

2018 NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON GLOBAL SECURITY

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Abstract

The 2018 nuclear review of the United States would enhance arms race and provide greater leverage to battlefield of nuclear warheads while giving boost to application of tactical nuclear weapons, which historically NATO had inducted during the Cold War period against the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, American political and military leadership in its 2018 NPR has considered the dynamics of 'lowered nuclear threshold' which earlier in the 2010 Obama NPR revolved around 'increased nuclear threshold'. This happened due to undeclared Russian induction of tactical nuclear warheads in any possible war theatre with NATO at the European battlefield. Also, US acceptance of the lowered threshold would ignite a new wave of political orchestration around the globe particularly imposing political maneuvers against China and Russia including nations imposing strict protocols against US non-kinetic interventions. This research makes the point that possibility of war is possible under the new nuclear posture, which would be limited in scope and controlled in actions. Serious nations around the globe had already started non-kinetic war-gamming to evaluate the US doctrine and how it helps Washington to politically craft the environment in the regions such as South East Asia, South Asia, Middle East, and states compiling pro-Russian Eastern Europe. The findings of this study are based on deductive approach with hypothetical premises mentioned above.

Keywords: Nuclear Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review, United States, Tactical Nuclear Weapons, Non-Kinetic Interventions, Limited War, Europe, South East Asia, Middle East, South Asia.

Introduction

The 2018 nuclear posture review (NPR) of the United States, in continuation to the previously crafted 2010 Obama, NPR is a renewed effort to modernize the US military.¹ Moreover, Washington had envisioned enhancing reliance on battlefield utilization of 'non-strategic nuclear forces' in contradiction to the 2010 Obama NPR which focused more on strategic deterrence with induction of strategic weapons in the battlefield. Though, it is important to understand the context of 'non-strategic nuclear forces' in 2018 NPR. In fact, this refers to the idea around induction of nuclear weapons in the battlefield with lowered-yield such as tactical nuclear weapons. Interestingly, the

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lowered-yield of 'non-strategic nuclear forces' is that of the 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man' nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The yield could be adjusted keeping in view the strategic opponents of United States who have also clustered their non-strategic nuclear weapons with the same yield. So, the yield could be a problem for Pakistan or India but it would somehow get adjusted in the nuclear phenomenon of both United States and Russia. Today, under the February 2018 NPR United States is determined to acquire new modes of lowered-yield ballistic and cruise weapons for its sea based assets.²

Trump's NPR rationalizes adoption of the lowered-yield weapons with that of Russian undeclared induction of battlefield of nuclear warheads to successfully wage a war against the United States, while creating a limited war theatre. This in fact, recalls Pakistan's response to Indian Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) that envisions a similar limited war theatre under the nuclear shadow. Induction of battlefield weapons by Pakistan such as Nasr has jeopardized the dreams of Indian stalwarts. Though, Nasr does not maintain nuclear yield that of United States or Russian 'non-strategic nuclear weapons'. Without going into dilemma of South Asian nuclear environment, this research highlights the reemerging of limited war phenomenon between the United States and Russia. The stated rationale of the United States 2018 NPR is to address and correct an imaginary invented fantasy of the Russian misperception that "greater capacity in this area could give Moscow the possibility of successfully waging a limited nuclear war".³ For modernization of non-strategic nuclear weapons, it has been crafted in the 2018 NPR draft that:

*These supplements will enhance deterrence by denying potential adversaries any mistaken confidence that limited nuclear employment can provide a useful advantage over the United States and its allies. For example, Russia's belief that limited nuclear first use, potentially including low-yield weapons, can provide such an advantage is based, in part, on Moscow's perception that its greater number and variety of non-strategic nuclear systems provide a coercive advantage in crises and at lower levels of conflict. Correcting this mistaken Russian perception is a strategic imperative (NPR Draft 364-370).*⁴

The military buildup, under 2018 NPR, will give President Donald Trump "nuclear weapons that are theoretically more usable in a regional conflict".⁵ The application of NPR in real scenario would have drastic impacts with ability to trigger the brinkmanship anxiety towards misjudgment of the threshold. For example, the forward deployment of tactical nuclear warheads during crises time could catastrophically create a blockade inevitably originating food crisis that could potentially cause more deaths in Europe than real war. Moreover, forward deployment of such weapons itself create environment of limited war which consequently lowers the nuclear threshold and increases the possibility of ambiguity in conflict escalation leading the crisis into total war conflict.

