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TRILATERAL STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES IN SOUTHERN ASIA

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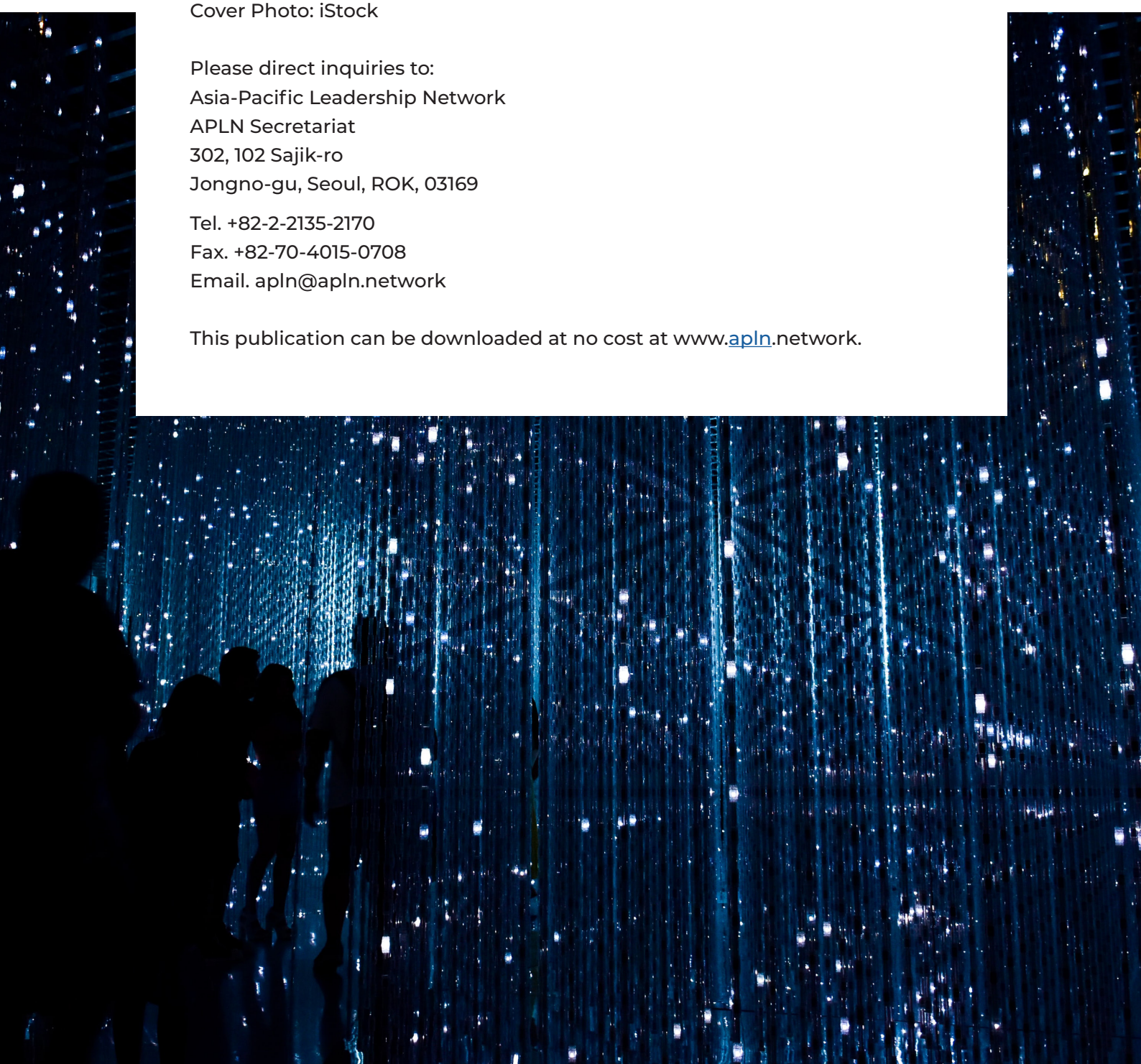

Section 1.

INTRODUCTION

The China-India-Pakistan strategic triangle is emerging in an era of great power competition wherein power rebalancing is shaping Asia's strategic alignments. While literature and publications on the China-India rivalry in Asia and the India-Pakistan conflict are in abundance, the implications of triangular relations involving the three nuclear armed countries—China, India, and Pakistan—are few and far between. Scholars find the China-India rivalry somewhat enigmatic; both countries engage economically but compete strategically. Except for one major war in 1962, generally, military crises between China and India have been less sporadic, more contained, and amenable to de-escalation through bilateral diplomatic means.[1] In contrast, the India-Pakistan nuclear dyad is much more deeply complicated and one of the most challenging and dangerous regional conflicts. The two have fought three major wars, engaged in numerous military crises, and remain at the brink of crises. The advent of nuclear weapons in South Asia ought to have induced efforts toward conflict resolution instead of an arms race imbibed with both countries investing heavily in conventional and nuclear arsenals.

> *Given cross-border terrorist attacks and militaries jockeying for better tactical or operational positions along contested borders in the mountainous trijunction of three nuclear-armed countries, the frequency of crises is increasing along the China-India border as well as along the India-Pakistan Line of Control (LoC) in disputed Kashmir region.*

Given cross-border terrorist attacks and militaries jockeying for better tactical or operational positions along contested borders in the mountainous trijunction of three nuclear-armed countries, the frequency of crises is increasing along the China-India border as well as along the India-Pakistan Line of Control (LoC) in disputed Kashmir region. At the trijunction of three nuclear-armed countries, the potential of major regional military crises—either between India and Pakistan or China and India —is increasing, and it could escalate to a major conventional war and nuclear catastrophe.

1 Jeffery Gettleman, Sameer Yasir and Kari Kumar, "India and China Faceoff Again at Border as Troops Move In," New York Times, August 31, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/31/world/asia/india-china-troops-border.html

At the system level, the evolving balance of power in Asia affects regional stability in South Asia. China's meteoric economic growth has catapulted it to great power status, and Beijing is investing heavily in its military to project power, exert influence, and protect energy sources and commercial shipping lanes, particularly in the Indian Ocean. Hand-in-hand with Beijing's expanding power is its growing confidence to uncompromisingly assert its claims on disputed territories on China's periphery. Prominent among these are the entire Indian province of Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin area—adjoining China's volatile Tibet and Xinjiang provinces. Recalling India's defeat in the 1962 war with China, Indian security managers observe these developments with alarm.

Meanwhile, China-Pakistan relations are closer than ever. They are cooperating on a host of development projects collectively known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which includes infrastructure expansion, defense research and development, and support for Pakistan's civil nuclear energy program. New Delhi interprets the China-Pakistan partnership as a deliberate effort to encircle and contain India and as a wedge driving India and Pakistan further apart. While China-Pakistan relations deepen and expand, India-Pakistan and China-India relations are deteriorating[2] The United States has been a key provider of economic and military aid to Pakistan, but now Islamabad fears that its strategic relevance to the United States is waning with the U.S. shift from war against terror in Afghanistan to the great power competition in the Asia-Pacific theater, part of which would be luring India as bulwark against rising China.

In the meantime, China is advancing its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and influencing regional countries as part of its peripheral diplomacy and furthering its network of economic and strategic hubs. The appealing BRI promises combined with the technological revolutions, create new grounds for competition, including digital connections between individuals, societies, and governments in an unprecedented manner. Consequently, smaller regional countries feel pressured to choose between major power centers in Asia.[3] Strategically located countries, like Pakistan, acquire bargaining power to leverage their land and sea connectivity in exchange for strategic alignment and new technology transfers. These major shifts in international affairs significantly affect threat perceptions, diplomacy, application of military force, and public expectations of government performance.

2 Two recent publications highlight the emerging triangular strategic balancing and power rivalry in South Asia. See Jeff M. Smith, Cold Peace: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the 21st Century (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); Andrew Small, The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

3 International Institute of Strategic Studies, Strategic Survey 2019: An Assessment of Geopolitics (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis, 2019), 12.

Though China and India are engaged in strategic competition and have had few bilateral security confidence-building-measures (CBMs), bilateral trade between them is near US$100 billion, and both engage diplomatically in various multilateral forums and organizations. In contrast, India and Pakistan currently have numerous CBMs, negligible trade, and virtually no engagement. Worse, while the frequency of India-Pakistan military crises is increasing, there are few bilateral mechanisms for crisis prevention, no structural off-ramps for crisis de-escalation, and no agreed framework for nuclear risk reduction.

