

Event Transcript:

20 Years After Kargil

The Future of Strategic (In)Stability in Southern Asia

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Featuring:

Hannah Haegeland, Research Analyst, Stimson Center South Asia Program

Sameer Lalwani, Director & Senior Fellow, Stimson Center South Asia Program

Frank O'Donnell, Postdoctoral Fellow, National Security Affairs Department,
U.S. Naval War College

Negeen Pegahi, Assistant Professor, Strategic and Operational Research
Department, U.S. Naval War College

Diana Wueger, Faculty Associate for Research, Department of National Security
Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California; PhD student,
University of Chicago

More information available at: <https://www.stimson.org/content/20-years-after-kargil-future-strategic-instability-southern-asia>

Stimson Center South Asia Program

Haegeland: Thank you to everyone for being here this morning and to the Carnegie Endowment for opening up these side panels and inviting people to submit proposals, to come and host conversations. Stimson's really glad to be doing this. One important note that may get reiterated a few times is that several of our panelists work or are affiliated with the Naval War College and Naval Postgraduate School, and I have been asked to make clear that in no way are their views representative of the Department of Defense. They are their own. Take them for what they're worth or not worth.

Haegeland: Before we get going, I want to answer a question that was posed to me yesterday about a term that Stimson's been using for some time, but maybe others use differently. It's this term "Southern Asia." The question I got asked was, "What is Southern Asia, first of all, and why does Stimson keep using it?" The initial answer is that we hit a point as people who work on South Asia day in and day out where we couldn't talk about any of our issues anymore without discussing China, without bringing Chinese counterparts and scholars into the room. Paired with that very practical reality was the increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific region, the strategic chain terminology that Bob Einhorn propagated, I think, through a PASCSC supported project. We found that it's a useful term to capture all of the strategic competition in this amorphous space that people talk about very differently in a useful way.

Haegeland: And then, in terms of our focus on the Kargil crisis, I think a number of you are quite familiar with this, but for those of you who aren't and who are jumping into South Asia nuclear issues, Kargil presented this really interesting case study for both South Asia, but for nuclear issues and nuclear powers around the world. It was really the first time overt nuclear powers had gone to war in 30 years, and only the second time in the history of nuclear issues in the world. 20 years later, we're still having debates of scholars and people who think about these issues about what that reality might mean for our work today, in South Asia but also broadly.

Haegeland: I think I will go ahead and probably skip introductions. I'm going to ask each person to go ahead and just identify yourself once we come to you first. I'm going to start with my boss, who is the Director of the South Asia Program at the Stimson Center, Sameer Lalwani. Sameer, I'm going to ask you, as we look back on these last couple weeks, we had this very big crisis that people are calling Pulwama in South Asia between India and Pakistan. It escalated to an exchange of airstrikes and got fairly serious while we were running a Track II in the region, actually. As you look back on that and the other crises that continue to occur between nuclear powers in Southern Asia, including between China and India, what are the implications of that kind of environment for strategic instability or stability?

Lalwani: Great. Again, I'm Sameer Lalwani from the Stimson Center. I did not expect that was going to be the first question I was going to answer.

Haegeland: It wasn't? What question would you like to answer?

Lalwani: Yeah, that's good. I like that. I just wanted ... Actually, I thought it'd be worth starting with just some salient things or aspects of this recent crisis that jumped out at me that I've been thinking about over the last few weeks, but I haven't really had a chance to articulate or discuss with colleagues in great depth. But I want to put them on the table because I think that there were some new features of this crisis that we learned some interesting things about.

Lalwani: I have four of them. The first is ... We have been talking a lot, I think, in the US or the strategic nuclear community about the risk of inadvertent escalation. I think that's a central point of discussion, particularly with respect to US and China, and a lot of other countries as well, that pressures applied on a country can lead to inadvertent pressures for nuclear use or strategic use. But in the case of this Pulwama crisis, I was surprised how much deliberate escalation played a role, and for political purposes. Both countries knowing the strategic risk, knowing the costs, and potentially the limited strategic benefits, still chose to escalate, from what I can gather, to signal something to their domestic political audiences. I think that's a feature that has always been true in South Asia, but it became much starker for me as you started to observe higher levels of risk being incurred by both sides in terms of the use of air power on both sides without very clear objectives in mind.

Lalwani: That said, at the same time, the second thing that I observed was that there still doesn't seem to be a great appreciation for inadvertent escalation. I think that is drawn from my brief discussions with colleagues on both India and Pakistan, that both sides were really surprised by the other side's move. I don't think that Pakistan was really calculating that India would escalate both vertically and horizontally, and do so in a way that potentially embarrassed their military in terms of threading their air defenses, whether through suppression of enemy air defense capabilities or just finding gaps in radar coverage. But that, I think, was surprising for that Pakistanis.