The review reaffirms the willingness of the United States, which now seems prepared to adopt 'first use policy' during scenarios which are alarming and manifold at the same time. The traditional nuclear policy of the United States maintained an

ambiguous posturing vested in its response mechanism while remaining silent on explaining the exact circumstances that could demand a clear-cut nuclear response. Whereas, 2018 nuclear posture review specifically chart out the possible scenarios where it could unleash its weapons. For example, it calls the situation as “extreme circumstances” particularly to defend its interests which it refers as “vital interests of United States, its allies, and partners”. On this point the 2018 NPR draft specifically writes that:

The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners. Extreme circumstances could include significant non-nuclear strategic attacks. Significant non-nuclear strategic attacks include, but are not limited to, attacks on the U.S., allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure, and attacks on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, their command and control or warning and attack assessment capabilities (NPR Draft 915-920).⁶

The US right to use nuclear weapons also includes possibility when its friends are under attack which it refers as “allies and partners”. The document includes almost 30 states spread over “European, Asian, and Pacific” (NPR Draft 945-946) as US allies and partners which will be defended through the ‘use of nuclear weapons’ at times of crises.⁷ The definition of the “extreme circumstances” includes most probable Russian attack with non-strategic nuclear weapons or strategic conventional weapons on “allied or partner civilian population or its infrastructure”.⁸

The language and tone of the NPR also indicates that the connotation of “Russian attack” somehow includes allies and partners of Moscow into the context as well. For example, if Syria or Iran as ally or partner of Moscow launches some kind of attack against US or its “allies and partners”, it could also invoke the US nuclear response. Moreover, for deterrence stability the “United States also maintains a portion of its nuclear forces on daily alert, with the option of launching those forces promptly”.⁹ China, Russia, Iran, Syria and North Korea will be the direct victims of Trump NPR, whereas Pakistan must uphold its anxiety on the regional fronts that might have fallouts on its national security under the domain of non-kinetic mingling.

Challenges Erupting out of US NPR

The United States 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is compiled after eight years and surfaced with few changes into it as compared to the previous 2010 Obama NPR. The recent Trump NPR seems more aggressive based on the following reasons:

Negation of the CTBT

The review weakens the ongoing arms control treaties and disarmament commitments as the US retain the right to resume nuclear testing. Washington says that from now on the US doesn’t feel obliged to ratify Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The NPR draft specifically mentions that “the United States does not support ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty” (NPR Draft 529-530).¹⁰ This aptitude reflects dangerous trend because it’s the backward step and rolling back the

consensus of the global world. What signal United States wants to send to the world? By signaling such a drastic tilt in its nuclear posture, Washington has re-invoked the use of nuclear weapons.

United States investment to modernize its existing stockpile and raise inventory of non-strategic nuclear warheads will jeopardize the strategic stability with greater impact. Moreover, it's changing stance over CTBT along with building more sophisticated delivery means is a clear indication for possible real conflict. With all this in view, the 2018 NPR commitment to deploy the weapons on forward bases with ready to launch status under 'first use policy' to protect its so-called 30 allies is alarming. The increased political, economic and diplomatic tensions with contemporary Russia and China along with their allies like North Korea, Syria and Iran; make the United States nuclear posture review explosive. The silent orchestration of world order is feeding the momentum of limited war scenarios, which in turn had been the primary point of address in the 2018 US NPR.

Arms Race with New Means of Delivery

The United States wants to develop new means of delivery and more sophisticated nuclear devices compatible to its weapons. The NPR draft says that:

The United States will modify a small number of existing Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) warheads to provide a low-yield option, and in the longer term, pursue a modern nuclear-armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM) (NPR Draft 383-385)."

This indicates massive arms race in the domain of tactical nuclear warheads allowing induction of sophisticated technology usable to dictate the future battlefield. One needs to stay clear regarding trends of arms race. It's the US political will that had played decisive role to curtail or increase arms race among big powers particularly between itself and Russia. Washington had positively allowed mature responses to initiate global agreements ensuring arms control and disarmament. Today, Trump regime has invoked mistrust that has ignited the arms race and massive weaponization. Therefore, in absence of US commitment towards arms control and disarmament, the world is likely to witness proliferation of the battlefield weapons concept.