This paper examines the prospects of triangular CBMs between China, India, and Pakistan as a means of developing a common agenda for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) nonproliferation and disarmament strategies. In the first section, the paper traces the history that led to the triangular strategic construct. The second section explores an appraisal of respective nuclear doctrines and develops a threat perception matrix. The third examines the existing risk reduction measures and existing CBMs, and the fourth section assesses prospects of triangular CBMs and proposes strategic restraint arrangements and risk reduction measures. Finally, the concluding section assesses strategic futures, draws major conclusions, and offers recommendations for a common agenda for the Asia-Pacific regarding the risk of nuclear war in the Pakistan-India-China triangle.

Section 2.

STRATEGIC TRIANGLE: A HISTORIC APPRAISAL

Perspectives differ as to whether the China-India-Pakistan conflict constitutes a triangular strategic construct in Southern Asia. According to some, China-India and India-Pakistan are two separate and asymmetric dyadic strategic rivalries with differing sources, objectives, motives, and drivers. However, both sets of rivalries are enduring in nature and are characterized with ideological underpinnings, territorial claims, and power asymmetry.[4] China and India have differing governing ideologies—the former is an authoritarian system while the latter is a pluralistic democracy. In essence, the China-India rivalry exists at three levels. At the system level, two historic civilizations are rising as major powers in the 21st century and competing for power and influence in Asia. At the regional level, they have territorial claims and disputed border alignments, which is a legacy of the previous colonial era. At the domestic level, the two have different models of governance and political traditions. Both are affected by ethnonationalism, which has hardened attitudes overtime, making compromise difficult for both.[5] From the Chinese perspective, India and Pakistan are neighbors to its two most volatile provinces—Tibet and Xinjiang—abutting the Himalayas and Karakorum ranges. In 1949, China invaded Tibet and knocked on the doorsteps of South Asia. Aksai Chin links Tibet with Xinjiang, which is critical for China; India claims part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (Ladakh region), which is also claimed by Pakistan.[6] China rejects India's former North-East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh) and considers it to be part of Tibet (Southern Tibet). Both Aksai Chin and Arunachal were the battlegrounds in the 1962 war between China and India and subsequent border clashes, including the recent one in 2020. Since then, India has seen China as its main rival, though India's policy toward China at various times has vacillated between appeasement and aggression.

4 According to Paul, "Enduring rivalries are defined as conflicts between two or more states that lasts more than two decades with several militarized inter-state disputes punctuating relationship in between." T. V. Paul, ed., The India- Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

5 Arunabh Ghosh, "India-China Border Conflict: An Analysis of India-China Row Must Acknowledge Dramatic Growth of Ethno-Nationalism," Quint Newsletter, June 19, 2020.

6 In June 2020, China and Indian military forces clashed in Galwan Valley in Eastern Ladakh area. In 2017, another border clash occurred in Doklam area, which is at the junction of Bhutan, India, and China. https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/india- china-border-history-relationship-military-rise-of-ethno-nationalism-modi-govt-xi-jinping

In 1954, India and China agreed on the Panchsheel principles to govern their bilateral relations.[7] India's security policy, manifested in the famous slogan Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai (India and China are brothers), was to bandwagon with China; however, it soon ran into trouble because both failed to resolve the border dispute inherited from the colonial era. Moreover, when China cracked down in Tibet, the spiritual leader Dalai Lama escaped and found refuge in India. Border disputes and the Tibet issue led to a series of China-India border crises, which laid the foundation for China-India rivalry. Until 1998, China's dominance outweighed India's aspirations to compete with China as a peer. Even after the 1998 nuclear tests, India's attempt to seek parity with China did not yield desired results immediately. India began to seriously countenance contesting China almost a decade after the nuclear tests, especially after the United States and India cemented a budding strategic partnership manifested in the U.S.–India nuclear deal in 2008 whereby the United States began encouraging India to claim its status as the Asian counterweight to rising China.

Nathu La Border. Wikimedia Commons Image

7 In 1954, Prime Zhou En Lai and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru jointly established Panchsheel, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual nonaggression; noninterference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. Cited in Jingdong Yuan, "Beijing's Balancing Act: Courting New Delhi, Reassuring Islamabad," Journal of International Affairs 64, no. 2 (2011), https://www.jstor.org/stable/24385533

Despite historical, cultural, and social commonalities between them, the India–Pakistan rivalry is fundamentally ideological and much more antagonistic than relations between China and India. The India-Pakistan conflict dates to British colonial rule of the subcontinent when the rulers fanned communal problems between Hindus and Muslims to consolidate the British raj. Before departing, the British partitioned the subcontinent into India—a secular, pluralistic democratic state with a Hindu majority (with many ethnicities, religions, and languages)—and Pakistan, the creation of which was based on the demand that Muslims on the subcontinent constitute a separate Muslim nation-state in a geographically contiguous area. India's rejection of this notion is the root of the rivalry.[8] This ideological disagreement is compounded by contested territorial claims and rooted in the core dispute of Kashmir (a Muslim majority state). For over seven decades, the non-resolution of the Kashmir dispute and other inherited cross-border problems between India-Pakistan and China-India have resulted in wars, crisis, and the collapse of peace process and myriad agreements signed between all three countries.[9]

In short, the dialectic of India and Pakistan as two opposing states has created an ideological power struggle in South Asia region, wherein India seeks domination of the Indian subcontinent, and Pakistan resists it as an anathema to its sovereign existence. Pakistan relies on external and internal balancing to contest India's domination. Externally, it seeks alliance or strategic partnerships. Internally, it relies on conventional military and nuclear weapons for national survival and security.

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8 Of late, under the Modi regime, the rise of Hindutva and religious discrimination (especially against Muslims) has undermined India's democratic credentials and led to violent communal clashes. In turn, this vindicates the Pakistani two-nation theory and fuels further tensions within the subcontinent.

9 This essay uses the terms "Indian administered Kashmir" and "Pakistan administered Kashmir" rather than more politically sensitive terms such India occupied Kashmir or Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The Chinese administered portion of the state of Kashmir is Aksai Chin area and Shaksam Valley that China and Pakistan settled in 1963; however, India rejects the settlement, lays claim to the area, and considers the settlement illegal. This area now links China and Pakistan via Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan administered Kashmir).

Pakistan is the weakest leg of the triangular dynamics in Southern Asia. Situated at the confluence of three geopolitical powerhouses (Russia, China, and India) and at the crossroads of South and Central Asia, Pakistan is both blessed and cursed by geography. Faced with acute domestic crises and regional threats, alliance politics have come naturally to Pakistan. For example, in the 1950s, the United States offered it partnership in Western-led alliances in the Cold War. Whereas the United States sought to "contain" the communist axis between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and People's Republic of China, Pakistan's prime objective was to survive and balance against its archrival India. These fundamental cross-purposes and disconnect in the strategic objectives of the United States and Pakistan resulted in disenchantment with each other that gradually waned their alliance.

The 1962 China-India Himalayan border war brought Pakistan and China together with India as the common enemy and set in motion the triangular dynamics in the South Asian conundrum.[10] Realizing that alliance with a distant great power (that is, the United States) might not be of help when in trouble with India, Pakistan sought a special relationship with China, a neighboring rising power. The 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars over Kashmir and East Pakistan, respectively, cemented the China-Pakistan relations, especially after the latter war led to Pakistan's dismemberment and Bangladesh's birth.[11]

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Triangular Nuclear Contest

China, India, and Pakistan began their respective nuclear programs a decade apart from each other with the previously mentioned undercurrents affecting the decisions to go nuclear. Each of the three have experienced national humiliation, abandonment of allies, and have a strong sense of national identity or prestige of power associated with nuclear weapons. [12] China's quest for nuclear weapons began in the 1950s after the Taiwan Straits military crisis (Quemoy-Matsu conflict) with the United States.

10 Pakistan and China quickly settled their border problems immediately after the India-China war. In March 1963, Pakistan and China agreed to delineate the border between China's Xinjiang province and Gilgit-Baltistan. Division of Pakistan administered Kashmir (Azad Kashmir). India protested the agreement blaming Pakistan for ceding Kashmir territory to China that India has continuously claimed. See Garver, Protracted Contest.

