

General

A Talk on Deterrence Stability (with particular reference to the Asian Context) was held at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) on 08 February 2011. Mr. Michael Krepon, Co-founder and Senior Associate, The Stimson Center, Washington D.C spoke on the subject. The session was chaired by Dr Rajesh Rajagopalan, CIPOD, JNU. The talk was well attended by a number of strategic affairs and nuclear experts as well as defence officers.

Opening Remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd), Director CLAWS

South Asia is the second most dangerous places on earth after West Asia. The presence of nuclear weapons in the region makes it more volatile and risky. Some believe that nuclear deterrence is at play in the South Asian context, while others feel that it either does not apply in the case or is bound to fail. Deterrence stability is an important facet of nuclear equations.

Michael Krepon, Co-founder and Senior Associate, The Stimson Center, Washington D.C.

South Asia remains one of the most dynamic places in the world with a cluster of nuclear powers. Deterrence stability and escalation control in South Asia depends on numerous factors but instability majorly arises from the fact that certain number of people in India and Pakistan would consider a crisis an opportunity rather than a problem. According to the theory of nuclear deterrence, A can deter B by threatening to use nuclear weapons if B does not act in accordance with A. The concept relies on the idea of mutually assured destruction.

Pakistan continues to enhance its nuclear capability and is increasing its nuclear stockpile. Currently, Pakistan is in an advantageous position for deterrence stability. While India believes that nuclear weapons are important to counter the nuclear weapons of other states, Pakistan believes that nuclear weapons can be used to deter war. Undoubtedly, these conflicting ideas of nuclear deterrence lead to further instability and destabilise nuclear deterrence.

It may be true that nuclear deterrence worked during the Cold War because nuclear weapons were not used, but there can be numerous other reasons for the same. The dynamics of nuclear brinkmanship varies from region to region. There were many instances where nuclear exchange could have resulted due to miscalculation etc, but the luck factor was at play. Therefore, to presume that nuclear deterrence worked outright would be imprudent. Undoubtedly, two adversaries with nuclear weapons add to increased tension in the region and a higher potential for friction among them.

Deterrence optimists believe that exchanges by accident, miscalculation, change, unauthorised usage et al are not possible in the South Asian context. However, It is hard for India and Pakistan to predict with accuracy the holdings of their adversary. Along with other measures, both countries also rely on human intelligence on nuclear matters, which may not always be reliable. Both the sides feel that their nuclear arsenals are in safe hands and they have robust system which ensures no possibility of unauthorised usage. Both also continue to secure and stabilise their nuclear capability at land, water and air. While Pakistan continues to expand its nuclear arsenal but one should not negate the fact that they are taking the extra mile to keep their nuclear complex secure. The possession of nuclear weapons under the Army along with the help of Strategic Plans Division (SPD) makes it rather safe and secure.

Nuclear stabilisation also presumes adequate back-up from conventional forces. Clearly, the conventional military balance is in India's favor, therefore making Pakistan more insecure about it. Both the countries had resorted to brinkmanship during the Kargil conflict. Pakistan initiated the conflict through militancy and eventually tried to use the nuclear card as a leverage.

Currently, the Stability-Instability Paradox is being tested in South Asia, but things are becoming more complicated because of the India-Pakistan-China triad. Some feel that this paradox is not applicable to South Asia and others feel that nuclear weapons would stabilise the region. However, things have not settled with the advent of nuclear weapons, rather issues have become more complex. Pakistan has resorted to militancy and terrorism along with the periodic expansion of their nuclear arsenal.

For both tenets of the stability-instability paradox to be in place, thereby preventing unintended escalation, lines of communication need to be reliable, the messages conveyed over these channels need to be trustworthy, and they need to be interpreted properly. While India and Pakistan may understand each others conventional postures, they have failed to grasp the nuclear posture, which is dangerous, considering that it may backlash at a critical time in a crisis.

Deterrence requirements for India must catre for both China as well as Pakistan. India has adopted a no-first-use doctrine whereas Pakistan has not due to its conventional military imbalance with India, which has led Pakistan's security apparatus to rely on unconventional means to keep New Delhi off-balance and to tie down large numbers of Indian troops in Kashmir.

With periodic fluctuations in Indo-Pak relations, the nuclear equations become risky. Escalation control depends on careful and correct assessment of one's opponent. However, the minimum communication or miscommunication between the countries makes it difficult to undertake a careful analysis. Decreased political instability in

Pakistan, constraints on extremism in the country and ending the practice of using terrorism as a tool against India is likely to offer some progress in the larger picture.

The idea of massive retaliation is another course of concern. When nuclear doctrines consider deterrence synonymous to massive punishment, then the problems continue to become more complex. The threat of massive retaliation has more utility when the red lines are clearly specified, but such practices are rarely undertaken in the practice of global politics. It is pragmatic for India, China and Pakistan to avoid brinkmanship and initiate risk reduction measures, employ tacit agreements and confidence building measures.

Dr Rajesh Rajagopalan, JNU

Risk taking has been a part of Pakistan's strategic culture ever since the 1947 Kashmir invasion. They followed it up in 1965 and 1971 before the arrival of Nuclear weapons. Therefore, it is prudent to look at the larger picture and devise a strategy to counter Pakistan's risk taking culture.

Among the key items for risk reduction illustrated by Mr Krepon, the political decision makers remain the key. In the end, decision taken by the Political leadership remains critical and can prevent a nuclear war. For instance during Kargil, the decision of the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to vacate the intrusions and not deploying nuclear weapons remained final.

(Report compiled by Aditi Malhotra, Associate Fellow, CLAWS)