



## The Nuclear Gyre in South Asia and Beyond

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### Summary

*The nuclear weapons programs of the People's Republic of China, India and Pakistan are becoming increasingly intertwined. The Sino-Indian rivalry has intensified and has contributed to the growth of their nuclear and missile programs. Simultaneously, the Indo-Pakistani rivalry has also worsened and led to increased acquisition of similar capabilities. To compound matters, the Sino-Pakistani strategic nexus has deepened and has contributed to heightened threat perceptions in India. As a consequence, the nuclear gyre now threatens to encompass both South and East Asia. The continuing expansion of nuclear and ballistic missile programs in all three states, if not curbed through bilateral or multilateral measures, could have destabilizing consequences for both regions.*

1. In May 1998, both India and Pakistan ended their mutual nuclear ambiguity after conducting five and six nuclear tests respectively.<sup>1</sup> Since then neither country has carried out any further tests. However, over the past two decades both states have made substantial investments in their nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. Despite a professed commitment to “credible minimum deterrence” India has sought to fashion a full-fledged triad replete with strategic bombers, land-based ballistic missiles and submarine-launched missile capabilities.<sup>2</sup> It has also started a ballistic

missile defence program. For its part, Pakistan continued with its ballistic missile program and has dramatically speeded up the expansion of its nuclear arsenal. It has also, in the past several years, started to develop an arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons. Its policymakers have argued for the need to acquire theatre nuclear weapons on the grounds that they constitute an effective deterrent against India's attempt to field rapid-strike conventional capabilities.

2. It is tempting to argue that an action-reaction cycle has driven the Indo-Pakistani nuclear competition. However, such a characterization would be misleading. Pakistan's nuclear weapons program was and remains exclusively focused on India. It started in earnest in the wake of Pakistan's disastrous military defeat at India's hands in 1971 in the wake of the East Pakistan crisis. On the other hand, India's nuclear weapons program had been initiated to cope with possible nuclear coercion at the hands of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Only in the late 1980s did the Indian nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs focus on a two-front problem in the wake of the growth of Pakistan's missile capabilities with the capacity of striking a substantial segment of India's northwestern military bases.

3. Most analyses of the nuclear gyre in South Asia tend to focus on the dyadic nuclear relationship between India and Pakistan. This emphasis is misleading as it obscures the critical role of China in both precipitating and sustaining the nuclear gyre in South Asia. Accordingly, this discussion will focus on the direction and

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Rajesh Basrur of the Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore and Devin Hagerty, of the University of Maryland at Baltimore County, for trenchant comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript. All errors of fact and interpretation are necessarily mine.

<sup>2</sup> For an early discussion of the concept of “credible mini-

imum deterrence” see Rajesh M. Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

scope of the nuclear competition amongst India, Pakistan and the PRC. To that end it will argue that the underlying sources of strategic competition in the region can be traced to both Pakistani and Chinese revisionism.<sup>3</sup> It will also argue that particular strategic choices on India's part may be generating a security dilemma in the Indo-Pakistani bilateral relationship. This dynamic will be discussed in greater detail later.

4. This discussion will eschew any detailed account of the origins of the Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons programs. These have been explored at length elsewhere and need not be recapitulated here. The focus of this analysis will be on the developments in the Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistani nuclear dyads and their consequences for strategic stability in the region.

### The Nuclear Dyad and the Sino-Indian Rivalry

5. The principal focus of the PRC's nuclear forces, especially since the end of the Cold War, has been the United States. However, these capabilities, in turn, pose a significant threat to India. From the standpoint of New Delhi the nuclear forces of the PRC are deemed to be threatening because of the long-term rivalry and the extant border dispute with Beijing. Despite a range of discussions and negotiations the border dispute is no closer to a resolution.<sup>4</sup> Worse still, despite the existence of an important confidence-building measure that was put in place in 1993 to prevent inadvertent escalation, the PRC has conducted a series of "limited probes"<sup>5</sup> across the Line of Actual Control.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it needs to be forthrightly stated that the PRC over the course of the past decade has laid

<sup>3</sup> I characterize both Pakistan and the PRC as "revisionist" states in that neither of them is satisfied with the territorial status quo. They are both intent on territorial acquisition and on altering existing borders in South Asia. My position on their revisionist goals is strictly empirical and does not connote a normative stance on their respective goals. I do, however, believe that their revisionist behaviour does not stem from normal, security-seeking concerns but is predatory. On this subject see Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Jeff M. Smith, *Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> The concept of a "limited probe" is derived from Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside The Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016).

