

Introduction

Michael Krepon and Chris Gagné

Nuclear deterrence theory is now being tested against the complex realities in South Asia. In the formative stages of the US–Soviet nuclear competition, deterrence theorists identified a stability–instability paradox associated with the acquisition of offsetting nuclear weapon capabilities. The essence of this paradox was that nuclear weapons were supposed to stabilize relations between adversaries, and to foreclose a major war between them. At the same time, offsetting nuclear capabilities might well prompt provocations, instability, and even conflict at lower levels—precisely because nuclear weapons would presumably provide protection against escalation.

Nuclear deterrence theorists and strategic analysts argue about the stability–instability paradox. "Deterrence optimists" who believe in the stabilizing attributes of offsetting nuclear capabilities are convinced that the specter of the mushroom cloud will rationalize national security policies. For example, the most renowned deterrence optimist in the West, Kenneth Waltz, attributes the limited duration and scope of the Kargil war, as well as the concerted international efforts to end the hostilities, to the nuclear dangers present.

Other deterrence theorists are not as sanguine about the stabilizing impact of nuclear weapons. Most strategic analysts believe that offsetting nuclear forces could only provide for stability when both sides' nuclear forces are safe, secure, and survivable against pre-emptive attack. Even then, "deterrence pessimists" argue that nuclear capabilities are no guarantee of sensible national security policy. In any event, achievement of stable conditions between nuclear adversaries takes time. In the meantime, nuclear dangers are usually quite pronounced, and the stability–instability paradox is most evident.

For example, the first fifteen years of the US–Soviet nuclear standoff were accompanied by harrowing crises over Berlin, Cuba, and a prolonged ground war on the Korean peninsula. Soon after acquiring offsetting nuclear capabilities, China clashed with the Soviet Union in a contested border region. India and Pakistan appear to be following a similar course; soon after demonstrating the efficacy of their nuclear weapon designs, they engaged in a limited, high-altitude war along the Line of Control dividing Kashmir.

If there is one lesson to be learned from these cases, it is that stability is far from assured once states cross the nuclear threshold. Instead, stability and safety from nuclear danger require constant attention, hard work, and unilateral steps to put in place redundant and reliable command and control, as well as steps to improve and co-ordinate intelligence capabilities. These measures are absolutely

necessary, but they are also insufficient. Cooperation between nuclear adversaries is also essential if nuclear dangers are to be managed properly. Reducing nuclear dangers requires collaboration amidst competition.

Cooperation to reduce nuclear dangers is now sorely lacking in South Asia. The purpose of this Stimson Center Report is to provide impetus to indigenous approaches to nuclear risk reduction in the Subcontinent. This will be extremely challenging for many reasons, including Pakistan's continuing opposition to the *status quo* in Kashmir, the unsettled nature of the region's borders, and the difficulties in establishing substantive official exchanges on these matters.

Responsible national leaders have no choice but to establish the modalities for nuclear safety, and as this report is published, Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Pakistani Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf are about to try. The timing of *The Stability–Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia* is therefore quite fortuitous. The five essays contained in the report focus on the complex triangular nuclear interaction among India, Pakistan, and China. These essays examine nuclear dangers in the region and propose strategies for reducing these dangers through political, diplomatic, and technical means.

Michael Krepon, President Emeritus of the Stimson Center, discusses the key elements of nuclear risk reduction during the Cold War in “Nuclear Risk Reduction: Is Cold War Experience Applicable to Southern Asia?” While acknowledging the differences between the US–Soviet experience and the conditions present in South Asia, Krepon argues that the key elements for risk reduction are applicable to the India–Pakistan–China triad. The author observes that “it took Washington and Moscow two decades to pass through a dangerous opening phase of nuclear competition to establish treaty-based and less formal risk-reduction arrangements. India, Pakistan, and China are now in this difficult passage, but without the likely prospect of treaties to curtail regional nuclear dangers.” Leaders in these three countries argue that they will not repeat the Cold War mistake of bloated arsenals. However, Krepon asserts, “if China, India, and Pakistan are to demonstrate a superior wisdom that resists ever-increasing nuclear capabilities, they must first demonstrate a superior wisdom to reduce nuclear risks.”

In “Nuclear Restraint, Nuclear Risk Reduction, and the Security–Insecurity Paradox in South Asia,” P.R. Chari, Director of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies in New Delhi, contends that offsetting nuclear arsenals in South Asia have encouraged brinkmanship. Chari claims that there is a real danger of nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan because “the Kargil conflict revealed streaks of both rationality and irrationality by Indian and Pakistani leaders.” He argues that “pursuing the weaponization and deployment option would introduce great instability in bilateral relations” between India and Pakistan.

Chris Gagne, Research Associate at the Stimson Center, asserts that deterrence optimists and pessimists would both view the prospects of stable nuclear deterrence in South Asia with skepticism, particularly with the absence of nuclear risk-reduction measures. In “Nuclear Risk Reduction: Building on Common Ground,” Gagne illustrates the commonalities in Indian and Pakistani views on risk reduction and proposes these as starting points to build a process toward implementing a nuclear risk-reduction regime. He claims that India and Pakistan have started a process of nuclear risk reduction “by agreeing to broad concepts of nuclear risk reduction and confidence-building in principle” and argues, “if India and Pakistan are able to successfully implement a few simple [nuclear risk-reduction measures], bolder and more comprehensive steps could eventually follow.” Measures such as a formal moratorium on nuclear tests, an agreement to provide advanced notification of ballistic missile flight tests, and reliable lines of communication between India and Pakistan are all steps that ostensibly have strong support on both sides of the border.

In “Missile Threat Reduction and Monitoring in South Asia,” Kent Biringer of Sandia National Laboratories highlights the growing significance of ballistic missile-based threats in South Asia. Biringer suggests that the “introduction of missiles might serve to correct imbalances in nuclear or conventional capabilities,” but warns that “as inventories and types of missiles increase and as they are deployed, there could be an escalation of tension.” He argues that “agreement on monitoring and verification mechanisms would be an important element of moving forward on setting limits and minimizing threats” with regards to ballistic missiles and that “unilateral measures or limited scale cooperative experiments could be undertaken to demonstrate and evaluate the effectiveness of monitoring options.”

Finally, in “The Logic of Third Party Mediation over Kashmir,” Harinder Baweja, a journalist with *India Today*, argues that a third party, such as the United States, could play a useful, and not unprecedented role in reducing tension between India and Pakistan—if both countries are willing to allow it. Baweja asserts that since its inception, “the Government of India has been paranoid at the thought of international intervention, interference, or even interest, in the Kashmir issue,” but declares that “today, the very concept of a strictly bilateral approach is outdated and shortsighted.” She suggests that a third party could help to facilitate discussions on some of India and Pakistan’s most pressing bilateral issues as well as provide “legitimacy and staying power” to agreements that might otherwise become casualties of Pakistan’s uncertain political future.

This report is made possible by the generous grant support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the W. Alton Jones Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The editors wish to thank our case study authors for their contributions to this report. The editors also wish to thank Pradeep Ramamurthy for his research assistance and L.A. Levy, Claudine McCarthy, Elizabeth Wallish, Gail Cowan, Matt Martin, Caroline Earle, and Jessica Trojak for their assistance in preparing this report for publication.