

## STRATEGIC RESTRAINT REGIME IN SOUTH ASIA

*Dr. Muhammad Khan, Ahmed Khan and Dr. Syed Turab Hyder\**

### **Abstract**

*The post-independence Indo-Pak rivalry and the hostile nature of Pak-India relations have caused instability in the region, which continues to this day. While strategic stability has helped in avoiding a major war, stable and durable peace is still a distant reality. The Pakistani proposal for strategic restraint regime in South Asia aims at achieving a holistic peace in the region with the ultimate aim of peaceful settlement of all disputes, reducing arms race, and preventing a nuclear disaster. The initiation of the idea of strategic restraint regime by Pakistan was indeed a step towards peace through resolution of issues rather through stockpiling of arms and increasing the threat.*

**Keywords:** Strategic Stability, Strategic Restraint Regime, Arms Race, South Asia.

### **Introduction**

The distinct geo-political and security developments of South Asia have been receiving a lot of regional and international attention over the decades. Although South Asia comprises of eight countries; its political, security and economic destiny however, is largely shaped by bilateral relationship between Pakistan and India.

Since independence from the Colonial British rule, Indo-Pak relationships have had either a direct or an indirect impact on political cohesion, economic progress and stability in South Asia. As a resultant, intermittent conflicts, bilateral disputes, arms buildup and mutual distrust between the two countries have prevented cooperation for economic progress, peace and stability in the region.

Deterrence instability, offensive military doctrines, the presence of non-state actors, ongoing arms race and recurrent low- to- medium level-armed conflicts between Pakistan and India speak a lot about the precarious security environment of the region. Above all, Indo-Pak geographical proximity and the technological advancements in conventional, nuclear and tactical weapons manifest multifaceted threats for entire region.

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\*Dr. Muhammad Khan is Professor of Politics and International Relations at International Islamic University, Islamabad. Ahmed Khan is working as a Research Fellow at International Center for Refugee and Migration Studies at Balochistan University of Information Technology Engineering and Management Sciences, Quetta. Dr. Syed Turab Hyder has vast experience in operative research.

As peace has always remained elusive between Pakistan and India relationship, the need for it has never been greater than today. If there can be one great lesson drawn from history, it will be that no country on the face of the earth can afford the dangers of protracted conflicts and arms buildup in a nuclear environment. Therefore, the article aims to show the rationale and utility of implementing a strategic restraint regime in South Asia to ensure durable peace in the region.

The core context of this article is to argue on dual realities of nuclear weapons. On one hand they have a recognized utility of keeping peace, on other hand there are some destabilizing factors that will keep on threatening peace if a comprehensive Strategic Restraint Regime is not implemented. Moreover, this paper also argues that breaking down the issues with strategic stability and deterrence in south Asia can allow us to better understand the need for a strategic restraint regime in the region.

Besides, the article highlights some of the significant area. They are Pakistan's lasting commitment towards regional peace; the development of Pak-India relations in the post-nuclear era; the current and emerging dynamics of regional peace and security; the need for mutual cooperation between India and Pakistan in the areas of politics and security. It also looks into the interaction of global powers with South Asian region and its impact on security.

## Pakistan's Quest for Regional Peace

In October 1998, four months after becoming nuclear power, Pakistan offered India a strategic restraint regime that aimed at a) ensuring a nuclear restraint b) establishing a conventional balance, and c) resolution of all disputes between the two countries. In 2006, then Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz while speaking at The Heritage Foundation, once again, reiterated Pakistan's desire for regional peace and security in order to normalizing of its relations with India. Prime Minister Aziz stated that:

*"The progress we have been making within Pakistan has required an enabling external environment. To ensure such an environment, it has been necessary to create an architecture for peace, stability, and progress to facilitate regional cooperation and development".<sup>1</sup>*

*This architecture is based on four pillars: a) Dialogues for peaceful settlement of existing disputes and mechanisms to resolve issues on a bilateral and multilateral basis. b) Strategic restraint and avoidance of an arms race in the region. c) Strengthening of regional cooperation, especially trade, investment, and people-to-people contacts. d) Enhancing cooperation between the different sub-regions of Asia, which will enhance security and mutually beneficial cooperation.<sup>2</sup>*