claim to all of the territory of the Indian north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh which it refers to as "Southern Tibet."<sup>7</sup>

6. New Delhi, while seeking a resolution of the border dispute, has fitfully responded to the perceived threat from the PRC. Its responses have been fourfold. At one level it has started to improve its infrastructure along the disputed border areas. It has also undertaken efforts to bolster its conventional capabilities along its northern frontier. Furthermore, it has worked to enhance the reach of its nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. Finally, and most recently, under the regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi it has embarked upon a diplomatic strategy designed to bolster its ties with the United States, Japan, Australia and Vietnam. As part of that strategic shift it has offered to sell an indigenously designed short-range ballistic missile to Vietnam. Each of these arenas will be discussed below.

7. After a long period of neglect India is now turning its attention to the development of infrastructure in areas bordering its Himalayan frontier. According to reliable press reports it has started to construct airfields at high altitudes, it has built bridges in critical areas and has constructed a number of all-weather roads. It has also built bunkers and deployed tanks at a height of 4,000 metres.<sup>8</sup> The task that it still confronts is to sustain these efforts and maintain these investments.

8. In addition to the improvements in infrastructure India has also started to bolster its conventional capabilities to deter possible Chinese incursions. To that end it has started to raise a mountain strike corps. When deployed it will have a sanctioned strength of 80,000 men and will include two infantry divisions and two independent armoured brigades.<sup>9</sup> In addition to strengthening its conventional capabilities along the Himalayan border, India is also in the process of substantially enhancing the reach of its ballistic missiles.

9. At least two important factors are propelling the ballistic missile program. A bureaucratic-

<sup>7</sup> For details see Commodore Katherine Richards, *China-India: An Analysis of the Himalayan Territorial Dispute* (Canberra: Centre for Defence Studies, Australian Defence Force Academy, February 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Dinakar Peri, "India Ramps Up Its Military Presence in Eastern Ladakh," *The Hindu*, 18 July 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Sushant Singh, "War Game Quells Doubts on New Corps," *The Indian Express*, 8 February 2016.

technological-scientific momentum, in considerable part, explains its continued growth. However, such a drive would be difficult to sustain in the absence of a perceived, extant threat. Consequently, these two forces, in tandem, explain the impetus behind the program. In December 2016, the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) for the fourth time launched the Agni-V, a missile with a range of 5,000km and capable of carrying a warhead of 1,000kg.<sup>10</sup>

10. Additionally, India is developing an indigenous nuclear submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capability based on the *INS Arihant*. This program, though it has a long lineage (it was started as early as 1984) has only very recently seen initial user trials. Consequently, it is still some distance away from becoming an operational force.<sup>11</sup> The ultimate goal of India's ballistic missile program is to acquire capabilities that will enable it to have secure second-strike capabilities against the PRC. At the present time, however, India is still some distance from the acquisition of those capabilities.

11. India's land-based capabilities are designed to bolster India's overall nuclear deterrent. However, as is well known, fixed, land-based missiles are also amongst the most vulnerable to an attack in a crisis. India does have long-range, nuclear-capable bombers – the Mirage-2000 and the Sukhoi-30. However, both these aircraft, if forward-based, could be vulnerable to a Chinese first strike. More to the point, if used for long-range missions they are likely to encounter significant PRC air defences. Consequently, the most viable leg of India's triad, and ironically the least developed, is its incipient SLBM capabilities.<sup>12</sup>

12. Even if India develops and deploys a viable sea-based deterrent it may still encounter additional hurdles. To begin with, the PRC's missile capabilities far exceed those of India. Among other matters, to counter American

ballistic missile defences the PRC has already invested in multiple-re-entry vehicles.<sup>13</sup> Worse still, it is in the midst of developing significant ballistic missile defence capabilities.<sup>14</sup> The PRC, no doubt, is developing these capabilities to address the threats it perceives from the United States. However, they do have important adverse implications for the future of India's nuclear deterrent. If these efforts even prove to be partially successful, India's capacity to place significant Chinese assets at risk may be at question.

