



POLICY BRIEF NO. 73 | December 3, 2020

After the Crises of 2019, Can Nuclear Confidence-Building Measures between India and Pakistan be Revived?

By Marianne Hanson

SUMMARY

The strategic picture of the Indo-Pakistan-China region is undeniably unique. It includes a “standard” nuclear dyadic relationship, but also a larger rivalry between two rising powers who are nuclear-armed. It is exacerbated by a history of military skirmishes and two long-running and parallel border disputes. The nuclear arsenals of all three states are growing and undergoing modernization at a significant rate. Two of these states— India and China— have been willing to issue no-first-use of nuclear weapons assurances, and this has undoubtedly helped to stabilize their relationship and to limit escalation in recent clashes. Pakistan, on the other hand, remains committed to nuclear weapons first-use and has developed tactical nuclear weapons in anticipation of this. The region is thus complicated in a way that is not present in nuclear relationships elsewhere

in the world; it also lacks any substantial regional security frameworks. This has become apparent as perennial crises erupt.

In February 2019, relations between India and Pakistan were again thrown into crisis as the Pulwama suicide-bomb attack intensified into military strikes by both sides. Although the crisis was eventually contained, it showed the need for both states to engage in confidence-building measures (CBMs) designed to ensure that conventional conflict does not escalate, either inadvertently or deliberately, into nuclear warfare. A further setback to the relationship occurred in August 2019 when Delhi revoked the semi-autonomous status of Kashmir and Jammu and imposed a lockdown on civilians and political figures.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Marianne Hanson was a Stipendiary Lecturer in Politics at Magdalen College, Oxford University before she joined the University of Queensland in 1995. She has been a Visiting Scholar at the Liu Centre for the Study of Global Issues, Department of International Relations at the University of British Columbia, a Visiting Fellow at the Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth and a Visiting Scholar at Sciences Po in Paris. Her research interests include international security and arms control and disarmament.

While the relationship has deteriorated, there is all the more need to foster dialogue and revitalize the confidence-building measures that have been achieved over the years.

India and Pakistan have developed several CBMs over the years, but these have been largely unused, and in the case of the most important nuclear-related CBMs agreed at Lahore in 1999, incomplete and therefore not implemented. The dangers of nuclear conflict are exacerbated by the fact that flashpoints have been initiated by Jihadist groups, with or without the backing of Pakistan, causing India to respond by targeting bases in Pakistani territory. Nuclear deterrence has held so far, but the presence of non-state actors complicates the calculations of deterrence, leading to a more dangerous level of nuclear instability.

Confidence-building measures are thus required on at least two levels: first, those which can increase trust and goodwill between the people and leaders in both states, and second, those which are aimed at de-escalating small-scale conflicts so that they cannot spiral upwards into nuclear war. The latter are especially needed, because even if trust is increased between political leaders, terror attacks against India might continue, and Pakistan seems either unable or unwilling to curb these.

Various recommendations are made, including the need to increase what are called “positive” CBMs, to operationalize the CBMs begun at Lahore in 1999, and finally to engage China in a regional dialogue towards all three states moving to nuclear risk-reduction measures. While this paper focuses primarily on the India-Pakistan relationship and the need to increase confidence and security between these states, the unique tri-lateral

characteristics of this region need to be kept in mind to help frame this discussion. The paper recognizes the difficulty of putting in place CBMs given long-standing disputes, the difference in nuclear doctrines between India and Pakistan, and the prevailing political environment, but it nonetheless identifies some key areas where progress might be possible.

INTRODUCTION: THE CRISES OF 2019

Relations between nuclear armed long-standing rivals India and Pakistan came under severe pressure in February 2019, when a Kashmiri militant killed 40 Indian servicemen in a suicide car-bombing. Called the “Pulwama attack,” the event led to exchanges of artillery and canon fire and escalated on 26 February into aerial attacks carried out across the Line of Control. An Indian pilot was captured, and later returned to India by the Pakistani Prime Minister as a gesture of peace. Nonetheless, the events over these weeks demonstrated again how fragile the stand-off between these two countries is, and how tensions could have spilled over into a more overt and dangerous form of war-fighting. The Pulwama case bears the hallmarks of crises between India and Pakistan evident since the early 2000s, where extremist Jihadist forces— with or without Pakistan’s support— have launched deadly attacks against Indian targets. India has responded by blaming Islamabad, even as the Pakistani government has denied involvement, and Delhi’s retaliatory power has been swift, with the accompanying danger of an all-out war between the two states.