Fragile Parity

More worrisome is the possibility of limited war in regions like South Asia where warmongering Indian military could seek strength from such evolving international environment.¹² The so-called modernization of the delivery means would destabilize the fragile parity not only between the Cold War rivals but regional competitors like India vs. China, India vs. Pakistan, North Korea vs. South Korea, North Korea vs. Japan and Iran vs. Israel. This trend is possibly a dangerous step towards instability at global and regional fronts.

Gambling on ‘Allies vs. Partners’

Since early 1950s the United States maintains the pretext of nuclear umbrella to help protect its allies from nuclear attack. Today, the context involved the concept that if one of its partners gets hit by one of the weapons consisting chemical, biological or nuclear payloads/ agents, the United States could use nuclear weapons. In 2010 NPR, the United States used the term “allies” but interestingly the 2018 NPR propagates the term “partners”. So, the question arises, which are those countries that come in the new area of partnership? The 2018 US NPR writes that:

The United States has formal extended deterrence commitments that assure European, Asian, and Pacific allies. Assurance is a common goal based on collaboration with allies and partners to deter or defeat the threats we face. No country should doubt the strength of our assurance commitments or the strength of U.S. and allied capabilities to deter, and if necessary defeat, any potential adversary's nuclear or non-nuclear aggression. In many cases, effectively assuring allies and partners depends on their confidence in the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, which enables most to eschew possession of nuclear weapons, thereby contributing to U.S. non-proliferation goals” (NPR Draft 260-267).¹³

It seems that the United States can now add any country into its partnership that potentially brings valuable benefits for its global strategic objectives. The countries that can help her achieve interests against Russia, Iran and most probably North Korea could be of great status to qualify under “partners” category. In South Asian perspective India had already qualified for the special status against China and Pakistan. The pace of strategic relations, military modernization, defense pacts, and international projection of the Indian potential is adamant to the portfolio that New Delhi would soon resume under ‘partners’ cluster.

Lowered Nuclear Threshold

The threshold of using nuclear weapons in the 2018 NPR is significantly lowered. From now on the US believes to use nuclear weapons in the wake of chemical and biological attack. Amazingly in the wake of cyber-attack as well.¹⁴ Now a days, it's really difficult to locate the real source of cyber-attack and all these factors (chemical, biological and cyber) provides brilliant excuse and opportunity to manipulate facts and the reality surrounding the complexity of the issue. For example, Syrian President Bashar-ul-Asad is a bad guy and he has used chemical weapons against his people. Regardless of fact finding, ‘let's use nuclear weapons against him’ could be the mantra used to facilitate execution of 2018 NPR ‘first use policy’. Not going too far into history, we remember how Iraq was bombed on the phenomenon of ‘weapons of mass destruction’. Did the world found WMDs in Iraq? While looking for an answer of that question, this research also highlights few more scenarios that international community should be interested to find relevance that is taking birth out of 2018 NPR. For example, the NPR draft specifically writes that:

There now exist an unprecedented range and mix of threats, including major conventional, chemical, biological, nuclear, space, and cyber threats,

and violent non-state actors. International relations are volatile. Russia and China are contesting the international norms and order we have worked with our allies, partners, and members of the international community to build and sustain. Some regions are marked by persistent disorder that appears likely to continue and possibly intensify. These developments have produced increased uncertainty and risk (NPR Draft 579-584).¹⁵

The dilemma of mixed range of threats is volatile under the lowered nuclear threshold. This in fact is not a new phenomenon neither had been envisioned for the first time. At Cold War climax, tactical nuclear warheads were the reality to bring battlefield maneuvers though it faced issues of command and control system. The 2018 acceptance of the tactical nuclear weapons is different to Cold War as recent US NPR formally accepts the role of non-strategic nuclear weapons under the prevailing strategic command and control system and allows deployment of them at forward bases.

Implications of the United States Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) on Global and Regional Stability

Due to urgency in the United States nuclear posture review that undermines not only stability of the strategic deterrence but also lowers down the nuclear threshold by inducting tactical nuclear warheads into its forward bases; it is important to highlight contexts of limited war that most probably would define the future battlefield. Below are mentioned few of the important regions that come under the radar of the US nuclear posture review. The regions enlisted below include Europe, Middle East, South East Asia, and South Asia.