Lalwani: And then, correspondingly, I don't think the Indians were really prepared for the Pakistani counter-response, which ... It was not clear what the strategy was behind it, but nevertheless, the level of resolve that was summoned by the Pakistani air force was something that ... I talked to senior Indian colleagues who were like ... They didn't expect that to happen. They thought round one or round two was over.

Lalwani: That, to me, is worrisome, because once you start to update your beliefs that the things you assigned a very, very low probability to are starting to happen, or almost assigned no probability are starting to happen, then I think uncertainty starts to really take hold, and the uncertainty about what the next stage of escalation is really can start to focus the mind, but also get you to do things that you otherwise would not think about doing. That was another really interesting aspect of this.

- Lalwani: I'll say the last one that I think is worth considering is the role of chance in this recent crisis. To me, the hinge of this whole crisis was the fact that the Indian pilot was shot down, but landed in Pakistani territory, or Pakistan-controlled territory. But there were two contingent factors that could have changed the course of the crisis. The first is there are reports that when the Indian pilot landed in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, that he was being attacked by local villagers, and the Pakistani air force came to his rescue and saved him and brought him to safety, and then begin the basis for a release strategy. But what if he had died? What if he died, not just in a crash, but he had actually been killed by local villagers? Would the Indian government be able to back down from such a situation, where they believe that one of their soldiers was killed while in captivity? That would have been, I think, really, really hard for the Indian state to withdraw from.
- Lalwani: And the second is what if instead of landing on the Pakistani side, he had landed on the Indian side? Because it was just about drift when he released from his plane. If he had drifted to the Indian side, there would be no, I would say, bargaining chip, but there would be no way for the Pakistanis to climb down from this as seamlessly as they did. Those two contingencies make me think that even though this was settled on somewhat of a bilateral basis, or this crisis deescalated on a bilateral basis, there's still not real clear dynamics for escalation control from both sides. That, I think, is worrisome. I'll leave it at that.
- Haegeland: That's great. All right, Frank, I want to bring you in on this, and I'm going to repose my question so that you can reflect on Sameer's summary of Pulwama, but also what does this mean broadly, that we have this trend of recurring crises?
- O'Donnell: I would just first start off by echoing what Sameer said, that there was a lot of chance in the way this crisis evolved and ended up. Yeah, it's a series of chances that the Indian pilot landed in Pakistan-governed Kashmir, landed alive, and if that had not happened, the crisis could have gone on and continued to escalate. That really ... but it's a complete chance, the way that that happened. Neither party could forecast that that would have happened.
- O'Donnell: Looking at this more broadly, this is another instance of the pattern between India and Pakistan, in that both rely upon direct deterrence of each other to manage their rivalry, to manage their relationship, and there's not really a surrounding web of durable political dialogue, confidence-building measures, that the relationship is built around. Instead, it's around direct deterrence.
- O'Donnell: One thing that has stuck with me, and just seeing how things have changed more broadly in terms of the practice of nuclear deterrence in the last couple of years globally, is that India and Pakistan and the way they behave is starting to look like less and less of an outlier. Now we see the United States and Russia are gradually together removing much of the political web of dialogue, of treaties like the START Treaties, the INF, as we see, and moving toward direct deterrence as a

way to manage their relationship. The US and China, although they never had the same kind of thick web of political and dialogue and confidence-building measures and treaties that the US and Soviet Union and Russia did, are still moving further in that same direction.

O'Donnell: As we see with the NSS, with the nuclear posture review, with the missile defense review, which talks about offensive space-based weapons, use of space capabilities for counterforce against China, that previously used to be ... just a few years ago, that used to be the US and Russia, and to an extent the US and China had fairly stable political relations, even though they were rivals, based upon this thick web of political mechanisms, dialogue mechanisms, treaties. And now they appear to be moving closer to what India and Pakistan look like.

O'Donnell: While we saw in the crisis India and Pakistan relying upon direct deterrence with each other while being not really clear and not really understanding or choosing not to believe what each other stated deterrence thresholds are, and as we've seen through the very carefully calibrated moves, testing out each other's deterrence thresholds in real time, this is something that we could begin to see replicated across the board.

Haegeland: That's great. Diana, did you want to jump in on this?

Wueger: I do, yeah. And again, echoing ... Sorry. Diana Wueger. I'm at the Naval Postgraduate School, not the Naval War College. Very different. And I'm also a student at the University of Chicago.

Wueger: Echoing both of them, I agree completely, and I think that's a really interesting point about the direct deterrence. What I was watching as this crisis unfolded ... and I think Sameer had a really good point about them not really expecting the other side's move. In past crises, I think we've seen a little bit more ... There's almost a scriptedness to it. There's kind of a ... "We're going to say this. You're going to say this. Pakistan's going to promise to round up the usual suspects, and we're all going to do an investigation, and India's going to sit on its hands and be patient." And we've seen that change a little bit with Uri and these surgical strikes. It's a little bit different, at least in recent years.

