INTRODUCTION

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The stability-instability paradox, which was conceptualized during the Cold War in universities and think tanks, has proven to have quite significant real-world applications. The stability-instability paradox postulates that, when nuclear-armed competitors acquire the Bomb, they will seek to avoid a crossing of the nuclear threshold, and hence maintain a safe distance from catastrophe. But at the same time, one or both competitors might view this fearsome threshold as an opportunity as well as an insurance policy, since an adversary's reluctance to cross this threshold could provide license for mischief making below it.

The stability-instability paradox was seemingly confirmed in the Twin Peaks crisis that is the subject of this Stimson Center Report. This crisis was sparked by an attack by Islamic extremists on the Indian parliament building, which prompted a ten-month-long standoff in which the Indian and Pakistani armed forces were maintained at a high state of readiness to fight. During this standoff, another significant terrorist act was directed at the families of Indian soldiers stationed at the front. Nonetheless, the Government of India declined to wage war. Instead, it engaged the crisis management skills of Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to seek an end to the standoff.

Deterrence and war-fighting theories conceived in academia and think tanks are typically very neat and tidy. Crises, as well as warfare, on the other hand, can produce unpredictable and unexpected results. In the real world, no one can be certain that violence at the level of subconventional, limited, or proxy warfare will not spill across the nuclear threshold, whether by design, accident, miscalculation, inadvertence, or a breakdown of command and control. The stability-instability paradox is by no means a sure thing. Like other corollaries of deterrence theory, the stability-instability paradox "works" only until it fails. And one failure could be catastrophic.

The Henry L. Stimson has focused a great deal on the applicability of the stability-instability paradox to the nuclear-tinged competition between India and Pakistan.[1] In the early phases of this competition, full-scale conventional and nuclear wars have been avoided, while the incidence of serious crises has increased and one limited war has been fought. The evidence accumulated to date strongly suggests a regional confirmation of the stability-instability paradox.

To be sure, there are many differences between the US-Soviet and India-Pakistan cases. During the Cold War, Moscow enjoyed clear conventional military superiority along the most likely line of engagement, while Washington enjoyed nuclear superiority, at least in the earliest decades of the contest. Tactical nuclear weapons

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[1] See Michael Krepon and Ziad Haider, eds., *Reducing Nuclear Dangers in South Asia,* Stimson Report #50 (Washington D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, February 2004), Michael Krepon, Rodney W. Jones, and Ziad Haider, eds., *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia* (Washington D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, November 2004), and Michael Krepon, ed., *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

played an important role in the US-Soviet rivalry. Moreover, during the Cold War, the instability half of the paradox took the form of proxy wars far distant from the most sensitive equities of the two superpowers.

In contrast, the geographical propinquity of India and Pakistan rules out the safety of a long-distance competition. In addition, religion, not ideology, helps fuel the nuclear competition on the subcontinent. Nuclear risk reduction efforts in South Asia must take into account religious extremism, a factor entirely absent in the US-Soviet competition.

The conventional/nuclear balance on which the stability-instability paradox rests in South Asia is also quite different from that of the United States and the Soviet Union. While India's conventional military advantages over Pakistan are indisputable, the nuclear balance at this formative stage of the competition is still very opaque. Another difference is that India and Pakistan both claim that they are disinterested in tactical nuclear weapons.

Because every competition and military balance between two nuclear-armed rivals is different, it stands to reason that the particular conditions under which the stability-instability paradox plays out will also be different.[2] But for all of the differences in the US-Soviet and India-Pakistan cases, both appear to reinforce the same bottom line: a serious competition between states that possess nuclear weapons reinforces the caution of national leaders to avoid a full-scale conventional or a nuclear war, while increasing the instances of risk-taking below these thresholds.[3]

This was not the expectation of leading strategists, commentators, and government officials in India and then Pakistan after both countries decided to test nuclear devices in 1998. Back then, many expressed the confident expectation that, with their bombs now out of the basement, New Delhi and Islamabad could get on with the essential business of normalizing their ties and moving beyond old grievances. Instead, a series of hair-raising crises ensued, the most recent of which is dissected in this report. When two states add an existential threat to existing layers of mistrust and enmity, it should come as no surprise that, at a minimum, crises will follow.