11 Small, The China-Pakistan Axis.

12 Feroz Hassan Khan, Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb, Stanford University Press, 2012: 7-10

Long memory of centuries of colonial exploitation, humiliation at the hands of Japanese occupation in the 1930s–1940s, and the Soviet Union's abandonment of China at the peak of Cold War, reinforced China's determination to acquire a sovereign nuclear deterrent and ever since self-reliance became the foundation of the Chinese nuclear policy.

Like China, India is determined to revive its lost pride and take what it perceives as its rightful place in the world. Believing itself to be the inheritor of the British raj and imbibed with the premonition of past glory, India staunchly believes nuclear weapons confer prestige in world politics and this feeds its ambition of achieving great power status. India refused to sign the nonproliferation treaty (NPT) when it came into force and conducted its first nuclear test in 1974, which laid the foundation of nuclear competition in South Asia.[13] India's nuclear test in 1974 galvanized the Pakistani nuclear program, shifting it decisively from a hedging capability into a full-scale nuclear weapons program.[14] In addition to sharing centuries of Muslim rule with India in the subcontinent, Pakistan is the only nuclear-armed Muslim country today and very proud of its struggle of attaining independence and achieving nuclear capability against significant obstacles and nonproliferation challenges. Pakistan staunchly believes nuclear capability is at the core of its sovereignty, national security strategy, and survivability.

Nuclear Doctrinal Dissonance

After acquiring nuclear weapons, China, India, and Pakistan adopted minimal deterrent strategies. All three, however, have continued to advance their deterrence capabilities regardless of their spoken intent. For instance, China need only have a credible minimal deterrent to deter India but concerns over U.S. advances, especially in ballistic missile defense (BMD), have forced China to question whether its retaliation would be assured. Presently, India is seriously considering decoupling its nuclear policy with separate pledges for China and Pakistan. There is ongoing debate within India about keeping its first use option open against Pakistan (possibly in response to Pakistan's full spectrum deterrence posture) while maintaining a nuclear no first use policy against China.[15]

13 Chinese nuclear tests happened two years after India's humiliating defeat in 1962 border war. The defeat continues to have a huge psychological impact on India's national security and its approach to nuclear proliferation. See Jacques C Hymans, The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity. Emotions, and Foreign Policy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 171.

14 In the 1970s, there were other developments at the nexus of China, India, and Pakistan region that affected policies in this critical Cold War period. A series of coups in Afghanistan transpired throughout the decade and culminated in the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. The Islamic Revolution in Iran overthrew the shah of Iran and crises between United States and Iran began. Each of these developments brought Pakistan into the eye of the storm and catapulted its strategic significance, which impacted U.S.-Pakistan relations both positively and negatively.

15 Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang, "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities," International Security 43, no. 3 (Winter 2018/19): 7–52, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00340

India's increasingly diversified strategic force posture and historical plans threatening to preemptively snuff out Pakistan's nuclear facilities,[16] regardless of its rhetoric focusing on China and marginalizing the Pakistani threat, suggest otherwise.

Try as it might, India cannot seem to de-hyphenate itself from Pakistan.[17]

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China borders four nuclear states: Russia, India, Pakistan, and the DPRK. In addition, Japan and the ROK are under the extended deterrence of the United States. In China's threat perception, U.S. pressure to contain China is increasing, and, consequently, Beijing's primary focus is on the shifting nature of its strategic relations with the United States. China's nuclear relationship with India is a new driver affecting Chinese strategic thinking.

China's nuclear policy has been to maintain a "lean and effective" force posture based on self-reliance, an emphasis on no-first use doctrine, and minimum deterrence force posture sufficient to pose risks of second-strike. China seems to be shifting from this posture to a more assured, second-strike capability. Its primary reliance on medium and intermediate range delivery systems is moving toward intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs, both road-mobile and silo-based), multiple independent re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) missiles, and nuclear-powered submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).[18] These transformations have induced strategic anxiety in India, which has embarked on its own strategic modernization program, which in turn has affected Pakistan. Consequently, a strategic chain reaction in Asia drives competition and shifts in doctrines and nuclear strategies.

16 Khan, Eating Grass, 230.

17 Small, The China-Pakistan Axis, 32, 47–65.

18 Eric Heginbotham et al., China's Evolving Nuclear Deterrent: Major Drivers and Issues for the United States, RR-1628-AF (Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1628.html

After the 1998 nuclear tests, in a letter to President Clinton, India Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee justified India's nuclear test decision on the perception of the twin threat posed by China and Pakistan. India's declared doctrine includes three key elements:

1. Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrence force posture that will remain dynamic and subject to threat conditions and change in environment.
2. A policy of no-first use and massive retaliation in response to first nuclear strike on India's territory or Indian forces anywhere.
3. India's right to retaliate with nuclear weapons in response to chemical and biological attack on India or Indian forces anywhere. [19]

It is quite clear that India's declared doctrine is flexible in interpretation, fluid in force goals, and conditional on a no-first-use policy. A no-first-use pledge is an unambiguous commitment that nuclear weapons will never be used unless the country suffers a first nuclear attack. However, India imposed two qualifiers to this policy. First, if India's military forces suffer nuclear attack "anywhere," it reserves the right to retaliate with nuclear response. India's second qualifier is nuclear retaliation against chemical or biological attack on Indian forces— again— anywhere. The term "anywhere" implies deterrent protection for the Indian military if it invades a neighboring country should that country retaliate with nuclear weapons.

India's credible minimum deterrence posture is dynamic; "minimum" includes ICBMs, SLBMs, MIRVs—or anything either China or Pakistan introduces in their inventory. The credibility of India's threat of "massive retaliation" is also questionable, given the tightly coupled geography of the subcontinent. [20] India's military conceived a concept of limited war under the nuclear umbrella and refined its operational concept to launch a sudden cross-border military operation purportedly in response to terror attack in which India believes Pakistan is complicit. Colloquially referred to as Cold Start, this combined land/ air operations concept calls for shallow maneuvers across Pakistan using intense firepower to inflict maximum destruction and to terminate a war on India's terms without crossing Pakistani nuclear threshold.

Pakistan nuclear policy is the opposite of India's and China's policy. Pakistan has decided not to declare any official nuclear doctrine and adopted a policy of deliberate ambiguity. However, Pakistan is not entirely opaque in its declaration on nuclear use. Several publicly declared statements from leaders and interviews and speeches from serving officials of Pakistan Strategic Plans Division (SPD) have explained the contours of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine.

19 "The Cabinet Committee on Security Reviews operationalization of India's Nuclear Doctrine," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 4, 2003, https://bit.ly/3jrRvgG

20 For example, were Pakistan to use battlefield nuclear weapons against invading Indian forces on Pakistani soil, Pakistan considers it inconceivable that India would "massively retaliate," which would veritably mean causing "unacceptable damage" to India itself.

Pakistan nuclear doctrine is explicit that its nuclear weapon capability is India-specific and retains the options of nuclear first use as last resort to deter a major conventional war.

Like that of India, Pakistan's "credible minimum deterrence" posture has no fixed ceiling and is dynamic to respond to qualitative and quantitative threat (from India). Pakistan has also declared four criteria that would determine its decision on nuclear use: loss of territory, destruction of armed forces, strangulation of economy (naval blockade), and domestic instability.[21] These thresholds are deliberately ambivalent and clearly intended to deter the Indian military and to offset conventional asymmetry with India. In answer to India's Cold Start, Pakistan has introduced battlefield nuclear weapons with a short range of 60 kilometers and announced its nuclear capability will counter a full spectrum of threats at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.[22]

The doctrinal disconnect between China, India, and Pakistan has created an arms race in Southern Asia. While China and India maintain a no-first-use policy and Pakistan refuses to pledge a no-first use commitment, all three are engaged in strategic modernization that includes entanglements of dual-use delivery capabilities in missiles and aircraft. By creating greater ambiguity in warheads, the distinction between warfighting and deterrence is further blurred.

Given that three interconnected nuclear capable countries are locking horns at the confluence of disputed territory of Kashmir in South Asia, it is imperative to construct an architecture of strategic restraint regime that ensures deterrence stability. In the next sections, I examine the efficacy of existing structures of risk reduction or conflict management following which I propose a strategic restraint regime for larger stability and balance in Southern Asia.