## Coping with the PRC in South Asia

13. As part of its overall strategy of coping with the threat from the PRC, India has started to strengthen its security ties with the United States, Australia, Japan and Vietnam. These links had been pursued during the previous government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. However, they have been given an added impetus under the regime of Prime Minister Modi. For example, the Indo-US security relationship, which was already on a secure footing, has also flourished under Modi. The US emerged as India's principal weapons supplier (supplanting Russia) and has designated India as a "major defence partner."<sup>15</sup> The growing convergence in the US-India security relationship, in considerable part, can be attributed to mutual concerns about the uncertainties associated with the rise of the PRC in Asia. India has also made more contentious choices under the present regime. Despite the objections of the PRC, it appears willing to sell the BrahMos missile, developed in conjunction with Russia, to Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> India has also steadily improved its ties with Australia since 2009 when the two sides agreed on the formation of a strategic partnership. Since then, quite apart from a series of important commercial deals, they have conducted an annual maritime dialogue.

<sup>10</sup> Rajat Pandit, "India Successfully Test-Fires Nuclear Capable Agni-V," *The Times of India*, 26 December 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Osborne, "INS Arihant: India Nears Completion of Nuclear Submarine 'Slayer of Enemies' – So What Does It Mean For the World?" *The Independent*, 27 February 2016; see also Devin T. Hagerty, "India's Evolving Nuclear Posture," *The Nonproliferation Review* 21:3-4 (2014), pp. 294-315.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion of India's emerging force posture see Gurmeet Kanwal, *India's Nuclear Force Posture 2025* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/india-s-nuclear-force-structure-2025-pub-63988>

<sup>13</sup> See the *Nuclear Threat Initiative, China*, April 215, <http://www.nti.org/learn/countries/china/delivery-systems/>

<sup>14</sup> See the evidence in Bruce W. MacDonald and Charles D. Ferguson, *Understanding The Dragon Shield: Likelihood and Implications of Chinese Strategic Missile Defense* (Washington DC: Federation of American Scientists, 2015), [https://fas.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/DragonShieldreport\\_FINAL.pdf](https://fas.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/DragonShieldreport_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Sushant Singh, "India, US finalise Major Defence Partner agreement," *The Indian Express*, 9 December 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Manjeet Singh Negi, "India to Overlook Chinese Objections, Sell BrahMos Missiles to Vietnam," *India Today*, 3 June 2016.

14. The relationship with Japan, it appears, is of particular significance because both parties are concerned about the rise of a potentially revanchist PRC. Furthermore, Japan is in a position to provide India both with much needed advanced technology as well as investment. The relationship, in turn, has been cemented further because both Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Indian counterpart, Modi, are staunch nationalists. All of these factors have converged to contribute to an incipient security partnership. This is evident from India's ongoing discussions to acquire the US-2iShinMaywa amphibious search-and-rescue aircraft from Japan. India has also asked Japan to join in the annual Malabar naval exercises that it holds with the United States, overriding the stated reservations of the PRC.<sup>17</sup>

15. Despite India's willingness to adopt a more assertive stance towards the PRC, it faces formidable security and diplomatic challenges from the PRC in South Asia. The PRC, of course, has long enjoyed a cordial relationship with Pakistan. However, in the past several years those bonds have been significantly strengthened in a range of arenas. Among other matters, the PRC helped develop the JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft with Pakistan, it has offered to sell Pakistan nuclear reactors and it is developing a major port in Gwadar, Baluchistan. Most recently, despite India's diplomatic protests, it has gone ahead with plans to develop the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This corridor, should it proceed as planned, would involve both rail and road networks through disputed territory in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>18</sup>

16. Beyond Pakistan, the PRC has also made significant economic and political inroads into other states in South Asia including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Its presence in Sri Lanka and Nepal has proven especially worrisome to Indian security specialists. In Sri Lanka, partly because of India's own vacillation, the PRC managed to secure a contract to develop the port of Hambantota. This investment, while it has not proven wholly satisfactory for either party, nevertheless caused concern in New Delhi because it had enabled the PRC to secure

a bridgehead in a country where Indian influence had previously been paramount. More recently, New Delhi's anxieties were provoked further with the visit of a PLAN submarine to Sri Lanka.<sup>19</sup>

17. The PRC has also managed to expand its political influence in Nepal through the promise of economic and developmental assistance. Of greatest concern to New Delhi is the agreement that PRC reached with Nepal to build a strategic rail link across Tibet.<sup>20</sup> India's occasional diplomatic highhandedness has, in turn, facilitated the ability of the PRC to make political inroads into Nepal.

