U.S. had poured \$500 million into Pakistan's coffers and supplied a state of the art military hardware" (p. 2). He also found that the "Pakistan army got hundreds of Patton tanks, artillery, Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), howitzers, while Pakistan Air Force received over 100 F-86 Sabre jets, one squadron of F-104 star fighters, two Squadrons of B-57 light bombers, T-33 trainer jets, high level long distance radars, amphibious aircraft and helicopters and sufficient spares" (Ahmad, 2011, p. 2). Moreover, the frigates and submarine Ghazi were offered to Navy.

Pakistan joined the defence pacts with the U.S. i.e. The South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). However, these agreements became useless when U.S. was unable to prove a reliable partner for Pakistan in the wars of 1965 and 1971. That eventuated in the realization that these pacts were no more benefitting Pakistan and it withdrew from these pacts. However, U.S. policy was reshaped with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and Pakistan joining's of U.S. led war on terrorism. However, this partnership was only focused on war on terror and it could not help in resolving the regional issues of Pakistan, particularly, with India (Siddiqua, 2006). In fact, this partnership could only succeed in opening up western border for Pakistan to defend. The porous border with Afghanistan resulted in spilling over of terrorism to its territory. Pakistan is, ever since, facing challenges of defending against terrorism in all of its parts.

India also benefited economically and militarily from superpowers rivalry. According to Rizwan & Amin (2011), "USSR extended its support to Indian policy of non-alignment, aiming at restraining U.S. influence in Afro-Asian region" (p. 5). Sino-Soviet clashes and India's hostile relations with China also strengthened Indo-Soviet ties. During Sino-Indian border war of 1962, USSR provided economic and military assistance to India.

India has been shrewd in managing diplomacy with Russia and U.S. at the same time. It was sagacious in opening up its relations with the U.S. after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Pakistan could not attain out of U.S. even through SEATO and CENTO and even through war on terror what India has gained that in less than a decade of diplomacy. India has become a natural ally and this alliance is multidimensional involving economic and military ventures. India has also been instrumental in promoting the U.S. objectives in Asian region. The U.S. has old rivalry with China because of the Korean War. It also, according to Rizwan & Amin (2011), "pushed heavy military aid to India against China" (p. 5). Military to military contacts between Indo-U.S. started in 1990s and later in U.S. war on terror India offered, as per Kronstad (2006) "full cooperation and the use of India's bases for counterterrorism operations" (p. 3). However, for U.S., the policy has been oscillating between India and Pakistan according to its interests.

Nuclear Deterrence as Balance of Power in South Asia

The nuclear deterrence has prevented India and Pakistan from escalation of any crisis both in covert phase as well as in overt phase of nuclearization. After so-called Indian Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE), "a crisis occurred in 1986-87 when India conducted an extensive military exercise, codenamed Brasstacks, 20 miles from the Pakistani border" (Yusuf, 2006, p. 17). The purpose was to divide Pakistan territory by launching a war. In response to this apparent hostile exercise launched by India, Yusuf (2006) has found "Pakistan mobilized leading to an eyeball-to-eyeball deployment" (p. 17). During the crisis, "Dr. Abdul Qadir Khan, professed Pakistan's nuclear capability in an interview with an Indian journalist

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stating, nobody can undo Pakistan....We are here to stay and let it be clear that we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened” (Bajpai, 1995, p. 30). Though, Yusuf (2006) has found “the authenticity of this interview is still questioned yet the aim of communicating the existence of the capability was achieved” (p. 17).

Overt nuclearization brought obvious change in India-Pakistan relations as nuclear deterrence reduced the escalation of the conflicts or beyond a limited conventional war because of the nuclear weapons possessed by the two rivals. The following Indo-Pakistan conflicts showed that the nuclear deterrence prevented two states from indulging in full-fledged wars.