*The pursuit of our external relations in accordance with this architecture has already paid some rich dividends. However, this is still work in progress, and much remains to be done. We are confident that this policy*

*will enhance Pakistan's capacity to be an anchor for peace and security in the region.*<sup>3</sup>

Apart from this, in the 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the National Command Authority (NCA) that took place in February 2016, Pakistan's top political and military leadership also expressed the desire of "establishing the Strategic Restraint Regime in South Asia and the inescapable need of a meaningful and sustained comprehensive dialogue process for resolution of all outstanding disputes."<sup>4</sup>

These remarks, coming from top civilian and military leadership of Pakistan, reaffirm Pakistan's commitment to durable peace in South Asia. In fact, the desire of preventing arms race and finding ways that can lead towards the resolution of all the disputes and that can reduce the danger of crisis escalation and nuclear exchange find great resonance at all levels within Pakistan.

In this respect, Pakistan's proposal of implementing a Strategic Restraint Regime can be considered a highly significant top-down approach to implement reciprocal restraint that can ultimately take South Asia towards durable peace.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Pakistan views the Strategic Restraint Regime as a significant initiative in its pursuit of lasting peace in South Asia. Apart from this, Pakistan's proposal of a Strategic Restraint Regime also underscores Islamabad's desire of not wanting itself sucked into an unsustainable arms race in the region.

Pakistan, as a responsible nuclear power and an important country of the region, desires to bring the arms race under control and to find peaceful solutions to all issues between the two countries without leaving them for future generations to deal with.

## **A Critical View of Strategic Stability in South Asia**

Paul Stockton defines strategic stability as a "situation between adversaries, in which they are unlikely to fight a strategic war, involving attacks against industry, population, or strategic military forces."<sup>6</sup> Strategic Stability is also viewed as "a robust strategic nuclear balance that is maintained over a long period of time despite the impact of destabilizing factors."<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Schelling and Morten Halperin have defined strategic stability as a situation where the probability of war is minimal because neither side sees any advantage in striking first and their respective calculations are insulated from upsets, fears and trepidations.<sup>8</sup> That is why a large body of literature suggests that a nuclear state pursues strategic stability as the first choice approach to defend itself against a nuclear adversary.

The Cold War era, and during that period, the strategic competition between the United States and Soviet Union is vastly studied by scholars to draw conclusions about the utility of nuclear weapons in preventing war between nuclear adversaries. For example, the long peace between United States and Soviet Union, particularly, the

Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 is cited as the most prominent example by the protagonists of nuclear weapons.

After the end of the Cold War, the absence of a large-scale war between Pakistan and India is also attributed to the possession of nuclear capability by the two nuclear rivals. These examples gave much credence to the utility of nuclear weapons which has led to the famous hypothesis: the more the nuclear weapons, the better it is. Other scholars have argued that given the strong deterrent capability, why should states give up such a strong source of security.<sup>9</sup>

The protagonists of nuclear weapons claim that the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons is the most important element which can dissuade a nuclear state from starting a war or launching a nuclear attack against another nuclear state. However, the path nuclear states, after acquiring nuclear capability, have travelled along has led to a bitter, dangerous and unsustainable arms buildup with lesser focus on conflict resolution and more interest in getting strategic advantage over one another.

Furthermore, nuclear rivals such as Pakistan and India, in order to hedge against an uncertain security environment, have resorted to invest an heavy amount of economic and political capital trying to increase their security through different methods. These methods include conventional and nonconventional arms buildup; modifying their nuclear postures; revising their respective military doctrines; and a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of their respective deterrent capabilities.

In the presence of long-time disputes and historical animosity between Pakistan and India, any kind of offensive measures taken through any of the methods as stated above result in destabilizing forces that can turn strategic stability into a dangerous vulnerability. The Cold War as well as Pakistan-India relations present sufficient evidence regarding how vulnerable strategic stability might become and that how nuclear powers can reach to the brink of a major nuclear catastrophe.

