

Understanding Role of Security Dilemma in South Asia: Implications for Strategic Stability

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ABSTRACT

Security Dilemma is a phenomenon in International Relations most typically associated to Realist School of thought and particularly to Structural Realism. It is a concept that entails a predominant notion that states in global international structure rely on their own potentials and considering that realist international order is anarchic, there are often chances where relative gains of one state prejudice relative gains of another. Security Dilemma is a byproduct of actions and reactions of contending state actors built around their national security architecture. It can be understood to be a combination of strategic decision-making and fractures therein caused by reciprocating maneuvers by adversaries. Security dilemma in international relations has taken roots from the Cold War where bipolarity was seen as a potent equalizer through brinkmanship. Security dilemma in such Cold War context was built around Massive Retaliation Doctrines being too vulnerable to avert risk reduction and a total erosion of deterrence capability and credibility. Pakistan and India, have often relied on Cold War stratagem to achieve their strategic equilibrium which makes up a dominant portion of South Asia's security dilemma. In this paper, we will examine the paradigms of Security Dilemma and prospective strategies to manage the spiral effect on strategic equilibrium in South Asia. This paper will also place focus on various instances where Security Dilemma remained operable and played a role in transformation of strategic dimensions between Pakistan and India. The aim of this research is to operationalize the necessity of security dilemma oriented reactionary responses in South Asia and the consequent effect on bilateralism between Pakistan and India. The paper will rely on constructivism and structural realist paradigms to understand state behavior from a communicative standpoint.

Keywords: *Security Dilemma, Cold War, International Relations, Structural Realism, Constructivism, South Asia, Strategic Equilibrium*

Introduction to Security Dilemma and Strategic Stability

Nuclear deterrence is a complex undertaking where nature of adversarial engagements between two or more state partners is substituted by their ability to initiate equilibrium. It also entails that both states would refrain from eroding trust and confidence building through communicability while still preserving credibility of their deterrent capabilities. The major consideration is to simultaneously offer a strong consequence-based security infrastructure capable of affirming intent and

ability to resist crisis ascendancy and risk enhancement through strategic maneuvering. A significant eventuality in this regard is creation of equilibrium of actions without reducing integrity of deterrent capabilities. Security Dilemma indicates a general tendency of states of underestimate or overestimate their antagonistic relationship, leading to unilateral alterations to status quo that are corrosive to deterrence stability. Security dilemma also indicates an inherent vulnerability in nuclear deterrence with respect to its acceptability of aggressive conventional force posturing. Security dilemma operates as a safety net between states that have a tendency to escalate crises to a competitive frame where reciprocity becomes imperative for preservation of credibility of deterrent capabilities.

Cuban Missile Crisis between America and Soviet Union can be considered an original manifestation of security dilemma escalating to strategic decision-making to compensate for tactical and operational deficiencies. America and Soviet Union entered into a spiraling phase of competitive escalation where reciprocity of actions was deemed essential for maintaining parity in conflict. This posture created an atmosphere of misperceptions and uncalculated chancy strategies for short-term advantages. Such an undertaking was accelerated by their inability to mutually opt for risk reduction and de-escalation primarily due to their inability to comprehend effects of security dilemma on their national security priorities. Mid-crisis communication and post-crisis appraisal, being in a deficient capacity, made the environment corrosive for maintaining strategic restraint and augmented probabilities for Mutually Assured Destruction.

For South Asia post-nuclearization, understanding of strategic equilibrium was more focused on compliance than cooperation. Adversarial relationship between Pakistan and India, unlike USSR and the US, was more direct and actual (DiCicco 2020). It was focused on unsettled and undetermined territories coupled with standoffs that were perpetually stalemated. A continual shift in territories and fracturing bilateralism paved the way for more kinetic and aggressive policies for national security. For South Asian strategic equilibrium, taking references from the Cold War proved to be riskier than beneficial. Pakistan and India, in a bid to enhance their dominance over their longstanding disputes, caused diplomatic polarization leading to a more compartmentalized posture in which to maintain strategic equilibrium (Baker 2019). This meant that for Pakistan and India to maintain status quo, perpetuity of conflicts was a major destabilizer. Security dilemma in such an eventuality was even more pronounced and risk of Mutually Assured Destruction became more practical than theoretical (Khan 2018).