Wueger: But there's a value to having done that covertly. One of my professors, Austin Carson, just wrote this book, "Secret Wars," about collusion between governments in covert ways to manage escalation. There are lots of instances in history where something happens, and the government that could show up on the stage and say, "We are really mad about you having done this," chooses not to for whatever reason, but probably to manage escalation. In the case of Uri, Pakistan was able to deny completely that it happened. India was able to say it did. "We did a lot. This was a major win for us." But it was easier to walk back down the escalation ladder from there.

Wueger: I think this goes off the script. This is something we haven't seen, is an airstrike on Pakistan's sovereign territory. Two nuclear-armed countries. That's not something that we've necessarily seen, and I think that is rewriting the script in an interesting way, and in a kind of scary way, because it opens up this possibility that we could do this again. And was this enough the first time? Do we do more next time? How do you gauge where to stop? And when you do it that publicly, how do ... and I think this is exactly right ... how do you find a way back down? There was a lot of chance here. That worked out well in this case, but it seems like relying on that for future crises is not necessarily ... Hope is not a strategy, I believe.

Wueger: I'm not really sure what to take away from that, merely that it makes it much more unpredictable, and it makes the crisis a lot less legible, I think, to both sides when the script changes, when they don't quite know what the next move is going to be. And I fully sympathize with India's frustrations and their desire to rewrite the script and to make terrorism stop happening, but it also does create instability during crises that I think is worth thinking about.

Haegeland: I'm going to throw another question at you, centering on this Pulwama episode, but also stepping back a bit, thinking about what it might mean more broadly. At the last NukeFest, Vipin Narang had this great speech where he sparked a fire both in the analytical community here in DC, but also in the strategic community in India and in Pakistan, to think about whether there were official or unofficial doctrinal shifts in India's nuclear strategies. Pulwama, fortunately, didn't hit a point that we saw any of that play out, but reflecting back on the last two years, are you comfortable commenting on where you might observe continuity or possible change, whether doctrinal or applied, in nuclear strategy broadly in Southern Asia?

Wueger: That's a lot of question there. Yeah, I think this is something that India's going to grapple with, and I think it's going to be less ... It's not necessarily, I think, going to be as driven by Pakistan as it is going to be by China. I forget which panel they were talking about this on, but essentially, the weaker country's going to always have this ... India's no first use policy has long been established, and it seems very credible, as much as any no first use policy can be. But the weaker state is always going to have an incentive against the stronger state to need to be able to potentially go first, to deter, if only because otherwise China could act conventionally, and India's not going to be able to match them.

Wueger: And as China's capabilities keep growing and India's grow, but not at the same rate, you're going to see the differential continue to widen. I think that's going to force a rethink in Indian nuclear doctrine and posture, for better or for worse. And that of course is going to have effects on how Pakistan thinks about things. Everything that India says it's doing, it's just about China. Pakistan says, "You're doing this to us too."

- Wueger: And I think the sea base deterrence piece of that is going to be an interesting component. Pakistan's going to worry about that. The missile links are not really long enough that you can credibly currently say that that is targeted at or could be targeted at China, so of course Pakistan's going to go, "What are you doing? This is very threatening. Now we're going to have to rethink everything too."
- Haegeland: Frank, I'm going to give you a chance to jump in here. I know that you've done some thinking about the land warfare doctrine that India put out in 2018, and that fits in a little bit here.
- O'Donnell: Yeah, sure, I'll jump in on that, but I'd like to pick up on something that we were just talking about just there with regard to counterforce. One concern I might have is that the Indian air force will draw certain lessons from this. The planes that were used for the attack on Balakot were Mirages, 12 Mirages, which are dual use and which have nuclear missions, not necessarily the ones that were used there, but the platform itself has nuclear missions, and that the IAF might learn from this that, "Look, this was almost a natural experiment in a way, in that there were significant Pakistan air defense intelligence gaps that allowed us to get pretty far, not just into Pakistan-governed Kashmir but perhaps into Pakistan itself, or certainly to strike targets in Pakistan itself." And in terms of thinking about counterforce rather than nuclear conventional, they might conclude from this, "Yeah, there is actually a feasible capability that we have hear."
- O'Donnell: To the land warfare doctrine, this is an interested development because it seems to be leaning much more heavily into the 2004 Indian army doctrine about integrated battle groups who will quickly move across the border and seize limited Pakistan territory. However, the army chief, Bipin Rawat, has said that, "From now on, all combat operations with the army, I'm going to take my integrated battle groups." He seems to be leaning in a lot more heavily into this. And also, the quantum of how far they intend to penetrate into Pakistan keeps shifting. They're a lot more vague in this than before. It's variably been described as towards towns and cities in Pakistan, which would be incredibly escalatory and concerning if I were a Pakistan commander.
- O'Donnell: But another problem with this is simply whether or not the doctrine is outstripping capabilities. India, by the assessment of its comptroller and auditor general, can only fight a war for 10 days, really, with the ammunition amount they have, and so we risk the worst of both worlds. India has quite an offensive, aggressive land warfare doctrine. The Pakistanis take it at face value, but it might not be able to back up when it comes to it.
- Haegeland: Sameer, unless you're going to jump in, I'm going to transition us a little bit here. You want to jump in, Sameer?
- Lalwani: Let me say one more ... two quick things based on what my colleagues have said. I think the point that Diana brought up is really important, this question of secrecy

versus publicity, because I actually think that historically, the Indians and Pakistanis have always deferred to publicity rather than secrecy in their operations, because they haven't been that concerned about escalation control. That is a little worrisome to me.