18. Finally, despite India's efforts to woo the regime of Prime Minister Hasina Wajed, the PRC has established a presence in Bangladesh. It has done so primarily by becoming the largest weapons supplier to the country. In fact, between 2009 and 2013, it accounted for 82 per cent of the country's weapons acquisitions. The PRC has emerged as its principal weapons supplier owing to its ability to provide soft loans on highly concessional terms. Among other items it has sold two frigates and has supplied two submarines.<sup>21</sup>

19. The PRC's growing presence in many of the countries bordering India has placed India's policymakers in a quandary. India, obviously, can do little to wean Pakistan away from the PRC. In the other states, barring the pursuit of more emollient diplomatic strategies, India finds itself at a significant disadvantage. It simply lacks the resources to compete with the PRC in terms of providing material assistance. Consequently, it has fitfully, especially under Modi, attempted to improve its diplomatic ties with its immediate neighbours.

## The Indo-Pakistani Rivalry and the Nuclear Dyad

20. The origins of the Indo-Pakistani dispute are complex and deep-rooted. It can be traced to the process of British colonial withdrawal from the subcontinent. Its sources and evolution have been discussed elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> The con-

<sup>17</sup> Vivek Mishra, "Japan and India: A Special Relationship?" *The National Interest*, 24 November 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/japan-india-special-relationship-18491?page=show>

<sup>18</sup> Ashok Malik, "Why is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor such a Challenge to India?" *The Economic Times*, 16 November 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Rajat Pandit, "India Suspicious as Chinese Submarine Docks in Sri Lanka," *The Times of India*, 28 September 2014.

<sup>20</sup> PTI, "China, Nepal Agree to Build First Strategic Rail Link," *The Times of India*, 21 March 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Mizan Rahman, "China Biggest Supplier to Bangladesh," *The Gulf Times*, 19 March 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press,

flict, however, has undergone a qualitative transformation since the early 1990s. It has undergone a shift because of two compelling reasons. First, the Kashmir issue, that had remained dormant since the decisive 1971 war which saw the break-up of Pakistan, again came to the fore in 1989 as a consequence of the outbreak of an indigenous insurgency. The origins of the insurgency in the Indian-controlled portion of the state stemmed from the shortcomings of Indian federalism as well as the growth of political mobilization within the state. Second, with the eruption of the uprising, Pakistan quickly became involved in it. It managed to swiftly turn what was strictly a matter of internal political discord into a well-orchestrated, religiously inspired extortion racket.<sup>23</sup>

21. Through an amalgam of coercion and cooperation the Indian state has managed to mostly contain the insurgency. Its embers remain alive but for the most part it has subsided. However, the state has failed in its efforts to drain the reservoir of discontent that continues to seethe in much of the Kashmir Valley. As long as such disaffection continues to pervade this region Pakistan's decision-makers, most notably its military establishment, will continue to stoke the fires of discontent. Worse still, at least some of the terrorist groups that Pakistan's security apparatus had helped spawn may have evolved into autonomous actors not wholly within the control of their original sponsors.

22. Against this backdrop the Indo-Pakistani relationship has also been punctuated with a series of crises in the past two decades. Two of these, in particular, deserve brief discussion as they are directly relevant to the dyadic nuclear relationship. The first was an attack on the Indian parliament on 13 December 2001. It is widely believed that the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), a Pakistan-sponsored terrorist organization, spearheaded the attack. Even though the attack failed to meet any of its objectives, in that it did not result in any significant loss of life, it did precipitate a vigorous Indian military response. Over the next month India embarked upon a process of massive military mobilization with the code name of "Operation Parakram" (Operation Victory). This involved massing a substantial number of troops and armoured formations along the Indo-Pakistani

2001).

<sup>23</sup> See S. Paul Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy: Islamist Militancy, National Security and the Pakistani State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

border in an exercise of coercive diplomacy designed to induce Pakistan to end its support for terror. The operation, which lasted into the fall of 2002, amounted to mostly a Pyrrhic victory for India. Even though Pakistan formally eschewed its support for terror, for all practical purposes it did not abandon its terror-based asymmetric war strategy.<sup>24</sup>

23. During this crisis, at least on two separate occasions, external actors, most notably the United States, raised the spectre of nuclear escalation because of rising tensions in the region. These concerns had stemmed from terrorist attacks that had taken place on Indian soil even as significant Indian forces had been deployed along the volatile Indo-Pakistani border. In the wake of this crisis the US, given its misgivings about the prospect of nuclear escalation in a future crisis, prodded the two parties to undertake a series of bilateral discussions designed to reduce tensions. This process, which started in 2003, known as the "composite dialogue," had sought to address mutual concerns. There are some claims that it may have come tantalizingly close to a possible breakthrough in 2007 but unravelled because of the political turmoil within Pakistan that led to the ouster of the military dictatorship of General Pervez Musharraf. However, these assertions have not been independently confirmed.<sup>25</sup>