South Asia's case study is different from that of the Cold War in terms of understanding of security dilemma. America and the Soviet Union were able to create a comprehensive bilateral communication mechanism to avert trust deficit and reduce misperceptions from directing national security decision-making. They were also able to revisit their deterrence doctrine and role of conventional force posturing during crises. For Pakistan and India, such deficiencies still persist and conventional forces still act as catalysts to escalation dominance and crisis escalation. Security Dilemma remains a rational alternative to institute a scenario-based assessment module for both states to forecast limits of brinkmanship as a means to initially induct some risk reduction. It can be used as a means to assess and

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reconstruct national security strategies and thresholds of lenience against each other's actions during and after crises.

Security Dilemma and International Relations: Theoretical Approach to Strategic Equilibrium

Military strategy and security infrastructure is built around a realist interpretation of threats and challenges offered by one state to the other. It also entails an atmosphere where reciprocity of actions is gauged in terms of its impact on compressing national interests and preservation of the security architecture. Within realist school of interpretation of actions and reactions in a conflicting situation between two states is crucial for developing a trajectory of their escalatory tendencies. For Security Dilemma, emphasis is drawn by Kenneth Waltz who argues that states develop structural responses and institute national security parameters as a means to dissuade dominance-friendly environment (Waltz 1979, Waltz 2010). In nuclear strategy, security dilemma incorporates an anti-compellance approach following defensive realism to reduce significant adventurism causing a meltdown of deterrence and initiation of mutually destructive actions. Waltz also proposes that despite states being able to balance and maneuver some degree of offensive realist tendencies for more a pronounced presence (Waltz 2000), security dilemma in nuclear deterrence remains vital for sustenance of risk reduction and confidence building (Taliaferro 2001). A core argument is establishment of an understanding that trust deficit and risk-friendly environment encourages states to operate offensively, corroding their own ability to assert credibility of their deterrent capabilities. Such actions not only fast-track crises but also degenerate their ability to regulate such crises to a favorable position (Taliaferro 2001).

Though structural realism offers an in-depth assessment of how states can maneuver between offensive and defensive pursuance of preservation of their national security, operability of security dilemma and mutually assured destruction in nuclear deterrence implore a more defined valuation of national security priorities. For South Asia, the Cold War model of security and crisis management (Waltz 2000) creates an appraisal of its elements of national power. Where both Pakistan and India have sufficient territorial and ideological complexities, their ability to unilaterally attempt to exert change is compellance-friendly (Pashakhanlou 2014). Though Pakistan maintains a deterrence by denial mechanism focusing specifically on its defensive capabilities, Indian military doctrines push for a more punishment-oriented deterrence environment. This diversity, in absence of risk reduction and crisis communication, encourages spiraling thereby reconfirming risks articulated by security dilemma. For South Asia, a competitive environment is built around a mutual inability of Pakistan and India to conclusively define their elements of national power and also in their incapability to hedge enhancement of prevailing trust deficit in a crisis situation. Chronologically both states have been unable to maintain bilateralism and risk aversion and diplomatic endeavors have been circumstantial and terminated due to perpetuity of conflicts. For defensive realism, such an atmosphere reflects for risk enhancement and confirmation of threats identified by security dilemma in a spiral-prone conflict.

Within South Asia, much of its strategic calculus is designed according to how it understood America and USSR interacting in a conflicting angle (Pashakhanlou

2014). To Pakistan and India, utilizing conventional war fighting doctrines below a nuclear umbrella was mostly equated to how Cold War engagements were actualizing during conflict. Justifying use of conventional aggression without upsetting nuclear deterrence led to substantial levels of conflicting scenarios from 1998 to most recently in 2020 (Abbas 2017, Ahmed and Ashraf 2019). The realist dimension was inability of both Pakistan and India to bilaterally engage in risk reduction mechanisms and to employ use of force in settlement of disputes. Tangible national interests such as unsettled territorial disputes and perpetual conflicts on vital flashpoints like Kashmir have remained a constant denominator in warranting aggressive confrontation for fulfillment of strategic objectives without upsetting nuclear deterrence (Khan 2016).

South Asian security dilemma is enhanced by two factors; India assessing Pakistan-China alliance as a strategic disproportion and Pakistan calculating America-India alliance in a similar notion. Within South Asia, convergence of superpower interests and premeditated goals not only enhances regional stakeholders; Pakistan and India but also reshapes regional security (Drmola 2016). To India, connecting its national interests with America and for Pakistan, integrating its national interests to Chinese interests also means enhancing trajectory of conflict and intensity in erosion of strategic stability. In such a premise, security dilemma (Dittmer 2005) also tends to imply aggressive erosion of strategic stability of regional entities (India and Pakistan) if there is infringement of relative gains of influencing states (America and China) (Abbasi 2020). Such an integration allows both India and Pakistan to maximize their defensive and offensive capabilities simultaneously marginalizing their ability to avoid spiraling of existing conflicts like Kashmir.