Lalwani: I wonder ... If the Indians had actually done what they said they did at Balakot, but then shut up about it and not made any test statement whatsoever, they would have achieved potentially a strategic effect. If they really hit what they said they hit, have signaled to the Pakistanis, "We can hit things, and you won't be able to defend against them, and the same ability can be used against other targets in the future that are strategic," that would have been a very powerful message that is privately communicated. And if they missed, they would have been able to cover up the fact that there's inadequacy in their capabilities or they're not there yet. But for whatever reason, they deferred to publicity. I think this goes back to the point that I think that, principally, their objective was domestic audiences rather than a strategic effect.

Lalwani: The second thing I'll say is I think ... I heard Vipin at one point say something about how the ambiguity in this crisis and the information ambiguity allowed for crisis deescalation, which I think is probably true. Both sides could cling to a narrative that was sufficient for them, and say, "We really climbed down because we won, or the information suggest we won in this situation." But I think even if it's crisis-stabilizing, it can be deterrence-destabilizing in the long run because both sides, if they can conclude that they did all the things they did without any risk and achieved success, in the long run it can lead to replication and escalation. That's worrisome.

Haegeland: Yeah, definitely worrisome. In the interest of keeping to our theme, we've spent a lot of time thinking about this major crisis that just unfolded, and in many ways is still unfolding, in South Asia, but it's a perfect opportunity to reflect back on the Kargil crisis, which continues to perplex people. I want to bring Pegahieghi of the Naval War College into the conversation. Negeen, I'm going to pose two broad questions to you, and then you should answer whatever is most useful.

Haegeland: The first is, what really made the Kargil crisis possible? Was it miscalculation, organizational pathologies, rational actors testing out a new balance of power? Just as a refresher for anyone who doesn't spend all their time thinking about South Asia, right before the 1999 Kargil crisis, in '98 we had another crisis where both countries tested their nuclear weapons, became overt nuclear weapon powers.

Haegeland: That's the first question, and then the second one is, what role, if any, did nuclear weapons play in the decision-making during the Kargil conflict?

Pegahi: Those are some small questions, right?

- Haegeland: Just do what you want with that.
- Pegahi: Great questions, and great subject for today, especially given events in the last couple of weeks. It's heartening to see so many people come out at this ungodly hour, so thank you for your interest in the topic.
- Lalwani: There's not even coffee in here.
- Pegahi: Treat yourself afterwards.
- Pegahi: I'll make two quick points about the crisis in general, and then get into some of the details. I think first of all, Kargil crisis, the most important crisis of the second nuclear age, bar none. I think this is the Cuban missile crisis of our generation, and it should be quite thoroughly mined for lessons of a variety of types that are still proving relevant today, again, as the past couple of weeks have shown us. Point number one, Kargil crisis, Cuban missile crisis of our times.
- Pegahi: Point number two, at least from the Pakistani side, which is what Hannah's asking about, what made it possible, I think the crisis is also massively overdetermined. And I'd be interested in what you guys think about that. I made a brief list of the factors that I thought made this possible, meaning that made the Pakistani players feel comfortable authorizing this operation, and it's a real long list, but I'll go through it quickly.
- Pegahi: First, there are all the longstanding factors that were the permissive conditions. Those include Pakistan's general revisionism and the perceived unfinished business of partition, the military's dominant role in Pakistan's national security policy, whether or not a civilian is notionally in charge, the military's general preference for offensive operations ... and that's, of course, not limited to Pakistan ... and then the army in particular's desire to try and write a variety of perceived historical wrongs, losses, particularly losses of territory to the Indians.
- Pegahi: That's all floating around in the background, making something like Kargil look attractive in general. Then the question becomes, especially since it's just one year after the nuclear test, why Kargil then? First we talked about all the reasons that would make this attractive in general. Now I'm going to give you a list of why it might have been attractive 20 years ago, roughly now-ish. There, I think the arrival of Pervez Musharraf in the role of chief of army staff is hugely important. Here's a guy who had been pitching this type of operation for years, possibly even a decade, keeps getting shot down by whoever the head of the army was or the civilian prime minister. Finally, he assumes the role of head of the army, and with a pretty weak civilian prime minister to boot, one not particularly interested in national security affairs, in Nawaz Sharif. You've got the right guy at the right time in the right position.