Moreover, the US-Soviet strategic rivalry during the Cold War period as well as the history of Pak-India relations in the post-nuclear era suggest that security can at times become extremely fragile if its contributing economic and political variables get disturbed. The fragility of peace in South Asia can also be looked at in terms of how nuclear weapons and conventional imbalance, although having prevented major wars between India and Pakistan, has failed to prevent nuclear adversaries from adopting risky behavior.

A brief study of the past two decades of Pak-India relations shows that as compared to the pre-nuclear era, the frequency of crises between Pakistan and India have increased in the post-nuclear era. Thomas F. Lynch states that More incidents of military conflicts and larger conflicts occurred between India and Pakistan during the period of nuclear weapons development and testing (1990–2002) than in any other time since their independence from Britain in 1947.<sup>10</sup>

One explanation of the higher frequency of crises between Pakistan and India in the post-nuclear era points a correlation among the presence of disputes, arms

buildup and crises. In other words, the existence of disputes between Pakistan and India and the growing asymmetry of conventional weapons have created sufficient conditions for conflicts between the two countries.

In addition, Lynch's observation provides root causes of the frequency of crises which lies in security dilemma. The major dilemma is the acquisition of sophisticated naval, ground, air and, recently ABM systems by India adds to the security issues for Pakistan. As Lynch states that even if their military capabilities are aimed only at their self-protection, they potentially or actually threaten harm to other states that will respond in kind; which results in a spiral of fear and mistrust and make both states less secure.<sup>11</sup>

Susan G. Sample also shares the idea that arms race and war are linked by security dilemma.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the acquisition of sophisticated weapon systems creates an imbalance between the two countries, which leaves no choice for either Pakistan or India other than to follow suit and keep nuclear weapons as the central element of their security policy.

Furthermore, Douglas M. Gibler, Toby J. Rider, and Marc L. Hutchison note that a world with fewer nuclear, but more conventional forces is likely to bring forth new dynamics for arms races, which increase the likelihood of disputes and wars. The growing reliance on nuclear weapons, which is already happening, will make the crisis-prone system of South Asia increasingly unstable. Arms buildup in a crisis-unstable system might trigger war.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the systemic instability, arms buildup negatively influences the behavior of Pakistan and India to engage in serious and comprehensive diplomacy to find the resolution of their long-standing disputes like Kashmir, water and Sir Creek. An analysis of Pak-India relations in the post-nuclear era leads us to hypothesize that in the presence of nuclear cover, conventional arms buildup has opened up to the space for crises and risky behavior between Pakistan and India.

## **Strategic Restraint Regime, Stable Peace and Cooperation in South Asia**

The presence of disputes, the danger of crisis escalation, conventional and non-conventional arms build and deterrence instability in South Asia replicates many features of the Cold War strategic rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union. On a deeper level, Pakistan and India's rivalry can said to be even more dangerous than that of the United States and Soviet Union in at least two ways.

The first way is the geographical proximity of the two countries that can have severe consequences of unimaginable proportions for both countries in an event of crisis escalation or war. This factor, only, is enough to disrupt war-time strategic calculations on both sides. Apart from this, the geographical proximity also bears substantial influence on devising strategies to crises situation or war. The second factor pertains to major technological developments and advancements that have taken place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly in the area of cyber space. Technological advances that

make existing weapons obsolete can require the state that enjoyed a lead in deployment of the earlier technology to engage in an arms race that leaves it less secure.<sup>14</sup> Cyber warfare can prove to be a menace to strategic stability because it poses a serious threat to the nuclear command and control systems, cause decapitation without using any nuclear or conventional weapons and cause confusion.<sup>15</sup>

The threats that geographical proximity and technological developments present necessitate the implementation of Pakistan's proposed Strategic Restraint Regime. As Pakistan and India have both been living under the nuclear shadow for two decades now, it is now an appropriate time for both countries to consider a strategic restraint regime to prevent strategic vulnerabilities and improve level of trust among each other for larger regional and global peace.