Affects of the US NPR on Europe?

The official acceptance of the US to develop new delivery means compatible to tactical nuclear warheads is somehow legitimizing the scenario of limited war at local level. Though, the war is less likely to erupt between great powers such as between US and Russia but projection and likeliness of the limited conflict at the regional level will most likely convert the overall theatre into strategic level. The 2018 NPR categorically sets its pace in context to nuclear developments in Russia. It says:

While Russia initially followed America's lead and made similarly sharp reductions in its strategic nuclear forces, it retained large numbers of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Today, Russia is modernizing these weapons as well as its strategic systems. Even more troubling has been Russia's adoption of military strategies and capabilities that rely on nuclear escalation for their success. These developments, coupled with Russia's invasion of Crimea and nuclear threats against our allies, mark Moscow's unabashed return to Great Power competition (NPR Draft lines 77 to 82).¹⁶

The presumption of the US NPR believing that Russia plans to induct tactical nuclear warheads during its most likely conflict with NATO in Europe is somehow out of order. Further, ambiguity around induction of non-strategic tactical nuclear weapons by Russians somehow demands a credible acceptance from Moscow, which is still a

missing link. The trajectory of recent missile tests by the Russians suggests the other way around. For example, March 2018 test of 'Sarmat' that NATO refers as 'Satan 2' is an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile meant to address the global anti-missile defense shield of the USA.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, it's the United States that wants a limited war scenario to squeeze Russian influence in Eastern Europe. Due to 2018 NPR, it's the Europe that must feel the heat and birth of new Cold War rivalry on its territory. Acceptance of the limited war context by the United States would not hesitate to orchestrate possible application of it.

Eastern Europe will be the next battlefield replacing Cold War's Vietnam and Afghanistan. The unpredictable Trump is going to receive political benefits for the second term from the mantra of limited war just like Narendra Modi of India. The limited war scenario in Europe would have great potential to directly engage nuclear powers which most likely trigger the issues of threshold. War thereafter will be very expensive and Europe's unwillingness to accept lower threshold would create issues of brinkmanship. Any such scenario would ultimately qualify the limited war into total war which is why disqualifies the European theater as an immediate battlefield between U.S. and Russia. It is therefore, the mantra of war may be shifted to another region and most probably into Middle East which both rival can easily manipulate.

Implications of the US NPR on Middle East

As postured above, the region of Middle East is one of the biggest battlefields for the American strategic objectives. Whether legitimate or incorrectly postured, American policy makers have visualized all necessary means to achieve their objectives. Moreover, the so-called US politics is endorsed and even extended through tangible support by the dominant regional nations like Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Israel to mention few. As a result, Iran and Syria emerge as a rival block to the US political orchestration. Henceforth, overall situation somehow paves the way for global gambling. Russian placement in internal affairs of Middle East becomes inimitable which executes its plan, with the help of Iranian and Syrian political posturing, against US objective. Russian approach is more reactive in regional affairs of the Middle East. In fact, it jumps into the whole context as an ally to the anti-US nexus and provides tangible support to its allies and partners. As a conclusive posture, the Middle Eastern politics is hostile to global politics that fuel and support ideological fault lines among the regional nations.

Taking the context in relevance to the recent NPR, the Middle East holds some of the US "allies and partners" that are in bad shape such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Both the states face tangible threats due to Iranian ideological and political positioning. The so-called *Daesh* or ISIS is again a non-state element that has camouflaged identity in the region. Many experts believe that *Daesh* is orchestrated and sponsored by the US and Israeli intelligence agencies to destabilize part of the Middle East which is favorable for both; Washington and Tel Aviv.¹⁸ Further, the depth of the so-called *Daesh* is only active in Iraq and Syria. These two nations had always faced isolation and hostility from the US and Israeli politic-o-military leadership. This tendency of *Daesh* in fact declassify

US-Israeli nexus to manipulate the security politics of the region, where non-state actors play decisive role to ensure the instability.

The other ally or partner that fits into NPR context is Saudi Arabia. Due to the double dealing nature of US global politics, the Saudi security establishment would be victim of NPR. The contemporary political landscape of the region particularly Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Syria pose great challenges for the Middle East stability. It is most probably a challenging situation for Israel and Saudi Arabia too. Both the states along with US are looking forward to bring necessary arrangements that shall curtail any opportunity for anti-Saudi, anti-Israel and anti-US forces operating in the region.