Pegahi: Then I'll go through these more quickly, because again, I recognize people haven't had their coffee yet. There's also the perception from the Pakistan army's perspective that local, regional, and global trends are all moving against Pakistan or in India's favor. Locally, life in Kashmir, in the Kashmir Valley, main area of dispute, is largely getting back to normal, which is removing pressure. India and Pakistan civilian leaderships have embarked on this peace process, typically referred to as Lahore process, which makes improving relations look quite viable. That can be perceived as threatening to the Pakistan army's institutional interests.

Pegahi: And then finally, on the international scene, the United States in particular is just losing interest in Kashmir as a dispute, which again is very unattractive from the Pakistani perspective. And then you also get reports ... and we can debate the credence of these ... that the Pakistan army had received various indicators that they thought the Indians were about to launch some kind of territorial grab over the line of control, so that Kargil in some ways is an attempt at preemption.

Pegahi: There's another long list of possible factors. Because I feel like I've talked for a really long time, I'll save the nuclear ones, maybe for everybody talk about. But I would say that the one open question ... Again, this is 20 years later. I still don't think we have a definitive answer on this ... the one open question remains, what role, if any, did Pakistan's nuclear weapons play in encouraging or allowing the Pakistani leadership, specifically this group of army generals, to decide this was a good move?

Pegahi: Now, the dominant argument out there is that they believed that the country's recent demonstration of an overt nuclear capability with the tests basically provided them a shield to do whatever they wanted. "Now we're free to be more aggressive vis-a-vis India, either because our nuclear weapons can deter the Indians from any kind of severe retaliation, some kind of a direct situation, or it'll work in an indirect manner by freaking the United States out so badly that the Americans will come in and shut this down in a way that's helpful for us."

Pegahi: That's the common argument out there. I come out on the other side, again, for these reasons that I mentioned. There's so many factors pushing Pakistan in the direction of this crisis anyway. I think we would have had a very similar decision even had Pakistan not tested nuclear weapons the year before, but to be fair, full disclosure, that is very much a controversial position, so I look forward to other's opinions and any conversation you guys might want to have.

Haegeland: Great. Thanks, Negeen. Sameer, I know that question she just raised is one that you've thought about for the last couple years in terms of whether this argument that Pakistan was somehow emboldened by having nuclear weapons to act conventionally is true or not. Do you want to weigh in?

Lalwani: Sure. Yeah. I agree with everything Negeen said. I think we've had a mind-meld on a lot of these arguments before. I'll just add one more specific and proximate

cause, which I think is one that runs from Kargil back to 1965 and forward to present day, and that is the variable that I think is, in some ways, most important, the quality of strategic assessment in South Asia, and particularly in Pakistan.

Lalwani: What do we mean by strategic assessment? I think the best definition and unpacking of this is ... I've seen this done by Risa Brooks in her book, "Shaping Strategy." She talks about strategic assessment as having four components, information-sharing, strategic coordination, structural competence, and a clear authorization process. All these variables ... Pakistan, you'll start to unpack the details of the planning for Kargil, Pakistan falls pretty short. In terms of information-sharing, really narrow group of planners involved in this process. Relatedly, there's not really a strategic coordination and red teaming these ideas.

Lalwani: The details for this ... There's no archives out there to study this, but there are some really good books that have come out in the last 10 years or so that really unpacks the details. Shuja Nawaz's book has a great chapter on the Kargil planning process. Peter Lavoy's edited volume has a number of chapters that disentangle this, and Nasim Zehra's book recently also looks through the planning process. And actually, Jack Gill has an article that just came out in "Journal of Strategic Studies" this year that's also looking at the military objects that were planned here.

Lalwani: But very local, centralized planning without a lot of red teaming or thinking of the risks, underestimation of Indian responses and capabilities, and underestimation of political environments around this, which really stems from the fact that the military is making all the decisions, even though they're trying to achieve political aims that they're really not clear about, and have no political advisors involved in the process. This is, I think, a perennial problem for Pakistan's strategic decision-making, is that ... Forget the civil-military divide on a whole bunch of other things. The absence of scholars or analyst who understand and are attuned to the political consequences and political effects are not in the room in this decision-making process. That, to me, I think, is one of the greatest shortfalls it still runs into today.

Lalwani: And frankly, Shireen Mazari, who's now a minister in the civilian government in Pakistan, has written articles to suggest that this is still a problem. Particularly in an age of information warfare and hybrid warfare, where you need to understand how politics fits in with kinetic activity, there's not a lot of civilian role in the thinking and decision-making on this process.