On 5 August 2019, Delhi revised Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which had given special status to the contested areas of Kashmir and Jammu, but which was seen by Delhi as having failed to calm

India-Pakistan relations. These regions were downgraded to federally governed territories, suggesting a hardened approach to the relationship with Pakistan. More than a year later, curfews continue, new laws have been imposed, and a political stalemate prevails.

The India-Pakistan relationship has been precarious for several decades, stemming from the disputed territory of Kashmir, and is additionally complicated by the relationship that these states each hold with China. And while the two states have gone to war with each other in the past, most notably in Kargil in 1999, this brief argues that there is an urgent need for both sides to recalibrate their positions and to affirm a series of confidence-building measures. Such a rapprochement can play an important part in lowering the danger of an escalation to nuclear war. Many CBMs already exist between these states, but they have not been utilized well to date. Revisiting these, and expanding them, should now be urgently considered.

CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

Confidence-building measures (CBMs) can be very useful in increasing transparency between adversarial states, in easing the fear of unpredictable military threats, and in averting accidental or inadvertent war. Confidence-building measures— or more accurately, confidence and security-building measures— first emerged as a formal political tool in international security politics in the early 1970s, during the failed MBFR (Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions) talks, and, more successfully, as part of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)— or Helsinki process— governing relations between the Soviet bloc and the North American/Western European states.

Confidence building measures can be broken down into several kinds of reinforcing and cumulative activities. For the purposes of this paper, they are divided roughly into three types of practice. At the first and broadest level, CBMs include those general activities and cooperative practices which increase people to people contacts and cooperation between nations on common issues, especially via multilateral diplomacy to promote cordial relations. At a second, more direct level, CBMs include activities designed to enhance military security between adversaries, usually by providing a set of recommended formal practices which build trust, increase transparency, and limit the risks of strategic misperception. These practices are directed explicitly at preventing armed conflict; they rely on an element of constraint vis-à-vis military actions and a degree of strategic empathy with the adversary. A third level of CBMs works for the provision of crisis-management mechanisms, which aim to defuse tensions and reduce the chance of minor incidents escalating into more serious armed conflict. These can be characterized as the provision of more reactive, rather than preventive, measures.

Within the context of the India-Pakistan relationship, and the subset of India-China relations, it would seem that is the second and third categories of CBMs which are most useful in avoiding military conflict, and especially nuclear conflict, between these states. Some have described these as “negative” CBMs. These are essential, but given the nature of the conflict in Kashmir, dominated as it now is by the problem of terrorist attacks beyond the control of either state, it is time to look again at reinforcing the simpler, day to day diplomatic and cooperative measures— which are called “positive” confidence-building measures as necessary preventive elements.

NUCLEAR DANGERS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

While CBMs have been extensively used within the European sphere, applying them to the Asia-Pacific region has remained an underdeveloped process, especially in terms of addressing the dangers of nuclear conflict. Yet such measures might help to decrease the high levels of insecurity between adversarial states in the region. The Asia-Pacific region is arguably the most dangerous in the world in terms of the likelihood of a nuclear conflict. Tense relations between not just India and Pakistan, but also between China and India, between North Korea and its neighbors in the U.S. alliance and with the United States itself, all point to the possibility of an escalation into armed conflict using conventional or even nuclear weapons. The region is beset with numerous nuclear-related problems: it remains the only part of the world where nuclear weapons tests have been conducted this century (North Korea), where seemingly intractable border disputes overshadow relations between nuclear rivals (India-Pakistan, India-China), where nuclear arsenals are growing rather than shrinking (India, Pakistan), where missile programs are being rapidly expanded (India, Pakistan, China, North Korea), where growing a nuclear and missile arsenal is controlled by a state with a worrying legacy of military rule (Pakistan), and where the most prominent modernization of military capabilities— both conventional and nuclear— is evident.¹ Added to these dangers is the fact that there is no formal

¹ Ramesh Thakur, “Asia-Pacific and Global Nuclear Orders in the Second Nuclear Age,” *APLN/CNND*, 2019. https://media.nti.org/documents/PB_21_Thakur_AP_Global_Nuclear_Orders.pdf

and well-embedded security architecture in the region generally— and in South Asia specifically— which can provide an effective forum for preventing military conflict or for addressing crises once they happen. Thus, the region faces significant security challenges, especially involving nuclear forces, while institutionalized trust-building and crisis-management mechanisms are largely absent. Against this backdrop, the Pulwama crisis of 2019 showed once again that the volatile relationship between India and Pakistan stands as a key flashpoint within the region. Indeed, Pulwama has been described as “the most dangerous crisis India and Pakistan had experienced since their overt nuclearization in 1998.”²