Kargil Crisis 1999

Following the 1998 nuclear tests Kargil crisis of 1999 was first military clash between India and Pakistan. Throughout the crisis, direct and indirect nuclear threats were emanated from both sides. According to some reports, “these threats were not completely empty; nuclear weapons were readied for potential use at short notice” (Ramana, 2006). The then Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary, Shamshad Ahmed stated on May 31, 1999 that “Pakistan would not “hesitate to use any weapon in [its] arsenal to defend [its] territorial integrity” (Joeck, p. 134, 2009). Pakistan’s nuclear capability prevented India to launch a massive military attack against it (Ramana, 2006). Nuclear threats also emerged from the Indian side during the crisis. As per the then Indian Naval Chief, Admiral Sushil Kumar, “the Indian navy could both survive a nuclear attack and launch one in retaliation” (Hoyt, p. 157, 2009). However, the nuclear balance of power was established which prevented India from dictating terms to Pakistan and also restricted Pakistan from escalation of conflict.

Border Confrontation 2001-02

Nuclear deterrence avoided escalation during the border confrontation of 2001-02 as well. The crisis rose when more than half a million troops, about two-thirds of them Indian, were moved to the border. Both states warned each other to use nuclear weapon. George Fernandes, Indian Defence Minister, stated that “the Indian military was raring to go and also warned Pakistan not to consider using nuclear weapons” (Sareen & Bakshi, p. 212, 2004). When Pakistan mobilized the troops immediately, “then the Indians blinked and quite ignominiously agreed to a mutual withdrawal of forces” (Musharraf, p, 301, 2006). India abstained to escalate the conflict with Pakistan because the fear of Pakistan’s nuclear response.

Mumbai Attacks 2008

Nuclear deterrence worked to maintain stability between India-Pakistan and also sustained balance of power. Terrorist attacks on Indian soil on November 26, 2008 which claimed 163 lives and crippled Mumbai for three days were blamed on Pakistan. Then international community was concerned that this blame-game may lead to nuclear states to another war. However, Indian reaction to the incident was quite opposite and it refrained from mobilizing of forces against Pakistan. A former Indian Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Shankar Roy Chowdhury, bluntly stated that “Pakistan’s threat of nuclear use deterred India from seriously considering conventional military strikes” (The Hindu, 2009). Thus, nuclear deterrence maintained balance and prevented two states from escalation of conflicts.

The Role of External Powers

The external powers have their peculiar interests in the South Asia. To boost its trade and sustain economy, U.S. seeks the Asian markets for investment where it can achieve its economic goals. To build and sustain its influence in the region, the U.S. is inclined to have mutual and cooperative relations with Pakistan and India. After September 11, 2001, U.S. strategic interest to combat violent radicalism became a matter of strong consideration and Pakistan emerged as a front-line ally in the U.S. global war on terror. Pakistan is also important for U.S. for bringing stability in Afghanistan because both countries have cultural ties. The Indo-U.S. strategic relations are on the boost. U.S. intends to restrict China in the region and India would be a key player for U.S. to stop China’s influence in South Asia. Indo-U.S. cooperation in nuclear, science and technology has posed new challenges for the strategic stability of the region as Pakistan and China view it as jeopardizing their security interests in the region and especially in South China Sea. However, the stable relations between South Asian States would help the U.S. in achieving its interests. The role of U.S. is important in the strategic landscape of South Asia because it affects the nuclear power balance in the region.

Pakistan’s policies are India specific where it tries to balance India through nuclear deterrence. China has been an extra-regional adversary of India and is considered as directly affecting the strategic stability of South Asia. This adversarial relation between India and China has culminated into friendly relations between China and Pakistan. To curtail Indian influence in the region, the Sino-Pak ties are a natural consequence. However, this Sino-Pak nexus has been a major concern for India and U.S. Their interests congregated to curtail Chinese influence in the region.

Although U.S. involvement in the region in the form of Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has triggered an element of instability in the region, yet it has helped on some occasions to use its influence to control the hostility during a crisis between India and Pakistan. Albeit U.S. and China did not establish desired level

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of tranquillity in the region but their role to de-escalate Indo-Pak confrontations cannot be denied.