Haegeland: That's great. In the interests of time, because I want to bring in the fact that we have people with a lot of experience in the room, I'm going to ask a final question, and those of you who are ready to pose questions should get them ready in your head. This final question is trying to pull us back even more. We've done a really good job providing empirically-driven arguments about Kargil and Pulwama. Thinking more broadly about the future of strategic instability in Southern Asia,

we have this increasingly nuclearized multipolar environment. You've got the United States very much on the scene. You have China expanding through things like the Belt and Road Initiative. The US and India are looking at balancing that, and Pakistan is acting on its own, often in coordination with China, but has its own set of interests.

Haegeland: My question is, how might these expanding interests and modernization and balancing efforts ... How are the actions by certain states affecting other states, and how might some of these developments be exacerbating existing security dilemmas, and what types of conflict should we be watching for in the region?

O'Donnell: Shall I-

Haegeland: Please, go ahead, Frank.

O'Donnell: Yeah, I'm happy to start with that really easy softball. It was mentioned previously, the great report that came out a few years ago now by a commission, I think chaired by Bob Einhorn at Brookings, the strategic chain, which ties back to Southern Asia and the interactivity between what the US does and nuclear and conventional terms that impinge upon nuclear affecting what China does, which in turn affects what India does, which in turn affects what Pakistan does.

O'Donnell: To return to one of the main concerns of this conference, the INF treaty, the INDOPACOM commander testified last month that he would be very happy, his words, to see the US fielding formerly INF-banned missiles in East Asia. It would free their hand a bit, he said, to essentially up the amount of missiles that are posed against China. China will likely respond to this, I would say, either by upscaling their own missile production emplacements or increasing further ambiguity around their no first use commitment. India and Indian strategists tend to read what China does, nearly all of which is posed against the US, as being applicable to their own intentions against India, and that'll place pressures upon India to follow suit. And Pakistan has an India-specific strategy.

O'Donnell: That's just one simple dynamic that I see coming out of this that I think is foreseeable, and I think, to those on both sides who think that the INF is past its day, it's an open question as to how far they've thought through these dynamics.

Haegeland: Diana, you want to jump in?

Wueger: Yeah. I think on the question of how regional realignments are playing out, and then linking back to crisis instability, one of the things that I question or that I find interesting is the role of third parties and who actually can be a third party if everybody's involved. Is there anybody who is neutral and outside of this dynamic, or is this very much the US-India alignment getting closer, China-Pakistan getting closer, and now we have two dyads that are potentially conflictual? And nobody's a neutral arbiter, or even a remotely trusted agent. That

I am concerned about, given the role that third parties have played in past crises in South Asia, and then also at the great power level.

Wueger: I don't know. I think it'll be interesting to see where other regional powers ... how the quad develops. Granted, it's not going to be a formal military alliance. That's far too much to think about anyway. But where do Japan and Australia come down on this? How do US-India ties continue to develop? On the strategic front, there's a lot of shared interests. On the economic front, not so much, and that's, I think, going to play a big role in how far our governments can continue to work together. At what point does that become a stumbling block for us?

Wueger: And I think, similarly for China and Pakistan, if something were to happen to the Belt and Road initiative, to Gwadar if there's terrorist attacks along this corridor, how does China react to this? What do they do about that? I'm not really sure. I think there's a lot of potential inflection points in there.

Haegeland: Yeah. I think the China angle will be an interesting one to watch.

Haegeland: Sameer, do you want to weigh in on this broader question?

Lalwani: Yeah. I think one of the things I plan to pay attention to in the next few years is something that's a little more narrow in terms of the military technology on both sides, which is ... We have discussions here in DC about cyber-warfare and AI and robotics, and really advanced conversations on the military technological revolution and where it's going, but I think in India and Pakistan, the question that's really going to matter for them in the offense-defense balance is anti-access capabilities, particularly cruise missiles and air defense systems and suppression of enemy air defense capabilities and electronic warfare.

Lalwani: I don't really have a good sense of where that is, but I gather that's emerging, especially with the Balakot strike. That's going to be a point of competition from both sides. It's something that I think a lot of ... The United States thought of that maybe 20-something years ago, and it's past that phase now. We feel very confident about gaining air supremacy fairly easily. But I do think that's going to be a contested space between Indians and Pakistanis that they can both compete on, and it might be a place to see where the technology drives things.

Haegeland: Great. We were given a hard deadline of 8:30 cutting off, so I want to leave most of the rest of our time for questions. I think one of our Carnegie colleagues has one, and I will give the first question to this gentleman in the fourth row ... [audience name].

Question 1: Great panel. Given us a lot to think about. Here's my question. The best second move after you've sustained an injury is one that the other guy doesn't have a good counter to. My question is, can you think of that second move? Obviously, the one that India chose was an obvious counter, so is there a counter in your mind

that Pakistan is left flat-footed? I can think of one, which is not to react. Then the whole spotlight is on the first step, which puts Pakistan totally on the defensive. But if you are compelled to act for domestic political reasons, what's the second move?

Haegeland: Great. Thank you. If there are two others, I'll take them now. Sir?