Given the nature of this relationship, and the recurring rate of border clashes, nuclear escalation remains a possibility. Yet there continues to be a degree of complacency, a sense that somehow tensions will resolve, that cool heads will prevail, and that nuclear deterrence between these adversaries will always succeed in averting the worst outcomes. Such optimism is itself risky; while the chance of armed conflict escalating to nuclear warfare between India and Pakistan might be relatively low, it cannot be ruled out. Neither side may want nuclear war, but, as Michael Krepon has observed, “miscalculation is South Asia’s middle name.”³ Nuclear deterrence has held— so far. But as long as intermittent

² Moeed YusufW ‘The Pulwama crisis: flirting with war in a nuclear environment’, *Arms Control Today*, May 2019.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-05/features/pulwama-crisis-flirting-war-nuclear-environment>

³ Zachary Keck, ‘This is the world’s most dangerous flashpoint (no, not North Korea),’ *National Interest*, July 8, 2018.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/world%E2%80%99s-most-dangerous-flashpoint-no-not-north-korea-25291>

cross-border skirmishes occur or extremist groups continue to target India, the stakes will rise, as will the dangers of anger, misperception, and emotionally charged responses from both sides. The two states labour under what Glenn Snyder has called the “stability-instability paradox,”⁴ where the very threat of nuclear war means that states believe that they can wage war safely at a lower level without it escalating to nuclear war, and therefore do engage in small-scale conflicts. But this is a risky strategy, and Snyder also believed that one could argue the opposite: adventurous skirmishes causing instability might not always be restrained by the apparent stability of a nuclear deterrent, and might themselves lead to the failure of deterrence. Additionally, in the case of South Asia, even if both governments assure each other that they do not seek escalation, they cannot necessarily control the militants intent on fighting. The terror actions of groups based in Pakistan in the last two decades, especially Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, allegedly supported by Pakistani intelligence forces, have complicated the calculations of deterrence and suggest a more dangerous level of nuclear instability than that which existed between the superpowers during the Cold War.

Former Pakistani President Musharaff has claimed that nuclear options were considered during the crisis sparked by the December 2001 attacks against the Indian parliament.⁵ Suggesting that nuclear

⁴ Glenn Snyder, ‘The balance of power and the balance of terror’, in Paul Seabury, *Balance of Power*, (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965).

⁵ Mainichi Shimbun, “Interview: Ex-Pakistani Pres. Musharraf mulled using nukes against India after 2001 attack,” 26 July 2017.
http://www.apln.network/news/news_view/Interview:_Ex-Pakistani_Pres._Musharraf_mulled_using_nukes_against_India_after_2001_attack

strikes were contemplated certainly garners inter-national attention. But even if the risks of nuclear conflict are overstated, they cannot be ruled out altogether. A nuclear launch, either deliberate or inadvertent, would have profound consequences. Yet, there has been little progress in achieving the risk-reduction strategies needed to help avert nuclear war.

The Pulwama conflict should therefore motivate India and Pakistan to move to a serious commitment to avert future conflicts and to work towards building a durable peace. The protagonists may not be eager to engage in meaningful dialogue at the present time, or to implement confidence-building measures, but the nature of current regional circumstances suggests that a move towards such processes should certainly be made. Similarly, tensions between India and China, will also benefit from the application of CBMs, and may have positive implications for the Pakistan-India relationship.

None of this is to suggest that these will be easy tasks. But all three nuclear armed states must recognise that the stakes are simply too high for continuing simply with ad hoc responses to recurring crises and for avoiding processes of confidence, security, and trust building measures, especially those measures which can have a preventive function. It may be that two kinds of CBM now need to be emphasised: those that build people to people contacts and diplomatic contacts, or positive CBMs, and those which are designed to prevent localised crises, once they break out, from escalating into nuclear war.

