

Nuclear Security Dilemma in South Asia: The Nuclear Arms Race Between India and Pakistan From an International Relations Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The region of South Asia is known to have complex dynamics in terms of security challenges. It is largely due to a rivalry between two neighboring states – India and Pakistan – which dates back decades ago. Ever since the two states became nuclear powers in the late 1990s, their confrontation has evolved into a nuclear arms race rather than mere conventional rivalry. This paper aims at identifying the role played by the security dilemma in the arms race between the two South Asian rivals and its implications for regional stability. In order to achieve the goal set out above, the paper employs a qualitative research design using secondary data derived from a review of academic literature, scholarly journal articles and policy reports with a focus on neo-realism. It becomes clear from the findings of the analysis that the defensive nature of actions taken by either side in the name of protecting its national security may be viewed by the other side as a potential offensive move. Thus, the security dilemma continues to prevail, resulting in a situation in which even the presence of nuclear weapons does not necessarily guarantee stability.

Keywords: *Security Dilemma, Nuclear Weapons, India, Pakistan, South Asia, Regional Stability*

INTRODUCTION

Indeed, South Asia has long been considered one of the regions characterized by the most intricate security dynamics within the international community (Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Paul, 2009). One of the notable examples of rivalry in this area is the relationship between India and Pakistan that emerged as a result of partition in 1947. Since then, the relationship between these two neighboring states has been characterized by tensions, wars, and a general lack of trust. Specifically, the ongoing Kashmir issue continues to serve as one of the main triggers for conventional wars and prolonged insecurity among the rivals (Wirsing, 2003; Ganguly, 2001).

Several studies have been devoted to the nuclear side of Indian-Pakistani relationships. According to Waltz (1981), nuclear weapons may help maintain stability by deterring states from large-scale warfare. Conversely, in his article published in the mid-1990s, Sagan (1996) emphasizes the problem of miscalculation and possible accidents in areas where there is active hostility between two states. Meanwhile, the persistence of the Kashmir issue prevents Ganguly and Kapur (2010) from discussing the stabilizing function of nuclear deterrence. For his part, Krepon (2016) claims that South Asian crises tend to be very volatile owing to the presence of misperception and distrust. More recent works confirm the ongoing militarization as well (Narang, 2017; Ahmed & Ahmed, 2020).

However, despite these important contributions, current research mainly focuses on either deterrence stability or specific causes of insecurity. At the same time, very few sources provide a comprehensive description of how the process of the security dilemma is continuously affecting the nuclear arms race and overall regional stability. This aspect is especially important since the interplay between threat perception and defensive strategy is likely to become the primary catalyst for escalation. Thus, this study takes the security dilemma as the theoretical basis for the discussion.

The objective of this research is to investigate how the nuclear security dilemma fuels the arms race between India and Pakistan. Employing a qualitative methodology, this work will attempt to analyze the connection between threat perception, defense measures, and the modernization of nuclear capabilities in terms of their impact on regional stability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of the security dilemma represents another fundamental aspect within the realist and neorealists' theory. The phenomenon implies a situation when actions taken by one state to protect itself create a threat to others and induce countermeasures that decrease security overall (Jervis, 1978; Waltz, 1979). Under the anarchic structure of international system, there is no single governing body that could guarantee security. Hence, each state should secure its interests independently through self-help measures, causing a vicious cycle of mutual distrust and competition.

In South Asian region, the tension between India and Pakistan serves as an exemplary case for illustrating the security dilemma theory. The historical conflicts and rivalry in the area, especially with regard to Kashmir issue, had a significant impact on the threat perception and defense policy of both parties (Wirsing, 2003; Ganguly, 2001). Consequently, due to such experiences, mutual suspicion between India and Pakistan persists and prevents cooperation from taking place.