Question 2: Thanks. [Audience introduction]. Anybody want to comment on the nuclear component of this crisis? Pakistan made a point of convening the National Command Center and reminding people that they had command of nuclear weapons. Was that a good move? Did that signal something that India then responded in a way that decreased the escalation, or was it counterproductive in any way?

Haegeland: Great. Thank you. And then I saw one hand over here. There we go.

Question 3: Hi. [Audience introduction]. When you started, we were talking a little bit about how the internal political and public opinion affected this crisis. I was wondering if you had any more insight on how that also affects how these two countries act in the nuclear realm as well.

Haegeland: Great question. We are short on time. I'm going to ask you all to limit yourself to 30 seconds apiece. This will be like a round robin, and respond to what you will. Who'd like to go first? Diana, please.

Wueger: I'm happy to give it a shot. On [Question 2's] comment, I think the National Command Authority gets invoked every time anything happens, and so I don't know that it necessarily ... I think its purpose is essentially to remind the rest of the world that, "You need to probably pay attention to this." I think Pakistan's usual move is to draw in the international community. India's move is to say, "No, no, we got this. This is a bilateral process and problem." And I think the National Command Authority and the invocation of nuclear weapons is very much a, "Help, help, we're being oppressed."

O'Donnell: Yeah, because that was at the start of the crisis, and that didn't stop India sending the 12 Mirages, as I've already talked about. Negeen, you were-

Pegahi: Yeah. To largely pile on here, I think there are two primary audiences for this, obviously, the Indians and the international community, primarily us. I think we're already always nervous about Pakistan's nuclear weapons, so invoking the National Command Authority didn't really change our nervousness or perception of what was going on. And on the flip side, I get the impression that the Indians are pretty confident about the belief that they control the risk of escalation, that the Pakistanis are largely bluffing about a lot of these nuclear moves, etc. So I don't think that implication changed any Indian minds either. I saw it largely as a nonevent, but that might also be a wildly optimistic take.

Pegahi: To get to [Question 1's] question, a lot of these crises ... We think we've got very clear escalation ladders in place. What counts as vertical escalation? What counts as horizontal? This time they go into Pakistan proper, whereas previously they limited themselves to the Pakistani-administered portion of Kashmir, etc, etc. The thing I worry about is all the stuff, typically the non-military or non-kinetic tools, where we don't have any sense of what those ladders look like. If one side chose to respond in a very different domain, whether with cyber or economic warfare, things that we don't have a good sense of what even counts as escalatory or counts as de-escalatory, and trying to sort that out or help both sides sort that out in the middle of a crisis, that makes me pretty nervous. We haven't gotten there yet, but I imagine we will one day, and we're not going to have the kind of clear rubrics in mind that we seem to have now for what makes a crisis better or worse.

Haegeland: Sameer, you want to jump in on public opinion?

Lalwani: Yeah. I can take that real quick. There is a working paper out there that is under review ... I believe it's by Clary, Lalwani, and Siddiqui ... that is basically taking on this question of public opinion and whether it has escalatory pressures or not with regards to the use of nuclear weapons. Basically, the finding is that, at least in the case of Pakistan, based on some survey experiments, if given a choice between a leader escalating or backing down, there's high pressures for a leader to escalate, high incentives for a leader to escalate. And when you even inject caveats like, "But this could lead to some nuclear consequences or dire economic consequences because of the risks," it attenuates that pressure a little bit, but there's still a much greater preference for escalation and assuming those risks than not. It's worrisome, but I also imagine it's because there's just not a lot of socialization and understanding of what those actual nuclear consequences are.

Haegeland: Great. Frank, last words?

O'Donnell: Yeah. I'd like to just go to [Question 1] on the good second move for India. I agree with a lot of the analysis in the Perkovich-Dalton book, "Not War, Not Peace," in that after the Mumbai attacks and India's deliberate decision not to militarily respond, plus the sheer horror of the attacks, created immense public pressure on Pakistan, to the extent that they report that many Pakistanis believed that the whole attack had been an Indian inside job, so damaging was it to Pakistan's image globally.

O'Donnell: And so, if it comes to the potential for military, it's not quite the kind of kinetic military operation you might be envisioning, but to take some of the policy measures that they talk about toward the end of what's called nonviolent compellance ... For example, increased pressure from Indian diplomats here to ensure that the United States continues to take a hard line against Pakistan being able to buy F16s or other military technology that they need, and which will be used against India. There is a Pakistan treasury official quoted in the Economic Times of India a few days ago saying how publicly concerned he was about the

prospect of Pakistan being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force, and what that would do for the Pakistan economy, for investor confidence, if the support for terrorist activities within Pakistan was tied to Financial Action Task Force blacklisting. Those things are a lot more damaging to Pakistan, if India is minded that way, than anything militarily or kinetically they can do.

O'Donnell: With regard to the F16 example, it's not quite a kinetic thing, but it still has military significance.