The relevance of the stability-instability paradox in South Asia is no longer disputed by Indian and Pakistani strategic analysts. The question at hand is whether both countries have had their fill of intense crises and limited wars. India's answer to this question is not hard to divine. As the *status quo* power with respect to the Kashmir dispute, New Delhi would surely welcome the normalization of its ties with Pakistan, even though India's leaders have so far found it difficult to move beyond small steps toward a final settlement.

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[2] See, for example, S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 127-152.

[3] The Sino-Soviet competition also resulted in border friction soon after Beijing joined Moscow in the nuclear club. Among nuclear competitors, only the post 1974 Sino-Indian competition has not—or not yet—resulted in similar friction or a proxy war. This exception merits closer scrutiny.

Pakistan's leaders face a far more difficult set of choices. The proxy war supported by Pakistan's military and intelligence services has not loosened New Delhi's grip from Kashmir, but it has tied down significant numbers of Indian security forces. As the disparity in conventional military capabilities grows in favor of New Delhi, some in Pakistan might well seek to extend India's long and painful security presence in Kashmir. This choice would surely impose costs on India, but it would likely result in even greater injury to Pakistan's standing and domestic well-being. The longer Pakistan's military and intelligence services support unconventional warfare in Kashmir, the more they accentuate the negative trend lines imperiling Pakistan's future.

President Pervez Musharraf's new thinking—or at least his new initiatives—regarding Kashmir suggest that he understands the damage done to Pakistan by providing safe haven for Islamic extremists. But key steps required for Pakistan to become a moderate, enlightened, Islamic state remain untaken. It is hard to see how Pakistan becomes the country envisioned by Musharraf and the Qaid-e-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, without jettisoning Pakistan's proactive Kashmir policy and without normalizing relations with India.

The impulse toward normalization wanes with bomb blasts at sensitive sites and symbolic targets in India. As in other Islamic countries, religious parties that have militant wings in Pakistan appear to be gaining more of a voice in domestic affairs. It is sobering to consider that Musharraf seems unable or unwilling to make enough of the hard decisions needed to significantly brighten Pakistan's future. If this is not possible by Musharraf—a general who enjoys the backing of the Army, the nation's most powerful and coherent institution, and who presides over a country that practices multi-party politics, whose two biggest parties do not define themselves in religious terms—then Pakistan's relations with India could be troubled for a long while.

Judging by the US-Soviet and India-Pakistan cases, the most dangerous phase of the stability-instability paradox is at the early stages of the nuclear competition. The Berlin and Cuban missile crises provided glimpses into the abyss. After this dangerous passage, Washington and Moscow began to take steps to reduce nuclear dangers by means of technical measures as well as political accommodation in particularly sensitive regions. Both superpowers continued to compete and continued to experience crises, but with more insulation against a crossing of the nuclear threshold.

Have India and Pakistan reached a similar understanding? Is the Twin Peaks crisis of 2001-2002 analyzed in the pages that follow the functional equivalent of South Asia's Cuban missile crisis?

To be sure, Pakistan and India have taken modest, but important steps to relax constraints on travel, trade, and other exchanges. Elementary nuclear risk-reduction measures have been adopted, such as improved communication links and a ballistic missile flight test pre-notification agreement. These steps have increased insulation against shocks, but small, positive steps toward normal relations between New Delhi and Islamabad can be trumped by big explosions at sensitive sites.

The Twin Peaks crisis was defined by two big explosions—one at the Indian parliament building in December 2001, the other in May 2002, directed at family members of Indian troops in Jammu mobilized to fight. The reasons why a war was avoided during this extended crisis, and the lessons learned by US crisis managers, are discussed in the pages that follow.

Regrettably, these lessons learned still have considerable relevance. There is no steady-state equilibrium during this transitional phase of India-Pakistan relations. If bilateral ties do not improve, they will backslide. And if serious efforts are made to improve ties, or to seek a resolution of Kashmir's agony, significant efforts will also be made to disrupt progress. Only sustained, top-down impulses toward normalizing ties can provide sufficient insulation against extreme shocks. But each act of terrorism makes new diplomatic initiatives by Pakistani leaders less credible, and those by Indian leaders less likely.

If backsliding occurs and significant acts of terrorism directed against targets in India continue, another nuclear-tinged crisis could well confront leaders in New Delhi, Islamabad and Washington. The case study that follows serves as a warning against complacency. The stability-instability paradox is still operative in South Asia.