The nuclearization of South Asia took place in 1998 and marked another crucial moment in regional security dynamics. Though, in general, nuclear weapons serve as instruments to ensure deterrence and strategic stability, numerous scholars doubt their capability to prevent war (Narang, 2017; Sagan & Waltz, 2013). Thus, in their discussions about consequences of nuclear proliferation, Sagan and Waltz (2013) question whether this process

stabilizes or destabilizes international relations. Moreover, recent researches indicate the existence of limited nuclear warfare in South Asia, where the stability provided by deterrence creates preconditions for small conflicts (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2020).

Alongside the presence of nuclear weapons, the existing power asymmetry and conventional superiority of India over Pakistan also contribute to the security dilemma in the region. Due to the military and economic dominance of India, Pakistan has to rely on nuclear weapons to balance the situation (Kapur, 2007). Therefore, due to power asymmetry, both countries find themselves trapped in the vicious circle of security dilemma and nuclear arms race.

Despite the numerous studies devoted to various aspects of nuclear arms race in South Asia, little attention has been paid to the interrelation of such variables as deterrence, conventional power asymmetry, and threat perception. Thus, while most of the studies focus only on one factor, neglecting others, further integrative analysis is needed to reveal how these components affect nuclear arms race in South Asia.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design will be used to explore the nature of the nuclear security dilemma in the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan under the lens of international relations. This choice seems to be the best approach to take since the goal is not to measure any dependent or independent variable but to explore the relationship between various factors such as patterns of interactions, threats perceptions and strategies involved. The analysis will be an interpretive approach that aims at explaining the security dilemma and its impact on the nuclear arms race in South Asia.

The research design will involve the use of the literature review approach in which data will be obtained from secondary sources in order to achieve the research goal. The major sources will include academic books, peer reviewed journals, and reports from reliable authors on the issue of nuclear security, South Asian politics and bilateral relations between India and Pakistan.

The research methodology employed in this study takes the form of a case study, focusing specifically on India and Pakistan as the main units of analysis. The particular emphasis on these two states will help in achieving a deeper understanding of the way in which the existence of historical animosities, notably over the question of Kashmir, interacts with the process of building up nuclear capability through the security dilemma paradigm.

In the interpretation of the collected data, qualitative content analysis will be used. Pertinent documents will be carefully analyzed to establish the underlying themes such as perception of threat, modernization of military capacity, nuclear deterrence, and policy reactions to these factors. These elements will be then explained from the neorealist point of view, paying attention especially to the concepts of anarchy in the international system and self-help as the main determinants of state conduct.

In order to provide consistent analysis throughout the research, there is a set procedure adopted for gathering information classifying data, and interpreting the data. Firstly, literature related to the topic will be collected and classified according to theme relevance. Secondly, the collected information will be analyzed to find any pattern and correlation between variables. Lastly, the findings will be interpreted in light of the security dilemma theory to understand the perpetuation of the nuclear arms race in South Asia.

DISCUSSION

Dynamics of the Nuclear Security Dilemma in India-Pakistan Rivalry

From 1998 onwards, when India and Pakistan acquired nuclear armament, their rivalry did not fade away but has

only become more intricate and durable. The results of this paper indicate that nuclear armament has transformed rather than settled down the nature of competition between the two parties, while instead of solving the issues at hand, India and Pakistan continue to be suspicious of each other's defense strategies. It also represents the basic assumptions of neorealism especially the theory that international politics is characterized by anarchy in which survival is the main concern (Waltz, 1979). In this situation, policies which are otherwise defensive in nature such as military modernization or even the acquisition of nuclear weapons are perceived as threatening to rival countries. This means that the two countries have been caught in a vicious circle of attack and counterattack. This behavior can be attributed to a security dilemma in which defensive actions are usually perceived as offensive and lead to unnecessary escalation (Jervis, 1978; Waltz, 1979).