21 Paolo Cotta-Ramusino and Maurizio Martellini, "Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Stability and Nuclear Strategy in Pakistan," interview with Khalid Kidwai (Como, Italy: Landau Network-Centro Volat, 2002), https://pugwash.org/2002/01/14/report-on-nuclear-safety-nuclear-stability-and-nuclear-strategy-in-pakistan/

22 Feroz Hassan Khan, "Going Tactical: Pakistan's Nuclear Posture and Implications for Stability," IFRI Proliferation Papers, No. 53, September 2015, French Institute of International Relations at https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/proliferation-papers/going-tactical-pakistans-nuclear-posture-

Wikimedia Commons Image

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Section 3.

ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTING PEACE AGREEMENTS AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

The absence of adequate peace and security architectures and risk reduction mechanisms between the two South Asian dyads is a major concern and a cause for fragile stability. Given the frequency and intensity of crises between Pakistan and India, the probability of limited war escalating into a deeper war is far greater than one between China and India. Generally, the border between India and China had remained dormant for almost three decades until the Doklam (2017) and Ladakh (2020) border crises erupted. Furthermore, India and China have a good track record of deescalating crises through political engagement, but they have made no progress toward settling the bilateral disputes.

India views China as a strategic rival and competes with China to achieve strategic parity. In any tactical conflict with China, India's policy is to diffuse the crisis through diplomatic engagement. For its part, China dismisses India's threat perception and gives little countenance to any notion of strategic parity with India. China's policy is to develop good relations with India and with all of India's neighbors through economic investments, including its BRI.

In contrast, India views Pakistan more in tactical terms; its current policy is to diplomatically isolate Pakistan and bear down with its military preponderance in response to alleged asymmetric use of proxy forces and its resistance to challenge India's hegemonic ambitions in South Asia. India is prepared to challenge Pakistani nuclear deterrent and engage Pakistan into a debilitating arms race, hoping that Pakistan would strategically exhaust itself. On its part, rather than getting entrapped in an arms competition with India, Pakistan has deepened its strategic partnership with China to balance against India. Over the past several years, India has perceived China and Pakistan as a collusive threat, which means that in any tactical conflict against either China or Pakistan, India's response could be on worse case assumption that could potentially move tactical level crises into a strategic dimension.[23]

23 Snehesh Alex Phillip, "Don't Try Any Misadventure amid India's Tensions with China, CDS Rawat," The Print (New Delhi), September 3, 2020, https://theprint.in/defence/dont-try-any-misadventure-amid-indias-tensions-with- china-cds-rawat-warns-pakistan/495246/. Also see Rajat Pandit, "Two Front War is Real Scenario, Says General Rawat," Economic Times, July 18, 2018, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/two-front-war-is-a- real-scenario-says-general-bipin-rawat/articleshow/56324336.cms

For all these reasons, it is necessary that China, India, and Pakistan undertake a trialogue as soon as possible. Nuclear armed states acting on exaggerated threat perceptions raise domestic fears and public expectations for national security. As in all previous crises in the Southern Asia, domestic political circumstances will likely remain the proximate cause for crisis escalation. Media hype during recent crises in the region riles up public emotions, wherein political expectations are expressed in terms of winning or losing. Decision makers in democracies come under intense pressure to explain what kind of concessions political leaders made to the adversary for crisis de-escalation. Of late, during a crisis, public pressure on political and military leadership pushes each country into deeper commitment traps than the policymakers would have otherwise desired.

Conversely, public expectations may greatly increase the stakes in peace and conflict resolution. Hopes peak when a dialogue process is making positive strides and all sides are engaged in innovating new CBMs. Public opinion thereby amplifies the dark and light moods that affect political leaders and complicates their task amid delicate negotiations.

Both dyads have made several attempts to create a peace and security framework to dampen the competition and build trust and CBMs. An examination of the past and existing arrangements reveals those measures that have been adopted indicate desire amongst all three states for durable peace and security and public demand to eschew violence and defuse crises.

Peace and Security Attempts: China and India

1. Panchsheel

India emerged from the post-colonial world as the largest country in South Asia, and its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, set the principles of India's foreign policy objectives in the context of the Cold War by declaring that "a deliberate policy of friendship with other countries goes farther in gaining security than almost anything else."[24] Despite being criticized for appeasing China, Nehru remained firm on his vision. Along with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, he signed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, or Panchsheel, in 1954. Nehru's vision became the central pillar of India's stated foreign policy philosophy: non-aggression, non- interference, peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and mutual benefit in all interactions.[25]

24 Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946–April 1961 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961), 79, http://archive.org/details/indiasforeignpol00nehr

25 Priya Chacko, Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004 (New York: Routledge, 2013).

The 1962 war derailed the Panchsheel foundations of India-China relations. For several years after the 1962 war, smaller scale China-India border skirmishes sporadically continued until the mid-1970s and a brief standoff in 1986–1987.[26] China-India relations accelerated between 1988–1996 after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi paid a visit to China. After this visit, the two nations held five summits that resulted in two major agreements that laid the foundations of China-India peace prospects.

2. India-China Border Agreements: 1993 and 1996

On September 7, 1993, Prime Ministers Narasimha Rao and Li Peng signed the "Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)" at Beijing's Great Hall of the People. This agreement was acclaimed as the "first major conventional arms control agreement between two Asian countries without any role played by third countries."[27] This China-India agreement comprises nine articles that developed joint consensus to resolve the boundary question "through peaceful and friendly consultations."[28] Both agreed to keep border military presence "to a minimum level compatible with the friendly and good neighbourly relations," not to "undertake military exercises in mutually identified zones beyond agreed levels," and to "give the other notification of military exercises" along the border. [29] Under the agreement, both sides were required to initiate a process to "appoint diplomats and military experts to formulate, through mutual consultations, implementation measures for the present agreement."[30] The establishment of a group of experts made this CBM inherently dynamic and progressive and also provided a process to address frictions. In essence, this agreement provides space for the political leadership of China and India to focus on improving bilateral their relationship.[31]

26 The last border military exchange was in 1975 (Sikkim). In 1979, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then Indian foreign minister visited Beijing, which was the first visit in post Mao era. Another military standoff occurred in 1986–1987 in the Sumdorong Chu valley (Wangdung area). The border crisis stepped up again after Modi regime took power in 2014.

27 Swaran Singh, "China-Indian CBMs: Problems and Prospects," Strategic Analysis, 20, no. 4 (July 1997) 543–559, https://www.idsa-india.org/an-jul-4.html.

28 Singh, China- India CBMs.

29 Singh, China- India CBMs.

30 Singh, China- India CBMs.

31 Singh, "China-Indian CBMs;" Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu and Jing-dong Yuan, "Resolving the China-Indian Border Dispute: Building Confidence through Cooperative Monitoring," Asian Survey 41, no. 2 (2001): 351–376, https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/14218788.PDF

In November 1996, India and China signed a second CBM agreement that comprised twelve articles during President Jiang Zemin's visit to New Delhi. Many analysts consider the agreement to be a veritable "no-war pact." [32] This agreement included additional military CBMs and specifically pledged that "neither side shall use its military capability against the other side."[33] Besides reaffirming commitments "to speed up process of clarification" and commence "exchange of maps indicating their respective perceptions... as soon as possible" (Article X), [34] the 1996 agreement also provided principles of "mutual and equal security" and mutual understanding on military forces deployments of such considerations and "parameters such as the nature of terrain, road communications, and other infrastructure and time taken to induct/de- induct troops and armaments."[35] An important element of the agreement pertained to categorizing offensive weapons to which both sides agreed to prioritize withdrawal and "exchange data on the military forces" to reduce deployments.[36] A major CBM in the China-India agreement was to "avoid holding large scale military exercises involving more than one division (15,000 troops) in close proximity to the LAC." Both sides agreed to inform the other side on the "type, level, planned duration and areas of exercise" if it involved more than a brigade (5,000 troops) and de-induct "within five days of completion" and provide clarifications to the other whenever either side sought. Yet another important CBM in the 1996 agreement included prohibition of any use of "hazardous chemicals, conduct blast operations or hunt with guns or explosives within two kilometers" of the LAC, unless it is "part of developmental activities" in which case the other side shall be informed "through diplomatic channels or by convening a border personnel meeting, preferably five days in advance."[37]

32 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas," Peacemaker UN, 1996,