Theoretical Approaches to Security Dilemma and its Effect on Power Posturing

Security Dilemma is a main feature of defensive realism and its construction is founded on the principle of inherent vulnerabilities in designs of a state. Conflicting situations and crises are catalysts in security dilemma that accelerate transition of a defensive-realist state into an offensive-realist mechanism if it is unable to redefine its national security structure to regulate intensity of escalation in a conflict (Toft 2005). The principal notion in this regard is designed around the fact that nuclear deterrence receives affirmation both by its ability to deter and its ability to restrain. Such an environment requires security dilemma to offer a projected capability for states engaged in perpetual conflict or transitory competitiveness. The basic aim is to reduce trust deficit by minimizing interpretability of actions and negative assumptions drawn by a certain strategy opted by an adversary. Security dilemma does not contradict state competitiveness and eventuality of conflict but it does suggest implementation of limitations to escalatory measures for risk reduction (Rajagopalan 1998). Security Dilemma also reiterates acceptance of state in transiting from defensive to offensive realist paradigm but cautions against frequent transitions as it can complicate preservation of national security (Dittmer 2001).

Pakistan and India have definitive threats to their intrinsic national security parameters as they have been unable to resolve territorial claims to a mutually agreed eventuality. Processes aiming to achieve this compromise have also been sacrificed for creating space for conflictual settlement of disputes. Nuclearization of both states could be interpreted to be a defensive-friendly undertaking but utilization

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of conventional force posturing dictates an offensive-friendly enterprise. This dichotomy has led to a series of hazardous confrontations prevented only by third-party intervention and a mutual inability to continue intensity of conflicts due to internal reasons (Herz 2003). For Security dilemma and defensive realism, Line of Control serves not only as an expression to preserve some offensive-realist tendencies but also as a source of abrupt escalation. Security dilemma caused after Kargil in 1999 was able to create a working model of bilateralism but preference of both states to maintain competitive posturing sustained threat levels to considerable margins (Usman, Hussain et al. 2017).

Inability of India to assert its capabilities of deterrence-dominance and fulfillment of its compellence strategies has made its conventional force posturing more aggressive and conflict-friendly. It has also altered Pakistan's national security structure to add a tactical-level layer of strategic deterrence as a means to institute denial. Not only does this strategy preserve eventuality of skirmishes and confrontations but it also complicates their ability to successfully synchronize their transition from offensive to defensive prioritization of national security. Under security dilemma, this environment is not only destabilizing but also creates significant space for adventurism controlled by apprehensive actions leading to acceleration of degeneration of deterrence stability.

Efficacy of Nuclear Deterrence and its Role in National Security Policy

Nuclear deterrence is categorized as ability of a state to project the use of nuclear weapons as an ultimate security assurance against any violations to sovereignty of a state. National Security Policy, in a broader connotation, is the state's comprehensive strategy to protect its sovereignty and entails with it security of its territorial integrity and protection of citizens. Any national security policy must be a comprehensive compendium of internal and external threat assessment and plausible policy solutions and preferences enlisted according to priority. Nuclear weapons, through considered as political force multipliers and apparatus to guarantee political and non-aggressive diplomatic leverage, play an important role in redefining security policy of any state possessing nuclear arsenal (Sargana and Hussain 2017).

The induction and deployment of nuclear weapons by the United States redefined international perspective over maintenance of deterrence which was previously sought through amassing large numbers of armed forces and maintaining colossal military stockpiles. The introduction of nuclear weapons revised the concept of national security by desensitizing political will of states to maintain large military stockpiles. This however, raised crucial questions as to how national security be defined as nuclear weapons were seen as exceptionally last resort arsenal and deployment of nuclear weapons in case of an escalated conflict would result into devastating consequences. National security is primarily based upon an intricate mesh of domestic challenges and their effect over interstate relations. Where most states separate foreign policy from national security policy, the introduction of nuclear weapons narrowed the gap between the two and tilted foreign policy objectives under subservience of national security policy (Baker 2019).