While the need for Strategic Restraint Regime might on the surface be considered normative or aimed at strengthening the moral side of Pakistan's argument on regional peace and security. On a deeper level, the need for a strategic restraint is deeply rooted in economics, politics and in security, because, the general understanding is that leaders have to consider at least five dimensions, military, diplomacy, economics, domestic institutions and ethical dimensions to build a nuclear arsenal.<sup>16</sup>

As Brian Rose notes that stability only makes sense with some kind of equilibrium or some kind of mutual restraint.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Strategic Restraint and conventional balance should receive more attention and be accepted as the most important and primary principle of dialogue and peace by Pakistan and India in the future.

Apart from that, implementing a Strategic Restraint Regime in South Asia will be a symbol of political vision, rationality and a recognition of necessity as well as a major leap towards a stability and peace.

*Stable peace emerges through a sequential process that cuts across longstanding theoretical divides. Realism adequately explains the outset. Strategic necessity induces a state faced with an unmanageable array of threats to seek to befriend an existing adversary; resource constraints make accommodation and cooptation preferable to balancing and confrontation. The process next moves into the realm of liberalism. Domestic attributes regime type, coalitional alignments, and sub state interest groups come into play, with societal integration facilitating and deepening the process of reconciliation. A constructivist perspective best explains the final stage of the process. Changes in political discourse and identity erode the self/other distinctions that are at the foundation of geopolitical competition.<sup>18</sup>*

Another benefit of implementing a Strategic Restraint Regime lies in its potential of providing peace dividends. Pakistan and India have gone through a learning process in the post-tests crises with nuclear overtones.<sup>19</sup> It is very clear to them that failure to resolve disputes and adding more weapons to their arsenals is not the answer either to their security problems or to bringing about stable peace in the region.

Moreover, stable and durable peace in South Asia requires a major transformation of the present security environment from a conflictual to a cooperative one. This transformation is only possible when the disputes between Pakistan and India are resolved and the threats of nuclear exchange or a conventional war are eliminated. For this to happen, Pakistan and India need serious diplomatic engagement, cooperation and political will which is rooted in the belief that achieving peace is not an impossible endeavor.

Cooperation on political, security and economic matters will remain a necessary element of regional peace building. Pakistan and India understand that the security challenges they are facing are multi-faceted and not only restricted to physical security only. As the comprehensive concept of security suggest, human and economic security are as important as the physical security of a state. Therefore, non-traditional threats that arise due to economic lag and underdevelopment cannot be overlooked.

Another reason why economic and human security should receive attention in security policy is that the economic, political and security systems do not act or operate in isolation from one another. In fact, economics, politics and security have a dialectic influence on one another. Therefore, investing too much in acquiring weapons might not be a good idea if it comes at the cost of the economic well-being of the people.

In addition to all these, the major security transformation that Strategic Restraint Regime envisages need cooperation from both sides. Cooperation will bestow significant benefits on the strategic environment of the region. Nuclear Restraint also has significant potential to contribute in confidence building among the nuclear-armed states.<sup>20</sup>

Although previous initiatives of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between Pakistan and India have been considered as a major attempt to improve relations, prevent crisis escalation and promote trust between the two nuclear rivals. However, CBMS have not borne much fruit as behavior on both sides have largely remained unchanged. Subsequently, with the passage of time, interest has fallen in strengthening Confidence Building Measures.

Discontinuity in the implementation of CBMs and NRRMs has been the major obstacle in building of sustained trust between India and Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> Veteran Pakistani diplomat and Pakistan's current representative to the United Nations, Maleeha Lodhi provides clues about why CBMs could not work to achieve a major change. She states:

*.....CBMs cannot stand alone and can only work in a broader context. The presumption of priority for CBMs is that underlying problems are not resolvable, and therefore, by freezing the status quo, CBMs can somehow reduce tension and avert the danger of war.....Meant to be a step towards conflict resolution they can often be used as a substitute. They have frequently been pursued in South Asia under external prodding or pressure and at the expense of problem solving.<sup>22</sup>*

Moreover, as military capabilities and doctrine have far outpaced nuclear risk reduction diplomacy in the 15 years, the few CBMs and NRRMs that have been reached since 1998 have not begun to serve as a stabilizing offset to technological and doctrinal developments.<sup>23</sup> The largely ineffectiveness of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and Nuclear Risk Reduction Measures (NRRMs) indicate that peace in South Asia cannot be half-done.