33 Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

34 Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

35 Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

36 The offensive weapons included armored tanks, infantry combat vehicles, artillery guns (including howitzers) with 75 mm or bigger caliber, mortars with 120 mm or bigger caliber, surface-to-surface missiles, surface-to-air missiles. In addition, two agree that no combat aircraft which "include fighter, bomber, reconnaissance, military trainer, armed helicopter and other armed aircraft" shall be allowed to fly "within ten kilometers" of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) "except by prior permission" from the other side. Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

37 Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

The 1996 border mechanism agreement required both sides to "strengthen exchanges and cooperation between their military personnel and establishments," designate points for border meetings, establish "telecommunication links" between these border points, and establish "step-by-step medium and high-level contacts between the border authorities."[38] China and India agreed to cooperate with each other on any land or air intrusions "because of unavoidable circumstances like natural disasters" and "extend all possible assistance" to each other.[39] Finally, both agreed to establish a "China-India joint working group" on boundary questions and to commence "mutual consultations" to implement the agreement.[40]

The comprehensive character of the 1993 and 1996 agreements generated an atmosphere of peace and amity in which the People's Liberation Army-Air Force (PLAAF) and Indian Air Force (IAF) attempted to create a code of conduct and began improving relations, that is, the IAF invited PLAAF officers to visit). [41] In the same spirit, the Indian and Chinese navies also began initiatives to build confidence and remove suspicions and doubts. There were suggestions for joint naval exercises, and India invited China's envoy to visit the Indian naval base at Port Blair in Andaman and Nicobar.[42]

By the mid-1990s, China and India had normalized relations and clearly desired a peaceful resolution of border disputes and intent to engage in economic activities, turning Asian rivalry into healthy competition. China was surprised when India cited China as a principal reason for its decision to conduct nuclear tests in 1998, which underscores that the China-India issues are deeper than the apparent warming of relations manifested in the two border agreements.[43]

38 Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

39 Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

40 Peacemaker UN, "Agreement."

41 "Officers of PLAAF Have Been Visiting Indian Air Force Bases," Times of India, December 22, 1995, quoted in Swaran Singh, "Sino-Indian CBMs: Problems and Prospects," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, accessed November 5, 2020, https://www.idsa-india.org/an-jul-4.html

42 Singh, "China-Indian CBMs."

43 Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's letter to U.S. President Bill Clinton also alleged China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation as another reason for India decision to conduct nuclear tests. "Nuclear Anxiety; India's Letter to Clinton on the Nuclear Testing," New York Times, May 13, 1988, https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/13/world/nuclear-anxiety-indian-s-letter-to-clinton-on-the-nuclear-testing.html

> *The China-India border crises in 2017 (Doklam) and Ladakh (2020) indicate that, despite existence of structure to prevent violence and crisis escalation, the two peace agreements are insufficient for settlement of conflict.*

The China-India border crises in 2017 (Doklam) and Ladakh (2020) indicate that, despite existence of structure to prevent violence and crisis escalation, the two peace agreements are insufficient for settlement of conflict. It seems even more surprising that India and China went into a military crisis in summer 2020, when in January 2020, both countries had agreed to establish a military-to-military hotline between India's director-general military operations (DGMO) and China's Western Theatre Command.[44] It is unclear if the hotline was established when the Ladakh crises occurred, but it is

44 Shaurya Karanbir Gurung, "New India-China Military Hotline to Become Operational between DGMO and Western Theatre Command," Economic Times, January 11, 2020, https://bit.ly/3jtqDx3

clear that the China-India relationship is undergoing a downward spiral at a time when India-Pakistan tensions on the LoC in Kashmir continue to heat up following India's suppressive measures in Kashmir since August 2019. Lately, with the backdrop of the India-Pakistan military crisis in 2019 and the China- India crisis in 2020, Indian military leaders are more concerned about a two-front collusive threat from China and Pakistan. India's current policy is to decouple its dealing with China and Pakistan by reaching China diplomatically to diffuse the crisis but isolating and not engaging with Pakistan. India's policy is counterproductive, however, because it is only bringing China and Pakistan closer.

Peace and Security Attempts: India and Pakistan

The history of peace attempts between India and Pakistan begins immediately after partition and their war over Kashmir. The 1948 Kashmir war ended by dividing the Jammu and Kashmir state between India and Pakistan, and after their military forces ceased operations, they established the Cease-fire Line (CFL). Both sides entered into the Karachi Agreement of 1949 that established the code of conduct of the militaries at CFL—pending the final resolution of Kashmir under United Nations Security Council resolutions. [45] After the 1971 War, India and Pakistan signed the Simla Accord in July 1972 and, since then, the CFL became the LoC in Kashmir.

This accord brought a decade of peace throughout the 1970s; however, from the 1980s onward, India and Pakistan have undergone a series of military crises.[46]

45 One of most durable India-Pakistan treaty was agreed under aegis of World Bank in 1960 known as Indus Water Treaty, which standardizes river water distribution from Kashmir into Pakistan's Indus water basin. "Fact Sheet: The Indus Waters Treaty 1960 and the Role of the World Bank," June 11, 2018, World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/brief/fact-sheet-the-indus-waters-treaty-1960-and-the-world-bank

46 India and Pakistan differ in interpretation of the forum on Kashmir. Pakistan insists Kashmir remains a dispute under United Nations Security Council resolutions to be resolved after a plebiscite. India is adamant that the council's resolutions are superseded by the 1972 Simla Agreement, which binds the two countries to settle all disputes bilaterally.

1. Non-Attack on Nuclear Installations and 1991 Military CBMs

In December 1985, Pakistani President Zia-ul Haq visited New Delhi and concluded agreement in principle on "non-attack on nuclear installations," which was eventually formalized under Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi in December 1988. Both prime ministers also agreed to establish a "hotline." [47] While a hotline between the two prime ministers did not materialize, the two militaries established hotlines at their respective military headquarters known as the DGMOs (Director Generals of Military Operations) that have been functional since 1990. Importantly, the military structures of India and Pakistan are similar compared to those between China and India, and in the India-Pakistan case there is regular DGMO exchange every Tuesday.

Not long after prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi made their agreement in December 1988, a new crisis erupted in Kashmir in the summer of 1989. This crisis again brought India and Pakistan close to another war. Over the next year, the crisis was diffused through U.S. intervention, which underscores the lack of any bilateral mechanism to end crises between the two. While relations between India and Pakistan remained strained as the Kashmir uprising was on all-time high, both countries agreed to several military CBMs in 1991. [48] In April 1991, India and Pakistan signed two military agreements in New Delhi "prior notification of military exercises" and " prevention of the violation of Airspace."[49] Taken together, the 1991 Military CBMs, DGMOs hotlines, and the Karachi Agreement of 1949 on LoC on Kashmir provide both countries with robust understanding to regulate and clarify the code of conduct of the two militaries. Yet, as is the case between China and India, the military CBMs between India and Pakistan have proven insufficient to prevent numerous military crises between the two.

2. Vajpayee Initiatives: The Lahore Agreement (1999) and Islamabad Declaration (2004)

In the mid-1990s, India's Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral took a bold initiative of reaching out to India's neighbors to resolve conflicts; the new cordial approach became famously known as the Gujral Doctrine. In this new spirit of forging regionalism, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif agreed to hold a "composite dialogue" on all issues affecting peace and security in the region. [50]

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47 The hotline is a quick, reliable, and ever-ready communication link available to the leaders particularly in a military emergency. "India and Pakistan Agree Not to Hit nuclear plants, Los Angeles Times, January 1, 1989, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-01-01-mn-289-story.html

48 "Confidence Building and Nuclear Risk-Reduction Measures in South Asia," Henry L Stimson Center, June 14, 2012, https:/www.stimson.org/2012/confidence-building-and-nuclear-risk-reduction-measures-south-asia/

49 Two military CBMs were the Agreement on Advance Notification on Military Exercises, Maneuvers, and Troop Movements and the Agreement on Prevention of Airspace Violations and for Permitting Overflights and Landings by Military Aircraft.