EXISTING INDIA-PAKISTAN CBMS— INCOMPLETE & LARGELY IGNORED

Several confidence-building agreements have already been reached between India and Pakistan, but in reality these have been either incomplete or not well-utilised.⁶ Certainly they appeared to play no role in defusing the Pulwama crisis.⁷ Early CBMs between the two states include the establishment of a hotline between military commanders after the 1971 war, the Simla Accord of 1972 which included a commitment to renounce the use of force by each state; the establishment of a hotline directly between Prime Ministers in 1989; a series of military transparency measures, including the observation of military exercises in 1989 and 1990; a commitment not to attack the other's nuclear facilities, in 1988; and a prior notification of military exercises, together with a non-intrusion of air space commitment, made in 1991. Of these, perhaps the most important early nuclear-related CBM is the "Prohibition of Attack Against Nuclear Facilities," agreed by Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto at the end of 1988. The agreement was formally implemented in January 1992 and sought to prevent any direct or indirect attack against the nuclear facilities of either country. It also provided for an exchange of information between parties specifying the location of these facilities, although this occurs only periodically at present,

⁶ Sobia Paracha, "India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs: Internal Dialogue as Catalyst for Peace? How successful have India-Pakistan confidence-building measures really been?" *The Diplomat*, June 7, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/india-pakistan-nuclear-cbms-internal-dialogue-as-catalyst-for-peace/>

⁷ Ryan French, "Can confidence-building measures repair the mistrust between India and Pakistan?" *London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2019. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2019/06/06/can-confidence-building-measures-break-the-impasse-between-india-and-pakistan/>

and details in the lists are often disputed by one or other state.⁸ A more recent nuclear-related CBM was the 2005 Agreement on Pre-Notification of Missile Tests signed by both states, which applies to flight testing of ballistic missiles.

But it was the attempt made in Lahore in 1999 to reduce nuclear dangers which was the most promising step. Following their 1998 nuclear tests, both states engaged in putting together a series of CBMs designed to prevent nuclear war, at meetings in Lahore, Punjab. These included the February 1999 Joint Statement by Prime Ministers Vajpayee and Sharif, the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Secretaries, and the Lahore Declaration. In particular, the MOU focused on elements of nuclear risk reduction, especially the need to ensure nuclear safety and security and to prevent an accidental or unauthorised nuclear exchange. Communication mechanisms were also addressed, including new emergency hotline processes, and a commitment to exchange information on nuclear doctrines and security concepts, as well as a moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons.⁹

While these constituted an excellent suite of nuclear CBMs and presaged a more stable nuclear relationship between the two states, the finer details of how they would be achieved were never completed. Fighting in Kargil erupted three months later, and what seemed to be promising agreements simply languished in the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Holly Higgins, "Applying Confidence-Building Measures in a Regional Context," *Institute for Science and International Security*, Workshop on Building Nuclear Confidence on the Korean Peninsula: Proceedings of the July 23-24 Workshop, 2001. <http://isis-online.org/uploads/conferences/documents/higginspaper.pdf>

ensuing atmosphere of mistrust and ongoing tensions. Things deteriorated further, when in subsequent years the practice of Jihadist groups overtly launching attacks against India complicated the relationship further.

The provisions of the Simla Accord were clearly not upheld during the Pulwama crisis. This agreement had confirmed the ceasefire line of 1971 as the new “Line of Control,” which both sides agreed they would not alter unilaterally. Signed by Ali Bhutto and Indira Gandhi, both states had agreed to “work for the promotion of a friendly and harmonious relationship and the establishment of a durable peace in the subcontinent,” and a commitment to settle any disputes arising “by peaceful means.” While the Pulwama crisis occurred just south of Srinagar, some distance away from the Line of Control, the subsequent retaliation and responses crossed the Line of Control repeatedly. Promises of the peaceful resolution of disputes were discarded as air strikes took place across the Line for the first time since 1971, with India targeting terrorist camps deep inside Pakistan’s territory and even considering conventional missile strikes against Pakistan.

The point here is that existing CBMs focused on averting nuclear war remain largely underdeveloped; with the political relationship getting in the way of completing the technical details required for full implementation, there will always be a risk that nuclear strikes could occur, that relatively minor conflicts can spin out of control and not be contained by the constraints of a well-functioning CBM program. But the above also shows us that the region is in need of a new approach to a different kind of CBM to prevent conflict in what is a changed environment. Ensuring that such attacks do not escalate to nuclear strikes is important, but so too

are measures which will create goodwill between the parties and work seriously towards preventing the threats posed by these groups. Confidence and trust-building measures are urgently required to tackle these new threats. Even if India and Pakistan were to fine-tune and implement fully a range of nuclear related CBMS, useful as this would be, it would not on its own be helpful in addressing the causes of recent conflict. CBMs therefore must be created to operate on a number of different levels in the region.