Moreover, the history of CBMs also indicate that bringing durable peace in South Asia will require political vision and comprehensive solutions as envisaged by Pakistan's proposed Strategic Restraint Regime. Repeating cycles of crises between Pakistan and India have unraveled the challenges to peace in the presence of long-time disputes between the two countries. The Kargil war, border standoff in 2002, the Mumbai attacks, and the recent incidents of Uri and Pathankot suggest that the region will remain prone to crises until the main variable – territorial disputes – is not taken out of the equation.

Parag Khanna, an Indian author, acknowledges the importance of Kashmir in Pak-India relations. He states that the unresolved status of the princely state of Kashmir at the time of the partition of South Asia into independent India and Pakistan in 1947 has been the direct or proximate cause of three major wars and a near nuclear standoff in 2001 between the two states.<sup>24</sup>

The resolution of disputes, for example, Kashmir, is very important because most of Pakistan and India's security policies are formulated in the shadow of long-time disputes between the two countries. This dispute has played as a key variable in Pakistan's relationship with India as well as in the larger security architecture of South Asia.

## **Regional Security and Arms Buildup in South Asia**

Throughout the past seventy years of their history, India and Pakistan have remained dependent on major powers for the acquisition of weapons and conflict resolution. In fact, the acquisition of arms has been an important factor which influenced the direction of foreign policy of Pakistan and India.

These alignments have had greater impact on security thinking, strategic stability and the overall security environment of South Asia. In the past, both countries have strongly objected to the sale of weapons by a major power to its regional rival. This indicates that the interaction of the major powers of the world have had a considerable influence on regional security.

The US tilt toward India soon after May 1998 nuclear tests and the subsequent US-India strategic alliance as embodied in the 2008 Indo-US Nuclear Deal alienated Pakistan and contributed to Pakistan's fast-paced nuclear weapons and missiles build up, to counter what was perceived as an increasing Indian threat, now supported by the United States.<sup>25</sup>



Pakistan and India have also remained suspicious about each other's alignments with foreign powers. Islamabad and New Delhi view such alignments as a potential security threat for the other. Pakistan has long ago expressed its reservations on Indo-US strategic partnership and the special and discriminatory waiver to India in the nuclear suppliers group, while India has also shown concerns regarding Pakistan's growing relations with China, specially, Chinese development of Pakistan's deep-sea port of Gwadar and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

With the absence of a regional approach, Pakistan and India induced dependence on global powers that forced both countries to play great powers games, particularly, at the expense of their national interests or the interests of the South Asian Region.

The Strategic Restraint Regime offers a pathway for reducing their dependence on external powers and removing the great power factor out of the security thinking. Moreover, Pak- India strategic rivalry also provide important lessons when seen in the context of US-Soviet strategic rivalry of the Cold War era. During the Cold War, the United States of America and Soviet Union got involved in a bitter arms race that ultimately led them towards developing a vast structure of strategic triad.

With the development of Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), which was one of the most sophisticated and the most expensive defense programs ever, the two countries reached the climax of their rivalry in the late 1980s. This unsustainable arms race was one of the factors that ultimately brought the Soviet Union to its knees. To some extent, Pakistan and India also seem to be moving in the same direction.

During the past twenty years, the two South Asian rivals have brought significant qualitative and quantitative improvements in their nuclear capabilities by making their nuclear capability more effective, and of course, much more lethal. New Delhi and Islamabad have added a wide spectrum of ballistic and cruise missiles into their respective arsenals. The march is on now for defense systems and India has already decided to purchase the latest defense systems from United States that will cost more than a billion dollars.

Presently, both countries have much more lethal capability of carrying either a first or a second strike against each other. In fact, after achieving missile capability, both countries are now trying to establish an effective triad while at the same time working on the development of ABM systems. The most probable future course, they take, might lead to space becoming the new pivot of arms race.