50 "Analysis of Pak- India Composite Dialogue, IPRI Newspaper article, September 2015, Islamabad Policy Research Institute at https://ipripak.org/analysis-of-pak-india-composite-dialogue/

Gujral's successor, Prime Minister Vajpayee, refashioned Gujral's policy with an aggressive diplomacy towards neighbors, particularly with Pakistan, adding pragmatism and greater zeal to regional peace initiatives. After the nuclear tests, while both India and Pakistan were under nuclear sanctions, Prime Minister Vajpayee took a dramatic step of riding on a bus across the border into Pakistan and brought a peace initiative, which was signed between the two leaders as the famous "Lahore Declaration 1999." [51] By far, the Lahore Declaration of February 1999 is the most comprehensive agreement between India and Pakistan, the significance of which is all the greater because it was conducted after the 1998 nuclear tests and embedded both sides' best hope for peace and security on nuclear subcontinent. Within a few months, however, this dramatic peace initiative derailed on the heights of Kargil when India and Pakistan fought a short war in the summer of 1999. The Kargil crisis raised international concerns of nuclear conflagration in South Asia and shook the trust embedded in the 1991 military CBMs and high promise of the Lahore Declaration.

Nevertheless, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee continued to pursue peace throughout his tenure from 1998–2004. In this period, Vajpayee again took the initiative of inviting President Pervez Musharraf, the architect of the Kargil war in 1999, to a summit in Agra in summer 2001, but the two sides failed to reach an agreement. Violence in Kashmir has continued to derail peace efforts throughout the post nuclear test period. A terror attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 resulted in a 10-month military standoff between Pakistan and India in 2001–2002, which ended with a ceasefire agreement on LoC in 2003. Just before Vajpayee's term came to an end, he visited Islamabad for a meeting of the regional organization South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and reached an agreement, the Islamabad Declaration, in January 2004, that included peaceful resolution of conflict.

Vajpayee's successor, Manmohan Singh, continued peace efforts with President Musharraf through backdoor channels for nearly four years. During this period, India and Pakistan came close to agreement on conflict resolution over Kashmir and informally agreed on a roadmap of Kashmir solution, which became known as the Musharraf formula. Once again, New Delhi and Islamabad failed to bring to fruition the understanding both leaders had reached privately.[52] Since then, India and Pakistan have drifted so far apart that bringing them back onto a peaceful track is a colossal undertaking.

51 "Lahore Declaration," Nuclear Threat Initiative, last updated February 21, 1999, https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/lahore-declaration/

52 Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove: An Insider Account of Pakistan's Foreign Relations Including Details of the Kashmiri Framework (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 297–353.

Section 4.

TRILATERAL STRATEGIC RESTRAINT REGIME

The historic Lahore Declaration of 1999 included the Lahore Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which laid down the basis of potential peace, security, and CBMs. As mentioned previously, India and Pakistan have a long track record of negotiating CBMs but lacked mechanisms for implementation.[53] One of the key reasons for failure to construct a security regime in South Asia is the continuing distrust between India and Pakistan and lately between China and India. Instead of reassuring the countries involved, CBMs lose effect when forward military deployment, unending violence, and aggressive military posturing continues.

Unpacking the China-India and India-Pakistan agreements reveals the nature of CBMs negotiated in the 1990s were similar, but India's approach to dealing with China is different than with Pakistan. Karan Sawny, an Indian scholar, observes,

> With China, India has had positive experiences with forces pulled back and tensions eased. India believes this is so because there is greater political will and common desire to normalize relations in the case of China but not so in the case with Pakistan.[54]

Apart from political will, India's and China's force deployments against each other have been far less threatening and non-violent until 2017 and 2020 compared to India and Pakistan along the LoC in Kashmir and international border, which involves cross-border firing and casualties.

Trilateral Strategic CBMs

In 1998 after the nuclear tests, Pakistan introduced the concept of establishing a regional strategic restraint regime (SRR) between India and Pakistan as a foundation of a peace and security architecture as the best way to ensure strategic stability. To date, Pakistan continues to offer India the SRR, which comprises three interlinked

53 The Karachi Agreement of 1949; Simla Accord of 1972; Lahore Agreement of 1999; and Islamabad Accord of 2004 are some of the impressive bilateral accords. The Lahore MOU seeks developing mechanism for the implementation of existing CBMs.

54 Karan R. Sawny, "The Prospects for Building a Peace Process Between India and Pakistan," in Conflict Resolution and Regional Cooperation in South Asia, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Imtiaz H Bokhari, eds. (Islamabad Policy Research Institute 2004): 32–40.

propositions: conflict resolution process, conventional force restraints, and nuclear restraints. Under this concept, the first leg envisages a political process of engaging in an uninterrupted process of dialogue until a negotiated resolution to the India- Pakistan conflict could be found. Progress on such steps would ensure a friendly and peaceful environment as envisaged in the premise of all previous agreements. The second leg proposes a conventional restraint arrangement, which includes subsuming the existing military CBMs and nuancing it into formal conventional restraint agreements such as the creation of low military force zones along the border, the identification of offensive forces, and the process of notification. The third leg proffers a formalized nuclear restraint agreement, recognizing the existing state of non-deployed nuclear force postures between India and Pakistan. The nuclear restraint includes limits on strategic weapons deployments and development as well as prevention of arms racing, such as missile development restraints on payload ranges, mutual understanding not to mate missile frame with live warheads, agreement not to produce or acquire submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBMs), and halt developing or deploying missile defense. Such a regime would prevent accidental launches, increase the safety coefficient in nuclear operations, and simplify nuclear management. In essence, the SRR would formalize deterrence stability through a South Asian version of mutually understood mutually assured destruction.[55]

India has continually rejected the proposal citing other security concerns (China) and national objectives; India therefore refuses to bind itself bilaterally with Pakistan. Also, India does not want restraints on its conventional force because it has preponderance over Pakistan but not against China. Pakistan therefore refuses to agree on nuclear restraint and retains its nuclear-use option to offset conventional force asymmetry.

> *Over two decades have passed since the Strategic Restraint Regime was originally proposed. Now that India fears a China-Pakistan collusion, a new trilateral strategic restraint framework is needed that includes China as well.*

55 Khan, Eating Grass, 296–301

Over two decades have passed since the SRR was originally proposed. Now that India fears a China-Pakistan collusion, a trilateral SRR is needed that includes China as well. A new framework involving political, economic, and strategic commitments from all three states, which takes into consideration the new geopolitical shifts and technological innovations, is becoming essential for stability. [56]

1. A process of two separate sets of conflict resolution;
2. economic progress and interdependency;
3. conventional force restraints including deployment limits and low force zones;
4. nuclear restraint arrangement involving doctrinal assurance, and non-alerting status; and
5. establishing a modernized nuclear hotline at the level of head of state.

The new quadrangle of conflict resolution, economic progress, conventional and nuclear restraint is the best way forward.

Principles for Creating Conditions for Strategic CBMs

In the case of China and India, the 1993 and 1996 Agreements include principles and mechanisms and, similarly, in the case of India and Pakistan, the Military CBMs of 1991 and the Lahore Declaration of 1999 provide precedents and a framework for structuring mutual agreements—either bilaterally or at some stage—trilaterally. It is important that highest-level civil and military leaders identify the most urgent issues of peace and security and agree on mechanisms to settle these issues. Furthermore, if leaders use economic liberalization measures as a primary instrument of upgrading interstate relations, economic stakeholders and constituencies will have incentives to maintain a climate of cooperation and investment. Emergence of interdependent economic networks and reliance on cross-border trade will transform the region from the existential security-centric relationship into one that is more of an economic-centric relationship.

56 In the new proposal, I have added economic progress to conflict resolution as fourth element along with conventional and nuclear restraints. Also See Feroz Hassan Khan, "Strategic Restraint Regime 2.0," in Michael Krepon and Julia Thompson eds., Deterrence Stability and Escalation Control in South Asia (Washington D.C.: Henry L Stimson Center, 2014), 161–174, https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Deterrence_Stability_Dec_2013_web_1.pdf

Should economic and trade imperatives displace traditional security priorities, the China- India-Pakistan confluence in Southern Asia could emerge as a hub of trading states instead of a hub of separatism, terrorism, and territorial disputes. Pakistan is geographically positioned to play a pivotal role in providing outlets and inlets for both Indian and Chinese trade. Should China, India, and Pakistan develop mutual trust and collective will to eschew security-centric thinking and prioritize trade, the regional and global markets are ready for a paradigm shift at the fulcrum of Central, South West, and South Asia.