The U.S. Role

The U.S. role has proved to be instrumental in preventing uncontrolled escalation during the crisis. During the Kargil crisis of 1999, 2001-02 border confrontation and Mumbai crisis 2008, the U.S. pressurized Pakistan and India to withdraw and not to escalate further that could lead to a nuclear exchange. The U.S. was keen to pacify the situation because firstly, Pakistan was important due to its vital role in the war against terror in Afghanistan and did not want Pakistan to divert its attention on the eastern border. Secondly, U.S. did not want instability in South Asia because it was busy in Afghanistan and Iraq at the same time. Thirdly, the Indo-U.S. relations were transforming into strategic partnership, so it was not in the favour of the diversion of India to other issues. And lastly, U.S. wanted to show impartiality in the issue. The stated points from the U.S. sometimes in favour of India and in Pakistan are at others (Yusuf, 2011).

China's Role

The role of China has been different as compared to U.S. in the South Asian context. It did not use its influence on both the parties like the U.S.; however, it proved as a crisis manager in Indo-Pak context by supporting Pakistan on economic and military fronts. The Chinese assistance maintained balance of power in the region. Pakistan-China strategic partnership strengthened two states alliances. During the Indo-Pak 1965 war, China helped Pakistan as Indian military superiority showed its dominance due to arms supplied by the U.S. and the USSR. At that time, it was China, which balanced the power in the South Asia by helping Pakistan against India.

China's developments projects in Gwadar port sensed by Pakistan in its favour as Siddiq (2006) has stated that "it would enhance the stake and compel India to beef up its naval capability that Pakistan would find difficult to counter, yet China's presence would be a counter-balance to India's naval superiority" (p. 214). On the other hand, India is growing its military potential and developing ties with the U.S. to strengthen its arms. "India is one of major buyers of U.S. arms and ammunition in the world over the last two decades" (Mansoor, 2013). To compete with China's growing military capabilities, this collaboration has flourished. Since then the arms sales brought the two states closer.

To counter front-line rivalries, India has expanded its security plans by strengthening defence capabilities. Its quest to modernize its navy and air force has also started. These measures would certainly facilitate India to respond to the challenges to territorial integrity and internal solidity. On the other hand, Pakistan is making every possible effort to modernize its forces and weapons by utilizing its

own resources and by the bilateral agreements with other states like China, France and Russia.

Conclusion

South Asia's location on the world map appears unique both geo-politically and geo-strategically. Nuclear politics made it more important. Nuclearization of South Asia has created an overall power balance which has added a sense of stability in the region despite asymmetries in economy, industry, and military capabilities of India and Pakistan. This nuclear balance of power is quite different and unique from the Cold War concept of balance of power that was based upon alliances, bandwagoning, and security assurances to maintain a level of power where the states or alliances achieved security from the adversaries. That did not involve an individual state being necessitated to develop nuclear weapons for its security and the positive and negative security assurances were suffice to avoid war.

However, in the South Asian context, the nuclear weapons are central to maintaining the balance of power between India and Pakistan. This relative balance of power has helped both States to limit escalation of crisis like that of Kargil crisis and 2001-2002 border confrontation. The introduction of nuclear weapons in the region has increased the crisis stability; however, they are not the panacea for rooting out the causes of conflict between the two states. The nuclear weapons have increased the power of India and Pakistan at one side and have also equalized the status owing to the deterrent effect of the nuclear weapons. The deterrence works irrespective of the number of weapons possessed by a state. However, the qualitative increase in the weapons system causes the deterrence instability and overall power balance which needs to be rectified by neutralizing the qualitative effect. Pakistan has been doing so over the time where it has been balancing power against Indian deterrence.

The role of major powers to maintain balance in Indo-Pak relations was based on power politics approach. They helped to de-escalate crisis between Islamabad and New Delhi based on their own strategic interests. Indo-U.S. nuclear deal is another factor which helps strengthened Indian capabilities. It would enable India to build more nuclear warheads that could disturb the balance between India and Pakistan. In this regard, China could be helpful to maintain regional balance of power by assisting Pakistan economically, militarily and diplomatically. The nuclear balance will help India and Pakistan prevent further conflict.

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