New developments have also taken in the area of tactical weapons. Pakistan has successfully developed tactical nuclear weapons that can totally annihilate Indian field formations in the event of a war. The introduction of tactical nuclear weapons drastically affect the nuclear equation between Pakistan and India. This development show that, in the event of a conventional imbalance, reliance on nuclear weapons in South Asia will be gradually increasing.

The development of tactical weapons is the result of the widening asymmetry between the two countries in the area of conventional weapons. Christine Leah and Adam B. Lowther observe that if the India-Pakistan strategic situation offers any lesson; it is that weaker states (such as Pakistan) may desire to develop a “great equalizer” to achieve the security that they cannot find through traditional (conventional) means.<sup>26</sup>

Christine Leah and Adam B. Lowther further add that conventional imbalance becomes a key driver of nuclear proliferation and geostrategic instability. These developments specially the attention that has turned towards acquiring Anti-Ballistic Missile systems by Pakistan and India significantly threaten strategic stability in South Asia in many ways. Therefore, if a restraint regime is not implemented soon, the region will drift further into instability and preventing the region from on the edge of a nuclear disaster will become even more difficult.

The massive arms buildup and India’s refrain from responding positively to Pakistan’s proposed Strategic Restraint Regime define India’s political and security behavior in the region. India’s behavior has created major obstacles, which promotes diverging outlooks on regional security. Mostly scholars agree upon that Pak-India relations of the Past two decades indicate that Pakistan and India assess regional stability and strategic stability differently from each other.

During the Cold War, offsetting nuclear capabilities possessed by United States and Soviet Union generated security concerns resulting in diminished security by fostering risky behavior under the nuclear threshold and by intensifying crises.<sup>27</sup> The importance of a Strategic Restraint Regime is, therefore, important for crisis management which is a recurrent feature of Pak-India relations. As Zafar Khan observes that future crisis management strategies should create a strategic restraint regime (such as an arms control regime) to strengthen the credibility of crisis management and minimize the danger of war in South Asia.<sup>28</sup>

Minimizing the danger of war in South Asia will serve as an important step for making forward movement in other areas such as trust building, arms control and resolution of disputes. Despite spending billions of dollars on the development and acquisition of nuclear and conventional weapons, neither India nor Pakistan, has been able to achieve a decisive strategic advantage over the other.

Mooed Yousuf notes that the development and acquisition of sophisticated weapons systems by India, coupled with development of offensive doctrine such as the Cold Start will receive identical response from Pakistan. Through arms buildup and Cold Start doctrine, India in effect was looking for exploring the possibility of a limited war in a nuclearized environment.<sup>29</sup> He further states that by adopting this new proactive strategy India had hoped to create a situation wherein with advantage of its greater conventional forces, it will be in a position to force a result in its favor.<sup>30</sup> So far, India’s offensive posture and the development of its Cold Start Doctrine has only resulted in reinforcing the security dilemma between the two countries.

After two decades, now the need arises for creating space for promoting cooperative relationship that can bring both countries closer to the realization to take a greater account of each other's regional interests and sensitivities. Both countries need to kick-start dialogue to solve regional security problems as envisaged by the strategic restraint regime.

It is also important to state that the massive arms buildup and India's refrain from responding positively to Pakistan-proposed Strategic Restraint Regime define India's political behavior with regional countries. This behavior in itself creates obstacles and causes diverging outlooks on regional security.

## **Conclusion**

Although Pakistan and India have made some improvement in different areas, the security-centric approach has prevented any type of normalization of Pak-India relationship so far. Therefore, for achieving durable peace and normalization of Pak-India relations, both countries need to move away from the security first approach.

Peace and security in South Asia require trust, political vision, cooperative behavior and a reordering of priorities on both sides. However, more important than these, peace will require a settlement of all disputes and the elimination of nuclear threat. Reducing the nuclear threat is extremely important because until and unless this threat remains there, South Asia's strategic stability challenge will always be there to deal with.

Finally, the Strategic Restraint Regime symbolizes Pakistan's vision for peace. It also symbolizes Pakistan's understanding of the possible ways to achieve this end. The proposed Strategic Restraint Regime provides a path towards a holistic peace in South Asian region.

## NOTES

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