24. In the aftermath of this massive and ultimately less than successful exercise in coercive diplomacy, India's security establishment started to examine possible strategies to respond militarily to periodic terrorist attacks emanating from Pakistan. Even earlier, in the wake of the 1999 Kargil War, some Indian military officials had been arguing that it was possible to strike back without crossing the nuclear threshold. However, it was in the aftermath of the 2001-02 crisis that the security forces sought to formulate an actual doctrine that focused on a swift, sharp but limited conventional retaliation against terrorist attacks. This doctrinal innovation was referred to as "Cold Start."<sup>26</sup> Critics, however, quickly argued that

<sup>24</sup> See Sumit Ganguly and Michael R. Kraig, "The 2001-2002 Indo-Pakistani Crisis: Exposing the Limits of Coercive Diplomacy," *Security Studies* 14:2 (2005), pp. 290-324.

<sup>25</sup> For details about the origins, evolution and eventual collapse of the "composite dialogue" see Sumit Ganguly, *Deadly Impasse: Indo-Pakistani Relations at the Dawn of a New Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Gurmeet Kanwal, "Cold Start: India's Pro-Active Offensive Operations Doctrine for War in the Plains," *Army War College Journal* (Summer 2016).



the proposed doctrine was based upon rather demanding tasks for the Indian armed forces and, worse still, could provoke a wider war fraught with the possibility of inadvertent escalation.<sup>27</sup>

25. Once the existence of this doctrine became known in the public domain, Indian military authorities sought to downplay its significance. In any case, it is far from clear that the doctrine had been suitably operationalized even as late as 2008 because India failed to mount any conventional response in the aftermath of the swarming terrorist attack on Bombay (Mumbai) in November 2008. It is, of course, possible that given the sheer audacity of the attack as well as its scope and duration, Indian decision-makers were simply unable to act on multiple fronts simultaneously. The crisis decision-making that was involved in coping with the terrorist attack, which took nearly three days to suppress, may have overwhelmed the capabilities of India's national security apparatus.

26. At any event, it was not until 2017 that, following his appointment as the new chief of staff of the Indian Army, General Bipin Rawat, appeared to revive it.<sup>28</sup> His remarks, of course, need to be placed in context. They came after the Modi regime had chosen to carry out a set of "surgical strikes" across the Line of Control in Kashmir in September 2016 in the wake of two terrorist attacks which were traced to Pakistan. The decision to resurrect this doctrine has not gone unnoticed in Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> In fact, Pakistani officials have broadly hinted that their country would resort to the use of nuclear weapons should India actually carry out attacks in accordance with the expectations of this strategic doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

### Another Destabilizing Development?

27. India's revival of the Cold Start doctrine and Pakistan's decision to increasingly deploy tactical nuclear weapons may both bode ill for strategic stability in the region. Beyond these

choices another Indian technological pursuit could also have significant adverse consequences for strategic stability in South Asia. This stems from India's quest for ballistic missile defences. The sources of this program are relatively straightforward. Despite its dalliance with the Cold Start doctrine (as well its recent resort to a "surgical strike") India's policymakers have been unable to forge a viable strategy for conventional retaliation strategy against Pakistan's use of asymmetric (terrorist) forces. They have been stymied in this endeavour largely because of Pakistan's apparent willingness to resort to the use of nuclear weapons in the event of an Indian conventional response to a terrorist attack traced back to Pakistan.

28. The pursuit of ballistic missile defences represents an attempt at acquiring escalation dominance. If India can field a workable ballistic missile shield it can significantly degrade any Pakistani first use of nuclear weapons. Having mostly degraded an initial Pakistani nuclear use it can then bring the weight of its nuclear arsenal to strike Pakistan's own forces as well as counter-value targets. In Indian calculations, then, the deployment of this ballistic missile shield should act as a deterrent against continued Pakistani adventurism. From a Pakistani standpoint, however, the Indian deployment of robust ballistic missile defences appears to be a quest for first-strike advantages. With a deployed ballistic missile defence system, Indian military planners could, at least in principle, in a crisis, seek to carry out a disarming first strike secure in the knowledge that any Pakistani nuclear retaliation could be seriously blunted with its ballistic missile defences.<sup>31</sup>

29. Unfortunately, a series of statements about its putative efficacy from senior Indian military technology authorities working on the ballistic missile defence program has only fuelled the worst misgivings of the Pakistani security establishment. Not surprisingly, in an effort to thwart any such Indian plans, Pakistan has in recent years ramped up the expansion of its nuclear arsenal, has sought to disperse (and camouflage) its forces and has also begun to deploy theatre nuclear forces. These developments, in tandem, constitute a significant threat to nuclear stability in this dyadic relationship.