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Just as there is a symbiotic relationship between conventional and nuclear deterrence, so too are conventional force and nuclear force CBMs interlinked. When countries face asymmetric threats from superior conventional forces, they rely on nuclear deterrence to offset the imbalance. India faces a similar asymmetric situation with China just as Pakistan sees asymmetry with India. Though China and India have pledged not to use nuclear weapons, India's security concerns are far from being alleviated. Rather, India now sees twin threats from China and Pakistan. One way to resolve this conundrum is for China, India, and Pakistan to consider five broad principles that are derived from previously agreed principles that all three states had signed in separate agreements:

- Create a befitting political environment with less tensions and amenability for peace and security.
- Refrain from the use of sub-conventional strategies and assure each other that force would not be used to resolve problems.
- Recognize that conventional force balance and physical posture of respective militaries directly affect nuclear deterrence posture.
- Agree to establish institutional mechanisms to tackle crisis-triggering events at the onset of crisis as the best way to prevent crisis escalation.
- Consider creating a trilateral framework that is unbiased from the consideration of other countries' threat assessments.

Kartarpur Corridor. Wikimedia Commons Image

Formal Trilateral Conventional Arms Control Agreements

As explained elsewhere in this paper, the doctrinal priorities of each of the three countries are different. India insists on negotiating a no-first use doctrinal agreement without any restrictions on conventional force. Pakistan is unlikely to agree to this "without shifts in the conventional balance of forces, requiring CBMs to demonstrate non-hostile intent."[57] China in any case has no interest in bilateral discussions on nuclear issues with India (or Pakistan). But as explained above, all three countries have agreed already to some form of conventional force CBMs with each other. Therefore, the best way forward to guarantee non-use of nuclear weapons is to evaluate the existing conventional force CBMs of the 1990s and transform them into a formal conventional force arms control agreement between China, India, and Pakistan and including shifts in technological maturations of present times.

Some of the key overlap between 1993/1996 China-India Agreements and 1991/ Lahore MOU are as follows:

- Consensus to resolve all disputes through peaceful and friendly consultations.
- Military presence at borders to an agreed upon minimum level compatible with nature of terrain, road communications, and infrastructure.
- Categorize offensive/strike forces and offensive weapons and identify low force zones and agree to limits of military exercises and timings for notification to all.
- Exchanges of military force data and establishment of leadership and military hotlines.
- Formulation of joint working groups to review, clarify, and resolve all issues under the agreements under guidance from civil and military leaderships.

57 Dalis Dassa Kaye, Talking to the Enemy: Track Two Diplomacy in the Middle East and South Asia (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation Study, 2007).

Military Doctrines

Army. Lately India has nuanced its Army's proactive doctrine (Cold Start) land operations to include surgical strikes involving special forces and combined land-air cross-border strikes.[58] The Pakistan army announced the Comprehensive Response Doctrine and its nuclear establishment laid out the full spectrum deterrence concept. The respective Indian and Pakistani concepts reduce confidence if not entirely contradict the existing CBMs. The conventional force and nuclear force doctrines of both countries are seemingly disconnected and deliberately ambiguous, which can induce escalatory pressures during crisis. A sustained discussion on "security concepts"—as ordained in the Lahore declaration of 1999—is now important.
China is now part of the equation, especially since India believes that China and Pakistan are actively collaborating against India.

Air Force. Given that the India-Pakistan crisis in February 2019 involved the two air forces, future crises are expected to be air-centric. Further, though India considers China as its principal threat, the majority of IAF activity and bases are on its western border, which increases the force readiness of the Pakistani air bases. It is about time to review the existing bilateral CBMs and discuss trilateral air force CBMs merging the 1991 and 1993/96 agreements.

Navy. China, India, and Pakistan may consider including incidents at sea analogous to the agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Chinese, Pakistani, and India navies operate in international waters and in the absence of agreed protocols, rules of engagements and maritime communications have a potential for unintended maritime crisis.

Given that India has introduced a sea-based nuclear deterrent and that Pakistan is fielding nuclear weapons aboard a diesel submarine, both of which complicate strategic stability, agreeing to an 'incidents at sea agreement' between all parties has become extremely important.[59]

Joint Military Working Groups. As explained above, in the 1996 agreement, India and China had already agreed on a joint working group to redress border issues. It is time for all three states to upgrade their military-to-military interactions to the highest level and create a dedicated channel of conversations between the military chiefs. For such an institutional arrangement, I propose that the military chiefs create military working groups comprising civil and military senior leaders to discuss issues on boundaries/ borders, revive and subsume existing CBMs and eschew military operations and activities

58 Arka Biswas, Surgical Strikes and Deterrence Stability in South Asia, ORF Occasional Paper No. 115 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2017), 7.

59 Muhammad Ali, "Maritime Issues Between Pakistan and India: Seeking Cooperation and Regional Stability," (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), 1-4.

that defeat the purpose of existing CBMs, and negotiate new military CBMs.[60] New CBMs should include emerging disruptive technologies such as cyber, artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons, and the possibility of entanglement of dual- use delivery means.

Non-Deployment of BMD and MIRVs. Another area where all three countries could agree to stall vertical proliferation of delivery means is to pledge not to deploy ballistic missile defense systems or multiple warhead missiles, which are deemed strategically destabilizing.[61] China, India, and Pakistan could formalize agreements of reporting to each other their respective peacetime garrisons of strategic missile units and expand flight testing notifications of all types of missiles including ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, MIRVs, space-launched vehicles, and sea-based missiles.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization and SAARC. In a recent article the respected Indian scholar Manpreet Sethi has suggested that China, India, and Pakistan formalize low-level alert levels that formalize the existing state of arsenals in all three countries and suggested all nuclear-armed states adopt such an agreement.[62] In 1998, when Pakistan originally proposed the SRR, it offered formalizing the existing non-alert status between India and Pakistan into a recessed nuclear posture. Endorsing Sethi's proposal of formalizing non-alert status, [63] I suggest that all three countries should start discussing this proposal of creating a framework on institutionalizing a non-alert arrangement in a specific geographic zone.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) could be the starting point for such a discussion where at least four major powers—Russia, China, India, and Pakistan—are members states. I propose declaring Southern Asia (including South Asia, Central Asia, Tibet, and Xinjiang) as a low-alert zone. Although short of a nuclear weapons-free zone, any agreements covering territories of SCO and SAARC states would be significant CBMs.

Trilateral Agreement of Non-attack on Nuclear Installations and National Command System. The 1988 India-Pakistan non-attack on nuclear installations agreement could be extended to include China. This extension would not only redress one of India's major concerns, but I also propose that the scope of the existing India-Pakistan non-attack agreement be expanded to include non-attack on nuclear command, control, and communication (NC3) including cyberspace. A trilateral non-attack agreement on

60 Feroz Hassan Khan, "Break the Impasse: Direct Talks Between Army Chiefs" in Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler and Liv Dowling eds., Off Ramps from Confrontation in Southern Asia (Washington D.C: Henry L Stimson Center, May 2009) 154- 161 at https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/OffRamps_Book_R5_WEB.pdf

61 For analysis of the cascading effect of missile defense, read Michael Krepon, "Missile Defense and the Asian Cascade," in Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia, ed. Michael Krepon, 237–270 (New York: Palgrave Macmillion, 2004).

62 Manpreet Sethi, Complexity of Achieving Strategic Stability in Southern Asia: An Indian Perspective, Policy Brief No. 90 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2020), https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/Publications/CRIStin-Pub/Complexities-of-Achieving-Strategic-Stability-in-Southern-Asia-An-Indian-Perspective

63 Manpreet Sethi, Complexity of Achieving Strategic Stability.

nuclear installations and NC3 along with formalization of a low-alert status suggested above, would be a monumental CBM that would give much resilience to Asian stability.

Dedicated Political and Military Hotlines. Once a series of strategic restraint agreements are formalized between the three countries, I recommend a dedicated hotline between the prime ministers and foreign offices. Current hotlines between Indian and Pakistani military headquarters do exist, and they have been very useful during peacetime with routine clarifications and following standard bureaucratic protocols. The existing hotlines between land-based military forces should be expanded to involve air and naval command centers as well.

Military hotlines can help deflate pressures during border crises and complement political and diplomatic hotlines to de-escalate military confrontation.

To reach any understanding on the above proposals, I suggest that the best forum to initiate such a dialogue process would be the SCO where all three countries are members. A peace process under the watch of the highest leadership in each capital is now becoming important. Meanwhile, all three states must include eschewing the asymmetric strategies against the other in letter and spirit of the SCO, whether it be in Xinjiang; Kashmir, Tibet, Baluchistan/ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Arunachal Pradesh, or anywhere else.