The so-called anti-forces operating in the region are none other than Iran, Syria and their strategic partner the Russian Federation. Syria and Iran had also formed quite an impressive bond with Russia that has showed political, military and diplomatic support at times of dire need. Since the eruption of so-called instability in Syria, Moscow had been actively supporting the Bashar-ul-Asad regime with all means available in its basket. As a result, the regime has successfully reestablished its political writ and projected itself resilient to international propaganda orchestrated by the United States. The situation in Syria is neither ideal nor it could be called a state where life of its citizens is protected. Whatsoever is the situation but the conclusive hypothesis is somewhat not in favor of the US and its allies in the Middle East who wanted regime change in Syria. Out of tragedy, the situation evidently frustrates the United States. Politics around Syria is now stretching out its instability towards Saudi Arabia. Yemen is about to explode anti-Saudi militancy, which does have its ideological connections with Iran, Syria and so-called US-Israeli sponsored non-state actors.

It is also important to bring forefront the most important rival of the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia; which is Iran. The 2018 NPR draft highlights Iran with specific context which is:

Iran, too, poses proliferation threats. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has most recently stated that, "America is the number one enemy of our nation." While Iran has agreed to constraints on its nuclear program in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), many of the agreement's restrictions on Iran's nuclear program will end by 2031. In addition, Iran retains the technological capability and much of the capacity necessary to develop a nuclear weapon within one year of a decision to do so. Iran's development of increasingly long-range ballistic missile capabilities, and its aggressive strategy and activities to destabilize neighboring governments, raises questions about its long-term commitment to foregoing nuclear weapons capability. Were Iran to pursue nuclear weapons after JCPOA restrictions end, pressures on other countries in the region to acquire their own nuclear weapons would increase" (NPR Draft 775-785).¹⁹

The current political circumstances of the Middle East evidently reject the so-called US led orchestration in the region. United States failure to isolate Syria has now shifted to resist Tehran's political space granted earlier through nuclear agreement. Tehran has categorically announced to increase nuclear enrichment in case the

agreement is cancelled.²⁰ The major stakeholders including France, UK, China, Russia and Germany has been striving hard to stay with the agreement but due to American unilateral withdrawal, the so-called international commitment has entered into a black hole. The situation is now vindicating a new security environment in the region that brings them all into politics of vengeance.

2018 NPR is evidently addressing the so-called politics of vengeance. Today, if someone has to define the Middle East, following narratives dominate the environment such as; Middle East is hub of Daesh/ISSI, Bashar-ul-Asad is committing war crimes and killing innocent civilians with chemical weapons, Iran is sponsoring terrorism in the region particularly against Israel and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, developments around Iranian nuclear agreement would isolate Tehran that in turn could end up in a political frustration. All this provides breeding ground for mistrust and political tussles among the competing blocks. Initiation of any reaction on ground would demand protection and safety of “allies and partners” that United States would ensure under 2018 NPR with forward deployment of tactical nuclear warheads. The possible response against US military posture would trigger Russian reaction, hence making the situation closer to ‘zero hour’.

South East Asia as a Pivot to 2018 US NPR

China is under enormous pressure when it comes to the issue of North Korea in general and South China Sea in particular. Beijing’s political problems over the issue of Taiwan, Tibet and Hong Kong make it more vulnerable to proactively engage in any military adventure orchestrated by its immediate neighbor India or global rival USA. Moreover, NPR connotation of ‘allies and partners’ is somehow very suitable for the United States to twist the situation to put military pressure over China. The dilemma of disconnectivity between Chinese people and its leadership is somehow fruitful variable for the orchestration of political mingling under the non-kinetic or hybrid warfare. The NPR draft amalgamates Russia, China and North Korea as a common threat and highlights their developments with unique context as under:

While United States has continued to reduce the number and salience of nuclear weapons, others, including Russia and China have moved in the opposite direction. Russia has expanded and improved its strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces. China’s military modernization has resulted in an expanded nuclear force, with little to no transparency into its intentions. North Korea continues its illicit pursuit of nuclear weapons and missile capabilities in direct violation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. Russia and North Korea have increased the salience of nuclear forces in their strategies and plans and have engaged in increasingly explicit nuclear threats. Along with China, they have also engaged in increasingly aggressive behavior in outer space and cyber space (NPR Draft 585-593).²¹

What America needs is a military instrument to impose blockade that could potentially create timely brinkmanship crises in China. Billions of people can prevail under poverty but not under fear of being alienated. After Russia, China becomes the greatest victim of US acceptance of limited war and deployment of tactical nuclear

warheads at forward bases. In real perspective, it is the American capacity in the area of non-strategic tactical nuclear warheads that could give her the possibility of successfully waging a limited war in Europe, Middle East and South East Asia.