<sup>27</sup> Walter C. Ladwig, III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?: The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32:3 (2007/08), pp. 158–90.

<sup>28</sup> Rajat Pandit, "Army Keeps Surgical Strikes Option Open, While Honing Cold Start Strategy for Pakistan," *The Times of India*, 14 January 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Zulfqar Khan and Ahmad Khan, "The Strategic Impasse over India's Doctrinal Restructuring," *The Washington Quarterly* 39:1 (2016), pp. 139–57.

<sup>30</sup> Kiran Stacey and Farhan Bokhari, "Pakistani officials warn of nuclear retaliation if India attacks under Cold Start plans," *Financial Times*, 20 January 2017.

<sup>31</sup> For a wider discussion see Sumit Ganguly, "India's Pursuit of Ballistic Missile Defense," *The Nonproliferation Review* 21:3-4 (2014), pp. 373–82.

## Conclusions

30. The South Asian nuclear gyre is now increasingly expanding to encompass a wider sphere. The PRC's looming nuclear shadow over the subcontinent has started to link South Asia to East Asia. While the PRC has long had a strategic nexus with Pakistan, it is now steadily strengthening. More to the point, the PLAN has now become increasingly active in the Indian Ocean thereby posing a wider threat to India.

31. India, in turn, has sought to bolster existing ties with which it has enjoyed good relations for the past couple of decades, most notably with the United States, Australia, Japan and Vietnam. The difference today, however, lies in that India is seeking to develop strategic partnerships with all four states in an attempt to break out of what it perceives to be an increasing Chinese encirclement strategy in South Asia. It has also been quietly deepening its naval cooperation with the United States, all the while broadening the scope of its defence cooperation with a firm eye cocked on the PLAN's increasing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>32</sup>

32. The Indian efforts to foster defence cooperation with a range of states in Asia are wholly understandable given the many concerns that exist about the rise of the PRC. None of these endeavours can be deemed to be especially provocative to the PRC but represent prudential security choices. That said, other Indian choices, especially the pursuit of ballistic missile defences are certainly questionable. Furthermore, its continued investment in long-range, land-based, nuclear-capable ballistic missile program, which is primarily focused on the PRC, may needlessly provoke an arms competition that India has little chance of winning. It may also induce China to direct more of its nuclear arsenal towards India. Furthermore, if the PRC, as discussed earlier, succeeds in developing a robust missile shield, it may further degrade India's ballistic missile deterrent.

33. These developments aside, India's policy-makers face an important diplomatic conundrum that has significant strategic ramifications. It stems from the PRC's steadfast refusal to enter into any meaningful discussions with India about containing the nuclear gyre in South Asia. Instead it has either condemned or dismissed India's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Consequently, any prospect of pursuing a regional arms control regime, which would involve India, Pakistan and the PRC, are virtually non-existent. This impasse portends ill for the future of strategic stability in this increasingly interconnected region.

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<sup>32</sup> Ellen Barry, "U.S. Proposes Reviving Naval Coalition to Balance China's Naval Expansion," *The New York Times*, 2 March 2016.

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The **Asia Pacific Leadership Network (APLN)** comprises around eighty former senior political, diplomatic, military and other opinion leaders from fifteen countries around the region, including nuclear-weapons possessing states China, India and Pakistan. The objective of the group, founded by former Australian Foreign Minister and President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group Gareth Evans, is to inform and energize public opinion, and especially high level policy-makers, to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and ultimately eliminated. The co-Convenors are Professors Chung-in Moon and Ramesh Thakur. The Secretariat is located at the East Asia Foundation in Seoul, Republic of Korea. See further [www.a-pln.org](http://www.a-pln.org).

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### Funding Support

APLN gratefully acknowledge the generous support of Nuclear Threat Initiative, Washington DC.

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