National security previously was limited to maintenance of security prioritization of preferences only regarding population and territorial integrity. Moreover, it meant

presenting a concrete and autonomous policy objectification which would not be affected by any foreign factors. However, the induction of nuclear weapons in state apparatus meant diversification of this policy into three additional zones:

- Firstly, national security policy required an independent nuclear policy which would maintain focus on securing nuclear installations and maintaining nuclear stockpiles. Previously, military installations and equipment were kept secure but their security was generally understood under commonplace military SOPs. However, nuclear weapons were separated from this premise and separate protocols were required to be established which in turn, sometimes, circumvented basic military protocols.
- Secondly, nuclear weapons were considered absolute weapons which meant that not only could they redefine strategic objectives but could also ensue unprecedented damage both to military goals and foreign policy objectives. Where use of conventional armaments only required an act of war, the deployment of nuclear weapons during a declared war required an entirely separate chain of command structure of the highest level of government and military staff and also required diplomatic consent whilst determining deployment.
- Thirdly, states were now bound to declare, tacitly or expressly, their doctrinal approach and deployment policy regarding nuclear weapons. This meant that states were now somewhat required to share their national security policy through diplomatic levels and this meant that diplomatic policy objectives were rendered subjective to nuclear policy doctrine. Throughout the Cold War, the US and the USSR, communication was imperative, predominantly after the Cuban Missile Crisis, and this communication was also based upon on sharing their national security intentions and policy preferences whereby we see the doctrinal paradigm shift from massive retaliation to flexible response.

National security policy, in terms of deterrence, keeping into perspective the effect of nuclear arsenal on policy objectives, eradicates ambiguity as states are to share their security policy objectives and the value of nuclear weapons in said model so as to eliminate counter ambiguity which could result in arms race. Furthermore, deterrence means communicating to the adversary, state preferences and doctrinal objectives which means states are no longer loopholes for strategic manipulation that may result into conventional aggression. In these contexts, nuclear weapons maintain a progressive security policy in a manner that communication between deterring states encourages de-escalation of conflict (Tariq, Khan et al. , Abbasi 2020, Wilson III and Smitson 2020).

Where national security policy often allows for conventional weapons stockpiling, nuclear deterrence discourages conventional arms race which may result into low intensity conflict that consequently may lead to exchange of nuclear arsenal. Introduction of deterrence also restricts states from gaining strategic operational advantage through low intensity conflicts or skirmishes. Where national security policy must be frank assessment of resources available to a country, deterrence

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ensures that any deterring states with disproportionate resources still preserve a security apparatus between them, credible enough to discourage aggression.

Conventional Warfighting in South Asia: Effects on Strategic Stability

Strategic interaction between Pakistan and India is divided into their nuclear deterrent capabilities and how they utilize their conventional force posturing. Beyond Kargil, though intensity of operations has reduced in terms of forces involved and levels of escalation yet, frequency of sub-conventional skirmishes has increased significantly (Khan 2016). Pakistan and India, since 2008 have witnessed a significant increase in clashes around Line of Control and even on working boundary regions. For India, Cold Start Doctrine and other such deployment tactics are an assurance to keep Pakistan in check while for Pakistan, denying India any superiority in conventional realm is a daunting challenge. Inducting Tactical Nuclear Weapons and upgrading existing conventional hardware does ensure tactical equilibrium but does not guarantee cessation of adventurism. For strategic equilibrium, maintaining an affable status quo is imperative. The assurance in such regard would be that no participant upsets either conventional or strategic equilibrium (Joshi and Mukherjee 2019). For South Asian strategic stability, conventional engagement in an attempt to capitalize on geostrategic goals is a continuing challenge.

For India and Pakistan choosing to opt for escalation dominance and escalation parity is a necessary element. India's persistence to employ rapid mobilization ever since Sunderji Doctrine has been to achieve escalation dominance as a means to exert compliance. Such tactics, falling under 'compellence' are designed to allow India sufficient flexibility of responses to suit its No First Use doctrine (Abbas 2017). Indian claim is grounded around an aggressive and confirmed threat from two of its neighbors causing India to augment its conventional forces in an attempt to dissuade any adventurism from Pakistan. The doctrine of employing conventional forces against Pakistan is centered on the idea that by exhausting Pakistan's conventional capabilities and offering nuclear deterrence, India can not only preserve nuclear deterrence but can also achieve escalation dominance if needed. The Indian strategy of using conventional superiority to its best advantage suits its approach against Pakistan in the sense that it allows India a chance to preserve its nuclear deterrent while allowing it to exhaust its adversary's warfighting capabilities (You 2019). Using conventional forces in such a manner, or posturing with such a doctrine, exhausts viable steps towards strategic stability as maintaining equilibrium is not a desired approach. For India, if there is equilibrium between Pakistan and India in terms of their conventional warfighting/posture, an impressing pressure from China-Pakistan alliance would surely extinguish its escalation dominance factor (Arshad 2017).