This is relevant in terms of how India may choose to respond in the future. In the early 2000s, India developed its “Cold Start” doctrine, suggesting the possibility of a swift and decisive strike against Pakistani targets using conventional weapons.¹⁰ Although the doctrine was formally unofficial, the idea appeared to be revived by the new Chief of Staff of the Indian Army after India responded to the September 2016 terror attacks. But whether or not that response was associated with Cold Start, and regardless of the doctrine’s current standing, it has served to increase the development of Pakistan’s tactical nuclear weapons.¹¹

¹⁰ Sumit Ganguly, “The Nuclear Gyre in South Asia and Beyond,” *APLN Policy Brief*, 29 (7 February 2017).; http://www.apln.network/briefings/briefings_view/Policy_Brief_29_The_Nuclear_Gyre_in_South_Asia_and_Beyond

Sobia Paracha, “India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs: Internal Dialogue as Catalyst for Peace? How successful have India-Pakistan confidence-building measures really been?”

¹¹ Hans M. Kristensen, ‘Tactical nuclear weapons 2019’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2019, 75(5).

THE CHINA-INDIA COMPLICATION

Also crucial to addressing the India-Pakistan nuclear threat is an understanding of the relationship between India and China. This is marked by long-standing and unresolved border disputes, with parts of their 4000km border remaining undefined.¹² China and India are two rapidly rising powers competing for geostrategic influence, India balancing a rising China by forging closer links with the United States and Japan, and China by intensifying close relations with Pakistan and exerting a greater presence in the Asia-Pacific maritime region. Notwithstanding these differences, both states have a clear interest in maintaining a stable nuclear relationship with each other, and in creating a peaceful and stable region at the broader level, in order to enhance their economic relationship, and to collaborate on addressing shared concerns such as terrorism.

Yet their border disagreements might provide the spark for a larger conflict. While these disputes have been managed relatively successfully over the decades, a tense standoff in 2017 between Chinese and Indian forces in the Doklum plateau, adjacent to both borders, lasted three months, had the potential to escalate into open conflict, and caused widespread concern internationally. In May 2020, tensions increased when Indian and Chinese soldiers engaged in military skirmishes near the Galwan Valley, resulting in several deaths.

¹² Toby Dolton et al., “India-China relations: the need for confidence building measures,” *CEIP*, 9 October 2012. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/10/09/india-china-relations-need-for-confidence-building-measures-event-3810>.

Beijing and Delhi have taken several steps to develop CBMs, including military-military relations, the exchange of high-level defence officials, the establishment of communication links and hotlines, prior notification of military manoeuvres and troop movements near their borders, and even joint military exercises. Importantly, both China and India have shown restraint in terms of their nuclear relationship.

Bringing China into a regional nuclear dialogue will be essential in building trust and confidence between India and Pakistan,¹³ but to date Beijing has not been willing to do this. Sumit Ganguly laments China’s “steadfast refusal” to enter into serious discussions with India as a way of addressing the threat of nuclear warfare in South Asia.¹⁴ As O’Donnell notes, in the search for political and strategic stability in the region, “China must be involved as a committed party” to any proposals for managing the region’s precarious nuclear instabilities.¹⁵

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY?

Notwithstanding their reluctance to engage in such proposals at the moment, China, India, and Pakistan could take advantage of a series of political developments which suggest some openings for dialogue. The resounding re-election of Narendra Modi’s BJP in India in 2019 means that Delhi can afford to put forward a bold policy for resetting the relationship with Pakistan. The BJP has typically operated on the basis of a strong military response to threats from

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sumit Ganguly, “The Nuclear Gyre in South Asia and Beyond.”

¹⁵ Frank O’Donnell, “Twenty Years into Nuclear South Asia: Pathways to Stability,” *Southasian Voices*, 13 June 2018. <https://southasianvoices.org/twenty-years-into-nuclear-south-asia-pathways-to-stability/>

Pakistan, but as noted above, the risks involved in nuclear deterrence and the fact that nonstate terrorist actors cannot be easily controlled or defeated suggest that new measures are required. Responding positively to the requests made by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan for dialogue and cooperation could take place with little risk to Modi's reputation for strong leadership.