This phenomenon is easily observable within the process of each state responding to strategic initiatives launched by its adversary. Whenever India strives to modernize its armed forces and acquire an advantage in nuclear arms, this step is perceived by Pakistan as an attempt to outsmart the latter. As a result, the Pakistani authorities take steps toward developing capabilities necessary to counterbalance the possible threat coming from India in particular, Pakistan has already introduced tactical nuclear weapons to its arsenal. It should be concluded, as Kapur (2007) does, that nuclear deterrence will not settle the ongoing rivalry between India and Pakistan and might even lead to.

Arms Race as a Structural Consequence

The dynamics of the arms race in India and Pakistan become more comprehensible when viewed in the context of the international system. The lack of an authority that provides protection leads both countries to have to rely on themselves. This situation pushes them towards the constant improvement of military capabilities, since not doing so may lead to strategic weakness (Waltz, 1979; Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Therefore, the arms race in India and Pakistan should not be seen as a voluntary action of the states, but rather the natural consequence of their place in the system.

It should be noted that the ongoing arms race is not due to any kind of aggressive behavior; rather, it is a result of the nature of the global system itself. In neorealist thought, the lack of an overarching power means that states have to constantly upgrade themselves to prevent becoming weak and vulnerable (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Therefore, irrespective of their intentions, India and Pakistan continue their rivalry.

This trend gets clearer with regard to ground realities. Developments in the field of missiles, changes in nuclear doctrine, and military strategies are an indication of efforts being made by both the states to preserve their credibility and deterrence ability. But the example of Kargil confrontation reveals that even nuclear weapons fail to completely deter confrontation; rather, confrontation takes place in different forms, which are less devastating yet still very hazardous. The example above highlights "the stability-instability paradox," whereby nuclear weapons lower the chances of major wars while raising the possibility of minor wars (Sagan & Waltz, 2013). Hence, stability in South Asia cannot be defined by the lack of conflicts, but rather by a delicate balance that is largely determined by perceptions and communications. The above-discussed phenomenon can be termed as stability-instability paradox, where nuclear deterrence ensures that large-scale wars do not take place but leaves room open for small-scale confrontations (Ganguli, 2001; Wirsing, 2003). Implications for Security Stability in South Asia

Implication for Security Stability in South Asia

From this research, it becomes evident that the concept of stability in South Asia cannot be viewed from the perspective of certainty. Firstly, because of the existence of nuclear arsenals in both countries, the region faces high levels of deterrence against direct warfare. However, stability is fragile in this case due to its dependence on rationality and proper assessment of the threats. Any misjudgment or miscalculation might destabilize the situation very rapidly (Sagan & Waltz, 2013).

Secondly, there is a lack of reliable and effective mechanisms aimed at building trust between the two nations. Moreover, a lack of transparency in defense policies increases the level of uncertainties in the area. Thus, any small scale activities carried out by either side may be seen as provocative. As it was mentioned by Paul (2009), the history of non-use of nuclear arms played a key role in preventing disastrous war; however, this situation must not be perceived for granted in regions characterized by long-term hostility.

Together, all of these factors point toward a situation where the security dilemma persists in South Asia. It is not a case where stability has been achieved; rather, it is a case where stability needs to be maintained through constant management. In spite of the presence of nuclear deterrence, the danger of escalation cannot be avoided if there is no continuous dialogue for overcoming misperception

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The nuclear security dilemma emerges as an important determinant of the rivalry that exists between the two nations, in which any attempt made by one country to secure itself is seen as threatening by the other nation. The results indicate that while nuclear weapons help prevent major wars between India and Pakistan, they cannot provide certainty about avoiding war in the future. Rather, they generate an uncertain and insecure situation based on perceptions of danger and escalation. This is supported by structural elements like the international political environment, past history, and imbalances in conventional forces between the two countries, which compel them to continually adapt their militaries. As a result, building mutual confidence, increasing transparency, and continuing strategic talks become crucial to avoid the dangers of escalation and maintain stability not just between India and Pakistan, but also in South Asia as a whole.

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