Pakistan's position in South Asian strategic stability is quite precarious as it has to deal with almost all of its neighbors suffering from internal problems possessing spillover capabilities. For Pakistan, India's use of conventional warfighting and employing rapid mobilization via its strike corps and holding corps tactics is a means to erode strategic stability. To Pakistan, if India's conventional forces are supplemented by its allies and such a force is aimed at infiltrating Pakistan's territorial integrity, it would have to focus on key geographical vulnerabilities. Such

exposures within conflicting boundaries allows India to test its capabilities for warfighting with an intent to penetrate Pakistan's borders. Even with Tactical Nuclear Weapons available, dissuading such a threat would be an uphill task for Pakistan. India's No First Use does not mean India cannot or is not able to employ conventional aggression for desired objectives. Between Pakistan and India, strategic stability of South Asia hinges on their use of conventional force posturing to both initiate an escalatory trajectory and an opportunity to achieve either escalation dominance or escalation parity.

Recent engagements between Pakistan and India like Uri, Pathankot and most recent at Pulwama and Balakot all indicate that both states have sufficiently allowed conventional forces to dictate early levels of escalation. To India, a renewed commitment to modernize both its equipment and doctrines is a chance to signal its intent to a continued use of its conventional superiority against Pakistan. India's offensive conventional engagements alongside Line of Control are perceived to be an attempt to discover whether it can exploit geographical fractures to its advantage both as a diversion or a frontline precursor to its mobilization doctrines. Strategic stability and strategic equilibrium, within constraints of national security for India rests on being able to efficiently deter Pakistan's conventional capabilities in a manner that it is also simultaneously able to deny Pakistan a chance to escalate to strategic level deterrence which has often dissuaded further upsurge in conflict (Hagerty 2020).

Security dilemma plays a vital role in determining how Pakistan and India react and engage during and prior to a conflicting situation with escalatory potential. During Pulwama and its follow-up at Balakot India utilized its ability to create volatility within conflict as details of Pulwama Incident were sketchy and convoluted. Using its conventional forces under a 'surgical strike' narrative allows India to place recesses in Pakistan's use of Tactical Nuclear Weapons, providing enough momentum for preparedness for rapid mobilization (Ahmed and Ashraf 2019). Signaling to revise its nuclear doctrine and indicating free use of conventional forces also indicates that India intends to create a security dilemma in South Asia. Such dictates identify three core strategies; firstly, it allows India to maximize its nuclear/strategic potential via accelerated procurement of equipment; secondly, it also allows India to both modernize and enhance its conventional footprint and; thirdly, it provides India with sufficient momentum to create compression on Pakistan's restraint mechanism in terms of escalation of a conflict (Biswas 2017).

Security dilemma implies that with adversaries maintaining equilibrium, chances of inadvertent escalation or unrestrained escalatory conflicts is set to a minimum. In absence of bilateral conflict/risk reduction mechanisms, choosing to employ conventional force posturing to achieve escalation dominance fractures nuclear deterrence as well as enhances security dilemma. Operation 'Swift Retort' by Pakistan, despite aiming for escalation inhibition does not deter India sufficiently from maximizing its 'surgical strike' narrative as a precursor to rapid mobilization in an attempt to achieve escalation dominance (Biswas 2017). For India, achieving escalation dominance ensures that it not only is able to fast-track military and strategic modernization but it also allows India to create nuclear deterrence through compellance. Pakistan's position even after Operation Swift Retort (Tufail 2020) remains precarious because India's continued use of aggression against Line of Control remains progressively active and its desire to introduce hazardous doctrines

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to its conventional warfighting continue to enhance security dilemma in South Asia (Impiani 2019).

Conclusion

Security dilemma is a pertinent factor in South Asian strategic stability as it dictates escalatory potential and intensity of conflicts. Crises like Kargil in 1999 and Pulwama-Balakot in 2019 indicate that though both states have matured how they synchronize reciprocity and restraint in preventing accelerated escalation, they still maintain a dominating trust deficit. This discourages positive transformation of their environment post-crisis and keeps margins of future conflicts moderately operable. Transformation of crisis environment in South Asia is slow and risk reduction is significantly dependent on their ability to interpret equality and equilibrium in conflicts. Unilateral alterations to status quo and frequency of belligerence have also negatively confirmed vulnerabilities identified by security dilemma in abrupt transformations from offensive to defensive postures in national security. Pakistan and India have also significantly reduced bilateralism which not only encourages bellicosity but also pursues a more conflict-friendly assessment of threat perceptions. Conventional force posturing dictates nuclear deterrence as a byproduct to extended/enhanced security and such misconstruction allows escalation to calibrate future intractability and efficacy of Confidence Building Measures.