Khan might also hold some sway in Washington D.C. with incoming President Biden. Discussions on ending the war in Afghanistan, where Pakistan holds some influence over Taliban insurgents, are ongoing. The extent of this influence remains uncertain, but Washington nonetheless believes that Islamabad can use its agency to help facilitate a lasting ceasefire and assist American withdrawal from Afghanistan. The improvement of relations between the U.S. and Pakistan, together with India's own ties to Washington, could be important in driving a new push for trust and confidence-building in the South Asian region.

WAYS FORWARD

It is crucial that one of the most dangerous nuclear rivalries in the world is addressed via a series of confidence and security building measures. This Brief focuses on the immediate steps required to lower the risk of deliberate or inadvertent nuclear attack. The need is for mechanisms to prevent catastrophic conflict and especially nuclear conflict. Several recommendations follow:

- A genuine commitment to dialogue and cooperation. India's and Pakistan's leaders could embark on a meaningful process of rapprochement and trust-building. This calls for visionary political leadership, and an acceptance that the

alternative— recurring crises which could escalate— is untenable. The most important initial step that Pakistan can take is to disavow meaningfully any support for proxy war by Jihadists.

- The most basic of CBMs— what are frequently called positive CBMs— can be increased relatively easily. These are usually non-controversial but have a big part to play in trust-building. An increase in face-to-face meetings between political and military leaders, and in people-to-people exchanges, can lead to a virtuous spiral of reciprocity and cooperation.¹⁶
- Several “on the ground” measures can be initiated and/or reinforced, including relocating heavy weaponry some distance away from the Line of Control, limiting the size and frequency of exercises conducted by either state near the Line, and agreeing not to violate air space across the Line of Control.¹⁷
- Those CBMs agreed at Lahore in 1999 should be revisited and made fully operational as soon as possible. The technical requirements for their implementation should be a high priority for both India and Pakistan. Additionally, these CBMs should not simply wither in the event of any resumption of hostilities (as they did in 1999).

¹⁶ French, “Can confidence-building measures repair the mistrust between India and Pakistan?”

¹⁷ Mohammed Badrul Alam, “Rudiments of CBMs in South Asia and a Comparison of their Viability in North Korea and Northeast Asia,” *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 19(1) Spring/Summer, 2005.

- Efforts could be made to engage China in a new approach to regional security, particularly in relation to managing nuclear relations.¹⁸ One possibility is to encourage China to act via CICA (The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia), a forum which China favours.¹⁹ CICA has typically been used to address external threats to the region, but Xi Jinping stated in 2016 that it could form the basis for a “new architecture of regional security cooperation.”
- In terms of specific actions, as a gesture of strategic reassurance, India could reaffirm its commitment to a policy of no-first-use, which some observers suggest might be wavering.²⁰ Pakistan has refused to declare a similar policy, but it might be persuaded,

especially if the Biden Administration re-considers the idea of no-first-use for the United States as part of a global leadership effort to reduce nuclear dangers, and if it is able to bring other nuclear states along with it. (These are all big “ifs,” of course. But India and China, as the only two of the world’s nine nuclear states to adopt no-first-use doctrines, will also be influential.) In addition, Pakistan should be exhorted not to deploy its tactical nuclear weapons, and both states can be encouraged to make a commitment not to increase their existing nuclear stockpiles (which are the fastest-growing of all the nuclear weapon states).

- Both India and Pakistan have engaged in some risk-reduction measures such as separating warheads from delivery mechanisms, and their policy of nuclear restraint has held, at least in terms of deterring a nuclear strike. Their management of their nuclear programs might be stronger than is frequently believed, but— as with all the world’s nuclear weapon states— it remains the case that deterrence cannot be relied upon indefinitely.

¹⁸ Thanga G. Rajesh, “Revisiting Sino-Indian Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) On the Eve of 60th Anniversary of Panchsheel,” *Chennai Centre for China Studies*, 5 July 2014.

¹⁹ Chunshan Mu, “What is CICA (and Why Does China Care About It)? What is China’s vision for the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia?” *The Diplomat*, 17 May 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/what-is-cica-and-why-does-china-care-about-it/>

²⁰ Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang, “India’s counterforce temptations: strategic dilemmas, doctrine and capabilities,” *International Security*, February 2019, 43 (3)

The Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (APLN) is an advocacy group that aims to inform and energize public opinion, especially high-level policymakers, to take seriously the very real threat posed by nuclear weapons, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and eventually eliminated.