2018 NPR's Relevance for South Asia

South Asia is no different to Europe, Middle East and South East Asia when it comes to strategic gambling orchestrated under the new 2018 NPR. Indo-US strategic partnership is clear example of bilateral manifestation between New Delhi and Washington. Interestingly, 2018 US NPR and Indian Draft Nuclear Doctrine both have similar ambiguities when it comes to the use of nuclear weapons. For example, the Indian Nuclear Doctrine states that:

*In the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons.*²²

The United States 2018 NPR states that:

*The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners. Extreme circumstances could include significant non-nuclear strategic attacks. Significant non-nuclear strategic attacks include, but are not limited to, attacks on U.S., allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure, and attacks on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, their command and control or warning and attack assessment capabilities (NPR Draft 915-920).*²³

Moreover, the Indian Nuclear Doctrine calls upon non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states and specifically states that:

*India will not resort to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against States which do not possess nuclear weapons, or are not aligned with nuclear weapon powers.*²⁴

On this second point the U.S. NPR states that:

*The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their non-nuclear proliferation obligations (NPR Draft 921-923).*²⁵

Not going into the details of expression coincidence in the Indian and American nuclear language, still there is quite a good nexus between both the states. In fact, South Asia is the only region in the world that provides Washington a unique opportunity to squeeze both China and Pakistan while keeping an eye on Iran and Russia by using India and Afghanistan. It can jeopardize the Chinese network of land routes while using Afghanistan and blockade the sea route while using India in the Indian Ocean. Both OBOR and CPEC get intense pressure from Indo-US nexus. Moreover, their joint exercises in the South China Sea are also evident to disallow free mobilization of Chinese trade. The language of 2018 NPR is quite evident and apprehensively classifies China as a threatening actor to US interests or interests of its

“allies and partners”. Tangible response mechanism adopted by China and Pakistan altogether, or in individual capacity, will face Indo-US military adventurism. Engaging China on sea and land routes along with political turmoil on its neighboring territories would have dire consequences for Beijing. That is why either South China Sea or CPEC-cum-OBOR could be the triggering element to initiate China vs. US tug of war.

Squeezing Pakistan is somewhat gloomy for Indo-US strategic nexus. Afghanistan also is unable to push Pakistan towards instability though it had done all efforts to do so. The reason is robust and rigid due to security setup that Pakistan Army along with civil law enforcement agencies has installed in the country. It is today quite impossible to breach Pakistani intelligence and security apparatus for extra regional forces. Nor India and U.S. are successful to weaken Pakistani commitment to execute CPEC plan of action. Therefore, out of frustration the application of the limited war context would require a nexus between regional and extra-regional forces. It is thereby estimated that political, diplomatic and military instruments applied against Chinese influence in South China Sea and Indian Ocean along with land routes such as CPEC and OBOR is the most visible and viable area where Indo-US strategic nexus would like to trigger limited war. Pakistan being close ally and partner of Chinese CPEC and OBOR projects would inevitably play decisive role to secure Indian Ocean and land routes. Failure to negate the pace of positive stability, India might execute its ‘Cold Start Doctrine’ against Pakistan. The dual politico-military blockade by the US against China and India against Pakistan altogether would isolate both Beijing and Islamabad.

The situation would somehow require tangible response from China and Pakistan that as a result could trigger issues of brinkmanship. It is again important to note that Pakistan does not accept lowered nuclear threshold and that is why it had inducted tactical nuclear warheads to deter Indian Cold Start Doctrine. The situation will be worsening if India in alliance with United States executes its limited war strategy. In that scenario Pakistan would certainly uphold its ‘first use option’ against Indian adventure. Moreover, Chinese nuclear doctrine is silent on a scenario such as limited war. The 2018 NPR have definite implications and challenges for Chinese territorial sovereignty along with her ambitious economic plans spread around continents. The balanced evaluation of the Chinese nuclear response would not allow lowering the nuclear threshold, henceforth; making any such move of the United States and India to isolate Beijing could be catastrophic. Chinese response will be critical to US “allies and partners” in the region.