Strategic equilibrium in South Asia accommodates use of conventional forces but does not acclimatize to it as a norm between Pakistan and India. Employment of conventional adventurism has remained a permanent feature in South Asia and its geographical vulnerabilities yet it has not been able to integrate itself in a larger nuclear deterrence. Conventional aggression has remained a consistent anomaly between Pakistan and India since Kargil and has been a principal cause of both states escalating to nuclear signaling. Within such an atmosphere, experimenting with enhanced conventional forces and doctrines only makes strategic equilibrium lose its efficacy, capsizing to make room for nuclear signals.

The principal concern is anxiety regarding capabilities of adversary and if viewed in military dimensions, it rests on power projection that a state has as compared to its competitor/adversary. Continuity of conflict and inability to posture for pacific settlement of disputes or even retain crisis communicability makes strategic stability and strategic equilibrium more susceptible to unexpected escalatory competitiveness. In a situation where fundamental source of conflict is based around territorial and jurisdictional culpabilities, margins of conflict leading to compulsion of threat of deterrent reprisals are emphasized by security dilemma. For nuclear deterrence to maintain semblance and effectiveness, states are required to understand risks associated to security dilemma and negative space encouraging conflict and crises. Reactionary responses and reciprocity are a complex undertaking if it is required to be synchronized with the adversary in order to preserve strategic stability and deterrence equilibrium. Crisis communication and strategic communicability might assist in crisis termination but their efficiency in transformation conflict remains contingent on interacting players to maintain consistency of communiqué and rapprochement.

Within South Asia, Pakistan and India have accumulated sufficient capabilities at strategic levels to ensure that despite changes to their doctrines, nuclear deterrence

remains concrete. Evolutionary steps to enhance nuclear deterrence; including doctrinal modifications and force posturing as well as operational readiness are not demoting strategies. The use of conventional forces to examine conflicts for possible fractures in defense is a real-time downgrade to strategic equilibrium. In absence of a potent bilateral conflict/risk reduction mechanism, relying of third-party mediation has been a sustainable option since Kargil. In contemporary scenario, however, former mediators are stakeholders in South Asia and their competitive engagement further challenges regional security matrix. Strategic equilibrium implies India and Pakistan to either develop a standalone and self-sufficient bilateral engagement mechanism or implores them to abandon conventional adventurism in favor of a stable nuclear deterrence. Beyond Balakot strikes conducted by India in 2020, resorting to use of conventional aggression under a nuclear umbrella redefines both South Asia's canvas on its patterns of escalation and its ability to distinguish between conventional escalation and nuclear signaling.

Preservation of strategic equilibrium rests on a principled undertaking that nuclear deterrence remains preserved by reversing strategies that enhance security dilemma. For South Asia, this principal means that through bilateralism and confidence building in terms of risk reduction, both India and Pakistan would have to avoid brinkmanship and escalation dominance. This does not mean that they are not allowed to modernize existing doctrines and equipment but it implies that even after such modernization or evolution, margins to escalate via adventurism are kept at minimum. Operation Swift Retort does signal Pakistan's intention to allow maximum restraint in escalating a conflict but precursors to the operation by India suggest that such an undertaking needs to be instilled within its conventional warfighting doctrine. This can also be achieved by enhancing existing bilateral risk/escalation reduction mechanisms to a more broad-spectrum application between Pakistan and India. As for third-party interests, Pakistan and India need to distinguish their national interests within its absolute gains and relative gains dimensions before integrating any response to each other. Strategic stability and strategic equilibrium even within nuclear adversaries, requires an unprecedented level of consensual communicability so as not to misrepresent or misinterpret any intention/action. For South Asia, a continued reliance on strategic dilemma via use of conventional adventurism not only increases risks of a nuclear signal being misinterpreted but it also encourages relative gains to be transformed into absolute gains. Such a scenario increases chances of inadvertent escalation of existing conflicts which can quickly erode nuclear deterrence. For South Asia, risk/escalation reduction is imperative but it can be installed in an environment where escalation dominance through use of conventional force is not equated to be an initial undertaking in a broader nuclear deterrent strategy.

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