China Removes Objections. China's insistence of not discussing nuclear issues with India has been overtaken by geopolitical shifts, strategic modernization, and technological maturation. China should reconsider its policy and initiate a trilateral strategic dialogue with India and Pakistan to redress India's "collusive threat" perceptions, remove impediments in implementing existing CBMs, and discuss new CBMs—especially the implications of new technologies on strategic stability. Discussing strategic issues with India and Pakistan would not confer status to the two non-NPT states but is necessary for stability in Asia. Russia and the United States respectively ought to encourage such an initiative.

India Removes Objections. In the same vein, India must now give up its policy of objecting and resisting international community mediation in this conflict-laden and crisis-ridden region. The international community now has stakes in the triangular nature and technological complexities of the conflict. For its part, the international community should no longer defer to India's objection to external peace-brokers, whose role is necessary in forging Asian stability.

SCO Summit 2018. Wikimedia Commons Image

Role of International Players

The international community can play a major role first in recognizing that emerging threat perceptions of tri-junction of South Asia warrant attention.

> *It is time that the international community, especially the five nuclear weapons states, accept nuclear subcontinent as an existential reality. India and Pakistan must be brought into the folds of the nuclear world order so they can undertake obligations and stakes in the non-proliferation regime.*[64]

It is time that the international community, especially the five nuclear weapons states, accept nuclear subcontinent as an existential reality. India and Pakistan must be brought into the folds of the nuclear world order so they can undertake obligations and stakes in the non-proliferation regime.

64 India is a member of three export control regimes: the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Australia Group, and the Wassenaar Arrangement. Both India and Pakistan are vying for membership in the Nuclear Supplier's Group. See Feroz Hassan Khan, "Burying the Hatchet: The Case for a 'Normal' Nuclear South Asia," Arms Control Today, 46, no. 2 (March 2016), https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2016-03/features/burying-hatchet-case-%E2%80%98normal%E2%80%99-nuclear-south-asia

Renegotiate and Expand Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces to Asia. After 30 years of strategic arms control, the United States and Russia were unable to extend the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty that was one of the epic arms control agreements in the Cold War. Apart from differing interpretations between Russia and the United States, one of the rationales was that the former treaty did not include China. The INF treaty is open for renegotiating. Should China agree to negotiate, I propose that India and Pakistan be included in the discussion. It would make no sense that three major powers renegotiate terms of new INF and not include affected countries in South Asia.

Expanding the Asian Missile Regime. Separate missile notification agreements between the United States and Russia, China and Russia, and India and Pakistan already exist. The 2005 India-Pakistan flight pre-notification agreement is an important CBM, but it is limited to ballistic missiles only. It does not include the additional families of missiles, including cruise missiles, hypersonic cruise, and MIRVs that are now or likely to be in the inventory of both South Asian nuclear-armed states.

American scholar Frank O'Donnell has proposed a novel CBM of integrating the missile flight-test notification between five nuclear states: United States, Russia, China, India, and Pakistan. [65] Endorsing O'Donnell's proposal, I suggest expanding the flight-testing to included space launch vehicles (SLVs) outside of which all missile tests must be notified in several stages. As a first step, I propose bringing India and Pakistan into the existing Russia-China missile agreement that would be best discussed under the aegis of SCO. [66] Further, India, Pakistan, and China should also be brought into a new version of "non-interference with national technical means" clause that are embedded in the US-Soviet/Russia treaties. The 1988 United States-Russia pre-notification agreements could be integrated into this unified missile regime. The merger of the three pairings would go a long way in stabilizing not only the trilateral region but also cover all of Asia.

Trilateral Asian ABM Treaty. One of the key elements of assuring strategic stability in the first nuclear age has been the creation of mutual vulnerability and assured retaliation through the survivability of nuclear forces in the face of a nuclear first strike.

65 Frank O' Donnell, "Launching an Expanded Missile Flight-Testing Regime," South Asian Voices, October 19, 2019, https://southasianvoices.org/launching-an-expanded-missile-flight-test-notification-regime/#easy-footnote-%20bottom-6-11560

66 China and Russia have only committed to inform each other of flight-tests of ballistic missiles with a 2,000 km plus range and a trajectory approaching their border. Donnell, "Launching an Expanded Missile."

Manpreet Sethi and Happymon Jacob, two established scholars from India, have suggested a trilateral anti-ballistic missile treaty that would reduce vertical proliferation and increase confidence in stability. [67]

In 1998, Pakistan had proposed a bilateral anti-ballistic missile treaty between India and Pakistan (as part of its SRR proposal). Now both China and India have embarked in acquiring ballistic missile defenses and Pakistan is the only one that has thus far not indicated pursuing it, which makes one country vulnerable and tilts the offense-defense balance in Southern Asia. A trilateral discussion on Asian ABM involving all three countries is now important.

Multilateral Naval CBMs. All three countries have significant maritime concerns since concepts such as "Indo-Pacific Region" and "Maritime Silk Road" have emerged. In addition, naval modernizations, port and harbor developments (Gwadar, Hambantota, etc.), and associated maritime activities are causing anxieties in all countries in South Asia. Most important of all are concerns arising with the introduction of sea-based strategic deterrents. The comingling of conventional and nuclear capable systems in the Indian Ocean and the absence of any professional interaction of those responsible for operating these nuclear forces is a huge void. India, China, and Pakistan need an agreed framework to discuss concepts of operations, rules of engagements, command and control issues, etc., and to commence discussions on new naval CBM activities and the roles of navies in the new strategic environment in the Indian Ocean.

67 Sethi, Complexity of Achieving Strategic Stability; Happymon Jacob, "Time to Consider A Trilateral Asian ABM Treaty," South Asian Voices, June 18, 2019, https://southasianvoices.org/time-to-consider-a-trilateral-asian-abm- treaty/. Also see Khan, Eating Grass.

Section 5.

CONCLUSION

Since the rise of the Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping as leaders in India and in China respectively, the triangular conflict in South Asia has intensified. For the past three decades India and Pakistan engaged in cross-border military crises, military mobilizations, and standoffs. The intensity and frequency of cross-LoC military crises (including air force combat) also increased in the past five years. As analyzed previously, the China-India and India-Pakistan rivalries are unlikely to resolve given continued border tensions and contested maritime interests in the Indian Ocean.

Nevertheless, there are *three* potential strategic futures in South Asia:

The first future involves *intensification of the China-Indian border* tensions that engulfs the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir, which leads to a broader escalation into maritime domain. A second future is one in which *relative status quo is maintained* with all sides failing to agree on any negotiable position on conflict resolution but informally understanding not to escalate conflict into a broader war. Such future leaves open sporadic border skirmish and continuing tensions between the three countries but no serious prospect for issue resolution. A third future could become possible should all three countries reach some form of *modus vivendi and proactively seek cooperation.* Such a future would lower tensions and commence dialogue leading to a sustained peace process.

The trilateral strategic restraint proposal advanced above is only feasible if the third future materializes. All sides could then agree to a grand bargain to finally settle the disputed border regions on common denominator and develop shared maritime interests in the Indian Ocean. All three sides have core interests in combatting terrorism and maintaining free trade in the global commons along with good reason to cooperate in multilateral forums on a wide range of global and regional issues. The possibility of such a cooperative future would most probably happen only with the facilitation of other major powers.

To achieve such a level of trust and confidence seems a long way away today, even though China, India, and Pakistan share a clear mutual interest in maintaining strategic stability and recognize the costs of conflict and benefits of cooperation. They have had shared differences for decades, which makes it very challenging for their leaders to seize the moment and take initiatives for cooperation—especially since all countries are experiencing the impact of Covid-19. To jump-start such a future, I suggest that India–China and India–Pakistan commence separate bilateral dialogues to consider the above

strategic CBMs. In the next stage the three should commence a trialogue on the agreed bilateral CBMs and merge them into a comprehensive trilateral agreement.

Unfortunately, entrenched cognitive biases and low probability of visionary of like-minded leadership emerging at the same time in all three states makes such a positive future unlikely in the short term. The most likely future is one of continuing the current trajectory of land/air cross-border skirmishes and maritime competition while seeking cooperation in areas wherever possible. In sum, the three countries would be competing as well as seeking cooperation on lowest common denomination—somewhere between the status quo and increased competition with strategic balancing and deepening alliances.

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