Haegeland: Great. I wanted to get this one gentleman in the fifth row's one question in, and then I think we'll close after that.

Question 4: Real quick. [Audience introduction]. Pakistan appears to be increasing its capabilities in the nuclear realm, possibly with the numbers of its nuclear stockpiles. How do we deal with the potential imbalance in nuclear threats that may be arising, and how does that impact the effectiveness of deterrence between Pakistan and India?

Haegeland: Easy one.

Pegahi: I'm happy to take a stab at that. I think when you're dealing with a state like Pakistan ... and obviously, there are other countries that we worry about in a similar strategic position, a nuclear North Korea, a potential future nuclear Iran, where you're talking about a state with revisionist preferences that is conventionally weaker than its perceived primary adversary. As unsatisfying as this is, there are simply certain threats you cannot make against these states. No one will be ... Indians included, unfortunately from the Indians' perspective ... will not be able to credibly threaten any kind of severe, to the point of existential threat, to Pakistan.

Pegahi: Now, the unsatisfying part of that is of course it allows these countries to engage in all sorts of low-level behaviors that lots of us would prefer they not engage in, but in my opinion, at least, that is just a reality of life with nuclear powers. We haven't seen Pulwama take that on or accept that. The Indians obviously don't want to, but there's a certain ... I think Ashley Tellis once termed it "ugly stability" ... that is in play and will likely stay in play. I think the best we can all hope for is that it stays at ugly stability as opposed to something worse. I don't know that we can hope for much better.

Haegeland: All right, you each get literally 15 seconds.

Wueger: 15 seconds. All right. Some of the work that I've done with Feroz Khan, who's hanging out in the back there, has been about ... As the ranges get smaller, as we go towards battlefield nuclear weapons, what happens? I think one of the struggles here, and that I think India's going to have to struggle with, is the shortened decision-making times as a result of these things, and it's going to

foreclose some of the military options that India might want. But I think, going back to Frank's point, it's not satisfying on a domestic public level, but the most damaging things that India can do are the non-military things, are the economic tools or the public perception tools that they can deploy.

Haegeland: Frank, you want to get your 15 seconds?

O'Donnell: No, I don't, but I think ... Is there one more question we could perhaps ...

Haegeland: If it can be quick, we'll bring you in. Is it a quick one? Yes.

Question 5: Thank you. Does the panel still believe that Pakistan still has more military [inaudible] despite being more balanced [inaudible] there is civilian representation as well? And once we talk about revisionism, how do you differentiate revisionism ... I believe Pakistan's demand is resolution of outstanding disputes. Does that qualify as revisionism, and how do you differentiate that with another state trying to ... what we call reform the international nuclear order and political order as it seeks to get membership of the United Nations Security Council? What's the distinction? Thank you.

Haegeland: That is a very big question that we don't have time to do justice to, but I'll maybe give one or two of you the opportunity to try. Do you want to try?

Lalwani: Yeah. I want to go back to the first question real quick and just say I'm not sure there's really an imbalance, because I think India's capable of deterring Pakistan from conventional or nuclear attacks. They're struggling to compel Pakistan, but the space has been squeezed for what Pakistan can do. They can't do major power war. They can't do even Kargil operations. They can't even do a Mumbai attack, if that was something that they wanted to authorized. It's really been squeezed down to this very low level of non-state actor attacks on military targets within Kashmir, and even then, I think the strategy that India can adopt is one of interdiction and resilience, and they really just focus on the compellant strategy and ignore denial and resilience of their inherent capabilities.

Lalwani: On the revisionism question, I think there's a point to your argument, which is ... I think all risers, all rising powers, are revisionist inherently. They're trying to revise their national system in some way, so I think there's a point to that, but I think ... I'll just leave it at that.

Haegeland: Well then, I'm going to bring us to a close, and I want to close on a "what next" note, which is that Stimson and the people who work with Stimson on a lot of our projects have spent a lot of time thinking about and writing about the issues we discussed today. In terms of resources you could go to if you want to read more about this, we have a really great series on War on the Rocks that we're doing jointly, called "[Southern Discomfort](#)," that Sameer's been heading up with some of our colleagues at War on the Rocks. Sameer and I have a book that came out

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early last year that looks specifically at crisis dynamics in South Asia that's available online for free. It's called "[Investigating Crises.](#)"

Haegeland: My colleague sitting here in the front row, Emily Tallo, is a research assistant at Stimson that helps run our online magazine called "[South Asian Voices.](#)" where some of the people in the room that are experts from the region often are publishing fresh and timely analysis that you could read. And then the last plug is our Stimson fellow, Frank O'Donnell, just came out with a great book together with Yogesh Joshi called "[India and Nuclear Asia.](#)" All of those things are some of the most cutting-edge analysis, I think, on some of the discussions we had today.

Haegeland: We'll close with thanking all of you again for coming so early in the morning, and thank you to Carnegie for hosting us.