India and Afghanistan on the other hand find themselves in NPR list of “allies and partners”. The condition is an unconditional acceptance of Washington’s global ambitions. India is an ideal partner for the US and coincidentally follows the same brutal politics in the region against peaceful nations. India is an occupant nation so do the United States.

India had spread terrorism in South Asia and used its serving military officers like Col Purohit²⁶ and Commander Kalboshan Yadav to perpetrate violence within and outside India. Moreover, more than a million standing army of India is killing innocent Kashmiris.²⁷ Rap, torture and use of pellet guns are a common tool of the Indian army to

suppress freedom struggle of Kashmiris. Not only Kashmiris but in India, there are millions striving hard to achieve their freedom out of 'Hindutva' ideology.²⁸ Sikhs, Tamils and Nexalites are few of the examples. Kashmir is exception because under 1947 Partition Plan of British India, it was supposed to be part of Pakistan.²⁹

Indian forces occupied the territory in 1948 and since then it had been suppressing the freedom struggle of Kashmiris. Kashmir is also exceptional due to its very international acceptance as a disputed territory. For example, the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed the United Nation Resolutions to grant the Kashmiris a right of self-determination through a plebiscite in 1948.³⁰ The world is silent not only on human rights violations in Kashmir but it had also paid no attention to United Nations resolutions. It seems what matters in international politics is only 'politics of self-interest' not 'politics of self-above'. Due to nature of international politics India is playing politics of instability in the region and Pakistan is one of the biggest victims. Moreover, New Delhi's hegemonic ambitions had poisoned its military thought which had evolved mantra of madness in form of limited war, the Cold Start Doctrine.

United States NPR seems an associated concept of Indian Cold Start Doctrine that also accommodates limited war concept along with induction of non-strategic nuclear weapons at the forward bases. Washington's track record of occupying foreign nations is so rich that one cannot simply ignore. For example, use of force against Iraq that ruined the lives of millions of people is not an ideal episode of its foreign adventures. Also American global war on terror had contributed more towards terrorism rather mitigated the very threat. Nations are today instable and struggling with best available means against turmoil erupted out of American concept of war. Afghanistan has provided an ideal launching pad both for India and United States to maneuver instability in region. It is dangerously being used against Pakistan, China, Iran and Russian interest in Central Asian Republics (CARs). In South Asia, India and Afghanistan are the key "allies and partners" of the United States. Therefore, in case of any political orchestration by the Washington both New Delhi and Kabul will fall in the events of limited war against Pakistan and China.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed possible changes that happened in the new Nuclear Posture Review of the United States in 2018. Moreover, different hypothetical situations are created to understand the possible application of NPR that has adopted the concept of limited war. In this respect, four regions including Europe, Middle East, South East Asia and South Asia were highlighted along with their potential to host United States new concept of limited war. All these scenarios have different complexities and security anxieties that make them separately ideal for the implementation of limited war concept. It now depends on the US policy makers when and how they want to destabilize the regions mentioned above. Some are already paddling between stability and instability. What is necessary to understand is how the victim nations are going to respond to such American understanding of future battlefield? How Russia and China; as great powers and regional nations like Iran and Pakistan would respond to 2018 NPR?

The fundamental take out from this paper is the American acceptance of lowered nuclear threshold with possibility of limited war and deployment of tactical nuclear warheads at the forward bases. This in fact, creates possibility of conflict under the nuclear overhang while undermining the strategic deterrence. The increased nuclear threshold had been playing decisive role to maintain peace and security in the world. Earlier, only India wished to lower the nuclear threshold to destabilize Pakistan that Islamabad timely responded with induction of tactical nuclear warheads. Moreover, Islamabad had never neutralized its 'first use option' against Indian possible adventurism but the context of limited war under extra-regional forces somehow increases the security anxiety of Pakistan. Whether it's 'Cold Start or Hot Start', Pakistan should remain fully ready to respond to any Indian ambitions vested in its limited war strategy.³¹How China, Russia, North Korea and Iran are going to respond to US nuclear twisting is a question that needs an answer.

NOTES

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